

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/János Vajda

Ferry crossing on River Tisza closed due to flood alerts

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**EU affairs ministers meet in Brussels**

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

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY 'WEEDS OUT' PARTS OF RUSSIA SANCTIONS

All elements of the European Union's 13th package of sanctions against Russia that would harm Hungarians' interests "have been weeded out", the foreign minister said in Brussels.

The package was "for show" and did not promote peace, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after a meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council. The only reason for the new sanctions in the process of being finalised "is that the bloc can now say they did something ahead of the second anniversary of the war", he added. In the past weeks, the Hungarian government "has weeded out the measures that may have harmed Hungarian interests." Hungary's fundamental economic interests are not harmed by the package, Szijjártó said. "But there is a bigger problem: the EU is further pursuing a completely failed strategy, which takes us farther away from peace rather than taking us nearer," he said. Hungary will continue to strip any elements that may harm its interests, should further sanctions be proposed, he added. "The sanctions packages have harmed European competitiveness while improving that of other players in the world economy. That's a double failure, double disadvantage and double mistake. It would be good if colleagues in Brussels could draw the conclusions," he said.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: EUROPE 'STILL GRIPPED BY WAR PSYCHOSIS'**

The EU "is still gripped by war psychosis", and the majority refused to change its "failed strategy", Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after a meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council. The foreign minister urged a ceasefire and peace talks. Hungary has once again refused to take part in delivering weapons to Ukraine, he added. According to one proposal, the European Peace Facility would be extended by another five billion euros to finance military equipment, he said. "We made it clear we wouldn't participate in joint actions aimed at weapons deliveries, and will refrain from blocking such a decision only if it does not impose any duties on us, financial or otherwise," he said. Szijjártó said that thanks to a change in the rules of abstention, Hungary's part of those five billion euros would not finance materiel. Hungary will have the opportunity to determine the use of those monies, which could be ploughed into the fight against migration or strengthening stability in the Western Balkans, he said.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY REJECTS INCLUSION OF ISRAELI SETTLERS ON SANCTIONS LIST**

Hungary alone has withheld support for putting Israeli settlers on the EU

sanctions list, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said after a meeting of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels. Discussion of the issue had been "extremely tense", Szijjártó told a press conference after the meeting, adding that no agreement was reached on imposing sanctions against Israeli settlers that had been advocated by several EU member states. "At the start there were one or two ... other countries that had similar position to ours. Their position slowly shifted," he said, adding that in the end Hungary was the only one not to support the proposal. The minister said adding settlers to the sanctions list would "only exacerbate tensions in a country that suffered a terrorist attack". He said Israel's counter-terrorist operation not only was in Israel's interest but in that of the entire world. He added that the measure would weaken Israel and heighten tensions in the West Bank, where fighting could spread. "I think this must be prevented at all costs," he said.

Szijjártó said at the same time that new sanctions should be mounted against Hamas. "It had appeared that there was agreement on this, but several member states linked the two issues, which is completely unacceptable..." he said, adding that it was wrong and "anti-Israeli" to pair Hamas and Israeli settlers together. Hamas, he said, should come under "the heaviest possible sanctions", but it was unjustified to put settlers in the same category. Regarding the situation in Lebanon, the

minister said preventing the spread of the conflict was of paramount importance, warning that failure to do so may lead to the whole of the Middle East being "engulfed in flames", with a knock-on impact on European security. "This is why I initiated ... that the European Union should give the legitimate Lebanese government maximum support", with the goal of preventing the war from spreading, Szijjarto said.

Hungary has provided 500,000 US dollars in aid to Egypt and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the aim of protecting the civilian population. "Of course, we urge that the hostages be released immediately," he said, adding that this should happen without strings attached. "A realistic agreement must be reached, and I trust that the Qataris and the Egyptians will succeed here," he said.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT 'IN NO NEED FOR LECTURES FROM US DELEGATIONS'**

The Hungarian government has no need for lectures from US congress delegations on what should happen in Hungary, as only Hungarians can decide that, the foreign minister said on Monday. Responding to question regarding a visit to Hungary by a bipartisan US congress delegation, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference on the sidelines of a meeting of the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council that the delegation had not

been received at ministerial level, similarly to Hungarian delegations in the US.

Earlier talks with similar delegations had resulted in “comprehensive lectures on how we should govern Hungary,” he said. Szijjártó said the way Hungary should be governed was decided by Hungarians whose decisions the government implemented. “We do not need US congressional delegations to lecture us on what should and shouldn’t happen in Hungary.”

The delegation’s press conference had also shown they wanted to discuss EU and internal matters rather than bilateral ones, he said. “None of those [issues] concern them.”

Regarding European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s decision to run for re-election, Szijjarto said the EU’s competitiveness and security had “dramatically” deteriorated on her watch. “If ... she is judged on merit, I think President Von der Leyen will be graded poorly at the end of her term,” he said.

Szijjártó also welcomed Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristensson’s decision to visit Budapest, adding that the meeting could further the Hungarian parliament’s ratification of Sweden’s NATO membership, “although the final date is still unknown”. He also praised Hungarian-Swedish defence cooperation, adding that Swedish companies “feel good in Hungary” and noting that the Hungarian Armed Forces fly Gripen aircraft.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: EU LAUNCHES MARITIME MISSION AGAINST HOUTHİ REBELS**

Hungary has been urging decisive action to restore free and safe navigation in the Red Sea, and now the European Union has decided to launch a maritime mission to suppress Houthi rebels in Yemen in order to protect cargo ships, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in Brussels on Monday. The minister told a press conference after a meeting of the European Union’s Foreign Affairs Council that it was essential that Operation Shield mounted by Greece, Italy and France should coordinate as closely as possible with the US and the UK with the goal of eliminating disruptions in the supply chain.

The budget for the first year has been set at eight million euros, he noted, adding that this sum would not be sufficient. “That’s why I proposed supplementing the European Union maritime mission by allocating funding from the European Peace Framework to strengthen the Yemeni coast guard,” he said. Also, Houthis should be classed as a terrorist organisation, he said, adding that they were clearly committing acts of terrorism and harming European security.

## **CHAMBERS OF V4, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA TO HOLD JOINT DEMONSTRATION ON FEB 22**

The agricultural chambers of the four Visegrád Group countries will

organise a demonstration together with their Latvian and Lithuanian peers on Feb 22 to call the public’s attention to their situation caused in large part by the unrestricted inflow of Ukrainian grain and food products, the head of the National Agricultural Chamber (NAK) said on Monday. The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has gone nowhere over the past years and European farmers have been labelled “climate criminals”, with the term officially codified in community law, Balázs Györffy told public news channel M1. He called the European Green Deal, a set of policy initiatives proposed by the European Commission, “an unprofessional and unfounded diktat”, adding that “in light of the recent farmer demonstrations, decision-makers are now backpedalling”, which, Györffy said, he believed “could be because of the upcoming EP elections”. “The unlimited inflow of grain and food products, mainly poultry, eggs and honey, from Ukraine makes the situation worse by creating uneven competition for European farmers and consumers also because they are not subject to strict EU regulations,” said Györffy. Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, Györffy said “farmers across Europe are in an uproar and have lost their patience”. “What we can see is that the elite in Brussels absolutely ignores our opinion and does not listen to our problems”.

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## **KOC SIS: FIDESZ-CHRISTDEM GROUP TO CHOOSE PRESIDENT CANDIDATE LATER THIS WEEK**

The ruling Fidesz and Christian Democratic parties will hold a group meeting ahead of the spring session of parliament, on Wednesday and Thursday, in Balatonalmádi, where they will decide on their candidate for the new head of state, Máté Kocsis, the Fidesz group leader said. The prime minister will address the meeting starting on Wednesday evening, and the main agenda items of the meeting also include preparations for the European Parliament and local council elections and the new package of child protection laws, Kocsis said on Facebook.

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## **HUNGARY TOURISM SECTOR RACKS UP AWARDS FROM CHINA**

Hungary's tourism sector has received five professional awards from China, one of the top sources of tourists in the country, the Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTÜ) said on Monday. China's

National Geographic Traveller has recognised Hungary as a "gold-tier" Quality Destination, while the Chinese edition of The Voyage Magazine has chosen Hungary as the New Emerging Destination of the Year, MTÜ said in a statement. Meanwhile, MTÜ finished in the top three in the best regional innovations category of China's National Tourism News competition, and Hungary was recognised among the top five study trip destinations. Also, Tongcheng Travel, one of China's leading booking services, acknowledged Chinese-Hungarian tourism partnerships with the Best Partner of 2023 title, MTÜ said. The number of Chinese tourists arriving in Hungary quadrupled last year compared with 2022, MTÜ said, adding that tourism from China is expected to grow further this year.

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## **N HUNGARY RIVER SECTIONS ON FLOOD ALERT**

Areas along the rivers Tisza, Bodrog, Takta and the estuary of the river Sajó in northern Hungary are on flood protection alert, the northern Hungarian water management directorate said on Monday. First and

second-degree flood alerts are in place along a 334km section. Water levels in the directorate's operational area are generally receding or stagnating, with only the river Tisza's level rising slightly at Tiszapalkonya. The Tisza's water level in the Tokaj region has been receding since Sunday morning, having peaked at the Tiszalök hydroelectric power plant on Sunday afternoon.

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## **DUTCH WOMAN STABS PARTNER TO DEATH IN BUDAPEST FLAT**

A Dutch woman stabbed her partner to death in a rented apartment in central Budapest's Kazinczy Street, the website police.hu said on Monday. Budapest police received several calls reporting a man was bleeding heavily in the apartment early in the morning, according to the website. Paramedics were unable to save the man's life, they said in a statement. The police said that a middle-aged Dutch couple got into a fight, which led to the woman stabbing her partner, who died on the spot. The police took the woman into custody and launched legal proceedings against her on homicide charges, police.hu said.