

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Prime Minister's Press Office/Vivien Cher Benkő

PM Viktor Orbán (r) receives Krisztián Forró, leader of the Slovak Hungarian Alliance

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

EU affairs ministers meet in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY ABSTAINS

EU foreign affairs ministers have agreed to top up the European Peace Facility with 5 billion euros in connection with funding for Ukraine, a decision made with Hungary's constructive abstention, the foreign minister, has said.

EU member states can abstain from voting on a particular action without blocking it, and Péter Szijjártó said on the sidelines of a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council that "the price" of Hungary's agreement not to block the top-up was a change in the rules to exempt Hungary from involvement in financing arms deliveries. "This means that we have to pay our share of 50 million euros, but we can determine the purpose of its use," he stated. He added that several important goals could be discussed in light of this, such as strengthening the stability of the Sahel region with a view to combatting migration and supporting the Western Balkans. Szijjártó lamented that EU leaders "did not grasp that the EU's Ukraine strategy has failed." The cause of that reluctance could be that such a recognition could bring up the issue of taking responsibility for the damages Europe has incurred."

Referring to statements made earlier in the week concerning the possibility of deploying European troops to Ukraine, he appealed to western European politicians to abstain from making such statements.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ TO BLINKEN: CONFRONTATION WITH RUSSIA MUST BE AVOIDED

Noting that US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken also joined part of the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting via video call, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said he had reminded his colleagues of an earlier NATO decision that “everything must be done to avoid direct confrontation with Russia”. “Western and eastern European statements that don’t exclude deploying troops ... are in clear violation of that joint NATO decision,” he said, adding that no member had initiated a review of that decision. “I expressed my hope to the US secretary of state that NATO will never send troops” to Ukraine, he said. Increasingly militant statements from the EU or its member states would only make the situation worse, “summoning the spectre of a third world war,” he said. “An EU state sending ground troops to Ukraine would envelope the entire continent in conflagration... We are of the view that this is a grave violation of Article 5, as NATO is a defence alliance,” he said.

As Ukraine’s neighbour, Hungary has experienced the consequences of the war first-hand, he said. “Besides the inflow of refugees, our agriculture was nearly brought to its knees by low-quality Ukrainian grain flooding central Europe,” he

said. As Polish farmers blocked the roads from Ukraine to that country protesting against the grain glut, much of the freight traffic was re-routed to Hungary, increasing waiting times and work load on the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, he said. On the border at Fenyestitke, Hungary has set up the largest transfer facility for Ukrainian cargo in international comparison, “only the European liberal mainstream continues to forget” such achievements, he said. With a view to easing the pressure on the border, Szijjártó noted he had talks with Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, at the weekend, and they agreed to open another border crossing between Nagyhódos in Hungary and Velyka Palad’ (Nagypalád) in Ukraine, and to further develop the crossing in Beregsurány. “If there is a country constantly facing the tragic consequences of the war ... and taking on its burdens, and has the greatest interest in swiftly bringing about peace, it is Hungary,” he said.

ORBÁN RECEIVES HEAD OF SLOVAKIA’S HUNGARIAN ALLIANCE PARTY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán received Krisztián Forró, the leader of Slovakia’s Hungarian Alliance party, in his office on Monday, the PM’s press chief said. Orbán and Forró discussed the coming Sunday’s Slovak presidential election, and said that cooperation was of

paramount importance, Bertalan Havasi said. Forró, who is candidate in the race, said it was important for Slovakian Hungarians to show that “they are there and that Hungarian will still be spoken in Slovakia, even in a thousand years’ time.” Orbán and Forró highlighted the importance of the Visegrad Group, arguing that Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia should “find common ground” as “they can achieve more together”. They called for a ceasefire and peace talks in Ukraine, and took a stance against sending weapons or troops to Ukraine, “which is diametrically opposed to Hungarian interests,” Havasi said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY CONTINUES TO BE READY TO CONTRIBUTE TO INTL HUMANITARIAN AID

Hungary spent over 70 million euros on humanitarian aid worldwide last year, and is ready to continue to contribute to international efforts, the foreign minister said in Brussels. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the European Humanitarian Forum, Péter Szijjártó said humanity was facing a global humanitarian disaster, mainly due to “one of the worse security situations of the past couple of decades”. Some 30 countries and regions are currently suffering armed conflict, the gravest of them raging in Ukraine and the Gaza strip, Szijjártó said. As a neighbour of Ukraine, Hungary has been facing the “tragic consequences” of the war

for two years as over one million refugees arrived in the country, he said. Those who decided to stay in the country were offered access to education and health care, with some 1,600 schools and kindergartens now receiving Ukrainian children, he said. Szijjártó said Hungary was staging the largest humanitarian action of its history, and was ready to continue providing aid. "But we also know that the real solution to this tragic situation would be the war coming to its end, therefore we will increase our efforts to stand up for peace."

Regarding the conflict in Gaza, Szijjártó said the protection of civilians was of paramount importance and called for aid for Egypt "which is bearing a lot of the burden". Hungary has sent 200 ventilators and other health-care equipment to the country, he said. Szijjártó said the international community also had a responsibility to stave off the threat of terrorism, one of the root causes of migration. Creating safe circumstances for everyone to make a living in their homeland was "a global responsibility", he said. Hungary is setting up a humanitarian and development centre in Chad, and is ready to deploy troops to the country to help combat terrorism, the foreign minister added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT TO GAZA REFUGEES

Hungary provides humanitarian aid to the civilians suffering under the Hamas terrorist group in Gaza, the foreign ministry state secretary in charge of aid to persecuted Christian communities said in Brussels. Speaking to MTI after addressing the European Humanitarian Forum, Tristan Azbej said Hungary is helping Egypt manage the influx of refugees from Gaza by providing the country with medical supplies and financial aid. Hungary has also sent 400,000 US dollars' worth of humanitarian aid to both Christians and Muslims in the Palestinian territories via the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, he added. Meanwhile, Azbej said Hungary "hasn't forgotten about the crisis zones that get less global attention", either, noting that the government had launched a humanitarian and development project in the Sahel, which is facing political instability, desertification, a food crisis, a water shortage and civil wars. Hungary, through its Hungary Helps humanitarian programme, has also sent a medical mission to Chad to aid internally displaced people as well as Sudanese and other refugees there, Azbej said. The government also helps persecuted Christians in Nigeria living under the threat of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups,

the state secretary added. "We believe in providing both immediate and long-term assistance to local communities," Azbej said, underscoring the importance of Hungary's support for the Chadian authorities caring for refugees

GOVT REJECTS SPAR'S 'FALSE CLAIMS' REGARDING MEASURES TO BRING DOWN INFLATION

The national economy ministry called communication by the Austrian owner of SPAR supermarkets in Hungary on government measures to bring down inflation "malicious" and "false". The ministry noted in a statement that government measures requiring big supermarket chains to comply with price caps on staples and offer regular discounts had helped reduce double-digit inflation to 3.7% in February, while revenue from a windfall profit tax on the retail sector had been channelled into a fund to keep household utilities prices down. The ministry acknowledged that SPAR "disagreed" with those measures but said its behaviour ran "counter to the interests of Hungarian consumers". The ministry said SPAR's "attacks" against the government were driven rather by the "loss-making position" of its local business which had "fallen behind the competition