

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Boglárka Bodnár

Opening of the 12 Walls - architecture and contemporary ornament exhibition in Veszprém

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán at EU heads of state and government summit in Brussels

Parliament holds plenary session

Socialists hold conference on Budapest

Share market 2018 conference

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY BORDERS GUARDED BY HUNGARIANS

Hungary's borders will continue to be protected by Hungarian soldiers and police, and the country will continue to reject migrant settlement schemes, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

In a video posted on Facebook, recorded ahead of a three-day summit of European Union heads of state and government, Orbán said the Brussels meeting would be "an important one" given the European Commission "is still churning out" resettlement programmes for migrants. "They still want to strip us of our right to protect the border and tell us who gets to live in Hungary and other European countries. Hungary's stance on these questions is clear. Our police and troops will protect our borders and we will not accept any resettlement schemes," he said.

In Brussels he was also scheduled to participate in a summit of the European People's Party (EPP), of which his ruling Fidesz is a member. Answering a question on migration and border protection upon his arrival, Orbán said, "we are at war but our positions are good". Concerning allegations that the European party could strip Fidesz of its membership, Orbán said "we are the EPP". On the subject of Brexit, Orbán said that the aim was to achieve a "fair" agreement, one which meets the needs of Hungarians working in the UK.

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TRÓCSÁNYI: HUNGARY TURNS TO EU COURT OVER SARGENTINI REPORT

The government has turned to the European Court of Justice with the complaint that the European Parliament violated voting rules when adopting the Sargentini report concerning the rule of law in Hungary, the justice minister announced.

According to the Hungarian government, based on the EP's regulations, abstentions may be ignored during the course of normal voting but this rule cannot be followed in relation to special proceedings. So the document did not have the two-thirds majority required to pass, Hungarian Justice Minister László Trócsányi told a press conference. "The EP has not observed the rules governing its own operations," he insisted.

Altogether 448 MEPs voted in favour of the EP report of Green MEP Judith Sargentini, which said democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights were under threat in Hungary, constituting a clear risk of a serious breach of EU values. The vote in which 197 MEPs were against and 48 abstained triggered the Article 7 procedure against Hungary.

Answering a question, he said that if the Luxembourg court ruled in favour of Hungary, "there will be no Sargentini report" and the community's infringement procedure against the country "will be null and void".

GULYÁS: BORDER PROTECTION 'DUTY' OF EU MEMBER STATES, NOT FRONTEX

Border protection is both a "national and European duty" and it is not only national laws but the Schengen pact, too, that defines this duty, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said. But this does not change the fact that Hungary and other EU member states must carry out border protection "rather than some EU authority", he added.

Gulyás said at a weekly government press briefing that border protection was an "issue of sovereignty", and Hungary "insists on performing that task". He argued that Frontex could not ensure the same degree of protection, even with a larger headcount.

Concerning the European Parliament's recently adopted Sargentini report on the rule of law in Hungary, Gulyás said it was "witch hunt in a political disguise". According to the government "the legal charges in the report do not exist" and the document "raises closed issues", Gulyás said. The Hungarian government is "being attacked" by "pro-migration" forces in the EP because of the government's migration policy, he insisted.

Meanwhile, on the topic of Britain's exit from the EU, he said Hungary wanted a "fair" Brexit deal and it was important that ties between the EU and Britain should stay "as close as possible". He also quoted the

British home secretary as saying that Hungarians working in the UK need not have any fears, even if no deal is reached.

Referring to Ukraine, the minister said that the situation was "serious". Ahead of elections in that country "many hope to gain votes through anti-minority, anti-Hungarian moves" and it "gives cause for concern about the future," Gulyás said, but added that Ukraine Hungarians could count on the Hungarian government's support, and ethnic kin "wishing to come to Hungary in the current situation will be more than welcome".

Answering a question, Gulyás said that his Fidesz party will run in the upcoming EP elections as a member of the European People's Party.

Concerning a recent dispute with Guy Verhofstadt, head of the Liberal group in the EP, Gulyás said that the controversy was "not about Verhofstadt's position on migration" but if that position "should be considered when a member state makes its decisions". "Hungary will not tell another member state how to decide on migration and it will expect similar treatment from others," Gulyás said.

Answering a question about the House of Fates Holocaust museum, Gulyás said that though the government has involved Jewish organisation EMIH in the project, it "continues to take responsibility for the content of the exhibition". The government wishes to "appropriately pay tribute to the national tragedy of

the Holocaust and acknowledges the responsibility of the Hungarian state". The Hungarian state had been "unable to protect the victims and participated in their deportation", Gulyás said. He added that "despite all its inhumane laws Hungary had been more of a haven than a site of persecution before 1944".

EMMI: GOVT TO APPEAL AGAINST STRASBOURG COURT RULING OVER TEXTBOOK DISTRIBUTION 'MONOPOLY'

The government is appealing against a Strasbourg court ruling concerning the right of publishers to distribute textbooks to the country's schools. According to the non-final ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Hungary "monopolised" the school textbook distribution market, thereby violating the property rights of the companies concerned.

The human resources ministry said in a statement it rejected the charge that it had introduced a state monopoly over the development of textbooks but had rather centralised their distribution in 2013. Previously, all publishers delivered their textbooks themselves. After the law amendment was implemented, the centralised distribution was carried out by a state agency. "This system clearly works: textbooks arrive at schools simultaneously in a transparent way and it's cheaper this way," the ministry said. "Some companies did not do well, but students and families are clearly winners of the changes," it added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-SLOVAKIA TIES 'AT THEIR BEST'

Ties between Hungary and Slovakia are "at their best" and based on mutual respect, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Bratislava, adding that the two countries are "building success stories so that they can address serious issues".

He said that Hungary and Slovakia were planning to complete nine major joint projects by 2023, including a new bridge over the Danube connecting Komárom and Komarno, a motorway between Budapest and Prague, as well as three new bridges across the River Ipoly. He also mentioned such projects under way as linking the electricity grids of the two countries, planned to be completed by 2020, and preparations for a high-speed rail service between capitals of the four Visegrad countries.

On another subject, Szijjártó said the government would press ahead with its scheme promoting Hungarian businesses in southern Slovakia. So far, over 1,500 bidders have been awarded, he said, adding that the scheme would also benefit Slovakia's economy.

Concerning Slovakia's upcoming municipal elections, Szijjártó noted the ethnic Hungarian MKP party was fielding over 2,250 candidates. He said hopefully Slovakian Hungarians would cast ballots in large numbers.

Hungary and Slovakia see eye to eye on most issues concerning the European Union's future, Szijjártó

said. He noted that 10 out of Slovakia's 13 MEPs had refused to support the Sargentini report on the rule of law in Hungary and expressed thanks to those deputies for "supporting Hungary's sovereignty".

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES WAYS TO TIGHTEN V4 RELATIONS IN SLOVAKIA

Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó discussed ways to tighten Visegrad Group relations at talks with Slovak counterpart Miroslav Lajčák and House speaker Andrej Danko. The talks with Lajčák focused on the challenges facing central Europe, Szijjártó said after the meeting. Due to their migration policies, the countries of the region have been subjected to a series attacks, mainly within the European Union, which are expected to continue. Their reactions, however, have made it clear that the Visegrad Group is stronger and more united than ever before, he said. The talks with Danko focused on the House speaker's proposal for a resolution in which the Slovak parliament could defend Hungary's sovereignty as against the Sargentini report, Szijjártó said.

GOVT APPROVES FRAMEWORK OF HUNGARIAN VILLAGE PROGRAMME

The government has approved the framework of the Hungarian Village Programme, which aims to maintain or grow populations in communities with

under 5,000 residents, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said. As part of the programme, the government wants to allocate some 30 billion forints (EUR 93.2m) to preserve the building heritage of villages and support home purchases by residents in public service, such as GPs, dentists and nurses. Other elements of the scheme include kindergarten and crèche developments, pavement renovation, the construction of areas for sport and the upkeep of cemeteries.

CENTRAL GOVT TO REDUCE HEADCOUNT BY 18%

Around 18% of central government jobs will be cut, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, announced. The job cull affects around 2,500 employees. This proportion is similar to staff reduction levels at central state institutions. At the same time, parliament is poised to raise the salaries of civil servants by the end of the year, he said.

GOVT TO DECIDE ON BROADENING FAMILY HOME CREATION SCHEME THIS YEAR

The government will decide by the end of the year on broadening the family home creation savings and subsidy scheme (CSOK), the head of the Prime Minister's Office said.

Gergely Gulyás noted that parliament had decided on Tuesday to amend the law on home savings banks and

related state subsidies. He said that the money withdrawn from this state subsidy would continue to be ploughed into housing grants as part of the CSOK scheme. Explaining the move, Gulyás said that in three years more homes were built under CSOK than in ten years under the other scheme.

SOCIALISTS, PÁRBEZÉD DEMAND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SCRAP OWN HEALTH-CARE PRIVILEGES

The prime minister, ministers and state secretaries should not be entitled to the provision of priority health care, the opposition Socialist and Párbeszéd parties said, announcing a referendum initiative on scrapping the privileges. Socialist MP Lajos Korózs told a press conference held in front of the National Electoral Committee headquarters that amid the current "shameful" circumstances of health care in the country, it was wrong that top government officials should be getting VIP treatment. Given that the Fidesz majority in the relevant parliamentary committee voted down the opposition proposal, he said, they want to put the issue to a popular vote, he said.

FIDESZ DEMANDS LMP PM'S REMOVAL FROM PARTL OVER ALLEGATIONS CONCERNING PM'S DAUGHTER

The parliamentary group of ruling Fidesz has called on LMP MP Márta

Demeter to return her mandate for "disclosing classified information and slandering innocent people", group leader Máté Kocsis said.

Referring to press reports, Kocsis said that Demeter had "mixed up one of the prime minister's daughters with a two-year old girl of the same name" and disclosed "sensitive" military information "in the hopes of political gains" when she had suggested that the prime minister's family flew home from Cyprus on an aircraft of the Hungarian military.

News portal Origo on Tuesday identified young passenger Flóra as the daughter of an officer serving in Cyprus. With other family members, she was returning home after visiting her father at his post.

Kocsis said that Demeter had seen documents concerning the flight and "it must have been clear that none of the other passengers were relatives of the prime minister" and concluded that "she must have been aware that it was not the prime minister's family". Unless Demeter quits her seat, Fidesz will call on her group to withdraw her from the post of deputy chair of the law enforcement committee, and exclude her over her "inaptitude", he said.

ORBÁN: TOURISM SUCCESS THANKS TO SECURITY

Tourism has become one of Hungary's most successful economic sectors because the country is one of the safest in Europe, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at the Tourism Summit

2018 conference in Budapest. Tourism contributes a little over 10% of GDP, with 400,000 people working in the sector, he said. 2017 was one of the best years on record, and this year promises similar or even better results, he added. Hungary has become a strong country, with potentials exceeding its size. Thanks to young, internationally successful entrepreneurs, Hungary is now appreciated worldwide. Successful entrepreneurs in the tourism sector are per definition patriots because making a living in tourism is in itself a patriotic act, Orbán said.

TOURISM AGENCY HEAD: HUNGARY OFFERS ADVENTURE COMBINED WITH SAFETY

Surveys show that tourists generally seek adventure combined with safety when choosing a destination, and Hungary's strength lies in offering both, the head the Hungarian Tourism Agency said, commenting on Hungary's new "Wellspring of Wonders" brand presented at this year's Tourism Summit. Zoltán Guller told public television M1 that competition around the world for tourists, investors and conference-

goers was intense, but Hungary was now well-placed to appeal to all three. The "Wellspring of Wonders" campaign spot will be shown in 13 countries until late January. The agency is partnering with media companies such as Expedia and National Geographic to show the spot more than 3,000 times. Additionally, ads for the campaign will be published in in-flight magazines and put on 2,000 billboards in six countries. About 60% of the campaign exposure will be online.

EUROBAROMETER: SUPPORT FOR EU AT RECORD HIGH, 60% OF HUNGARIANS BACK MEMBERSHIP

There is clear and growing support for the European Union in member states, with 68% of respondents considering their country's membership to be worthwhile, Eurobarometer said, adding that this is the highest favourable rating in the past 35 years. In Hungary, fully 60% of respondents were positive about the EU. Altogether 79% of Hungarians thought the country's membership brought with it advantages as against 72% last year.

Based on a representative survey carried out in 28 member states, 68%

of Europeans believe their country has benefited from EU membership, a four percentage point increase since April and the highest reading since 1983. Meanwhile, 62% of respondents not only regarded membership as useful but they also thought it to be good for the country.

DANUBE LEVEL AT RECORD LOW, CONTINUES TO DROP

The water level of the River Danube has continued to drop from a recent record low, dipping to 43-44cm at Budapest, a water-management official said. Gabriella Siklós, the spokeswoman of the General Directorate of Water Management, said that the record low level of the Danube has been broken at various sections along the river, including at Paks, the site of Hungary's sole nuclear power station, whose reactors are cooled by the river's water. Points along the river in the south of the country, at Baja and Mohács, are also expected to hit record lows on Thursday. She said low levels do not affect water quality but they do cause problems for river navigation. On Wednesday morning, cargo barges were prohibited from using the river, she added.