

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Tour of Aggtelek Cave

MTI/Péter Komka

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parl foreign affairs cttee head meets Kazakh delegation

Plenary session of parliament

President addresses event marking World Sight Day

Stats office publishes construction industry figures for Aug 2018

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CEE WANTS FAIR BREXIT DEAL

Central European countries expect the European Commission and other relevant EU institutions to make every effort to reach a fair Brexit deal, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, has said.

Britain's exit from the European Union spells bad news for the bloc, Szijjártó said, attending an informal meeting of Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt and representatives of the Visegrad countries, as well as Slovenia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania in Chevening, in south-east England. Szijjártó told MTI that the CEE region expects the EU to reach a Brexit deal which both sides can acknowledge as fair. Failure to reach such an agreement would seriously undermine the interests of Central Europe, he added.

Szijjártó: Central Europe expects Commission to conclude Brexit deal which both sides can acknowledge as fair. Failure to reach such an agreement would seriously undermine the interests of Central Europe, he said, adding that the region's trade volume with Britain is massive, while British investments in the region's economies are intensive. Further, millions of central Europeans study in Britain, and their rights must be guaranteed.

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COMMISSION'S PERFORMANCE 'SCANDALOUS'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó branded the performance of the European Commission over the past four and a half years as "scandalous", insisting that it had caused the EU "very serious damage". Szijjártó told MTI that a once stable transatlantic relationship had become fragile. Moreover, the inability to respond to the migration crisis had been corrosive, he said. Next year, for the first time in the EU's history, there will be a decrease in the number of member states, he added.

Central Europeans have a clear interest in Brexit talks concluding with the deepest, most comprehensive and broadest possible free trade agreement, he said. Otherwise EU trade in the UK will continue with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, creating "extremely serious difficulties", he added. Given the emergence of a global trade war, Europe needs free trade agreements, strategic partnerships and friends, he said. Britain and the European Union cannot afford to part ways without such an agreement. If Brexit does not happen accordingly, the four Visegrad countries will want to conclude joint initiatives to maintain and expand relations with Britain, Szijjártó said. "We hope that we won't have to consider scenarios that for a period after Brexit would be without an agreement. If this were to happen, it would be necessary

to talk about it, but for now, any such scenario would be detrimental to the negotiations," the minister said.

ÁDER: V4 SEE MIGRATION AS LONG-TERM CHALLENGE

Countries of the Visegrad Group are in agreement that Europe will face the problem of migration over the long term, President János Áder said after a two-day V4 summit in Štrbské Pleso (Csorbató), in northern Slovakia, on Friday.

Áder insisted that the migration issue should not be approached "on an ad-hoc basis but as a daily routine". He quoted Polish President Andrzej Duda as saying at the summit that "all European Union leaders now accept the position on migration the V4 countries have been voicing for years", and added that he found it "gratifying". The V4 have urged that the bloc's external borders should be protected and aid sent to countries of origin to prevent further waves of migration, Áder said. He added that setting up hot spots to separate political refugees from economic migrants was also part of the V4 position as well as support for "first safe countries" such as Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon.

ORBÁN TO MARK 1956 ANNIVERSARY AT HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will address a commemoration of Hungary's 1956 revolution in front of

Budapest's House of Terror museum at 3pm on October 23, the government spokesman said. Commemorations are scheduled to start on October 22 at the 1956 Technical University Memorial, Zoltán Kovács told MTI. From there, commemorators will head over to the traditional commemoration at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, where the anti-Soviet uprising started 62 years ago. That ceremony will be addressed by former Prime Minister Péter Boross, János Józsa, the university's rector and József Halzl, head of the Rákóczi Association, which promotes ethnic Hungarian youth organisations. The ceremony will be followed by a traditional torch-lit march proceeding from the university to Bem Square, another important location of the revolution. There, Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, will deliver a speech, Kovács said.

On October 23, commemorations will begin with the hoisting of the national flag in front of Parliament with military honours. Kovács also said that the Parliament building will be open to visits from the public free of charge on the national holiday.

AFRICAN SWINE FEVER REPORTED IN FIFTY VILLAGES IN NE HUNGARY

The national chief veterinary officer has imposed restrictions in 50 villages in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County in the north-east after classifying them as infected with the African swine

fever (ASP) virus, regional daily Észak-Magyarország said. The paper said the districts of Cigánd, Miskolc, Sárospatak, Tokaj, Szerencs, Tiszaújváros, Gönc and Szikszó have been affected. Restrictions were introduced after ASP had been detected by laboratory tests in a wild boar shot near Tarcal. In the infected areas farmers are required to keep a registry of any changes in the number of animals and report any occurrence of sick or dead animals to the local vet, the paper said.

GOVT SPOX: JUNCKER'S COMMENTS ON ORBÁN 'PERSONAL REVENGE'

Government spokesman Zoltán Kovács dismissed European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's recent remark that Hungary's prime minister "no longer has a place" in the European People's Party as "personal revenge" on Juncker's part for Viktor Orbán's refusal to back his presidential bid four years ago.

In an interview to French daily Le Monde published earlier in the day, Juncker said of Orbán: "Although I respect the man, I see a lot of incompatibilities between what he says and the Christian democratic values on which the EPP is based. Unless he can guarantee to us that he will respect the fundamental values of the EPP and its election programme."

Kovács said on Twitter that Juncker's comments were "not worthy of an response", adding that Orbán and Juncker's differences over the issue

of migration "just make it more evident" that Juncker's remarks were about revenge. "We're never going to agree to the pro-migration stance he represents," Kovács said. At an informal European Union summit in Salzburg last month, Juncker had already proposed at a meeting of the EPP that Hungary's ruling Fidesz party should be frozen out of the grouping.

Antal Rogán, the cabinet chief, called it "unfortunate" that the EC president had put forward his proposal when Orbán was no longer in the room. Orbán had left to attend a meeting with Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Chancellor. In spite of this, the EPP members present at the meeting decisively rejected Juncker's proposal, Rogán said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISMISSES ASSELBORN'S CRITICISM

The Hungarian government "is prepared for the fight against pro-migration forces", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, in reaction to critical remarks by Jean Asselborn, his Luxembourg counterpart. Earlier in the day, Asselborn was quoted online by the Luxembourg Times as saying that "without [Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor] Orbán, there wouldn't have been a refugee crisis". He argued that while the Hungarian government had advocated protection for the European Union's external borders, it now rejects enhancing the role of border agency Frontex.

Szijjártó said in reaction that Asselborn was an "extremely pro-migration politician incessantly seeking to force immigrants and migrant quotas upon Hungary". The Hungarian government, however, will "never allow Brussels to flood the country with migrants" or to "snatch the right to border protection". According to Szijjártó, Asselborn and his "pro-migration comrades in Brussels" are "itching for the keys to the gate". "If we gave up border protection, Brussels would not protect us but organise migration across our borders," he said. Szijjártó insisted that "time is running out for the pro-migration forces" and they seek to "deploy everything they have against Hungary".

GOVT SETS GOALS FOR NEXT YEAR'S FOSTERED WORK SCHEMES

The government has set the objectives for next year's fostered work schemes in a resolution published in the latest issue of the official gazette Magyar Közlöny. The main goal is to encourage jobseekers to leave fostered work and find employment on the primary labour market. Other objectives include to meet seasonal demand for labour in the construction and farming sectors and to provide employment for longer periods to jobseekers with low qualifications who cannot find work on the open labour market. Further goals include assisting in

water management, preserving and maintaining public spaces and roads.

RÉTVÁRI: SPECIAL PREPARATIONS MADE FOR HOMELESS SERVICES

The state authorities are making special preparations for providing homeless services in the winter, including a national ambulance service team to help transport homeless to shelters, a human resources ministry state secretary said on Saturday. The change of law, enshrined in Hungary's constitution, bans people from inhabiting a public space from Oct. 15 "We are preparing to offer extra help to those that currently live in the streets", Bence Rétvári told a press conference.

The government is spending 9 billion forints (EUR 28m) on homeless care services, making 9,800 places available in night shelters, with an extra capacity of 1,600 places to be opened on demand, he said. There will be a capacity of 7,600 in daytime shelters, he added. The government is setting aside a reserve fund of 300 million forints for extra homeless provision which will be available to both state organisations and charities, he added.

Ambulance services spokesman Pál Györfi said three vehicles, withdrawn from regular service, will be dedicated to helping the homeless reach shelter. The members of this special ambulance team have been selected on a voluntary basis but they will get paid for their work, he added. They will be in contact with homeless care

institutions and will be ready to help those in need, he said.

Real help comes in the form of services that Hungary's homeless actually make use of, Attila Fülöp, the state secretary for social affairs and inclusion said on Sunday, a day before the new law on homelessness takes effect. Lajos Dani-Győri, the vice president of the Hungarian Maltese Charity, said their responsibilities will not change with the new law, and the charity has the necessary infrastructure to provide for the homeless.

GOVT OFFICIAL: BREXIT POSES EXTRA TASKS FOR TAX AND CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES

Brexit will pose significant extra tasks for tax and customs office NAV and preparations for these are already under way, the finance ministry's deputy state secretary for tax and international affairs said. Initial estimates show that the office will have to handle nearly half a million extra customs clearances annually as a result of Brexit regardless of whether or not a planned free trade agreement between the European Union and Britain is signed, Tamás Molnár told the press on the sidelines of the autumn conference of the Hungarian Association of Customs Affairs.

Tax and customs revenues will be record high this year, he said. The projected excise tax revenue for 2018 is 1,099.4 billion forints, as against 1,069 billion forints last year. Customs

clearance of goods from third countries and East Asia has been given special emphasis because Hungary wants to become central Europe's customs clearance hub for the Middle East and the Far East, he said.

DK CALLS ON GOVT TO SLASH VAT, SUSPEND WELFARE CUTS

The leftist opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) is calling on the government to take immediate steps to cut the VAT rate and to suspend cuts to social spending. Péter Niedermüller, the party's deputy leader, said over the weekend that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government was only offering inflation, rising food prices and reduced social benefits to the neediest in a year which has officially been dedicated to families. He called on the government to accept the European Parliament's proposal to cap VAT rates at 25% and to draw up a comprehensive plan to help the neediest members of society.

MEPs voted in Strasbourg this week to propose setting a maximum VAT rate of 25%. Hungary's main VAT rate is 27% at present, the highest in the European Union.

Niedermüller noted that DK had already proposed the introduction of a conditional basic income for families and the progressive pricing of utilities according to consumption brackets. It has also proposed raising family subsidies, supporting the education of poor children, reforming the fostered

work scheme and has called for a plan for the training of fostered workers, he added. Further, the government should take steps to reduce regional inequality, he said.

PÁRBESZÉD LAUNCHES REFERENDUM BID ON FREE UNIVERSITY TUITION

The opposition Párbeszéd party is submitting a referendum initiative with a view to ensuring that university tuition in Hungary is free of charge, party board member Gábor Erőss told said. Currently, students are required to pay a tuition fee unless they qualify for a state grant. The party will submit the question: "Do you agree that students of state-funded higher education courses should not pay for tuition?" Erőss said that ruling Fidesz wants to "privatise" Budapest's Corvinus University, to be followed by "all other institutions", further restricting access to higher education in an "already very unfair system". On the surface the government is enhancing their autonomy while actually "putting public funds into the hands of Fidesz oligarchs", he said. Lawmaker Bence Tordai said the party's proposal for a

universal basic income would benefit university students, who would receive 3.6 million forints (EUR 11,000) over 5 years.

AROUND 17% OF HUNGARIANS ALWAYS LOOK FOR CHEAPEST PRODUCTS - SURVEY

When making a standard purchase around 50% of Hungarians focus on the price to value ratio, 25% look for discounted items and 17% always buy the cheapest of everything, according to a representative survey made by insurance company Generali. The survey found that a third of shoppers regularly made impulse purchases, buying products they did not need or had not planned on getting. Impulse buying is mostly sparked by discounts discovered at stores and is most common among women, those younger than 40 years and those living in Budapest. Most respondents consider themselves to be conscious shoppers but this is only true when purchasing durable consumer goods like cars and smartphones, according to the survey.

HUNGARIANS EXPECTED TO WORK FOR ALMOST 34 YEARS ON AVERAGE

A person in Hungary who was 15 years old in 2017 is expected to be active in the labour market for 33.7 years during their life, according to data published by Eurostat. The expected duration of working life in Hungary was up from 27.5 years in 2000. In 2017 the expected duration of working life in the EU was 36 years, 3 years longer than in 2000. Last year the duration of working life among member states ranged from 32 years in Italy to 42 years in Sweden, with Hungary being in the bottom one-third.

RETAIL EMPLOYMENT UP IN 2017

The number of workers employed in the retail sector, working at organisations with at least five people, rose by 1.55% to 195,000 in 2017 compared with 2016, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The rate of employment growth was somewhat below the 1.64% expansion for the number of employed in the economy as a whole. Gross monthly payment for retail workers reached 231,800 forints in 2017, up from 200,700 a year earlier.