

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Students at a commemoration of the 1848 revolution and freedom fight in Pápa, C Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events marking the national holiday on March 15

Events related to the wars in the Middle East, Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MONTENEGRO PREPARED FOR EU

Hungary's government believes Montenegro is prepared for European Union membership, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister has said.

The Western Balkan country's accession would give the bloc the fresh energy it needed amid the current difficulties. Speaking at a joint press conference in Podgorica with Filip Ivanović, his Montenegrin counterpart, Szijjártó noted that Hungary is taking over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year, in a period when the bloc was facing severe economic and security challenges. "These challenges have thrown the European Union into a negative spiral, from which it can only emerge if it receives a fresh boost of energy from outside," he said. "This vital new energy can come from the ambitious, emerging, fast-growing states of the Western Balkans," Szijjártó said. "Therefore Hungary's main goal during its six-month presidency will be to speed up the enlargement process." Szijjártó said enlargement was "progressing at a snail's pace", which he mainly attributed to the fact that the majority of EU member states did not currently support the process, "and especially not its acceleration".

MONTENEGRO 'ALREADY PREPARED FOR EU ACCESSION'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said that "while it may appear otherwise in public", behind closed doors, "several member states are voicing their objections and concerns about enlargement." If this were not the case, he said, Montenegro would not be in the position of having been a candidate for membership for sixteen years and conducting accession talks for twelve, but still not having managed to close a single chapter.

Szijjártó said at a joint press conference with Filip Ivanović, his Montenegrin counterpart, that Hungary's position on the matter was clear. "Montenegro is already prepared for EU accession, which would also greatly benefit the bloc," he added. "That is why the time has come to start closing the accession negotiation chapters with you," he said, adding that the Hungarian government wanted to close the first chapters during its EU presidency. "We believe there are up to ten accession chapters that have been sufficiently negotiated," he said. The minister noted that bilateral trade had expanded by 50% over ten years to close to a hundred million euros. In addition, Hungarian companies have become market leaders in two key sectors in Montenegro as OTP Bank is the largest player in the local bank sector and 4iG has become the second largest telecom company.

Szijjártó said it was good news that Wizz Air was restarting the Podgorica-Budapest flight in April. He also noted that 35 Montenegrin students could study with scholarships at Hungarian universities every year, adding that this highly popular programme will be maintained in the future.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: US GOVT 'PURSUING SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HUNGARY'

The "pro-war, pro-gender and pro-migration US Democratic administration" is still pursuing a "smear campaign" against Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Facebook. "This time it was the national security advisor who joined the chorus," Szijjártó said. "Jake Sullivan's statement made it clear that the US Democrats do not take it well that, in the midst of the European progressive liberal ocean, there remains an island where we are proud to say: no war, no gender, no migration!" "We continue to take a firm stand for peace, we will protect families from aggressive gender propaganda and will not let illegal migrants into our country, whether the Democrats like it or not!" Szijjártó said.

FINMIN: GOVT DISCUSSES CENTRAL BANK ACT AMENDMENT

The government has discussed a proposed amendment to the central

bank act, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said in a post on Facebook. The government conducted a detailed and thorough consultation with the European Central Bank on the draft legislation before submitting it to parliament, Varga said. "The goal is clear: regulation that continues to guarantee the central bank's independence is necessary, while strengthening the transparency of the National Bank of Hungary and the frugal operation expected of state offices," the finance minister added.

ORBÁN GREETES ETHNIC HUNGARIANS AHEAD OF NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has greeted ethnic Hungarians in a letter to be read out at celebrations around the world marking the March 15 national holiday. "We will not give up any of our national independence either for the friendship or the threats of anyone," the prime minister's letter said. "The Hungarian nation became a flag-bearer of freedom in 1848," Orbán said. "The young rebels of March demanded not only a responsible government, the abolishment of censorship, and equality before the law, but they also wanted to live in a Europe where nations work together to prosper side-by-side, and not on the ruins of others." "They believed that freedom is not an end in itself and it is not the freedom of the strong above the weak, nor the freedom of the majority above the minority, but above all, its purpose is

to bring peace, security and wellbeing to all people," he said. "The spiritual heritage they left behind, stamped with their personal sacrifice, is that we will not give up any of our national independence either for the friendship or the threats of anyone," the letter said, adding that "the lights of the watch fires of Hungarian freedom" could be seen from afar. "They advocate that we Hungarians ask and demand the return of a free, dignified and strong Europe, one that could maintain peace in its territory, and resolutely stood up against all open or concealed attempts to abolish the language and culture of indigenous minorities," he said. "Let there be peace, freedom and consensus," he concluded.

DEFMIN: 'FUTURE BELONGS TO FREE NATIONS'

The future belongs to free and independent nations that protect their citizens and their economic and moral values, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said at a commemoration of the 1848-49 revolution and freedom fight in Budapest. Szalay-Bobrovniczky said he was convinced that the future did not belong to "empires ... following ideologies", but to free and independent nations. "We have entered the era of dangers; the peace that we enjoyed for decades is now a thing of the past, a war is raging in our neighbourhood as well as in the

Middle East," he said. The minister pointed out that the freedom fighters of 1848 had built their own army from scratch, with exemplary success.

"Today, our generation has had the opportunity to build our own army, the force guaranteeing the armed defence of the nation," Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. "This is our task, and in that we are no different from the revolutionaries of 1848." The government has ensured that more than 2% of GDP can be spent on defence, the leadership of the military has been rejuvenated, the two big recent recruitment campaigns have been successful, and the military development programme is progressing well, he said. The defence industry is also undergoing massive development without which "there would be no Hungarian national defence, no Hungarian economy."

"1848 was the school of freedom," the minister said, adding that this was based on the enthusiasm Hungarian youth had for their freedom. He said he could see "the same joy and enthusiasm on the faces of today's young people" when they join the Hungarian Armed Forces. At the event, decisions on promotions and appointments were announced and awards were presented.

HUNGARY TO OPEN UP MORE FOREIGN MISSIONS TO VOTERS ABROAD

Hungarian residents who are abroad during the June 9 European parliamentary election will have 147

foreign embassies and consulates in 99 countries at their disposal -- more than ever before -- to cast their vote. Voters who live abroad but maintain a Hungarian address can vote abroad if they register to do so by 4pm on May 31. Votes can also be cast in Kyiv this time round, unlike in the 2022 parliamentary election, but it will not be possible to vote in Lviv, in western Ukraine, or in Dakar, Senegal. In the 2019 EP elections, 134 foreign missions in 95 countries housed voting urns.

MARCH 15 NATIONAL HOLIDAY MARKED IN US CAPITOL

US and Hungarian dignitaries laid wreaths at the statue of Lajos Kossuth, a leader of the 1848 revolution and freedom fight, in the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, in an event marking Hungary's national holiday. Congresswoman Carol Miller, Republican of West Virginia, highlighted shared values of Hungary and the US such as the importance of family and faith, and a commitment to freedom. Szabolcs Takács, Hungary's ambassador to the US, said Hungary had always been a small country in the vice of large, often hostile powers, and had survived many tragedies to become a sovereign, democratic state. Kossuth's bust was placed in the Capitol's Rotunda on March 15, 1990. Further events in Washington, DC, will include commemorations on March 15 at the Hungarian cultural institute and at the Hungarian embassy.

PM'S POLITICAL DIRECTOR PRESENTS ENGLISH- LANGUAGE EDITION OF BOOK ON HUNGARIAN STRATEGY

It is not in Hungary's interest to follow the West's strategy of a return to geopolitical blocs, the prime minister's political director said at a presentation of the English-language edition of his book on Hungarian strategy, *Hussar Cut: The Hungarian Strategy for Connectivity*. Balázs Orbán said the end of the unipolar world had opened the door for smaller countries to develop and pursue their own strategies on their way to success. He warned that in the changing world order, certain political forces were working to divide the world into blocs again. This, he said, would limit smaller countries' room for manoeuvre, as they would only be able to maintain political, economic and cultural ties with the other countries in their bloc. This, he added, went against Hungary's interests as an open, export-oriented economy built on "knowledge and ambition". Hungary's priority, Orbán said, was to bring in new branches of industry, identify breakout sectors for Hungarian companies and pursue a foreign policy based not on ideology, but national interests. The world is going through changes which Hungary can use to turn its capabilities into advantages, Orbán said. He said that in just two decades, the world had lost faith in neoliberalism, which many

attributed to the strengthening of the BRICS countries, division in the West and conflicts caused by religions.

CITY COUNCIL TO SEEK PUBLIC OPINION ON RÁKOSRENDEZŐ PROJECT

The Budapest municipal council will conduct an online survey on plans for a major property development project in the capital's Rákosrendező area in the 14th district, the city's mayor, Gergely Karácsony, told a press conference. The survey will be open to all Budapest residents over the age of 14 with a permanent address in the capital.

He criticised the 5 billion euro rehabilitation project planned by UAE developer Eagle Hills as a "bad legal arrangement" that prioritised the interests of investors over the public interest. He said the same developer had carried out a project in Belgrade under a similar arrangement, which would be "remembered as a textbook example of botched urbanistic solutions".

Budapest needs rustbelt zones where quality homes can be built in order to halt the decline of the city's population, Karácsony said. The municipal council agrees with the public developments linked to the project, such as the plan to extend the M1 metro line, he said, adding that the city disagreed with the way the government had selected the developer without a tender, thereby "allowing it to dictate the terms".

He said that if the municipal council put together a joint development plan for the area in question, "major international property developers would be lining up to work on the project". Karácsony said the city council wanted to turn the Rákosrendező neighbourhood into a green residential area with affordable housing and public parks. In response to a question, he said that in 2019, the new city administration had prepared a development plan for the area that included 8,000-10,000 homes, commercial services and "quality green areas" and enjoyed "broad professional consensus".

OPPOSITION PARTIES SUBMIT AMENDMENT PROPOSAL ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

Opposition parties on Thursday said they have submitted to parliament an amendment proposal aimed at "creating the freedom to make end-of-life decisions". Tímea Szabó, the co-leader of Párbeszéd, told a press conference that her party, Momentum, and the Socialist Party have initiated an amendment to the Penal Code's section on aiding and abetting suicide. Under the opposition's bill, individuals who assist in the end-of-life decision of a fully legally capable but terminally ill person whose "suffering is incompatible with human dignity" would not be criminally liable, Szabó said. She said that whereas under the current law, an individual who participates in

assisted suicide is criminally liable, if the opposition's bill is passed, they would not be punishable either in Hungary or abroad. Szabó said the parties had made sure to draft the law in a way that eliminates the possibility of abuse, and the terminally ill patient's decision would have to be recorded in a notarial deed. She expressed hope that the ruling parties would back the bill.

Rebeka Szabó, Párbeszéd's other co-leader, noted that a terminally ill constitutional lawyer and his brother had submitted a referendum bid in the matter, but their question had been rejected by the National Election Committee, and they were now awaiting a ruling by the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court. She said public opinion polls showed that more than two-thirds of Hungarians support giving terminally ill people the freedom to decide to end their life.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT UP 17.2% IN JAN

Output of Hungary's construction sector in January climbed by an

annual 17.2%, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Output of the buildings segment jumped by 20.5% while civil engineering output grew 11.6%. Month on month, construction sector output rose by 10.2%, adjusted for seasonal and working-day effects.

SME RATE FREEZE TO END APRIL 1

A rate freeze on SME credit will end on April 1, as lending rates are expected to fall under the 7.77% threshold set in November 2022, the national economy ministry said, noting the rate freeze had saved over 50,000 SMEs, with close to 1,500 billion forints (EUR 3.78bn) in loans, around 150 billion forints. It added that the benchmark three-month Budapest Interbank Offered Rate (BUBOR) had stood over 16.5% when the measure was rolled out. The ministry noted that lenders had voluntarily agreed to reduce, temporarily, their spreads on corporate credit over the BUBOR to 0% from Feb 1 for a period of three months.

POTÁPI INAUGURATES PETŐFI STATUE IN VOJVODINA

Commemorations of the 1848-49 revolution and war of independence would be inconceivable without thinking of Sándor Petőfi, the state secretary for Hungarians communities abroad said in Vojvodina, inaugurating a statue of the 19th century revolutionary and poet. Petőfi "is proof that being Hungarian is a matter of identity and not a matter of origin," Árpád János Potápi said. He said Hungarian communities, no matter where they lived in the world, were linked by their common language, culture and history, especially when celebrating national holidays. Four Petőfi statues were inaugurated in Vojvodina this year and last as part of programmes dubbed Move!Petőfi! marking the 200th anniversary of the poet's birth. Petőfi is considered Hungary's national poet, and was one of the key figures of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.