

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Visegrad Group prime ministers Viktor Orbán (L2), Robert Fico (L), Donald Tusk (R) and Petr Fiala (R2) meet in Prague

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP plenary session

Budapest Assembly meets

**Stats office publishes
Jan guest night figures**

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

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: VISEGRAD GROUP 'HAS MEANING, FUTURE'

The Visegrad cooperation has “meaning and future” despite a difference of opinion on support for Ukraine, the Hungarian prime minister said after attending a summit of the Visegrad Group in Prague on Tuesday.

“Today’s meeting convinced me that Visegrad is alive and important. We are able to respectfully acknowledge our differences even if we debate each other’s stances. We continue to strengthen cooperation in joint issues. Hungary is ready to do that,” Viktor Orbán told a press conference. The Czech, Polish and Slovak prime ministers also acknowledged differences and took a stance for continued cooperation. Orbán said the summit “was not one of the easiest ones” as it had focused on “self-reflection” and on whether the Visegrad Group should be maintained in its current form. He noted that a similar meeting had taken place after the EU integration of the Visegrad countries, ending in the decision to maintain cooperation. The war in Ukraine “has overwritten everything”, and so the issue was back on the table, Orbán said. The prime ministers of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia were in agreement that Russia’s attack on Ukraine had been a “gross violation of international law”, and that Ukraine needed aid, Orbán said.

ORBÁN: HELPING UKRAINE IN HUNGARY'S INTEREST

"Hungary has another issue, namely that it wants to avoid having a joint border with Russia again, as it had bad experiences in the past," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told a press conference after a meeting of Visegrad Group prime ministers in Prague on Tuesday. "One of the most important baselines of Hungarian national security is to have an entity between us and Russia. We help Ukraine also out of our own national interest," he said. At the same time, Orbán said the Visegrad countries disagreed on "how to help Ukraine well". "Hungary's stance is clear: we shall not send weapons to Ukraine, with or without troops, but are ready to provide any other aid," he said, noting the country's efforts on humanitarian aid and care to Ukrainian refugees. Despite those differences, Orbán said carrying on with the Visegrad cooperation "makes sense". Cooperation has been successful on issues such as illegal migration "as the matter of [mandatory resettlement] quotas is not off the table". "Without our cooperation, tens or hundreds of thousands of migrants would be roaming our countries."

Asked who he thought would win the war, Orbán called the question a "trap" and said "it is impossible to tell who will win." He rejected "branding" one or the other of the

parties "culpable or guilty... that doesn't lead anywhere". "I suggest everyone maintains a strategic calm on the issue". "All countries have the right to view the Russia-Ukraine war from Russia or Ukraine's viewpoint." Hungary, Orbán said, was unique in that respect as it viewed the matter from a Hungarian viewpoint. Hungarians maintain that neither Russia nor Ukraine backed by the West would be able to defeat the other, he said. In that situation, it is imperative to save lives and start peace talks as soon as possible, he said. He rejected the notion that Hungary had been isolated in international politics because of its views on the war.

Responding a question, all four prime ministers said their countries were not considering to send troops to Ukraine. Robert Fico of Slovakia said his country "will give all aid needed to Ukraine, except for weapons and ammunition." Petr Fiala of Czechia and Donald Tusk of Poland said they would be ready to continue to provide weapons and ammunition. On the sidelines of the summit, Orbán also met former Czech presidents Miloš Zeman and Václav Klaus. The meeting with Zeman was also attended by incumbent Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. The ministers praised Hungarian-Czech political and cultural ties and reiterated experiences of their visits to each other's countries. Klaus served as Czech President between 2003 and 2013 and Zeman between 2013 and 2023.

SZIJJÁRTÓ WELCOMES V4 AGREEMENT ON CONTINUING COOPERATION

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó welcomed it as good news for Hungary that the leaders of the four Visegrad Group countries agreed on continuing the bloc's cooperation at their meeting in Prague on Tuesday which he said was also in Hungary's national interest. Szijjártó noted the V4's "outstanding achievements" in ensuring that central Europe remained "strong, sovereign and competitive". "Many were probably expecting the disintegration of the bloc", he said, adding that the V4 prime ministers had stood up for continued cooperation. "This is also in our national interest so that we can cooperate in future on matters that will strengthen Hungary, its sovereignty and economic competitiveness," the foreign minister said, according to a ministry statement. "The four of us will be able to cooperate in preserving our sovereignty and in designing our own energy mix, as well as in preserving our competitiveness by setting our own tax rates," said Szijjártó. He also welcomed that the V4 countries would be able to decide on their own how to protect their farmers against the glut of poor quality grain from outside Europe.

HUNGARY CBANK CUTS BASE INTEREST RATE BY 100 BP

Hungarian central bank (NBH) rate-setters cut the base rate by 100 basis points to 9.00% at a regular policy meeting on Tuesday. The Council also decided to lower the symmetric interest rate corridor in tandem, bringing the O/N deposit rate to 8.00% and the O/N collateralised loan rate to 10.00%.

The Council said disinflation had been "stronger than expected", external and domestic demand pressures remained "persistently low", and Hungary's risk perception had improved further as the current account balance improved. "This allows the base rate to be lowered at a temporarily faster pace," the Council added.

At an online press conference after the meeting, central bank deputy governor Barnabás Virág said lower than expected inflation and improved risk perceptions had allowed for the "temporary" acceleration in the easing cycle from 75bp cuts at the previous policy meetings. He added that the inflation path was now about half a percentage point lower than the central bank's earlier short-term forecast. Virág said the Council's expectation for the mid-year interest rate level was unchanged. He added that market players' expectations for an interest rate level of 6-7% at the end of the first half appeared "realistic". He

said the Council continued to take a "data-driven" approach and noted the importance of the March Inflation Report in determining the pace of the easing cycle in the second quarter.

FIDESZ MEPS BACK EU MFF REVISION

The MEPs of ruling Fidesz on Tuesday backed an agreement of European Union heads of state and government on the revision of the EU's seven-year budget, as Hungary received guarantees that the funds it is entitled to "would not land in Ukraine", the delegation said in a statement to MTI. The European Parliament's plenary session has voted in favour of a mid-term revision of the bloc's 2021-2027 budget, including for 50 billion euros in long-term aid for Ukraine. Fully 499 MEPs voted in favour of the changes, 67 against and 31 abstained. The aid for Ukraine will be disbursed over a period of four years in direct support, loans and guarantees, and will serve the war-torn country's recovery, reconstruction and modernisation, the EP said in a statement.

The EP also voted for setting up the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), "which aims to make the EU more strategically independent and to foster innovation", the statement said. The scheme aims to promote digital green and biotechnology, the EP said.

Fidesz MEP András Gyürk said STEP could provide "crucial help" for the European industry currently in a severe

crisis. "European competitiveness is in ruins, many companies are mulling layoffs and leaving the continent," Gyürk said, adding that the situation was a consequence of the industry policy of "Brussels bureaucrats" building on sanctions against Russia, "unrealistic green goals" and on growing bureaucracy. Fidesz has backed the measure as they saw STEP as a potential help in the current situation. At the same time, "a real solution to the crisis requires change in Brussels," he said.

DEFMIN: 'MACRON STATEMENT ON TROOPS TO UKRAINE CAUSE FOR CONCERN'

French President Emmanuel Macron's recent remark not ruling out the option of sending western troops to Ukraine gives cause for concern, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said on Tuesday, emphasising Hungary's rejection to send weapons to the neighbouring country. "We insist on our position urging a ceasefire and call on the warring sides to start peace talks," he told a conference of defence force, military and air attaches in Budapest. "The war in Ukraine has entered into its most dangerous phase as the aggressor seems to be gaining ground, possibly pushing western decision-makers into taking action," the minister said. The time of peace in Europe has come to an end, two European, Christian nations have been fighting a terrible, bloody war for two

years." The "massacre" had yielded no military results, nor was one to be hoped for in the near future, he said.

Meanwhile, Csaba Dömötör, a state secretary at the cabinet office, said in a video on Facebook that "the moment has come when the president of France is suggesting surprisingly openly that European troops might be sent to the battlefield in Ukraine... I think we are very close to a proposal requesting Ukraine's allies for troops to cross the border into Ukraine". He cited the Hungarian prime minister envisioning this scenario in an interview last year. Dömötör concluded the video by reiterating the Hungarian government stance that "We support peace talks and peace".

ROMANIAN PRESIDENT CONGRATULATES PRESIDENT-ELECT SULYOK

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis has congratulated Tamás Sulyok on his election as Hungary's next president. "Congratulations to Tamás Sulyok for the election as President of Hungary," Iohannis said on social media platform X. "I look forward to working together to the benefit of our people, on the basis of the Strategic Partnership between Romania and Hungary." Iohannis paid an official visit to Budapest last October for the first visit by a Romanian head of state to Hungary in 14 years. In September 2022, the Hungarian and Romanian presidents held an official meeting in Bucharest for the first time in 12 years when Iohannis received then-President Katalin Novák for talks.

CABINET OFFICE PROPOSES CHIEF NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR TO PM

In view of "drastic changes" in Hungary's security environment in recent years, the prime minister's cabinet office has proposed setting up a new body headed by a chief national security advisor, Csaba Dömötör, state secretary at the cabinet office, said in parliament in his introduction to the bill on Tuesday. Dömötör said the new and powerful body would help the prime minister with "promoting the government's endeavours for peace and security in all circumstances". The prime minister's chief national security advisor will have a "similar legal status to that of the prime minister's political director", Dömötör said. The chief advisor will help the prime minister "with questions concerning national security, with special regard to the civilian national security and intelligence activities, law enforcement, crime prevention, and maintaining public order in general," the state secretary said. The new official will make proposals and participate in the decision-making process, he added.

Fidesz MP Csaba Nagy expressed his party's support for the bill, and called for a higher level of coordination of national security aspects. Referring to the war in Ukraine, he said the Hungarian government must use every available facility to ensure the security of the country and its people.

AGMIN OFFICIAL: HUNGARY FORWARDS PROPOSALS ON REDUCING FARMERS' RED TAPE

Hungary has advanced 45 proposals to the Belgian EU presidency on reducing administrative burdens on farmers, Zsolt Feldman, the state secretary for agriculture and rural development, told a press conference in Brussels on Monday. After a meeting of EU agriculture ministers, Feldman noted that demonstrations by farmers had taken place in 18 member states, and it was only after these protests that the issue of cutting red tape affecting Hungarian and European farmers could be discussed. At the council meeting, hundreds of proposals from member states were received, he said, adding that a Hungarian priority was for the European Commission to accept the proposals by the end of the year. The official referred to high production costs in proportion to income, Ukrainian imports that placed farmers in hardship, poor agricultural profitability at the European level, EU conditions that constrained production and bureaucratic verification procedures. Feldman said the "psychological moment" had come when all European agriculture ministers were trying to relax EU farm rules. Commenting on the competitive disadvantage European farmers faced due to the influx of cheap farm products from third countries, Feldman noted that European farmers had to

adhere to strict regulations, while these did not apply to produce imported from outside the EU. He called on the EU to stand up for European farmers and ensure a regulatory level playing field.

Feldman also met demonstrating farmers in Brussels and representatives of several European farmer associations. "Hungary is highly active in looking for European solutions. We've taken steps domestically, but now it's the turn of Brussels as European rules and trade agreements must be handled at the EU level," he said.

HUNGARIAN, SOUTH KOREAN EXPERTS MEET AT ECONOMIC INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME EVENT

Experts from Hungary and South Korea discussed opportunities for technology and knowledge transfers at an event in Budapest organised in the framework of the Economic Innovation Partnership Programme (EIPP) on Tuesday, the national economy ministry said. The focus

of the EIPP, which paves the way for the involvement of Hungarian researchers in projects, is e-mobility and the development of carbon-neutral transportation, the ministry said. Addressing the event, deputy state secretary for technology Szabolcs Szolnoki noted that South Korea had been the biggest foreign investor in Hungary in 2021.

ESTONIAN INSTITUTE IN BUDAPEST TO SHUT DOWN

Estonia will close down its cultural institute in Budapest at the end of February, the institute said in a statement on Tuesday. The decision was made by the Estonian Institute in Tallinn, of which the Budapest institute is a subsidiary, for structural reasons, the statement said. The Estonian Institute in Budapest was opened on February 27, 1998, and has hosted many events presenting Estonian culture to Hungarian audiences both in Budapest and other Hungarian cities.

Also, the institute has provided information about Estonia and promoted the teaching of the Estonian language in Hungary. The institute's

library will be transferred to the Finno-Ugric Department at ELTE university, while its archives will be taken over by the Estonian embassy in Budapest.

OFFICIAL: SOLAR PRODUCES 6,000 MW OF ELECTRICITY IN HUNGARY

Industrial-scale solar parks and households' inputs combined have managed to produce 6,000 megawatts of electricity in Hungary, the energy minister said on Tuesday. On a sunny day solar produces the country's basic electricity needs, with average consumption being 5,500-6,500 MW, Csaba Lantos said at the inauguration of MVM Next Energiakereskedelmi's customer service office in Kalocsa, in central-southern Hungary. He said the government planned to increase the share of renewable energy further and significantly expand storage capacity. Meanwhile, the Paks 1 nuclear power plant's life cycle is being extended and the Paks 2 power plant is being built, he noted.

"We're working to make sure that Hungary's power generation capacity is greater than demand for electricity," he added.