

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/István Derencsényi

Kristóf Rasovszky with his Gold Medal from the men's 10km open water swimming at the 2024 World Aquatics Championships in Doha

UPCOMING EVENTS

Extraordinary session of parl on Sweden's NATO bid

EP plenary session

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Stats office publishes foreign trade figures for Dec 2023 in 1st reading

TOP STORY

HUNGARY SUPPORTS INVESTIGATION INTO UN AGENCY EMPLOYEES' ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN HAMAS ACTION

Hungary supports an investigation into the alleged involvement of some employees of the UN's agency aiding Palestinians in Hamas's terrorist attacks against Israel last October, the foreign minister said in Brussels on Saturday.

Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after an informal meeting of the EU's foreign affairs council that "a heated debate" had developed over the question whether funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) should be suspended or delayed over the issue. "I think that our common goal must be to prevent a humanitarian disaster. And our common goal must also be to prevent that innocent people should suffer, and to ensure that food, water and medicine supplies reach the civilian population," said the foreign minister. "It is however absolutely unacceptable, in fact intolerable, if employees of a UN organisation take part in any action or the operation of a terrorist organisation in any form," he added. Szijjártó said that given the gravity of the claim, a probe must be launched "instead of jumping at the EU commissioner over initiating an investigation".

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: CHANGE NEEDED IN EUROPEAN MIGRATION, AFRICA POLICIES

The EU should pursue radically different policies on migration and Africa in order to prevent the emergence of more serious crises, the Hungarian foreign minister said in Brussel on Saturday. The ministry cited Péter Szijjártó telling a press conference after an informal meeting of the EU foreign affairs council that the security of the continent started "in Africa which undoubtedly faces some very serious challenges". If Brussels maintains its current migration policy, the African continent's problems will affect Europe, which would be "hardly able to handle them", he said. Africa's population has increased by 590 million in the past 20 years and is estimated to grow by an additional 750 million in the upcoming 20 years, which in itself is more than the population of Europe in total, Szijjártó said. "The question is whether the African population growing by a significant extent, by many million people, stays in Africa or they set off towards Europe," Szijjártó said. "The answer depends on whether Africa will be a secure place in terms of physical and economic characteristics," he added.

"Radically different European migration and Africa policies are needed, security must be created on the continent with the help of economic development, and help must

be provided to fight the increasing threat of terror," Szijjártó said. Hungary has taken its share in preventing further waves of migrants to take off towards Europe, he added. "Over five years, we have provided some 100 billion forints (EUR 260m) worth of development resources to African countries to help them modernise their water management systems and ensure that people have clean and healthy drinking water, and are able to develop health-care services, education and public administration," he said. Additionally, the government provided some 6.5 billion forints to support Christian communities to stay in their home, and offered 1,460 young Africans scholarships annually to study in Hungarian universities, Szijjártó added. Terrorism especially affects the Sahel, and the government therefore works together with the countries of the region ready for cooperation in order to reduce the threat of terror and consequently the pressure of migration, he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS ON EU TO TAKE FIRMER ACTION AGAINST TERRORISM

Hungary's foreign minister has called on the European Union to declare the Houthis a terrorist organisation and to help the Yemeni government strengthen its coast guard. The funds necessary for this are available in the European Peace Facility, Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. Unless the European Union and western countries take

firm action, Szijjártó said, "European economies and businesses will have to reckon with this factor of uncertainty for a sustained period." "The western world sat on the fence for a long time and unfortunately did not recognise the seriousness of the threat posed by the Houthis. Thus in recent weeks traffic accounting for 15% of world trade was endangered off the coast of Yemen due to the attacks of the Houthis," he said.

The foreign minister noted that the Houthi rebels were constantly attacking cargo ships and the duration and the costs of maritime freight trade from Asia to Europe have increased significantly, as these ships now have to bypass the entire African continent. He said this was an increasingly serious problem for several Hungarian businesses, too, since deliveries are not arriving on time, and shipment costs are also increasing. "The world cannot let this organisation of rebels endanger the freedom of world trade to such an extent. The European Union must also take steps, since it would not be good if the economies of the European Union were to experience even more difficulties in addition to the challenges they are already facing," the minister said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ TO VRT TV: HUNGARY HAD NO REASON TO BLOCK FINANCIAL HELP FOR UKRAINE

Hungary's expectations had been fulfilled and therefore it had no reason not to support a proposal on financial

help to Ukraine at the EU summit on Thursday, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in an interview with Belgian VRT TV. In a video posted on Facebook on Sunday, he said a guarantee had been received that the money to be paid to Ukraine would not be the money that should be originally granted to Hungary. Additionally, the European Commission will prepare a yearly report and there will be a possibility for the Council to give guidance to the EC, he said. "And the most important thing on top of this was that the European Union should not finance delivery of weapons with our participation," Szijjártó said. It became obvious that the money sent to Ukraine will serve the operation of the state, covering social expenditures and others, and not weapon deliveries, he added.

OFFICIAL: UN RAPPORTEUR ASKS HUNGARY TO SHARE POLICY OF AIDING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS WITH REST OF WORLD

The United Nations' Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has asked Hungary to share its experience with its policy of aiding persecuted Christians with the rest of the world, a foreign ministry official said on Friday. Tristan Azbej, the state secretary in charge of aiding persecuted Christians, said at the end of his visit to Washington, DC, that he had spoken with UN Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea

on the sidelines of the International Religious Freedom Summit. He said Ghanea had specifically asked that Hungary share its unique experience in using humanitarian aid to assist in the survival of persecuted Christians and other religious groups. The state secretary said this year's religious freedom summit had been attended by more countries than ever before, with representatives of persecuted groups, national governments and other types of organisations present. He said it was a hopeful sign that whereas in the past, such summits had resulted only in statements, this time there was reason to trust that it would yield "tangible action". Azbej said Hungary had contributed to the summit by presenting the work carried out by the state secretariat in charge of aiding persecuted Christians since 2016 as well as the operations of the Hungary Helps humanitarian programme which promotes through development policy the cause of the freedom of religion.

Meanwhile, the state secretary said he had taken part in several political meetings in Washington, meeting US political figures, including members of Congress. He said that in his experience, Hungary and the Hungarian government's values nearly fully align with those of the American right and Christian conservative American people and organisations. He said one struggle that was once again gaining importance was the fight against anti-Semitism, which, he added, US conservatives also valued.

The state secretary pointed out that violent anti-Semitism had reared its head again in the Western world and the US following developments in Gaza. Azbej said his negotiating partners had all spoken highly of Hungary's efforts to protect Christians and fight against anti-Semitism, and measures taken in the interest of families, the institution of marriage and the protection of life.

The state secretary said he had also attended the National Prayer Breakfast, whose organiser had highlighted Hungary's family policy and protection of persecuted Christians to the House Representatives and Senators in attendance, including Speaker of the House Mike Johnson. Azbej noted his meeting with Republican Senator J. D. Vance, who had previously voiced his support for Hungary on several issues and had again spoken highly of the steps taken by Hungary in aiding persecuted Christians. Senator Vance also expressed his agreement with Hungary's pro-peace stance on the war in Ukraine, Azbej added. The International Religious Freedom Summit was held in Washington on Tuesday and Wednesday, with its opening event held at the Hungarian embassy.

GOVT OFFICIAL: 'BRUSSELS IS PRO-WAR'

There is a fundamental difference in the viewpoints of Hungary and Brussels as regards the Russia-Ukraine war and their related strategies because

Brussels has a pro-war stance, the prime minister's political director told public Kossuth radio's morning programme on Sunday. Brussels' stance is that it is in the interest of the European countries that the conflict should continue or may intensify, Balázs Orbán said. But in Hungary's view the conflict can only be resolved by means of diplomacy, he said. The political director said "it is worthwhile to support Ukraine", but he argued for a policy "which will bring us closer to peace". He said that blackmail, threats and withholding funding for Hungary "have hit back on those who had crafted those plans" because "they received strong international reactions". "This, interestingly, has broadened Hungary's room for manoeuvre," Balázs Orbán said, adding that "we managed to make good compromises in line with our national interests". In connection with the farmers' protests in several European countries, the political director said farmers were concerned over losing jobs, competitiveness and the European standard of living. "That's why change is needed in Brussels, because those European leaders who do not realise this and make decisions that go against the will of the European people cannot stay in power".

AGMIN: GMO-CONTAMINATED UKRAINIAN SEED SEIZED IN HUNGARY

Thanks to repeated checks and strict food security regulations, officials of the National Food Chain Safety Office (Nébih) seized nearly 40 tonnes of

GMO-contaminated maize seed originating from Ukraine in January, the minister of agriculture said on Saturday. István Nagy said on Facebook that the government would continue to protect Hungary's food security and the interests of Hungarian farmers. The goal remains to ensure that Hungarians only receive excellent quality and safe food, he added. As a result, Nébih will continue to perform regular checks, he said. After detecting the nearly 40 tonnes of GMO-contaminated seed, Nébih launched proceedings against the distributor and arranged for the destruction of the stock, he said. "We resolutely maintain the position that the same regulations apply to agricultural products imported from third countries as to those produced in the European Union," the minister added. Hungary will maintain a national import ban on agricultural products from Ukraine as long as an international solution of equal effect is found, Nagy said. The ban does not apply to seeds and transit shipments but the authorities will seal the shipments at the border and trace their transit through the country, he added.

PRESIDENT ON COUNTY TOUR IN BÉKÉS

Local residents in Békés County "highly await" the accession of neighbouring Romania to the EU's borderless Schengen zone which Hungary supports, President Katalin Novák said in an interview published by local daily Békés Megyei Hírlap on

Saturday. The president paid a visit to the county in south-eastern Hungary which formed part of her programme visiting every county to learn first-hand about local affairs. In the interview, Novák said with Romania's accession maintaining contact "between Hungarians on both sides of the border will be much easier, and economic cooperation could also be further boosted". "Nurturing good relations with its neighbours is in Hungary's fundamental interest, also because of the Hungarian communities living there," she said. In connection with this year's US elections, Novák said that depending on who will enter the White House, "prospects may change as regards the war in Ukraine" and "as regards the intensity and quality of Hungarian-US relations as well". The president called the United States an important ally for Hungary, adding that "Hungary is a good ally that fulfills its obligations", and "expects respect and a readiness for mutual understanding" within a non-hierarchic alliance.

Speaking about Ukraine, Novák said the war had claimed several tens of thousands of lives with the number of Hungarian victims constantly increasing. "More and more people started to agree with the position Hungary has represented since the beginning, namely that the only proper solution is to establish peace," Novák said, adding that even the Ukrainian president has started to draw up a peace formula, with Hungary participating in the efforts.

HUNGARY AMBASSADOR TO ROME REJECTS CLAIMS IN ITALIAN DEFENDANT'S BUDAPEST CASE

Hungary's ambassador to Rome dismissed claims of "demeaning prison conditions" by the family and lawyers of an Italian defendant held under arrest in Budapest as "false", in the prime time evening news programme on Italian public broadcaster Rai 1 on Friday. The defendant, identified as I.S., is one of three defendants kept in prison on charges of participation in violent attacks by the Antifa movement in Feb. 2023 in Budapest. Ádám Zoltán Kovács told the programme that contrary to the claims, all requirements and norms are strictly observed in Hungary's

prisons, noting that the defendant was allowed to meet her lawyer on several occasions and maintain continued contact with her family. Asked about the defendant's wearing handcuffs and shackles in the courtroom, the ambassador said it was a measure of precaution necessitated because of the gravity of charges.

AGMIN OFFICIAL MARKS WORLD WETLANDS DAY

February 2 marks the day of the adoption in 1971 of the Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands which is the oldest, still "active" nature protection treaty to date, the agriculture ministry's state secretary said on Friday, World Wetlands Day. The treaty has since been joined by

172 countries including Hungary signing it in 1979, András Rácz told an event held in Tata, in northern Hungary, to mark the anniversary. Hungary has so far designated under the Ramsar Convention 29 wetland areas occupying close to 250,000 hectares, or 2.6 percent, of the country's territory, he said. The quality of natural environment has improved on an area of close to 200,000 hectares in the country as a result of 101 projects implemented with the support of some 39 billion forints (EUR 102m) worth of funding under the EU's KEHOP operative programme for environmental and energy development, he said. "Two-thirds of the investments covered the reconstruction of conventional habitat areas, two-thirds of which are wetland areas," the state secretary said.