

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/PM's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

PM Viktor Orbán with European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to Hungary's EU presidency

Stats office reports on Q1 govt sector balance

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: 'LET US TAKE EUROPE CLOSER TO PEACE!'

The greatest opportunity in Hungary's European Union presidency will be a chance "to take Europe closer to peace", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview broadcast on Hungarian public television.

Speaking after taking over the rotating EU presidency from Belgium in Brussels earlier in the day, Orbán said the war in Ukraine was currently the greatest challenge for Europe, but "if we are thinking about the future of Europe, we cannot overlook America". Noting that US presidential candidate Donald Trump has pledged to put an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, Orbán said if Trump won "there would at least be a ceasefire". Europe must be prepared for a situation when "sooner or later the Americans and the Russians hold talks," Orbán said, adding that the most important questions would be "where will Europe be in all this and who will promote its interests ... and which interests?" Hungary cannot answer those questions, Orbán said, adding that as holder of the EU presidency, however, "it will table proposals and support the decisions of 27 leaders". "We will be present at all locations of importance for Europe, look at every situation and present reports to Europe's leaders," he added.

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ORBÁN: 'MAKE EUROPE GREAT AGAIN'

Asked about how European leaders had reacted to the Hungarian presidency's motto "Make Europe great again", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to public television: "They have swallowed it". The United States, he said, strived to make itself great, and he suggested that if Europe wanted to remain a global political player it should follow suit. Orbán said Hungary's diplomacy was "open and straightforward" and it would "call a spade a spade" in European debates. The Hungarian presidency would "lend momentum and do good to Europe" because it would talk openly about the most difficult questions "without trying to influence decision-makers," he added. Orbán said the Hungarian presidency would not see the "common practice" of addressing issues in a confusing, time-consuming way "in the Brussels bubble's own bureaucratic approach", or not addressing them at all. He added, at the same time, that Hungary "knows its place is in the world, its strengths, its faults", and would contribute what it has to Europe's values over the next six months. "There will be surprising things," he said.

Concerning illegal migration, the prime minister said the EU's migration pact was not working, and the bloc had to move on from it. Orbán said he recommended that Brussels should not penalise Hungary over

its refusal to take in migrants, but it and other EU capitals should adopt Hungary's migration policy. "Suddenly everything would become simpler," he added. As regards the Hungarian presidency's aim of boosting Europe's competitiveness, Orbán said it had been a mistake to introduce "big international taxes". "Taxes are bad, and stimulating the economy requires supporting economic players," he said. He said Hungary planned to revise measures "that purport to be about protecting certain industries, particularly the auto industry, from the Eastern industries". He said that during the preparations for the presidency he had spoken with the leaders of the major car manufacturers, who had told him that they did not want such measures because they stood to lose a lot more "when the Easterners strike back". Orbán said the EU was on the brink of a trade war with the East, which it would lose out on. The prime minister also spoke about the need to "radically re-think and re-shape" the EU's green energy policy, arguing that in recent years it had resulted in Europe using more coal than before while energy prices had doubled or even tripled.

Orbán said Hungary planned to advance 120 legislative dossiers during its presidency. Also, some 1,500 Council working group meetings will be held, along with 37 high-level meetings and 230 events connected to the presidency, he said. EU leaders will hold 27 summits and the summit of the European Political Community

comprising 47 European heads of government and state will also be held in Budapest, he added.

Orbán said voters in the EP elections had opted for change, insisting that the parties from 20 countries out of 27 that had declared "things cannot go on like this in Brussels" had "won". The Belgian prime minister and the French government had lost for not discerning the zeitgeist, he said, adding that "the situation is teetering" in Germany. Referring to Patriots for Europe, a new European party alliance he recently formed with Czech and Austrian right-wing parties, Orbán said change would take place as it became plainer to see that change was needed. He said the new grouping promoted peace, order, security and development, and would turn into "a large parliamentary group faster than you'd think", adding that "many people will be surprised in 4-5 days' time". The group's inaugural meeting will be held on July 8, he said, adding that as well as Portugal's Chega, which has already announced its plan to join, "an Italian party will also join soon". Orbán predicted the group would "quickly become the third and then the second largest" formation in Brussels. "It's we who want a better Europe," he said, adding that the group's members were "patriots who love their own country passionately but also find Europe to be important". "They want strong European cooperation, not against Europe, but for their own country," Orbán said.

Referring to European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, Orbán

said her performance over the past five years had been “quite meagre” when it came to big issues such as the war in Ukraine and migration, as well as the green transition. He also said the commission had launched political attacks against Hungary under the guise of rule-of-law procedures, so he would not be backing her nomination to retake the post. He also said that Manfred Weber, the leader the European People’s Party, was a “known Hungarophobe”, and he indicated that von der Leyen had been marginally preferable to a putative Weber presidency five years ago. Regarding Antonio Costa, the candidate to chair the European Council, Orbán said Costa had “always been on good terms” with Hungary. Meanwhile, commenting on Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, nominated as the EU’s foreign policy chief, he said he had abstained from supporting her as he was unconvinced she could handle the job, “and besides Estonia is strongly pro-war”. Orbán said it hadn’t been wise to freeze Italy, a founding EU state, out of the negotiations on top positions, adding that “the Italians are rightly outraged”.

PRESIDENT SULYOK: ‘VALOUR’ OF SOVEREIGNTY HAS OFTEN SAVED HUNGARIANS

Hungarians have often been “spared misfortune” by the “valour” of sovereignty, President Tamás Sulyok said in a speech at the Liszt Institute in Brussels, marking the start of

Hungary’s six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union. Sulyok said Brussels was a place to “learn the art of compromise”. He said that like Belgians, Europeans often had trouble understanding each other. “But in the end we must always strive for compromise, because without it no people or nation is viable,” the president said. He said Hungarians were not confined to Hungary, noting the times throughout history when they were forced to leave their homeland. “But as Hungarians, we can live anywhere, that is, we find our people everywhere and form close bonds and tight-knit communities with our compatriots,” he added. Sulyok said there were Hungarians living all over the world and their talent was also world-renowned. Noting the accomplishments of 2023 Nobel Laureates Katalin Karikó and Ferenc Krausz, Sulyok said that though they had left Hungary to pursue their academic careers, they had never forgotten their home country and had preserved their Hungarian identity. “They are wonderful examples of how one can find the way to one’s personal success abroad without forgetting the way home,” Sulyok said, adding that this also meant returning home in the intellectual and spiritual sense.

AZBEJ: HUNGARY, ARMENIA FOR STABILITY IN CAUCASUS

Hungary and Armenia share an interest in ensuring stability in the Caucasus, Tristan Azbej, state secretary in charge

of aid programmes for persecuted Christian communities, told MTI by phone from Yerevan on Monday, adding that Hungary’s European Union presidency would strive to strengthen ties between the EU and the Caucasian region. Azbej, who is on a one-day working visit in Armenia, said bilateral cooperation “is further strengthening and will soon include further components”. He said the Hungary Helps programme will provide further aid to Armenian families that had fled the Karabakh region. A donation of 200 million forints (EUR 507,500) may be spent on food, household articles, welfare services, and education, he added. The state secretary noted that the Hungarian government had earlier provided Armenians with an emergency donation of 40 million forints via the Armenian Red Cross. Azbej arrived in Armenia on Wizz Air’s first Budapest-Yerevan direct flight.

NATL ECONOMY MINISTRY PREPARING ACTION PLANS TO BOOST SMES, TOURISM

In line with a government decision aimed at further boosting Hungary’s economic growth, the national economy ministry is preparing two action plans by Sept 30 on further supporting the domestic SME and tourism sectors, Márton Nagy, the minister, said on Monday. Small and medium-sized enterprises are a mayor pillar of Hungary’s economy accounting for 99% of all domestic businesses and employing 72% of all domestic employees, the ministry cited Nagy as

saying. Those companies ensure the living of millions of Hungarian families, he said. Nagy said those companies were key for Hungary's competitiveness, and strengthening their effectiveness, productivity and performance was imperative. The ministry's action plan for SMEs includes proposals on financing programs and incentives to support investments and provide cheap loans, in addition to reducing administrative burdens, which will support and accelerate their green and digital transition.

The other action plan is to boost Hungary's strategic tourism sector which provides more than 10% of the country's GDP and gives jobs directly or indirectly to some 400,000 people, said Nagy. Its central component is a significant development of Budapest's recently re-purchased international airport by the state, the minister said, adding that the goal was to increase the airport's capacity to handle 20 million passengers. Boosting tourism in the countryside is also an important objective, Nagy said. He noted that the government aimed to raise the number of guest nights spent at tourism accommodations in Hungary to 50 million by 2030, while boosting the sector's contribution to GDP from 10% to 16%.

GAS RESERVES ABOVE EU EXPECTATIONS

Hungary's gas reserves stand currently at 5 billion cubic metres, or 78% of full capacity, comfortably above the European Union's requirement

to fill reserves to 65% by July 1, the energy ministry said on Monday. Hungary achieved the 65% threshold by May, it said in a statement. The reserves are holding 50% of domestic consumption, the third highest rate in Europe, and double the EU average, it said. Under EU regulations, gas reserves must be filled up to 90 % of full capacity by November 1. Last year, Hungary fulfilled that requirement by the end of summer, the statement said. Partly thanks to significantly falling consumption, gas reserves had not dropped below two thirds of capacity in the past year, the ministry said. The security of supply is therefore "guaranteed with great certainty", it added. The government's measures have ensured that Hungarian families are provided the cheapest gas and electricity in Europe. The home refurbishment programme launched on Monday also offers interest-free loans and non-refundable support to home energy upgrades, it said. The 108 billion forint (EUR 273.2m) EU funding is expected to ensure developments on some 20,000 buildings, it said.

TRADE SURPLUS EUR 1.7 BN IN APRIL

Hungary had a 1.7 billion euro trade surplus in April, expanding from 1.6 billion in March, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of data on Monday. Exports rose by an annual 9.2% to 12.5 billion euros. Imports slipped by 2.9% to 10.8 billion. Trade with other European

Union member states accounted for 76% of Hungary's exports and 75% of its imports during the month. Hungary's terms of trade improved by 1.7% during the period as the forint weakened 4.4% against the euro and 6.8% to the dollar. For the period January-April, Hungary had a trade surplus of 5.6 billion euros. Exports fell by 3.9% to 49.0 billion and imports declined by 12.3% to EUR 43.4 billion.

HUNGARY PMI POINTS TO CONTRACTION IN JUNE

Hungary's seasonally-adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) stood at 49.4 points in June, down from 51.3 points in May, the Hungarian Association of Logistics, Purchasing and Inventory Management (Halpim) said on Monday. The PMI was below the 50-point threshold that signals expansion in the manufacturing sector. Among the PMI sub-indices, the new orders index fell but was over the 50-point mark. The production volume index dropped and indicated stagnation. The employment index declined and continued to show a contraction. The delivery times index rose. The gauge of purchased inventories decreased but was over the 50-point mark.

GOVT OFFICIAL HIGHLIGHTS EU PRESIDENCY'S SPACE RESEARCH GOALS

The Hungarian presidency of the European Union will aim to launch negotiations on EU space law, the

foreign ministry's commissioner for space research said on Monday. Speaking at a science and technology conference at Óbuda University, Orsolya Ferencz said that, among other goals, Hungary will aim to conduct an interim assessment of the EU's space programme and strengthen European space competencies. The commissioner welcomed the EU's recognition of the importance of bolstering its space competency, pointing out the rate of development in the global space industry. "21st century history is being written in

space," Ferencz said, noting that the EU plans to put space research in the focus of its science and innovation policy. She noted that after 40 years Hungary was getting ready to send an astronaut to space again under its Hungarian to Orbit (HUNOR) programme.

RÉTVÁRI: ONLINE FRAUD REDUCED BY 30% IN SIX MONTHS

Online fraud cases have gone down by 30% in the past six months owing to new legal and police measures, an

official said on Monday. Police set up a 300-strong unit to fight cybercrime 18 months ago and 114 people out of 819 suspects have been arrested thanks to their investigations, Bence Rétvári, state secretary of the interior ministry, noted. Banks are now obliged to bolster protections for their clients against fraudsters, while further measures will be introduced from August to make it easier to catch scammers. Often foreigners, generally members of Ukrainian gangs, attempted to lure people into disclosing their banking details, he said.