

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán (l) at Heritage Foundation panel discussion with Kevin Roberts, the think-tank's president.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Prime Minister Orbán meets Donald Trump in Florida

Stats office publishes CPI figures for Feb 2024 in 1st reading

Events marking Intl Women's Day

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

TOP STORY

SWEDEN'S NATO DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED

The ratification documents for Sweden's NATO accession have been submitted at the US department of state, the foreign minister said after personally delivering them to Washington, DC.

Hungary's parliament recently approved Sweden's NATO accession, an important precondition for which was to rebuild trust between Hungary and Sweden, Péter Szijjártó said. "The prime ministers of both countries have done much work for this, among others, by expanding a defence cooperation agreement, which provided a sufficient basis for carrying things forward." Szijjártó said he instructed the Hungary's ambassador to Washington, Szabolcs Takács, to deliver the ratification documents to the US department of state, which happened at 2pm local time, and he also noted that he personally phoned his Swedish counterpart. "As a result, we have finished all the work necessary for Sweden to become a NATO member". He added that Swedish counterpart Tobias Billström had expressed thanks and the two were in agreement that there was an opportunity to give new impetus to bilateral relations, which would serve the interests of both sides.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-US TRADE BROKE RECORD IN 2023

Hungarian-American bilateral trade set a new record, exceeding 9 billion dollars last year, while US investments continue to flow into Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Washington, DC, on Thursday, noting that the United States is Hungary's biggest export market outside the European Union. Since 2014 the Hungarian government has provided financial support to 111 big American investments, a foreign ministry statement quoted Szijjártó as saying. Currently 1,700 US companies employ a local workforce of over 100,000, the minister said, highlighting substantial US investments in car manufacturing, electronics and services sectors as well as in research and development, including the pharmaceutical and IT segments. US companies now form the second biggest group of foreign investors in Hungary and have always played an "important role" in keeping the economy on a growth path with their broad range of activities, Szijjártó said. He added that those companies were drawn to Hungary by the low tax rate and political stability in the country. Szijjártó said he will meet members of the US-Hungary Business Council later in the day to discuss future investments in Hungary. He called US-Hungarian cooperation a "real success story, with the exception of political cooperation".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CHINA TO OFFER VISA-FREE TRAVEL TO HUNGARIANS

China will offer visa-free travel to Hungarians from March 14, and starting next month, airlines will again operate 13 weekly flights between Budapest and four major Chinese cities, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Facebook. Tourism is one of the most successful sectors of Hungarian-Chinese cooperation, Szijjártó said, noting that the number of Chinese tourists visiting Hungary reached 277,000 in the year before the pandemic, and came close to 100,000 last year. "The resumption of direct flights is also helpful," he said, noting that from April, airlines will go back to operating 13 flights a week between Budapest and the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Ningbo. The minister said it was good news for Hungarian tourists and businesspeople that the Chinese authorities will offer visa-free travel to Hungarian nationals between March 14 and November 30. He said that "in the spirit of reciprocity", Hungary issues long-term visas for the leaders of Chinese companies investing in Hungary. These steps will further strengthen the economic and tourism cooperation between the two countries and their citizens, Szijjártó added. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said earlier in Beijing that China will offer visa-free travel to citizens of Hungary, Switzerland, Ireland, Austria,

Belgium and Luxembourg from March 14 "on an experimental basis". He expressed hope that more countries would ease visa rules for Chinese nationals, too.

ORBÁN HOLDS PANEL DISCUSSION IN WASHINGTON

The US Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank, on Thursday hosted a panel discussion entitled "The Future of Relations between the United States and Hungary" with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as a guest participant, the PM's press chief said. Orbán held the panel discussion with Kevin Roberts, the think-tank's president, and the audience included renowned US right wing politicians, analysts and public personalities, Bertalan Havasi said. The programme was introduced by Vivek Ramaswamy, a US conservative politician, commentator and former Republican presidential candidate. The participants said the world needed a new movement to fight for justice, tradition, families and ordinary people. At the event held behind closed doors, Orbán was asked about the successes of Hungary's conservative family and economic policies, the war in Ukraine, US-Hungary relations, President Donald Trump, and his personal political beliefs. After the programme, Orbán met Steve Bannon, US media personality, political strategist and Trump's former advisor, at the Hungarian embassy in Washington, DC.

ORBÁN TO GIVE SPEECH AT NATIONAL MUSEUM ON MARCH 15

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will give a speech at the Hungarian National Museum on March 15, Hungary's national holiday, the state secretary for international communication and relations said. Celebrations of the anniversary of the 1848 revolution and freedom fight will start on March 14, with the handing over of the Kossuth and Széchenyi Prizes in Parliament, Zoltán Kovács said on Facebook. On March 15, the national flag will be hoisted in front of Parliament at 9am, and the main events will start at 10.30 at the National Museum. Throughout the day, commemorators will get to enjoy a host of family programmes at the National Museum garden, and the Parliament building and Buda Castle will be open to the public, Kovács said.

DEUTSCH CALLS FOR PROBE INTO LEFT'S 'MANOEUVRING' TO BLOCK HUNGARY'S ACCESS TO EU FUNDS

Parliament's European affairs committee should open an investigation into the "dollar left's manoeuvres" aimed at blocking Hungary's access to European Union funds, ruling Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch told MTI, adding that he has turned to Fidesz parliamentary group leader Mate Kocsis, calling for

a special session of the European affairs committee for the purpose of investigating the Hungarian "dollar left's political manoeuvring" to block Hungary's access to EU development funds. In his letter to Kocsis, Deutsch noted that opposition Momentum lawmaker Miklós Hajnal had recently "admitted" on television that his party's MEPs, Anna Donáth and Katalin Cseh, "did their utmost to prevent the transfer of EU monies to Hungary". He said Hajnal had admitted to Donáth and Cseh's roles in Brussels's rule-of-law and infringement procedures against Hungary that delayed the country's access "to the funds it is entitled to". Deutsch said Hajnal's "admission" meant that Momentum's MEPs had "broken their oaths and betrayed their voters" by working against Hungary. He said Fidesz believed that "no ideological belief or political calculation" could overrule an MEP's moral obligation to act in the interests of their country and its citizens.

ECON MINISTER CALLS ON EU TO INCREASE COMPETITIVENESS, CUT RED TAPE

The European Union's competitiveness must be boosted and red tape cut in the bloc in the coming years, the national economy minister told a meeting of the European Union's Competitiveness Council in Brussels. According to a ministry statement, Márton Nagy told the meeting that

the bloc's competitiveness should be lifted by implementing the green and digital transition, by opening towards Eastern as well as Western markets, and by consistently cutting red tape. He said the EU had been losing its competitiveness for decades, a trend worsened by the recent spike in energy prices and the crises and protectionist measures in the US and China. Regarding a European Commission proposal before the European Council on capping payment deadlines related to commercial transactions between businesses, requiring a mandatory payment deadline of no more than 30, Nagy said that a Hungarian survey found that about one quarter of companies would have difficulties complying. Many fear the step would benefit third-country competitors, he said. Regarding the European agenda for tourism, Nagy said the most important task of the Hungarian tourism sector would be digitalisation to the highest possible degree. By creating a national tourism data service centre, Hungary has been among the first to make the sector's performance measurable, he said. Its tourism strategy is also being amended to accommodate sustainability and green transition goals, he said.

ECON MINISTER HOLDS TALKS WITH AUSTRIAN COUNTERPART

Márton Nagy, the national economy minister, held talks in Brussels on Thursday with Martin Kocher, his

Austrian counterpart, in preparation for Hungary's upcoming EU presidency, the ministry said in a statement. Nagy and Kocher were in agreement that trade relations between Hungary and Austria were strong, and they discussed challenges related to the green transition and electric vehicle production, the statement said. Austria has been Hungary's third most important trading partner in recent years, and Austrian companies are the second biggest group of investors in the country, Nagy said. He called for maximising every possible means to boost the European Union's competitiveness and develop its industry, highlighting electric vehicle production and artificial intelligence as key sectors. The number of EVs reached 14 million in 2023, 58% of which were sold in China, he said, adding that the US EV market was also surging, while the EU was falling behind.

Nagy said Europe needed to take steps to boost its EV sector by launching an EU-wide scheme to promote the adoption of electric vehicles. He said Europe needed to dedicate itself to supporting the EV sector instead of a "general and ideological approach" to the green and digital transition. Making Europe the leader in electric vehicle production and maintaining its competitiveness against the American and Chinese expansion in the sector was a shared interest, the ministry said, adding that Nagy had asked Kocher to support speeding up the green transition in the interest of Europe's competitiveness.

Nagy also met members of the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA) to discuss ways to address risks facing Europe's green mobility transition. Nagy pressed for the launch of an EU-level incentive programme to support purchases of electric vehicles. The scheme is necessary to keep pace with the United States and China which have ploughed "significant budget resources" into supporting their own industries, he said.

Hungary will highlight such a scheme when it takes the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year, he said.

ACEA aims to advance the mobility transition and make affordable transport solutions available to all European citizens, while ensuring a strong global and competitive role for Europe's automotive industry, the ministry said.

REFORMED CHURCH EXPRESSES SYMPATHY WITH VICTIMS OF CHILD ABUSE

The presidential council of the Hungarian Reformed Church has expressed its sympathy with the victims of child abuse and said that it considered any ill-treatment unacceptable. Referring to former President Katalin Novák's pardon granted to a person implicated in a case of child abuse, which led to her recent resignation, the council said in a circular issued on Wednesday that the case "burdens Reformed Church

members in their preparations for Lent". Concerning Bishop Zoltán Balog, former head of the Reformed Church Synod, who also resigned after the pardon came to light, the council said "he and his diocese have the exclusive right to make a decision concerning his post as bishop."

CATHOLIC CHURCH ANNOUNCES PILGRIMAGE ON ANNIVERSARY OF PAPAL VISIT

The Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference (MKPK) announced a national pilgrimage to Rome on the anniversary of Pope Francis's visit to Hungary between April 23 and 25. Mass will be celebrated in Hungarian in one of the large basilicas in Rome on each day of the pilgrimage, with the last one held in St Peter's Cathedral, the MKPK said in a statement after its regular spring meeting on Thursday. The pontiff will receive the pilgrims in the Paul VI Audience Hall on April 25. Noting that Pope Francis had declared 2025 a Jubilee year, the MKPK said that in preparation to those events, the Hungarian Catholic Church will participate in the first World Day of Children, held on the last weekend of May.

HUNGARY SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY

Hungary has signed a framework agreement with the European Space Agency (ESA) on cooperation

in its national research astronaut programme, the foreign ministry's commissioner for space science said on Thursday. "The Hungarian to Orbit (HUNOR) research astronaut programme has reached a new milestone," Orsolya Ferencz said in a video posted on Facebook. Under the agreement, ESA will offer support for astronaut training as well as for aerospace medicine training and ground control activities, she said. The training of Hungarian astronauts will take place in ESA's centres in Cologne and in the Netherlands, Ferencz added. She said the agreement offered a unique opportunity for Hungary to be the first among the 22 member states to execute its programme as

ESA's official partner. Hungary will send an astronaut to the ISS, with the cooperation of US-based Axiom Space, for a 30-day research mission at the end of 2024 or in early 2025.

BUDAPEST SPRING FESTIVAL TO FEATURE OVER 40 EVENTS

The Budapest Spring Festival will feature over forty events at thirty venues, including theatres, exhibition and concert halls between April 29 and May 12. The festival's organiser, Budapest Brand, said the event was tied to the 20th anniversary of Hungary's European Union accession, with many of

the programmes "reflecting on our intellectual and emotional relations with Europe". New venues will include the recently reopened Merlin theatre and the City Hall passage, the statement said. A concert by the Chamber Orchestra of Europe will open the festival on April 29, followed by an open-air concert launching the Budapest Jazz Festival marking the 20th anniversary of Hungary's EU accession on April 30. International theatre performances will include Rimini Protokoll from Germany, Roger Bernat/FFF from Spain, Cirque Inextremiste from France, Hooligan Art Community from Ukraine, and Sarajevo War Theatre from Bosnia.