

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán addresses European nuclear summit in Brussels

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**EU summit ends in Brussels**

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

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: NUCLEAR ENERGY INDISPENSABLE

Only nuclear energy can produce large quantities of cheap, safe and sustainable electricity, Viktor Orbán said in Brussels.

Speaking at the Nuclear Energy Summit 2024, organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the prime minister noted that Hungary has been using nuclear energy for some fifty years, "and this provides a stable basis for the safety of our energy supply". Around half of Hungary's electricity is produced by its nuclear plant, which covers about one-third of its demand, he said. "Based on this experience, we decided not only to maintain our already existing capacity, but to invest more into nuclear, and to increase its share into 70% when it comes to national electric supply," Orbán said in his speech delivered in English. "The challenges we have been faced with recently have further raised the significance of safe and secure supply of energy," he said. "The question became absolutely obvious: how can we generate big quantity of electricity in a cheap, safe, sustainable and environmentally friendly way. The answer is clear: it is only the nuclear way of generating electricity which can simultaneously satisfy all these requirements."

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## **ORBÁN: NUCLEAR CAPACITY TO EXPAND FROM 2030S**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the Nuclear Energy Summit 2024 that new 2,400 megawatt capacity "will be connected to the grid" at the start of the next decade. "This will enable us to avoid imports of 3.5 billion cubic metres of natural gas every year, and our annual CO2 emission will be decreased by 17 million tonnes, which equals 1.5 times more than the emission of the entire Hungarian transportation sector and three times more compared what all Hungarian forests can digest. "We are happy to note that regardless of the geopolitical difficulties, a wide range international, professional and scientific cooperations still exist on the field of nuclear energy, while Russia became the number one Uranium supplier of the United States this year, a number of American, German, French, Swedish, Swiss and even Austrian sub-contractors are working together with the Russian constructor of our nuclear expansion project."

"It is the interest of all of us to prevent nuclear energy to become hostage of geopolitical conflicts, hypocrisy and ideological debates. Therefore let me finally thank all of you to interfere into the European Court case regarding our nuclear investment and to ensure the safe delivery of nuclear fuel to our existing plant." Speaking to journalists,

Orbán reiterated that the issue of energy often became hostage to an ideological approach which, he said, was "bad", arguing that energy was neither an ideological nor a geopolitical question, and should be rescued from that "trap". Orbán stated Hungary's full support for nuclear energy as the only energy source that did not degrade the environment while providing large quantities of energy.

## **ORBÁN'S LETTER TO PUTIN: MAINTAINING DIALOGUE 'ESSENTIAL CONDITION' FOR ESTABLISHING PEACE**

Following the publication of the official results of the Russian presidential election, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sent a letter to President Vladimir Putin to congratulate him on his recent re-election, the prime minister's press chief said. Orbán said it was a matter of satisfaction that cooperation between Hungary and Russia was "based on mutual respect, enabling the discussion of important issues, even amid the current difficult geopolitical situation". Orbán said Hungary stood on the side of peace, "and we are convinced that maintaining dialogue is an essential condition for establishing the quickest possible peace". He assured the Russian president of Hungary's readiness to enhance cooperation with Russia in areas not restricted by international law, the statement said.

## **ORBÁN SEES 'GOOD CHANCE' FOR CHRISTIAN FORCES TO BECOME DOMINANT IN EU**

"It's been a long time since I've seen such a good chance for forces with a national conservative, sovereigntist and Christian basis to become dominant in the European Union," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at an award ceremony in Brussels. "It is nations rather than the Soros empire or Brussels bureaucrats that will win the debate with liberals," the prime minister said. The ideology of an open society will not gain ground in central Europe, Orbán insisted. "We will relegate them where they belong, the garbage heap of history, just as we have expelled the communists."

At the ceremony, the Hunyadi János Award of the For a Civic Hungary Foundation was given to Polish MEP Ryszard Antoni Legutko. Referring to the Polish awardee, Orbán said Legutko had "studied the operations of the European Union and discovered critical signs of endeavours for political authoritarianism". "He established that progressive liberals have an adversarial attitude towards anybody else with a different way of thinking ... they have become like the communists and pose a real danger to freedom, pursuing their own utopian nightmares," Orbán said.

"Progressive liberals in the European Union are not interested in the European person ... they only have

an interest in their own ideology,” Orbán said. “If promoting those ideas costs dismantling European industry and agriculture, they will do so... If it involves erasing Europe’s culture through illegal migration, they will also do that,” Orbán said. “But we do not promote ideas but represent European people,” he added. Orbán said that at the time of Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004, “we felt that we had arrived and that we were home.” “We thought that the EU was a guarantee of prosperity and our national independence,” he said. But he said Legutko had recognised earlier that the representatives of liberalism strove to “eliminate sovereignty, take away as much of member states’ national competencies as possible”, and to control the bloc with “political diktats”. “Those we are arguing with actually want to eliminate us,” he said. After Brexit, the representation of sovereignty had been left to central Europe, the prime minister said, adding that the Poles and the Hungarians had always been in agreement when it came to the matter of sovereignty. “For the first time in decades, I feel that the sovereigntist central Europeans are not alone,” Orbán said. He said something was “astir” among German farmers, as well as in France and Portugal, while the “international conservative sovereigntist forces” had also become key players on the Netherlands’ political scene. “Europe is showing signs of life; it’s defending and having its voice heard,” the prime minister said. Orbán said that after Legutko had

discovered the “motifs of communism” in progressive liberalism, he “spoke about it openly”. The prime minister praised Legutko for his courage to speak about the “autocratic tendencies that were inherent in liberalism” in the 1990s, thanking him for contributing to Hungarian freedom through his work.

**SZIJJÁRTÓ: MAINTAINING COOPERATION IN V4 COUNTRIES’ INTEREST**

Although there have been multiple attempts over the past decades to fracture the Visegrad Group, the grouping remains alive, and it is in the member countries’ interest to keep the partnership going, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Prague. Keeping V4 cooperation going is in Hungary’s “obvious national interest”, Szijjártó told a press conference held jointly with his Czech, Polish and Slovak counterparts, according to a ministry statement. Over the past decades, many attempts had been made “to break this cooperation from the outside”, the minister said. He added, however, that despite the pressure on the V4 and the four countries’ disagreement on how to achieve peace in Ukraine, “the V4 is still operational and there is a common interest and common will among the four of us to keep the V4 operational”. He underlined that maintaining the V4 alliance was a national, economic and political interest for Hungary.

Szijjártó said cooperation among the four central European countries had so far been effective in protecting their

national sovereignty and overcoming the “federalist intentions” of the European Union, adding that the V4 would remain relevant in the future as well. The V4, he said, was also essential in combatting illegal migration, noting that Czechia, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia insisted on their right to determine whom they allow entry to and want to live together with. The V4 countries, he said, refused to relinquish their sovereignty in determining their national energy mix and took a joint stand against discrimination against nuclear energy. The grouping also wants tax policy to remain a national competence, he said, adding that the four countries would continue to stand up for the interests of their farmers in the EU. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Slovakia was Hungary’s second, Poland its third and Czechia its sixth most important trading partner, noting that the combined trade turnover today exceeds 46 billion euros. The success of the other three countries was also in Hungary’s interest, he said, adding that it was therefore important for them to coordinate their tactics on the most important EU issues, which the Hungarian government was prepared to do.

In response to a question, Szijjártó said Hungary was committed to its policy of not sending weapons to Ukraine, and neither would it participate in any joint arms deliveries. He noted, at the same time, that Hungary was undertaking its biggest-ever humanitarian aid operation in Ukraine. The minister also warned



of the dangers of remarks about potentially sending European troops to Ukraine. Addressing criticism of his meeting with Russian counterparts, Szijjártó said negotiating with those who had differing views on certain issues was also a diplomatic responsibility, arguing that limiting contact to those whom one was in full agreement with was “not a major achievement”. Shutting down communication channels, he added, would amount to abandoning the hope for peace. He said Hungary wanted to advance its cooperation with Russia in areas not affected by European Union sanctions, the same way other countries were doing “in secret”, as evidenced by the latest statistics on natural gas, crude oil and uranium deliveries.

### **POLITICAL DIRECTOR: ONLY DIPLOMACY CAN END RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR**

Unlike belligerent Brussels, Hungary's standpoint is that the Russia-Ukraine war can only be ended through diplomacy, for which a ceasefire is a precondition, Balázs Orbán, the prime minister's political director, said in Brussels. An increasing number of people in Brussels are discussing aspects of support for Ukraine that risk the outbreak of a third world war, a “doomsday scenario”, the official told Hungarian journalists on the opening day of the European Union summit. “What's at stake is serious,” the PM's political director

said. He said that several statements by “serious leaders of Brussels and member states” had come to light in recent days that pushed events “in a direction that Hungary has been trying to avoid for two years”, piling on pressure to involve NATO troops in the war in Ukraine and risking the war's escalation. Peace talks “must start as soon as possible”, he said, adding that political leaders in Brussels should “pull away from the current spiral of escalation”.

Orbán noted Hungary's stance on sending weapons to Ukraine: “We do not support sending weapons in any context or within any procedure. We are unwilling to make Hungary party to the war.” Also, if proposed sanctions were to conflict with Hungary's fundamental national interest, “we will stop those too”, he said. He said Europe should be able to defend itself and guarantee its own security. But given its reliance on others whose geopolitical interests differed from its own, he added, Europe was in a position of strategic weakness. Developing Europe's military industry and armed forces would be crucial in terms of fortifying European sovereignty, he said, adding that Hungary would partner with any initiative at European level that advanced Europe's military industry and armed forces. The June European parliamentary election could result in the predominance of pro-peace politicians in the EP, and this could possibly determine what happens in respect of the war in Ukraine.

### **DÖMÖTÖR: EC WANTS TO ABOLISH THE RIGHT OF VETO**

The European Commission wants to abolish the right of veto, and instead of a full consensus, require only qualified majority voting, Csaba Dömötör, a state secretary of the prime minister's office said on Facebook. The proposal had not received much attention despite having great significance, he said. Certain areas have been earmarked for its application, including tax policy, social policy and foreign policy, he added. “This is a grave proposal because it means that a decision could be made in Brussels setting corporate tax at above 9% ... and they could even decide in Brussels what our position should be regarding the matter of the war,” he said. A similar procedure was applied in the case of migrant settlement quotas, “and we protested in vain; they approved them in the end”. Dömötör said attempts were being made to gradually take away powers from member countries, adding that this could be described as “concealed legislation”. The current proposal goes even further and wants to take away decision-making rights in several areas, he added.

### **DEFENCE MINISTER URGES ARMS EXPORTS**

Minister of Defence Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky underscored the importance of exporting Hungary's

defence industry products, at a conference organised by the Hungarian Defence Export Agency. Hungary recognised the need to rebuild its defence capabilities and embark on a comprehensive military development programme as early as the start of the previous decade, he said. In the current phase of its strategic development, Hungary's task is to begin exporting the equipment manufactured in Hungary.

Szalay-Bobrovniczky criticised the previous governments for delaying the upgrade of the Hungarian military. He said the Hungarian economy had got strong enough by 2015 for a military development programme involving the complete replacement of its land and air equipment. Hungary, he added, was now enjoying the benefits of the "acceptable prices and delivery deadlines" negotiated back then because of the defence industry's more limited capacities at the time.

### **DEFMIN: HUNGARY UPGRADING SEARCH AND RESCUE CAPABILITIES**

The Hungarian Armed Forces is enhancing its search and rescue capabilities by upgrading its helicopter fleet, according to Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, the defence minister. The military has recently replaced its Mi-17 helicopters with modern Airbus H145M aircraft, he noted. In addition to the procurement of the H145s, Hungary is also taking delivery of new multi-purpose Airbus H225M

helicopters, the minister said. The new aircraft will enhance the Armed Forces' search and rescue capabilities, he said in a statement, adding that helicopter pilots and crewmembers have had to acquire new skills to effectively carry out rescue operations using the latest technology.

### **SZÁZADVÉG: VAST MAJORITY OF HUNGARIANS OPPOSE SENDING EUROPEAN TROOPS TO UKRAINE - SURVEY**

Fully 86% of Hungarians oppose sending European or NATO troops to Ukraine, according to a fresh survey by pollster Századvég, which said that several European leaders had recently "joined in on the war rhetoric of French President Emmanuel Macron", proposing that European countries should support Ukraine in the war against Russia by sending troops of their own to the conflict. The survey found that 75% of Hungarians saw the war as conflict between the economic and military interests of the United States and Russia. Hungarians also say the biggest obstacle to peace is that neither side is willing to compromise, the statement added. Altogether 77% of respondents said they had heard about the French president and other European as well as Ukrainian leaders urging the involvement of European troops in the conflict. Meanwhile, Századvég also found that 80% of Hungarians say Russia is unlikely to

attack Hungary if achieves a military victory Ukraine, while 79% believe Russia would not attack NATO at all.

### **EP CONSERVATIVES ECR CO-CHAIR CALLS ORBÁN 'COMPATIBLE WITH EUROPE'**

The co-leader in the EP of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) has called Prime Minister Viktor Orbán "compatible with Europe", insisting that those who seek "to portray him as a demon" were using Orbán "as a tool to enforce a minority political position onto others". Addressing an ECR meeting in Subiaco, Italy, on Thursday, Nicola Procaccini said that Orbán was "democratically elected and he is member of the European Union". He said Orbán "has his own views, but he has proved that he is compatible with Europe, because he voted to support Ukraine". Speaking about the upcoming EP elections in June, Procaccini said it would "bid farewell to the Ursula von der Leyen-led EC majority", expecting "a strong sea change" compared to the situation five years ago. Procaccini, who is group leader of the conservative Brothers of Italy party (Fdi) in the EP, said "it can be known in advance that the next European Commission will be centre-right, irrespective of the EP ballot's outcome, because the commissioners will have been nominated mostly by centre-right European governments". The politician said that Valerie Hayer, president of the centrist liberal



Renew Europe group in the European Parliament, on Thursday mounted “an aggressive attack” against the president and the EP group of the ECR, adding that Hayer’s words reflected fear over losing “a central role in the balance of European institutions”.

### **FIDESZ REJECTS ‘ALL EU PROPOSALS HARMING FARMERS’**

Fidesz MEPs will not support or vote for proposals putting the livelihood of European farmers or safe and quality food production at risk, the ruling party’s MEPs said in a statement. Enikő Győri and Ernő Schaller-Baross noted the European Parliament’s Committee on International Trade (INTA) has adopted a proposal that would extend by another year the permission for Ukrainian products to enter the bloc without quality or quantity restrictions. “The expert commission of the European Parliament has failed farmers yet again,” they said. The negotiating committee had failed to fulfil its mandate from the EP, which last week called for automatic protective measures to be activated if too much wheat arrived from Ukraine, Győri said. The measure is in force on other products already, she noted.

Schaller-Baross warned that European farmers had seen their revenues plummet recently. “The EU is choosing surrender rather than competitiveness, exposing European farmers to the impossible expectations of a skewed market.” The proposal was

“forced through” by left-wing parties and the backing of the majority of the European People’s Party, they said.

In July 2022, the EU suspended quotas and tariffs imposed on Ukrainian agricultural imports for a year, and extended that exemption by another year in 2023, the statement said. The measure had resulted in “serious disturbances” of the market as Ukrainian agricultural produce “flooded” neighbouring countries, the MEPs said. In May 2023, “the EC expressed its solidarity with the five member states along the [Ukrainian] border for four and a half months”, and allowed Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Romania to ban Ukrainian wheat, corn, sunflower seeds and rapeseed oil, they said. That measure was then scrapped by EC President Ursula von der Leyen on Sept 15, resulting in those countries introducing a unilateral ban to protect farmers, they added. The EC is now working to extend the exemption by another year, they added.

### **PÁRBESZÉD TO SUBMIT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PROPOSAL TO PREVENT INVESTMENT PROJECT**

The opposition Párbeszéd plans to initiate a constitutional amendment to prevent the government from transferring the Rákospuszta area in Budapest to Arab investors, Rebeka Szabó, the party’s co-leader, said, adding that at least thirty tenants would be “put out in the street” from

the service flats they currently occupy in the area. She demanded that these residents be offered good quality and affordable housing in exchange. Szabó said that instead of building skyscrapers in the area, an affordable, energy-efficient and eco-friendly garden district should be developed.

### **LÁZÁR: SOVEREIGNTY PRIORITY TO POLITICAL COMMUNITY LEADING HUNGARY**

The issue of sovereignty “is a priority for the political community leading Hungary”, János Lázár, the minister of construction and transport told the Portfolio Construction 2024 conference. The government’s interpretation of sovereignty, he said, was that in the 21st century “nobody should decide about Hungarians without the say of Hungarians”. Before 2010, the Socialist and Liberal governments of Hungary worked as if they had been country managers of a large company, sacrificing the aspects of sovereignty to the interests of large multinationals. “We think in a very different way,” he added. “The problem is not with capital and the markets but when multinationals want to rule the country,” he added. The government’s goal, he said, was to make Hungary a key state in the upcoming decades, meaning that Hungary should be the strongest country in the region. When it comes to Hungary and countries to the south and east, this should apply also in terms of specific logistics,

he added. Instead of developing all industries steadily, it has been decided that certain industries should be highlighted, he said, citing the car industry as the first and foremost. The car industry plays such an important role in industrial output and the GDP “that you could safely say that Hungary is and will remain a car-industry country”, he added. He also highlighted the importance of the defence and food industries, adding that construction was an industry in which Hungarian ownership could be maintained in the long term. The years from 2024 to 2027 will be dedicated to factory building, with 15-20 billion euros annual capital investment arriving in Hungary, he said.

Commenting on supermarket chain Spar’s complaint to the European Union concerning a special tax imposed by the Hungarian government, he said his message to all foreign businesses investing in Hungary was that they must respect their buyers, respect the country that hosts them, and respect Hungarian consumers that help them generate extra profits. “Those foreign companies that do not respect Hungarians cannot stay in the country in the long term,” he said. “The Austrian grocer’s

baseless and unfair accusations against Hungary, based on utter lies, will only result in the company having to pay the price for its actions now and in the upcoming period,” Lázár said. “We in Fidesz have learnt to swim against the current, govern without money, and now we will be able to swim against Spar; nobody should have any doubts about that,” he added. Lázár said he had advised the prime minister that “now that the Austrians have lied, saying that the government wants to buy into Spar, this should be treated as a good idea and the whole company should be bought out.”

### **HUNGARY’S EU COMPETITIVENESS SLIPS**

Hungary in 2023 slipped by two places in the competitiveness rankings of the EU’s 27 countries, to 19th place, the central bank (NBH) has said in a report. This places Hungary a tad below the average of the Visegrad Group countries, and more so compared with the five northern member states with the most sustainable growth trajectories, Zsolt Kuti, the bank’s executive director responsible for monetary policy, financial analyses and statistics, told

a press conference, commenting on the NBH 2023 Competitiveness Report. In nine of 14 areas covered by the report, such as the quality of education and health care as well as digitalisation, Hungary’s performance slid, he noted.

### **GOVT TO LIFT CAP ON DEPOSIT RATES FROM APRIL 1**

The government will phase out a cap on deposit rates from April 1, the national economy ministry said. The cap, set at the average three-month discount T-bill auction yield, was rolled out on November 22, 2022, as a measure to counter interest income of a scale that was “unjustified and unfair”. The cap was applied to institutional investors, pension funds, insurers and investment funds, as well as retail banking clients with 20 million forints (EUR 50,000) or more on their accounts. The ministry noted that the effective central bank base rate and interbank interest rates had fallen close to ten percentage points since the cap was introduced, as inflation dropped sharply supported by government measures.