

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Speaker László Kövér meets Vietnamese NA vice chairman Tran Quang Phuong in Budapest

MTI/Noémi Bruzák

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATO foreign ministers meet in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ SPEAKS WITH YERMAK

Hopefully “progress will be made” when officials from Ukraine and Hungary meet to resolve issues such as the rights of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community and long waiting times at the border, the foreign minister has said.

Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said he has spoken by phone with Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian president’s office, and they reviewed the situation regarding the rights of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community. In a post on Facebook, SZIJJÁRTÓ said that following a decision made at their previous meeting in Uzhhorod on Jan 29, a working group will hold an online consultation on Thursday, adding he was hopeful that “progress will be made”. “We reviewed the infrastructure development projects at the Ukrainian-Hungarian border and established that while progressing at a good pace, they must be speeded up so as to eliminate ... long waiting times,” he wrote. Szijjártó will hold talks with the Ukrainian foreign minister on the sidelines of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers on Wednesday.

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**SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY,
CYPRUS REJECT DIVIDING
EU**

Hungary and Cyprus “will never accept the European Union being divided into first- and second-class member states,” Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Nicosia, adding that the two countries “firmly oppose scrapping unanimous decision-making” in the EU. At a press conference held jointly with his Cypriot counterpart Constantinos Kombos, Szijjártó said the economy and security of the bloc were “worse than after the coronavirus pandemic”, and European competitiveness was waning, the war in Ukraine was at risk of escalation, while illegal migration was also causing difficulties. Hopefully the upcoming European parliamentary elections would bring about changes, he said, “with the bloc turning in the right direction and the peace camp gaining in strength”. The Hungarian government urges peace as soon as possible, Szijjártó said, adding that its position, however, was “not in the mainstream and not supported by a majority”. Hungary refuses to send weapons to Ukraine and “sharply opposes declarations concerning the possibility of sending Western troops”, he said. Those “promoting the peace camp’s position are stigmatised” and “there is extremely small room for a sober dialogue” on the matter, he said, adding that “similarly, there has been no opportunity for a meaningful debate concerning some kind of

compensation for member states seriously impacted by the sanctions against Russia.”

Concerning the proposed scrapping of unanimous EU decision-making, Szijjártó said: “We will never accept a situation in which the big countries could make decisions on issues also impacting us, leaving us the only possibility to say ‘yes, sir.’” The EU’s Hungarian presidency in the second half of the year will aim “to stop a further weakening of the community”, he said, adding that “a strong Europe requires strong members.” The EU needs “new momentum and energy, which can only come from the outside; the government, therefore, will have promotion of the integration of the Western Balkans high on its agenda,” he said, adding, however, that some countries should not be granted a “fast-track” procedure on a political basis; “each candidate must be assessed on their actual merits.” The Western Balkan states deserve to be treated fairly, he said, adding that Hungary and Cyprus will join forces to promote the issue.

The Hungarian presidency will also place increased focus on the fight against illegal migration, Szijjártó said. “The government considers migration as a danger rather than an opportunity,” he said, adding that “migration must be stemmed rather than managed”. Szijjártó welcomed that, like Hungary, “Cyprus always promotes its national interests in the EU”, and noted a regular political coordination between the two countries.

Concerning the economy, Szijjártó pointed to tourism as a fast

developing sector, and said over 66,000 Hungarians had visited Cyprus in 2023, up by 31% from the previous year. Bilateral trade turnover is above 100 million euros, Szijjártó noted, adding that energy offered further opportunities for cooperation, especially when it came to new resources in Cyprus. Szijjártó also mentioned that Hungary had sent troops to the United Nations peace keeping mission (UNFICYP), “thus contributing to peace and stability”.

Meanwhile, the minister noted that Hungary has reopened its embassy in Cyprus, “which is a clear sign of the Hungarian government’s appreciation of continuously developing bilateral ties”. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony in Nicosia, the minister called bilateral relations “a success story” backed by economic cooperation. He noted bilateral trade turnover of over 100 million euros, up 28 % year on year based on the latest statistics, adding that Hungary’s exports to Cyprus increased 2.5-fold in the past 10 years. Noting Cyprus’s Hungarian expatriate community of nearly 4,000, the large number of Hungarian tourists, Hungary’s presence in the United Nations peace keeping mission, as well as economic cooperation, the Hungarian government decided to reopen the country’s foreign mission and developing diplomatic services, the minister said. It is crucial to provide the best possible services to Hungarian tourists and Hungarians living in Cyprus, Szijjártó said,



adding that “a personal diplomatic presence could also be key to further improve diplomatic ties.” “I hope the embassy will clearly demonstrate how important the Hungarian side considers ties with Cyprus,” Szijjártó said. “The Hungarian government is committed to writing further chapters of the success story of the two countries,” he said.

FINMIN MEETS CHINESE COUNTERPART IN BEIJING

Finance Minister Mihály Varga has met Lan Fo’an, his Chinese counterpart, in Beijing, the finance ministry said in a statement. “Efforts in the past decade have resulted in making Hungary a bridge in economic cooperation between Europe and China,” the statement quoted the minister as saying. China has now become Hungary’s largest investor outside Europe and “its most important trading partner”, Varga said, adding that bilateral financial ties “are constantly strengthening”. According to 2023 data, China is Hungary’s 9th largest trading partner, bilateral trade accounting for 4% of Hungary’s total turnover, the statement said. Among China’s investment projects in Hungary, Varga mentioned the CATL project worth a total 3,000 billion forints, Huayou Cobalt investing 520 billion forints and BYD using a budget of “several billion euros”. The two ministers agreed that building further infrastructure links between the two countries was necessary, with special

regard to direct flights, Varga said, noting a Tuesday agreement to launch a new cargo flight which could “further increase Hungary’s role as a logistics hub in central Europe”.

KOVÁCS: ‘GET FACTS STRAIGHT’ ABOUT ILARIA SALIS CASE

Hungary’s state secretary for communications and international relations has said: “Let’s get some facts straight” about the case of Ilaria Salis, who is being detained in a Hungarian prison. “Since mid-February, Ilaria Salis’ father, Roberto Salis, has been touring the European media saying that he is ‘concerned’ about his daughter’s safety as long as she is in Hungary. Therefore, they applied for house arrest in Italy, about which [foreign minister Peter] Szijjártó said that ‘it will be decided by the court, which is an independent body,’” Zoltán Kovács wrote on X. He wrote there was “a reasonable suspicion that Ilaria Salis travelled to Hungary with her two antifa associates with the aim of beating up innocent people on the streets of Budapest.

Meanwhile, the Italian media did its best to portray Salis as a martyr.” Citing an statement made earlier by Szijjártó, Kovács wrote that it was “astonishing that they are trying to interfere with a Hungarian court case from Italy”, and he referred to “the premeditated nature of the act” which had been “well-thought-out”. “They nearly killed people in Hungary, and now she is depicted as a martyr.” He added that

“no direct request from the Italian government (or any major media outlet) to the Hungarian government will make it easier to defend Salis’s case, because the government, as in any other modern democracy, has no control over the courts.”

NATIONAL MINORITY VOTERS HAVE UNTIL MAY 31 TO REGISTER FOR VOTING

National minority voters can register to vote in the June 9 local elections by the May 31 deadline, the National Election Office (NVI) said. Hungary’s 13 registered national minorities will elect local, regional and national self-government councillors and mayors on the same day the country elects its municipal officials and its members of the next European Parliament, NVI said in a statement. The registration can be submitted online at www.valasztas.hu, in person, or in writing at local election offices.

KARÁCSONY: BUDAPEST RESUMES ONLINE POLL ON RÁKOSRENDEZŐ PROJECT, OUTPATIENT CARE

The Budapest administration is again conducting an online survey of residents’ views on how the project to redevelop the Rákosrendező district should be carried out and whether district municipalities should continue to run specialist outpatient care facilities, Gergely Karácsony,

the city's mayor, said. The question was whether the Rákosszentmihályi project should end up like a mini Dubai or a "park city", the mayor said in a Facebook post. Questions also remain over whether the Hungarian government should sell the area in an open international procedure or "hide behind an intergovernmental contract". He also noted the residents would be asked whether outpatient clinics should be "taken away by the state", as was the case with hospitals and schools. Karácsony insisted that waiting lists in the capital had been shortened, while districts were provided with extra money for outpatient specialist care. More than a 100,000 people participated in last year's survey dubbed residents' assembly, when the chief questions concerned traffic on Chain Bridge and a lawsuit the capital launched against the government, he noted.

MINISTRY: HUNGARY REDUCES GAS CONSUMPTION ABOVE EU EXPECTATIONS

Since last April, Hungary has reduced its gas consumption by 20%, similarly to the previous one-year period, as against the European requirement of 15%, the energy ministry reported. Between 2017 and 2022, the country used an annual 10 billion cubic metres of natural gas on average, which has now been reduced to nearly 8 billion cubic metres, the ministry said. The ministry's statement added that other EU members reduced their

consumption by an average 17.7%. The statement noted that the EU directive introduced in August 2022 in response to an international energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, will be maintained as a recommendation for members. "Hungary's consistent position is that defining a member's energy mix should stay a national competency; Hungary will not support any proposals running against that position," the ministry added in its statement.

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY TO RANK 4TH BY 2030 GLOBALLY IN GREEN ENERGY STORAGE

Hungary is set to have the largest green energy storage capacity in the world by 2030, after China, the US and Germany, a government official said, also noting that its climate protection plan announced in 2020 set the goal of producing 90% of the country's electricity from green, carbon dioxide-neutral sources by 2030. "We've now got to the point that solar panel capacities planned for 2030 will be completed in 2024," László György, the government commissioner for professional cooperation in economic strategic tasks, told a press conference in Nyíregyháza, in eastern Hungary. Various schemes have been launched to increase energy storage capacity and promote the green transition, he said, noting 75 billion forints-worth of subsidies for households and 30 billion forints available for businesses for purchasing electric cars, among other programmes.

Referring to a public survey on green energy consultation the government launched recently, he said the 13-question online questionnaires can be completed by April 15. The government wants to know whether citizens support Hungary "being the leader of the energy revolution" and whether energy should be produced in an environmentally friendly way. It also wants to understand attitudes to "the domestic production and development of energy storage systems" and whether homes "should be linked to this green system", he said,

LMP DEMANDS MONITORING STATIONS AT CHEMICAL PLANTS

Opposition LMP will submit a motion to parliament on setting up monitoring stations at plants that produce hazardous chemicals, the party's deputy group leader said in front of a battery plant in Komárom, in northern Hungary, where an accident occurred over the weekend. Eight workers of the plant were taken to hospital after hydrogen cyanide was released into the air, party MP Antal Csárdi told journalists. In a similar accident in January, 12 workers needed treatment, he said. "It's clear that the criteria for the operation of plants producing hazardous chemicals in Hungary are not in place. LMP, as Hungary's Green Party, will submit written questions to the government, asking how it plans to guarantee the protection of the environment" and locals, said Csárdi.

LMP also wants the government to tighten inspections and set fines in proportion to those plants' revenues.

Meanwhile, SK On Hungary Kft, the Komárom plant's operator, said that no dangerous substances had been detected in the air around the plant on March 31. It cited findings of mobile lab inspections by the local disaster management authority and police showing no harmful amounts of hazardous chemicals in the air. Eight workers complaining of headache underwent a medical examination and were all released afterwards, the company said in a statement, adding that it had ordered an internal inspection of the accident and would take further measures to prevent any future accidents.

NAGY MEETS HUNGARIAN BATTERY ASSN HEAD

Márton Nagy, the national economy minister, met in his office on Tuesday the head of the Hungarian Battery Association, according to a ministry statement that also noted how high-tech battery production for electric vehicles was a key driver of Hungary's export- and investment-oriented economy. Hungary's exports of batteries and battery components exceed 5% of GDP, putting the country among the top EU countries on this score, and battery production is expected to bring about 6,300 billion forints-worth of developments, making the country the world's 4th largest battery producer after China, the US

and Germany. Domestic production capacity is likely to reach 250 gigawatt hours, which could serve 35 percent of European needs, the statement said.

At the meeting, Nagy agreed with Péter Kaderják that an EU electric vehicle purchase incentive scheme would be needed to boost the EU's competitiveness and Europe's electric car industry, it added.

INDUSTRIAL PPI FALLS 4.3% IN FEB

Factory gate prices in Hungary dropped by an annual 4.3% in February, falling for the seventh month in a row after rising for years, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Prices for domestic sale fell by 5.8% and export prices declined by 3.5%. Month on month, prices edged up by 0.5% as prices for domestic sale were up by 0.7% and export prices inched up by 0.3%. Domestic prices of the manufacturing sector, which have a 60.0% weight in the PPI, dropped by 2.0% year on year. Domestic energy prices, which account for 38.6% of PPI, fell by 14.1%. Export prices of the manufacturing sector, which have an 82.9% weight in the PPI, edged up by 0.7%, while energy sector export prices, with a 16.7% weight, dropped by 33.1%.

HUNGARY POSTS EUR 583 M JAN TRADE SURPLUS

Hungary had a 583 million euro trade surplus in January, after the balance turned negative for the first time in

almost a year in December, a second reading of data released by the Central Statistics Office (KSH) shows. Exports fell by an annual 6.8% to 11.506 billion euros. Imports dropped by 14.3% to 10.923 billion euros. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 78% of Hungary's exports and 69% of its imports during the month. Hungary's terms of trade improved by 3.2% during the period as the forint firmed 3.4% against the euro and 4.6% to the dollar.

HISTORIAN: WESTERN CIVILISATION SUFFERING FROM 'FREEDOM DEFICIT'

A "freedom deficit" in Western civilisation was leading to inequality, Mária Schmidt, the head of the House of Terror Museum, said in a discussion with János Csák, the minister of culture and innovation, on current news channel M1, on Monday evening. Csák said individual freedoms had overcome order and freedom for the community in Western cultures. Schmidt insisted that Western civilisations were restricting freedom of religion, of speech and of the press, as well as academic freedom. "Those are all the freedom rights necessary to discuss our issues jointly and freely," she added. One topic that could not be debated in Western civilisations, Schmidt said, was the Russia-Ukraine war. She noted Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had urged European leaders to "have a plan B". "They don't understand, because they only suffer

one solution,” she added. Csák said: “Hungary’s task is to preserve our common sense, and remain a voice of reason, like so many times in our 1,100-year history.”

HEAT RECORDS BROKEN IN FOUR CATEGORIES ON APRIL 1

Hot air continued to flow in the Carpathian Basin from the south on April 1, leading several heat records

being broken, the weather service said. The new national record for the highest morning temperature on April 1 was registered at Jászszentlászló, southern Hungary, with 17.4 degrees Celsius, as against the earlier record of 15.4 C registered in Lenti in 1989. The new afternoon record temperature for the day was 30.2 C, in Kelebia, southern Hungary, as against the previous record of 27.7 C registered in Körmend in 1989. The new early morning record

high temperature for Budapest was registered at Ferihegy, near Budapest, at 16.2 C on April 1, as against the former record of 13.2 at Lágymányos in 2016. The Budapest heat record for the day was 28.1 registered at Újpest, as against 26.1 registered in the same location in 2021. The weather service said that once all measurements are certified for Monday, then April 1, 2024 will be the earliest day of the year ever recorded with temperature above 30 C since April 8, 1939.