

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Winter aconite blooming in eastern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary session

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Finance ministry releases Jan budget report

TOP STORY

KOVÁCS SLAMS EC 'ATTACK' ON SOVEREIGNTY LAW

Brussels "and the owners of the dollar left are attacking" Hungary's Sovereignty Protection Act because it is aimed at preventing foreign influence in the country's affairs "via the Soros-affiliated rolling dollars", a government official has said.

The European Commission on Wednesday sent a letter of formal notice to Hungary, launching an infringement procedure over the country's Sovereignty Protection Act, saying it breached EU law. Zoltán Kovács said in a post on Facebook that it was a "fact" that "the dollar left's top contributor" in the 2022 general election campaign had been US financier George Soros. He noted that the Sovereignty Protection Act criminalises the acceptance of foreign campaign donations. The state secretary said the government was standing by the law, as 98% of the respondents to the last National Consultation public survey had expressed agreement with the legislation.

In a statement, ruling Fidesz said "we are not even surprised" that "Brussels does not like it that the Sovereignty Protection Act has criminalised the acceptance of foreign campaign financing". The party reiterated its position of calling for tightening the rules on attempted foreign influence, asserting that "only the Hungarian people are entitled to decide about Hungary's future".

EC TO LAUNCH INFRINGEMENT PROCEDURE AGAINST HUNGARY OVER SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION LAW

The European Commission has sent a letter of formal notice to Hungary, launching an infringement procedure over the country's Sovereignty Protection Act. In a press release on the February infringement package, the EC said the law, adopted on Dec 12 and in force since Dec 22, 2023, breached EU law. The statement noted that the law established the Sovereignty Protection Office, "tasked with investigating specific activities carried out in the interest of another State or a foreign body, organisation or natural person, if they are likely to violate or jeopardise the sovereignty of Hungary; and organisations whose activities using foreign funding may influence the outcome of elections or the will of voters."

Further, the law contains provisions and amendments to already existing legislation "that prohibit candidates, political parties and associations participating in elections from using foreign funding to influence or attempt to influence the will of voters for the elections in question, and to punish under criminal law the use of foreign funding in the context of elections," the EC said. After a "thorough assessment", the EC said it found the law to be in violation of several EU laws, "among others

the democratic values of the Union; the principle of democracy and the electoral rights of EU citizens; several fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, such as the right to respect for private and family life, the right to protection of personal data, the freedom of expression and information, the freedom of association, the electoral rights of EU citizens, the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, the privilege against self-incrimination and the legal professional privilege; the requirements of EU law relating to data protection and several rules applicable to the internal market."

Hungary has two months to reply to the letter of formal notice. Should it not address the issues listed in the letter, the EC may step up the procedure by sending a reasoned opinion.

SZIJJÁRTÓ IN UN: THREAT OF THIRD WORLD WAR HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER

The threat of the outbreak of a third world has never been as great as it is now, the Hungarian foreign minister said in New York on Wednesday, underlining the need for an urgent end to the war in Ukraine and the success of the counter-terrorism operations in the Middle East. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Péter Szijjártó said global security was in its worst shape since the end of the second world war, and that the threat of a third world war had never been as great as it was now. The UN, he added,

must therefore spearhead all counter-terrorism and peace efforts. According to a ministry statement, Szijjártó also spoke out against the re-emergence of geopolitical blocs, saying that the longer it takes to settle the situations in Ukraine and the Middle East, the greater the chance of a return to a world of blocs would be. Central Europe and Hungary already lost out on such a divide in the past, he said, urging connectivity and mutually beneficial cooperation. Szijjártó said this required bringing back mutual respect into international politics. This, he added, was key to turning "an age of dangers" into "an age of peace and sustainable development". He said the UN needed to take the lead in this effort.

The minister said Hungary wanted the war in Ukraine to come to an end as soon as possible and the anti-terror operations in the Middle East to be successful. The UN's most important responsibility, he said, was to stand up for peace and aid the success of the fight against terror. Szijjártó also warned against the risk of escalation in both conflicts. He said that if just one other country got involved in any of the two conflicts, "these conflicts will not be stopped at the border of that given country" and the threat of a regional or global war would become realistic. The minister said the success of the counter-terrorism operations in Gaza was a global interest. Szijjártó said the more countries supplied weapons to Ukraine, the longer the war would last, the more casualties

and the greater destruction there would be. The minister expressed hope that the voice of the “global pro-peace majority” could grow louder and louder in the UN against the “war psyche” of the transatlantic world. “You can count on Hungary as a true ally when it comes to standing up for peace, when it comes to saving the lives of people and when it comes to fighting terrorist organisations,” the minister said.

HIDVÉGHI: GOVT VIEWS FARMERS AS ALLIES

The “inconsiderate and short-sighted” green policies of Brussels destroy European farmers, whereas the Hungarian government views Hungarian farmers as allies, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said. Hidvéghi told MTI that “this alliance is demonstrated by the decisions and political support from us”. Last year, Hungarian farmers received 1,300 billion forints (EUR 3.4bn) and in the period until 2027, “we will be able to pay them 2,900 billion forints of support, of which only 600 billion forints will be European Union resources,” he added. “We do this because we are aware that without supporting farmers and agriculture, there will be no safe and quality food on our table,” Hidvéghi said.

At the same time, Brussels has signed trade agreements that benefited farmers from outside Europe. He accused Brussels of serving foreign interests, adding that “completely absurd and ill-

considered decisions have been made, so the farmers’ demands and protests are completely justified and fair”. “It is unacceptable that over the excuse of the war, Ukrainian grain, chicken meat and other products have been allowed to enter the territory of the EU which has caused huge problems to European producers,” he said. He welcomed the fact that Hungarian farmers also expressed their opinion and participated in the protests, adding that the situation was very different in Hungary and in western Europe. He said the government had been protecting farmers’ interests for years, citing protectionist measures in Hungary and other forms of financial support.

ORBÁN MEETS ARMENIAN PRESIDENT IN BUDAPEST

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan in his office in Budapest, and pledged to further strengthen diplomatic ties between the countries. Orbán said the relations between Hungary and Armenia were strong and based on mutual respect. “Hungarians value Armenia’s cultural and Christian traditions. It is time we stepped up diplomatic relations too,” Orbán said. At the talks, Orbán and Khachaturyan said economic cooperation was expected to develop apace in the coming period, especially in the areas of energy and tourism.

FIDESZ MEP: MEMBER STATES SHOULD HAVE RIGHT TO DECIDE ON GMO PRODUCE

Keeping Hungary GMO-free is one of the government’s priorities, and Hungary will insist that member states retain the right to decide on the technologies used on produce allowed into the country, an MEP of ruling Fidesz said on Tuesday in Strasbourg, in reaction to a European Parliament debate on new genomic technologies. Edina Tóth said the report at the heart of the plenary debate “needs amendments”, calling for a clear distinction between NGT produce and organic agriculture. Further, “GMO produce’s beneficial effect on climate change or food safety is yet to be proven,” she said. The Fidesz delegation will not vote in favour of the report, she said. “We will protect Hungary’s GMO-free agriculture,” she said, adding that the rejection of such produce was also enshrined in the Fundamental Law.

Regarding the EC’s announcement on Tuesday on new climate goals, Tóth said “the timing is completely botched”. The announcement came at a time when “farmers are protesting against climate and agricultural policy decisions, and Europe is yet to catch up with its 2030 goal of cutting harmful emissions by 55%.” Tóth said there was “cause for optimism” as the EC did not try to present the goals as draft legislation but kept it a simple

proposal, “at right-wing pressure”. She also welcomed that, “at right-wing pressure and in view of the protests”, the EC announced that it was scrapping the proposal to slash pesticide use by 50% by 2030. “That proposal would have ruined European and Hungarian farmers, as it would have sent food prices through the roof,” she said, pledging to “continue to protect European farmers, citizens and the industry from extreme, unrealistic EC proposals”.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER DISCUSSES UKRAINIAN GRAIN INFLUX, FARMERS’ PROTESTS WITH SLOVAK COUNTERPART

Agriculture Minister István Nagy on Tuesday met his recently appointed Slovak counterpart, Richard Takáč, to discuss the difficulties caused by the inflow of Ukrainian grain into European markets, the farmers’ protests in Europe, trade and animal health, the ministry said on Tuesday. Nagy called for closer cooperation as a key to better representation of shared interests. Even amid a “wholly new set of requirements” brought by the new Strategic Plans of the Common Agricultural Policy, Hungary managed to pre-finance 70% of EU funding for 136,000 farmers, he said. To protect Hungarian farmers, the government will maintain the ban on Ukrainian grain it announced on its own authority last year, “in view of the lack of EU action”, he said. Nagy

said Hungarian farmers would join the protesters in Brussels, demonstrating against EU agricultural policies. “Hungary would like as many member states as possible to support its fight in Brussels against the threat posed by Ukrainian agriculture.”

Ukraine’s EU accession would bring lasting difficulties for Hungarian producers “as Hungarian farmers working amid the limits of EU regulations can’t compete with [giant] Ukrainian farms which are in the hands of global capital and must abide by much laxer rules”, he said. Nagy said Hungary’s upcoming EU presidency would head the negotiations on CAP regulations after 2027, adding that Hungary would focus on crisis management during the talks. Reducing food waste and preserving the EU’s “food sovereignty” will also be high on the agenda, he said. “We will insist that food arriving from third countries must fulfil the same requirements as EU produce,” he said.

ECONOMY MINISTER CALLS ON FUEL INDUSTRY INSIDERS TO KEEP PRICES ‘COMPETITIVE’

Minister for National Economy Márton Nagy has called on vehicle fuel sellers to comply with an earlier commitment to keep price levels “competitive in regional comparison”, his ministry said on Wednesday. At a meeting with representatives of the Hungarian Petroleum Association (MASZ), including ones from oil and

gas company MOL, Nagy said he saw a “chance for adjusting” petrol prices, but not diesel prices. Local fuel prices need to stay in the “regional mid-range”, he added. Affordable fuel is in the “common interest” and can contribute to a recovery of consumption and a 4% GDP growth, he said. The sides earlier agreed to meet regularly to discuss the impact of domestic and international trends on fuel supply and prices, the ministry noted.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY A ‘KEY STATE’

Hungary is a “key state” which takes it upon itself to represent regional interests as well, and represents values in connection with the changing world order that “differ from the usual”, the prime minister’s political director said at the presentation of a book on Hungary’s strategy for connectivity in Győr, in the northwest, on Tuesday. Balázs Orbán, who is also chairman of the board of trustees of Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), said the changing global power dynamics were also impacting the balance in world politics. He argued that the ongoing industrial revolutions were based on technologies requiring raw materials not available in Europe, making the continent vulnerable.

He said Hungary could choose to either apply an emotional approach to this change, or take it as something that is natural and try to manage the situation. Though Hungary is “demographically not a significant

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.



country”, its level of technological development is high and its export power strong, the political director said, adding that over the last 30 years, Hungary had become capable of producing what it needs and making sure that its goods are competitive in other parts of the world as well. He said it was impossible to predict global developments, but a policy of a formation of blocs was not a solution. The emergence of blocs, he added, was dangerous for Hungary because it blocked breakout opportunities and posed a geopolitical threat.

He said that the policy of blocs did not strengthen the development position of the United States, but instead accelerated change, arguing that Europe “fell to its knees” as a result of the US’ approach to the war between Russia and Ukraine, while Russia had been able to diversify its economy and strengthen its relations with China. He said Hungary needed an approach that opposed the formation of blocs and was built on connectivity. Such an approach, he added, ended unilateral dependence, strengthened sovereignty and widened economic spectrums. The political director said this entailed government policies that focused on transport infrastructure developments and the establishment of logistics hubs while devoting attention to increasing value added in the economic output, and a foreign policy based on national interests.

MINISTRY: HUNGARY SOLAR POWER RATIO IN ELECTRICITY MIX 2ND BIGGEST IN EU

Hungary has the second largest share of solar power in its electricity mix in the European Union, with 18.16% after Greece’s 18.83%, the energy ministry said on Wednesday, citing a fresh analysis. The Hungarian solar power ratio is almost double the EU average of 9.1%, the ministry said on Facebook. The solar power capacity increases of the last several years have provided a solid basis for green energy production and storage, they said, noting that Hungary’s total solar output increased by over 1,600MW last year. More than a quarter of a million households have solar panels installed, compared with the 200,000 originally expected by 2030, they said. Meanwhile, the ministry said more than 25,000 households have applied for subsidies for home solar panels and battery storage in an ongoing scheme. Households may apply for up to 5 million forints in support. Companies can also apply for government support for industrial battery storage investments. The two subsidy programmes worth a combined 137 billion forints (EUR 354.2m) promote the fulfilment of climate protection obligations, relieve strain on the power grid and contribute to the ratio of green energy in the national energy mix, the ministry said.

BKK SUBMITS EU FUNDING BIDS FOR METRO, TRAM DEVELOPMENTS

The Budapest transport centre (BKK) on Wednesday submitted a bid for EU funding worth 10 billion forints (EUR 26m) for the preparation of large-scale metro and tram development projects in the city under the 2021-2027 budgetary cycle, BKK said. The projects under the Budapest Mobility Plan include renovating and extending the Millennium Underground, connecting the tramlines of northern Pest and southern Buda, upgrading Nyugati Square and its environs, constructing a tramline ring in southern Pest and extending tramlines 3 and 42. The application has been submitted as part of a 300 billion forint support package of EU development funding Budapest is scheduled to receive over the coming years. BKK said that “the package of development projects is only the first step”, adding that the city would soon submit bids for the funding of further development projects.

END-OF-WINTER BUSÓ FESTIVITIES TO BEGIN IN MOHÁCS ON THURSDAY

The end-of-winter masked carnival Busó festivities, a registered UNESCO cultural heritage event, begins in Mohács, in southern Hungary, on Thursday. At the festival held between Feb 8 and 13 this year, a record number

of masked participants, 2,500 in all, wearing traditional wooden masks and sheepskin costumes, will march through the city, the organisers have said. Programmes include an anniversary gathering of bagpipers, a Busó wedding, a folk singers' contest, folkdance shows, and a workshop on making Busó masks. Spectacles will end with the burning of the coffin of winter on Shrove Tuesday in the city's main square. Busó procession is a folk custom of the local Croatian minority. The event recalls a legend of the ethnic group, according to which their ancestors, seeking refuge from the Turkish occupiers on the island of Mohács on the opposite side of the Danube, crossed the river in boats at night, disguised in horrifying masks, and forced the superstitious soldiers of the enemy into a panicked escape. In

an older, less popular story, the Busós scare away not the Turks, but winter itself. The Busó procession was listed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009 and described as "a general emblem of the city and a commemoration of the great events of its history".

It is expected to attract 110,000 spectators over the six days this year, including 40,000-45,000 on Saturday and Sunday, the organisers said.

SHOW OF CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN ARTISTS TO OPEN IN BERLIN

An exhibition of the post-digital works of nine contemporary Hungarian artists will open on Friday at the Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin, in cooperation with MNB Arts and Culture. Code +

Canvas will feature works from the collection of the National Bank of Hungary, focusing on post-digitalism, one of the most influential trends in contemporary art, the bank's property wing, MNB-Ingatlan, said in a statement. The show attempts to give an insight into the world view and artistic practices of generation Y, it added. The artists have used a wide array of forms of expression, "attempting to strike a balance between the digital and analogue worlds", NBH said. Their works combine digital and more traditional imaging techniques. "Besides an emphatic presence of digital culture ... the artists are also in touch with the traditions of art and painting", the statement said. The exhibition curated by Kinga Hamvai and Zsuzska Petró will run through to March 22.