

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán with French President Emmanuel Macron on the second day of the EU summit in Brussels

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events marking Hungarian-Polish Friendship Day

Events marking Palm Sunday

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

EP ELECTIONS 'BETWEEN PRO-WAR AND PRO-PEACE'

Brussels "is caught up in a spiral of war", and the main question at the European parliamentary elections will be whether someone has a pro-peace or pro-war stance, the Hungarian prime minister said on Friday.

Previously in European political battles, the main categories were between the right and left, globalists and sovereigntist forces, but recently a new dimension has opened up, and instead of party affiliations, what matters is whether someone is pro-peace or pro-war, Viktor Orbán said in the interview held in Hungary's Brussels Public Media Centre. It would be best if Hungary and the other European countries sent as many pro-peace politicians to the EP and as few pro-war politicians as possible, he said. The future of left-right cooperation, and who would be stronger, were also worth discussing "but what's most important is stopping the war psychosis", he added. Orbán said EU leaders talked as if they were fighting their own war against Russia, "unlike us, who, while not indifferent to human tragedy, are not a warring side". He said "distance" was needed, and "calm" was missing in Brussels. "They are at war, and they talk about the need to defeat Russia," Orbán said, adding that "they are taking on more and more to achieve that goal".

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ORBÁN ON BRUSSELS' STEPS TOWARDS UKRAINE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview held in Hungary's Brussels Public Media Centre, said that in Brussels "at first, they only talked about sending helmets to Ukraine, then it came to tanks and aircraft, "and now they're talking about proposals to send western European soldiers to be stationed in Ukrainian territory". He added that no decision had been made yet about where and for what purpose, but the preparations were under way. "We must be careful not to get sucked into the war psychosis and lose the ability to pursue the right direction based on Hungarian national interests," he said. Orbán said that 2-3 months ago what had been unimaginable had since become a simple everyday event. He noted that whereas once the Germans talked only about sending helmets, they were now discussing giving a missile system to Ukraine that would enable them to reach targets as far as Moscow. The prime minister said he was a supporter of reasonable disputes but it was now necessary "to put our foot down" and demand ceasefire and peace talks because otherwise "they will suck us in". He also said that even in Hungary there was no consensus about the issue, because whereas the government maintained a sober and pro-peace attitude, the left wing was pro-war. The "umbilical cord", the "alimentary canal" of the Hungarian left

wing "are in Brussels and in America", he said. "They are getting fed from there ... they pay them from there, and this is why they represent the pro-war position", he added. Orbán said he was certain that "Hungary would be deep in the conflict currently spreading between western European countries and Russia" were it not for its national, right-wing government. He warned that the first world war also started as a local conflict which then expanded.

ORBÁN: BRUSSELS CAPTIVE TO SOROS'S NETWORK

Brussels is captive to George Soros's network and the Soros network is an integral part of European institutions, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public radio in an interview on Friday. The Soros network "is so well established" that European institutions finance their operations from it, he added. He said the European Commission, the European Parliament and "a fair number of prime ministers are clearly backed by Soros". The Soros network "built up over the last 30 years" hampers the representation of the opinion of Europeans, the prime minister said.

Regarding Ukrainian grain, Orbán said that although Hungary generally supports trade, investment and economic cooperation, it rejects Ukrainian grain imports to Europe as Brussels had set bureaucratic and rigid rules for European farmers while "there are no such regulations in place in Ukraine", giving the country "a big

competitive advantage". Hungary, he said, was among 6-7 European countries that produced more food than they consumed, and customers in western Europe were buying cheap Ukrainian grain instead of Hungarian farmers' produce. "We're making strenuous efforts to find markets for the Hungarian stocks before the next harvest," he said, slamming Brussels for "turning a blind eye" to this problem. "Brussels is in the heat of war. Ukraine is more important for them than the European farmers," said Orbán, insisting that Brussels should either ban Ukrainian grain imports or employ the same loose regulations to Hungarian farmers as it applies to Ukraine.

The prime minister said that "although the European Union has been set up with the aim of ensuring peace and wellbeing", Europe was now pervaded "by war and poor-being". "People are basically negative towards Brussels bureaucrats. Not towards the European Union, because everybody supports the ideal of cooperation... The problem is with Brussels bureaucrats."

The prime minister was also asked about his ruling Fidesz party's plans regarding Budapest after the party's Budapest chapter named Alexandra Szentkirályi, a government spokesperson, as their candidate for Budapest mayor in the upcoming municipal election. Orbán, referring to the leader of the Democratic Coalition, Ferenc Gyurcsány, called for "Gyurcsány's people" to be frozen out of circles influencing the capital's administration. "The people who

ruined the country before 2010 are all doing business in the capital, and their politics is the same as during their administration," he said. "Those who bankrupted Hungary are now bankrupting the capital," Orbán said, adding that this was why "the coffers are empty, even though Budapest was once the richest city in Hungary". In the municipal elections held in June, hopefully a mayor would be elected who could prevent the capital's complete bankruptcy, he added. Orbán said Budapest was important for him and he was keen to address issues important for the city's residents. "But today there is no more important question for them than whether the Hungarian left can achieve that Brussels takes away part of the high wages given to kindergarten and school teachers."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY INTERESTED IN CLOSE EU- MOLDOVA COOPERATION

Hungary is interested in the European Union and Moldova forging the closest possible cooperation, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after meeting his Moldovan counterpart in Budapest on Friday, pledging Hungary's support for speeding up Moldova's integration process during its EU presidency in the second half of the year. At a joint press conference with Mihai Popsoi, Szijjártó said the EU was "ailing", and "the most effective cure" was to build closer ties with partner countries outside the bloc, the ministry said

in a statement. The minister recalled Hungary's "difficulties" during its own accession process, and he pledged the government's help to Molodva in "completing the task". Szijjártó noted an agreement signed at the meeting offering training at the Hungarian Academy of Diplomacy in legal harmonisation and the implementation of accession-related reforms to fifty Moldovan public officials.

Szijjártó said each candidate country should be evaluated on the basis of its performance. Hungary's position is that it is unacceptable if certain countries "become hostage" to those with "a poorer performance" in the integration process, referring to Albania and North Macedonia. "This is unacceptable for us, and we would like to indicate in advance that we will not support tying Moldova's integration to that of any other country." Hungary supports expanding the EU-Moldova free trade agreement, the liberalisation of their freight transport pact and allocations to Moldova from the European Peace Framework for the development the country's defence capabilities. "In addition, if the first inter-governmental committee meeting on Moldova's EU accession does not take place by June, we will hold it at the start of the Hungarian EU presidency to help speed up the process," Szijjártó said.

Commenting on bilateral relations, he said trade increased 2.5-fold since 2010. Hungarian exports were mainly supported by pharmaceuticals and the food industry, he said, adding that

OTP had grown to become one of the largest players in the local banking sector, following investments worth several tens of millions of euros. He welcomed Wizz Air connecting Chisinau to several western European cities, and said it was "good news" that Budapest services were restarting from April 2.

Szijjártó noted that forty Moldovan students studied at Hungarian universities with scholarships each year, and the programme seemed to be very popular. "Hungary is a dedicated supporter of Moldova's integration process, and the signing of today's agreements also makes clear that this dedication ... is backed by real action," he said. In response to a question concerning recent criticism by Vice President of the European Commission Věra Jourová, he said Jourová "has proven several times in recent years that she suffers from severe Hungaro-phobia, and she simply looks down on Hungarian people". "We ask you: the way she talks about supporters of Hungary's governing party. And we ask you: the way she generally talks about Hungarian people and Hungary," he said. "Perhaps she finds this unusual, but in Hungary the government has been elected by the people in a democratic way," Szijjártó said, adding that questioning the democratic character of the political system was a serious insult. He criticised Jourová for her support of the proposal to abolish the right of veto by member states, adding that this would result

in the government not being able to act against EU decisions that severely harmed Hungarian interests. "Věra Jourová should be ashamed of her performance in recent years, because the European Union is in a worse state than it was when the European Commission entered office, and Věra Jourová has played a large part in that," Szijjártó said.

Commenting on last week's remarks by US Ambassador David Pressman, he said they should be assessed "as remarks by a left-wing political activist". He added that Pressman should remember that when talking about undermining trust within NATO, he should not forget how many of his countrymen had been evacuated from Afghanistan by Hungarians.

NAGY HOLDS TALKS WITH MONTENEGRO PM

Márton Nagy, the national economy minister, has held consultations with Prime Minister of Montenegro Milojkko Spajić, reviewing the international trends that influence the region's performance, the ministry said on Friday. At the meeting in Montenegro, the sides also reviewed bilateral economic and tourism relations, and they discussed further areas in which to enhance economic cooperation, the statement added. Montenegro is an important partner for Hungary, which is a dedicated advocate of Montenegro's European Union accession, he said, adding that bilateral trade turnover approached

100 million euros last year, much higher than in previous years. When it comes to Hungarian investments abroad, Montenegro was the 21st most important target country for Hungarian capital in 2022, with investments worth 314 million euros. Last year, the number of tourists from Montenegro exceeded 6,000 and the number of guest nights was over 17,000, a 28% and 23% annual increase, respectively, he added. The Hungarian government aims to further strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries, and regular consultations will be held in the future, he said.

BUDAPEST MAYOR HAS FAILED TO DELIVER ON PROMISES, SAYS FIDESZ, LMP

Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, has failed to deliver on the promises he made in his 2019 campaign, Alexandra Szentkirályi, the ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance's mayoral candidate, said on Friday. In a Facebook video discussing Karácsony's track record, Szentkirályi said the mayor had promised to make City Hall Park "nice and green", but all that had happened instead was that the car park there had been "rearranged a little" and a "tiny garden" added. "The city deserves a lot more," she said, adding that change was needed in Budapest. Meanwhile, the opposition LMP party said Karácsony had "failed to keep even his simplest promise"

that one-third of executives on the boards of Budapest-based companies would be women. Delivering on this promise "would have only been a matter of will", but "the party's interests were more important than equality and his campaign promise," Anna Süveg, LMP's spokesperson, told a press conference. She said Budapest transport centre BKK, transport company BKV and the Budapest Capital City Property Management Centre (BVFK) all had a single woman each on their board. Süveg said her party was backing Karácsony's other challenger, Dávid Vitézy, an urban development expert and former state secretary in charge of public transport, to deliver on this promise.

SOCIALISTS SUE AUDIT OFFICE

The Socialists are taking legal action against the State Audit Office (ASZ), saying the auditor nefariously ordered the party to pay a fine for allegedly accepting illegal campaign financing before the 2022 parliamentary elections, the opposition party said on Friday. The auditor said in its report released on Feb 20 that parties in the opposition alliance, including the Socialists, were engaged in illegal campaign financing before the general election. It accused the parties of illegally accepting more than 261 million forints (EUR 671,200) from abroad via the Hungary Belongs to Everybody (MMM) movement,

and ordered them to pay the entire sum, shared equally, to the central budget within 15 days. The Socialists accused the auditor of taking “political orders”, calling the report “a baseless document” which flouted the rule of law. The party rejected the charge that it had accepted illegal financing, adding that it had published a full account of its campaign budget in the official Hungarian Gazette. It had also kept to campaign spending limits, it added. The ruling Fidesz party was attempting to “immobilise the democratic opposition parties using ÁSZ with just three months left until the municipal and EP elections,” the party said in a statement.

JOBBIK LEADER ASKS INTEGRITY AUTHORITY REVIEW ON SPAR ALLEGATIONS

Opposition Jobbik-Conservatives are turning to the Integrity Authority with a request that it

examine whether a criminal act was committed in connection with allegations concerning Austrian supermarket chain Spar. Spar’s head told media outlets that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had tried to convince Spar to sell a minority stake to one of his relatives, Márton Gyöngyösi, the party’s leader, told a press conference on Friday, adding that when the Hungarian government introduced a special tax on various foreign subsidiaries, it was a form of “blackmail” aimed at getting the companies to sell business stakes to friends or family members of the prime minister or other government members. Gyöngyösi suggested that this was the reason why Spar had submitted a complaint to the European Commission and the EU budget committee. He also suggested that this could be the reason why an EU country report said last year that the government regularly harassed foreign investors in Hungary.

DK: COMPLAINT ABOUT CHINESE VENTILATORS REJECTED BY POLICE

Law enforcement investigators have rejected a complaint by opposition Democratic Coalition concerning Chinese ventilators, a party lawmaker said on Friday. Zoltán Varga told an online press conference that DK had reported to the police suspected misappropriation after a press report showed that the government had transferred over 4 billion forints (EUR 10.1m) in an advance payment for 749 Chinese ventilators. Varga, who is also the head of parliament’s public welfare committee, said that the ventilators would now be auctioned off “at a fraction of their price, for a few cents”. He added that the police had made the “ridiculous” claim that the auctioning of ventilators only showed that ministry was acting in a responsible manner when it came to handling public monies.