

PHOTO OF THE DAY

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer



PM Viktor Orbán with Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

Commemorations of communism victims

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: NO PARDON FOR CHILD ABUSERS

Hungary's next head of state must restore the national unity that ruptured when it came to light that the previous president pardoned the deputy head of an orphanage convicted of covering up child abuse, the prime minister said.

Viktor Orbán told public radio that clemency cases "are completely separate from the government's work", and fall solely under the president's authority, adding that Katalin Novák had said "yes" to the pardon when the only fitting response could have been "no". Most people in the country broadly felt this way, especially on the right, he said, adding that "family values and protecting children are at the heart of our political creed". The president's decision had ruptured national unity, which could only be restored with her resignation, he said, praising Novák for her work and integrity in admitting to her mistake. He said the entire case was "unacceptable", adding that when child abusers were convicted, then at the very least there would be "no pardon and no mercy". He said all institutions working with children would have to be inspected to determine whether their leaders had passed an aptitude test and whether they meet all the requirements to be there. These screenings, Orbán said, must also extend to the officials' lifestyles, "sexual deviance" and psychological fitness.

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ORBÁN: SULYOK'S NOMINATION FOR PRESIDENT DOWN TO HIS EXPERIENCE, STANDING

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has said the ruling parties chose to nominate Tamás Sulyok, the current head of the Constitutional Court, for head of state based on his experience in constitutional and legal matters as well as his knowledge of the international stage and political institutions. It was these qualities and his professional standing that made Sulyok stand out as the most qualified candidate for the job, Orbán said. He said the nomination was preceded by long consultations and negotiations, also within Fidesz's leadership. Orbán said Hungary was a strong country, even though "there's trouble now because the previous president resigned". "Our heart still bleeds", especially because the resignation happened over a matter in which there had been a sharp contrast between public opinion and the president's decision, he added. But the cloud's silver lining was that when examining potential candidates, the ruling parties found many Hungarians who were qualified to hold the office of president, "which strengthens one's faith in one's own country and nation". Orbán said it would be the new head of state who would have to restore unity and balance, expressing hope that Sulyok would make it clear in his first national address that there can be

no pardon for child abuse or related crimes. "I hope he will also call on us to make the legislative amendments and decisions needed to prevent such things from happening again," Orbán said, adding that he had already made some of these decisions and ordered a full-scale screening and inspection. "People who pose a threat to children can't be allowed to work in schools, kindergartens or children's homes," he said. Orbán said it was "impossible" for a case like the one concerning the director of the Bicske orphanage who had been convicted of child abuse to happen and not be followed by a public outcry but rather a cover-up. He said the government will bring order to this area, vowing to personally monitor the process and bring it to an end by "making the right decisions".

ORBÁN: HUNGARY TO EXPAND GRIPEN FLEET WITH FOUR NEW FIGHTER JETS

Hungary is expanding its air force's fleet of Gripen fighter jets with four new aircraft, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after meeting Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson in Budapest on Friday. The extension of Hungary's Gripen contract will significantly boost the military's capabilities and capacity to take part in foreign missions, Orbán told a press conference. The changed security environment and the war between Russia and Ukraine make it especially important to enable the Hungarian air force to use its own

equipment in performing operations with its allies outside the country's airspace, he added.

Orbán said he and Kristersson had agreed to extend a related logistics contract and expand it to training. Also, an agreement has been reached on Saab and the Defence Innovation Research Institute opening an artificial intelligence-focused centre of excellence, Orbán said, adding that the two countries will also begin cooperating in R+D. The prime minister noted that there had been a debate during the tenure of his first administration between 1998 and 2002 on whether Hungary needed to develop its own air defence capabilities and with what kind of technology. The government then had chosen to cooperate with the Swedes, leading to its use of Gripen fighters, he said. Orbán said they had now arrived at a key point, as the contracts were set to expire. "Since we were poor when we bought the first Gripens, we couldn't buy as many as we actually needed," Orbán said. In response to a question, he said that by signing the agreements, Hungary had decided to maintain and increase its air defence capabilities, adding this meant that Hungary would remain part of joint NATO operations in which member states secure the defence of each other's air spaces. Orbán said this also strengthened Hungary's commitment to NATO.

He thanked Kristersson for his visit, and, referring to Sweden's NATO membership, said Hungary's parliament will convene on Monday

and “make the necessary decisions” that will bring one phase to a close and begin another.

Asked why Hungary’s opinion had changed on Sweden’s NATO accession, Orbán said NATO membership meant that the allied countries were prepared to fight for each other, adding that maintaining such strong ties with a country required trust and mutual respect. That was why, he said, both countries had made careful preparations to rebuild the past trust between them. “This took some time,” he said, adding that the recent developments were not a matter of Hungary changing its opinion, but about a process with a beginning and an end.

Orbán rejected the idea that the new bilateral defence agreement was a determining factor. “This isn’t a business deal involving NATO membership in exchange for Gripens,” the prime minister said. He said that Swedish-Hungarian defence cooperation “is a much longer story than Sweden’s intention to join NATO”. He added, at the same time, that a defence cooperation agreement contributed a lot to restore trust between the two countries, “but let’s not see this as a deal”. Orbán described his talks with Kristersson as “interesting, exciting and productive”, emphasising that they had both made their “mutually good intentions” clear. He noted that Sweden had been a friend of Hungary in 1956 when it welcomed Hungarian refugees, and had been a crucial partner during

Hungary’s EU accession, too, when it argued for swifter enlargement. Meanwhile, Orbán said they had also discussed EU matters, with a special emphasis on Hungary’s upcoming presidency. He praised the Swedish presidency of the first half of 2023, saying Sweden had promised to share its experiences with Hungary.

Orbán said their discussion had also touched on the EU’s economic competitiveness on the global stage, the development of common security and defence policy, the need to fight illegal migration and cooperation in the elimination of organised crime. He hailed bilateral trade cooperation, noting that trade turnover has tripled compared with 2010 and is approaching 3 billion euros. Bilateral cooperation in the area of nuclear energy is also effective, Orbán said, welcoming the Swedish participation in the upgrade of Hungary’s Paks nuclear power plant. He also noted that some 70,000 Swedish tourists had visited Hungary last year. Kristersson said the new agreements served both Sweden’s and Hungary’s interests. The two countries have signed two military industry deals, as part of which Hungary will procure another four JAS-39 Gripen fighter jets from Sweden, he noted. Hungary currently leases 14 Gripens from Sweden, which will transfer into Hungarian ownership in 2026, he said.

The deal will also strengthen European security, he said, noting that the Hungarian Gripens also participate in policing Baltic airspace near Sweden.

Kristersson also pointed out Sweden’s and Hungary’s strong business relations, noting that there are 180 Swedish companies present in Hungary employing around 170,000 people. He identified economic cooperation, competitiveness and the internal market as areas with potential for progress in bilateral relations. He said Sweden respected the fact that Hungary’s parliament was making a “Hungarian decision” concerning Sweden’s NATO accession, adding that this was not a formality. Asked about past disagreements between the two countries, Kristersson said he was in agreement with Orbán that they should work together in areas where they have common ground and shared interests.

ORBÁN: ‘PANIC’ IN BRUSSELS AS ‘THE GATE CLOSES’

As the current term of the European Parliament ends in June, Brussels is enveloped in “panic” and “entering a final round” to push through decisions related to “LGBTQ, migration and war”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to public radio on Friday. Orbán said Hungary must mount a defence against this. “There isn’t that much time” before the June EP elections, he added. He said the migration pact was the “greater problem” as “the situation is slightly more divided” in Hungary on this issue than on “the LGBTQ issue”. He underlined, at the same time, that an

overwhelming majority of Hungarians supported the country's national sovereignty and the principle that only Hungarians should have the right to decide whom they want to live together with. The government even called a referendum and has held National Consultations in this matter, he noted, adding, however, that "there are a lot of paid agents here". The prime minister said that George Soros had unveiled a programme in 2015-16, the "infamous Soros plan", which proposed the same policies found in a draft plan in Brussels by those "who are now nervous about the gate closing". These, he said, included the plan to create "migrant ghettos", bring at least a million migrants a year to Europe and to manage, rather than reject migration. "We've been able to prevent his so far," Orbán said, adding: "I've been fighting since 2015, starting out on my own, but then there were more and more of us, until we became the majority who can prevent the idiotic migration-friendly rules in Brussels." "Now we must suffer one last attack," Orbán said. "But we're not alone," he said, adding that several other EU member states did not back "migration-friendly rules". He referred to Slovakia among others who had abstained or objected to certain elements of the pact. "The Italians are also sane, while the Greeks are also suffering," he said. "We don't want our struggles of the past years to remain migrant-free" to be in vein "because of the attack in Brussels before the election", he added.

ORBÁN URGES CEASEFIRE, PEACE PROCESS IN RUSSIA- UKRAINE CONFLICT

Given that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine cannot be settled on the battlefield or through military means, a peace process is needed to end the conflict and bring about a liveable Europe for the long term, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview on Friday. Noting the second anniversary of the start of the war, Orbán told public radio that the conflict was "a very difficult issue". Russia attacked Ukraine, "which raises a number of ethical and moral questions, but war is fundamentally a matter of realpolitik," the prime minister said. "The realities [of the conflict] were obvious from the very first moment," Orbán said, adding that this was why Hungary had maintained its position. The West cannot thrust itself into a war which, "based on mathematical and realistic facts", cannot be resolved on the battlefield, he said. The aim should be to secure a ceasefire and peace, because Russia cannot be brought to its knees by military force, Orbán said. "We Hungarians don't agree with the British, French and German points of view which want to force a military solution," he said. "We need peace in our neighbouring country; this is an existential, vital humane matter."

Asked if the EU could change its stance on the war, Orbán said leaders had "made a mistake" and got "stuck in a hole", but public opinion would settle

the issue. There was a risk that the war may spread, "which is bad for Europe and would ruin us economically". He added that vast amounts of money were being spent "without any chance of military success... This must be stopped." Orbán said that sooner or later someone would have to say: "I made a mistake". "That's why we are waiting for the American presidential election... President Trump will return and he will be given a free hand to make peace," he said. "There needs to be a European parliamentary election and in America a presidential election" for change to happen, he said.

KOCSIS: PARLT TO ELECT NEW HEAD OF STATE ON FEB 26

Parliament will elect Hungary's new head of state on Monday, ruling Fidesz's group leader said on Facebook. Presidential candidates must be backed by one-fifth of MPs to be eligible, Máté Kocsis said after a meeting of the house committee on Friday. He noted that unlike in 2022, the opposition parties are not nominating a joint candidate this time round. Opposition LMP has recommended legal expert Péter Hack, while Mi Hazánk has proposed economist Magdolna Csath for the post, but neither group has the number of lawmakers needed to officially nominate their candidate, Kocsis said. Meanwhile, the other opposition parties have indicated that they will not take part in electing the president, he added.

VARGA: GOVT TO REDUCE PUBLIC DEBT FURTHER, KEEP IT BELOW EU AVERAGE

Hungary has reduced its public debt to 73.5% of GDP and will keep it below the EU average, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said in Ghent on Friday. Only 16 out of 27 EU member states managed to reduce their public debt last year, he said before an Ecofin meeting, adding that Hungary regards making further reductions this year as a top priority. Varga argued that the EU debt level must also come down, and Hungary does not back new proposals that would further indebt the EU. Meanwhile, the minister noted that previously blocked EU funds were continually arriving and the EU has transferred 520 billion forints since last December. This tendency would remain "unhindered for the rest of the year", he added. Hungary also expects the European Commission to transfer monies requested for the protection of EU borders, he said, adding that Hungary has spent 700 billion forints on border protection since 2015. Regarding measures to boost European competitiveness, he said Hungary supported the European Investment Bank's enhanced role in financing small and medium-sized enterprises, adding that the bank could contribute to Hungary and Hungarian companies becoming the winners of the green transition. Varga said the bank must play a role in investments required for nuclear energy and energy storage.

BRADLEY-FARRELL'S BOOK ON HUNGARIAN POLITICS PRESENTED AT HUNGARIAN US EMBASSY

A book on Hungarian politics by American author Shea Bradley-Farrell, *Last Warning to the West*, was presented at the Hungarian embassy in Washington, DC, at an event linked to a CPAC meeting on Thursday. Bradley-Farrell, who heads the Counterpoint Institute and is a leading staff member of the Centre for Fundamental Rights, argues that Hungary serves as an example to Western countries for how to put conservative values into political practice. Hungary's ambassador to Washington, Szabolcs Takács, said Hungarians were survivors, noting its history of fighting for survival culminating in their uprising against the Soviet Communist regime.

Miklós Szánthó, the director of the Centre for Fundamental Rights, argued there was a need to build a coalition for promoting conservative values, as such values were "under attack by progressive forces". Szánthó is scheduled to address the Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday. Also attending the embassy event was Arizona politician Kari Lake, a possible vice-presidential candidate of Donald Trump.

HUNGARY JAN JOBLESS RATE 4.5%

Hungary's jobless rate stood at 4.5% in January, up from 4.2% in December, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on

Friday. The rate covers unemployment among people between the ages of 15 and 74. In absolute terms, there were 222,000 unemployed in January, 14,700 more than in December. The rolling three-month average jobless rate stood at 4.6% in January, inching up from 4.4% in December. KSH noted that data from the National Employment Service (NFSZ) show there were 233,000 registered jobseekers at the end of January, down 4.4% from twelve months earlier. The employment rate for the 15-74 age group was 64.4% in January, down from 64.7% in December. In absolute terms, there were 4,698,500 people employed in January, 24,900 fewer than in December. The number of economically active people in the age group stood at 4,920,600, giving Hungary an activity rate of 67.4%.

Commenting on the data, Sándor Czomba, the state secretary for employment policy, said the government had been successful in protecting jobs and families, noting that the number of jobholders had grown by 1 million since the tenure of the previous Socialist governments. The government this year is focused on achieving a GDP growth rate of 4%, restoring consumption, keeping the investment rate above 25% and increasing labour-market activity, he said. The state secretary said a 460 billion forint (EUR 1.19bn) GINOP Plusz European Union-funded economic development scheme would contribute to raising the activity rate of the 15-64 age group to 85% from the current 78%.

HUNGARIAN 3D BRAIN IMAGING TECH HANDED OVER TO CANADA'S MCGILL UNIVERSITY

A Hungarian brain-imaging microscope employing 3D imaging technology, Femto3D Atlas, was handed over to McGill

University in Canada on Thursday in cooperation with the Hungarian embassy in Ottawa. Hungarian ambassador Mária Vass-Salazar said the embassy considered R&D&I to be a priority in strengthening Hungarian-Canadian relations, adding that interest in value-added high-tech Hungarian products was strong in Canada. McGill's vice-

president, Anja Geitman, said the Femtonics device aptly illustrated Hungary's technological expertise and capacity for innovation, and testified to the importance of international cooperation in high-level research. Neurons are scanned in 3D using the device, allowing representation of complex neural activity.