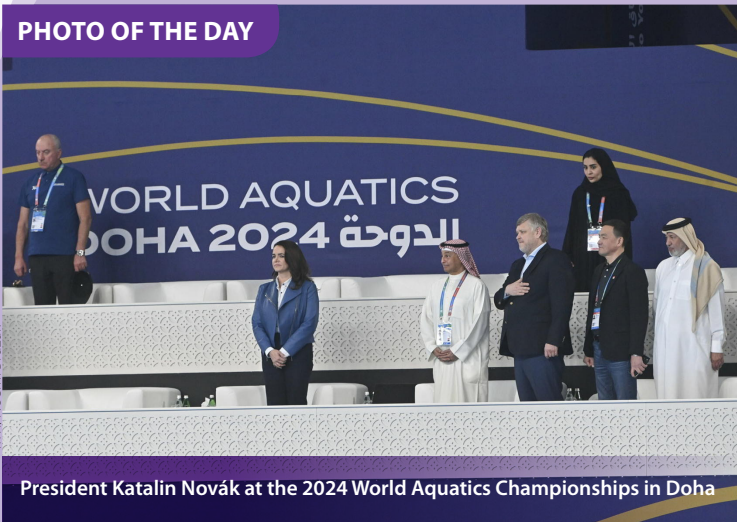


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Katalin Novák at the 2024 World Aquatics Championships in Doha

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Jobbik-Conservatives' season opening**

**Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East**

**End-of-winter festivities**

## TOP STORY

# SZIJJÁRTÓ WARNS AGAINST MIDDLE EAST ESCALATION

The opening of a second front in the Middle East should be avoided at all cost, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, said after meeting Amir Ohana, the Speaker of the Israeli parliament, in New York late on Thursday.

"The success of the anti-terrorism operation in Gaza is an international interest, as it would guarantee that such an attack will never happen anywhere in the world," Szijjártó told Ohana, according to a ministry statement. The spread of the conflict to neighbouring Lebanon should be prevented as it would have "tragic consequences" for the entire region, he said. Ohana thanked Hungary for its support of Israel, its continued blocking of European Union sanctions against Israeli settlers, and for maintaining its Israel-friendly policies and fair approach to the state, Szijjártó said. The minister slammed a "long-standing bias and unfair treatment of Israel in international organisations". Anti-Semitism has grown in western Europe and the United States since the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on Oct 7, "to an outrageous, brutal degree", he said. "Dozens of violent protests have been held" in the US, he said. "I hope the US Department of State will now stop preparing reports on religious freedom in other countries."

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## **BÓKA: 'EP, EC USING EU FUNDS AS TOOL TO PRESSURISE HUNGARY'**

Political communication preceding last week's European Council session and documents that have come to light since "are proof that the European Parliament and the European Commission are using EU funds as a tool to politically pressurise Hungary", the EU affairs minister said on Thursday. In a post on Facebook, János Bóka noted "a long-standing dispute over objective criteria, European values and rule-of-law standards" when it came to the release of EU funds to Hungary. Putting Hungary under pressure in this way had been possible owing to "how regulations are phrased", he said. After the EP elections, an objective and fair procedure would hopefully be backed by the majority in the newly formed European Commission, he said, and this would change the situation regarding Hungary's EU funds. Hungarians, he said, were entitled to the EU money, and the government was unwilling to compromise or show flexibility on such issues as the country's sovereignty, migration or child protection. Regarding the upcoming EP elections, Bóka said Hungary's ruling Fidesz party "will be an unavoidable player in a real conservative European alternative". European conservative forces, he added, would emerge stronger from

the vote, and Fidesz, the Hungarian prime minister and his government would be instrumental when it came to institutional and structural changes in Brussels.

## **GULYÁS: PERPETRATORS OF CRIMES AGAINST MINORS NOT TO BE GRANTED PARDON**

Perpetrators of crimes committed against minors shall not be granted a pardon of any kind, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said on Thursday evening, in connection with the prime minister's announcement on a constitutional amendment proposal he had submitted earlier in the day. Viktor Orbán announced that he had submitted the amendment proposal on behalf of the government, adding that it was his personal belief that there must be "no mercy for paedophiles". Speaking to HírTV, Gulyás said that the opposition in Hungary had done everything it could to prevent the implementation of a family support system. "In a concrete case, because of a dispute that arose in this regard, it was considered absolutely necessary for the government to make it clear and enshrine it in the constitution that granting a pardon in any crime committed deliberately against minors shall not be an option allowed to the president of the republic". Gulyás said this measure was hoped to help make clear the government's penal policy goals.

## **KOCSIS: 'NO CLEMENCY FOR PAEDOPHILES'**

"There shall be no clemency for paedophiles," Máté Kocsis, the group leader of ruling Fidesz, told public Kossuth Rádió on Friday morning, adding that Fidesz MPs support Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's constitutional amendment proposal to that effect. Kocsis said a debate had developed in Hungary in recent days that made it clear that from now on, it is not necessary to consider whether such an offender can be pardoned or not, but that the possibility of granting a pardon to such a person must be excluded from the start. Commenting on President Katalin Novák's decision to pardon the deputy director of a children's home who had been convicted for coercing residents to withdraw allegations of paedophilia against the director, Kocsis said "nobody contests the legality of the president's decision." Kocsis said it would be good to know what the president's clemency decision was based on, but MPs should not deal with what the basis for the decision was but ensure that this will not happen again. The constitutional amendment could be adopted in the second half of March, Kocsis said.

"Also, I believe that since there was a referendum in Hungary in 2022, which aligned 3.6 million people in the area of child protection ... and in this referendum people made it clear that lawmakers must do everything to

protect children," Kocsis said. He added that the constitutional amendment proposal submitted by the prime minister on Thursday must be accepted because it complements the child protection system, so from now on all offenders must know that if they do what they do at the expense of children, no presidential pardon would be an available option for them. Kocsis said the governing parties had adopted in 2021 Europe's strictest child protection and anti-paedophile law, which the left-wing parties did not support. They did not back proposals for a searchable register of paedophiles or stricter rules in the penal code, he added. He said the left regularly attacks Hungary abroad over this, adding that the president of the European Commission said Brussels was withholding EU funds due to Hungary in large part because of Hungary's child protection act. "This is why I think what the left wing has done in recent days ... is hypocritical, since they have always opposed everything about child protection rules and the anti-paedophile law," he said.

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## **HUNGARY, SLOVAK DEFENCE MINISTERS CALL FOR CEASEFIRE IN UKRAINE**

The war in Ukraine must be ended through a ceasefire and peace talks, the Hungarian defence minister said, after meeting his Slovak counterpart on Friday. Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky and Robert Kaliňák visited Tata, in northern Hungary, and inspected

new equipment of the 1st Armoured Brigade and a simulation centre used in training there. Szalay-Bobrovniczky said he and Kaliňák agreed in their assessment of the war in Ukraine. Slovakia and Hungary are both members of the European Union and NATO, as well as neighbours "with a shared history and values, in strategic partnership", he said. Hungary is also securing the Slovak airspace until that country takes delivery of recently ordered fighter jets, he added. After a presentation of military equipment, Szalay-Bobrovniczky noted that some of the equipment is being manufactured in Hungary, "which allows for cooperation with Slovakia".

Deputy Prime Minister Kaliňák, who also serves as defence minister, said "it is not right that the European Union should allow only one opinion." Prolonging the conflict would benefit no one, Kaliňák said. "We need peace and calm so we can focus on developing our own countries," he added.

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## **PRESIDENT NOVÁK MEETS WORLD AQUATICS CHIEF, HUNGARIAN SPORTSPEOPLE AT WORLD AQUATICS CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA 2024**

President Katalin Novák met Hungarian sportspeople at the World Aquatics Championships Doha 2024 during her official visit in Qatar on Friday, her office said. Novák met the athletes and

leaders of the Hungarian Swimming Association (MÚSZ), members of the national water polo team and World Aquatics President Husain Al-Musallam. She watched a Hungary-Qatar men's water polo match which ended with a 28:1 Hungarian victory and granted an award to player of the match Vince Vigvári. During the meeting with the World Aquatics president, she said preparations were progressing well for the move of the World Aquatics headquarters to Budapest. She added that it represented the recognition of Hungarian sports, especially aquatics, and the world-class events hosted by Hungary. She also noted that 2024 had been declared a "Year of Movement" in Hungary, with a focus on community as well as competitive sports. Novák and Musallam discussed the preparations for the 2027 World Aquatics Championships in Budapest and Musallam expressed his appreciation for Hungarians' openness and support for water sports. Novák is in Qatar on an official visit and she is scheduled to meet Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Sunday. He paid a visit to Hungary last August and invited Novák to visit Qatar.

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## **ECON MINISTER CALLS FOR EU SCHEME TO SUPPORT E-VEHICLES AT EU COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL MEETING**

National Economy Minister Márton Nagy called for joint, comprehensive support programme for electric

vehicles at an informal meeting of EU competitiveness ministers in Genk, Belgium, on Friday. Improving the bloc's competitiveness is crucial, Nagy said, adding that the EU must keep abreast of the US and China, which he said ploughed significant funds into supporting their own industry. Nagy said the EU would need to involve new resources for the green transition as it returns to enforcing the Maastricht criteria and stricter budgetary policies that had been put on hold during the Covid pandemic. Development bank, commercial bank and national bank resources would have a significant role in future, he said. At the same time, the minister urged a new approach to industrial policy, and a more effective, targeted funding for sectors or products, in line with environmental goals. He proposed an EU scheme to support the users and manufacturers of electric cars.

On Ukraine's EU accession, Nagy said the integration process was "unprepared", its effect on member states not clear. Sectors such as

agriculture and logistics were already suffering, and distortions were becoming visible in other sectors, too, he said. He called for consultations with various sectors' players, noting that Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Polish logistics companies had written a letter to the EC, outlining "concrete proposals". Their competitiveness is being eroded by the agreement between Hungary and Ukraine, he added. The letter is asking for regulations ensuring that Ukrainian drivers had to abide by the educational, technical and other specifications pertaining to EU drivers, he said. Those requirements would ensure equal competition and operating requirements.

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### **HUNGARY JAN INFLATION 3.8%**

Annual inflation in Hungary was 3.8% in January, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Month on month, prices rose by 0.7%. Food prices increased by 3.6%, while household

energy prices went down by 11.3%. Services prices were up 10.4%, while consumer durables fell by 1.4%.

Commenting on the data, Minister for National Economy Márton Nagy said in a statement that inflation no longer presented a significant problem from the point of view of the economy, and the 3.8% annual inflation reported for January was better than the relevant figures in Estonia (5.0%), Croatia (4.8%), Austria (4.3%) or Slovakia (4.3%). Nagy added that real wages had started rising again since September, and real wage growth could reach or even exceed 6% this year. After bringing down inflation, the government will now focus on "the main task of 2024" which is restoring economic growth, the minister said. In order to achieve GDP growth of around 4%, he said progress must be made in three areas: the activity rate of the labour market must be boosted, the level of investments must be maintained above 25%, and household consumption must be restored by strengthening consumer confidence.