

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Márton Mönus

Old coins found in 18th c. boat wreck in River Danube near Érd

UPCOMING EVENTS

Minister heading PM's office, govt spox hold regular press briefing

Govt official for nation policy visits Transcarpathia

Report on public finances at end of Sept

Presser on air quality ahead winter heating season

TOP STORY

HOUSE SPEAKERS PRAISE HUNGARY-CROATIA TIES

Hungary-Croatia ties show that fair cooperation can be maintained with other countries in the European Union even when strong national identities are a part of the equation, László Kövér, Hungary's Speaker of Parliament, said.

Croatia is a good neighbour and an important partner in the economy and tourism, Kövér said in Pécs during a meeting with his Croatian counterpart Gordan Jandroković on cross-border affairs. Both countries are developing national minority policies that can serve as examples to other members of the bloc, he added. "As far as the EU's future is concerned, this is a highly important issue," he said. Contrary to received wisdom, relations can be fair if strong national identities are part of the equation, he added.

Jandroković said that both countries are doing a lot for their ethnic minorities, and their efforts could serve as examples for other countries. Visiting a Croatian kindergarten, primary and secondary school, and college earlier in the day, Jandroković said that "what I have seen in Pécs has made a deep impression". He said he was very pleased with the rights granted to Hungary's Croats and the way the community was using those rights. "On the other side of the border the Croatian government takes similar care of ethnic Hungarians and it will stay that way in future," Jandroković said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY PROPOSES TO UKRAINE PACT ON MINORITY PROTECTION

Hungary proposes to Ukraine signing an accord on the protection of national minorities, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó said. "Confidence between the two countries needs to be rebuilt," the minister told MTI in Warsaw, where he held talks with his Ukrainian partner Pavlo Klimkin on the sidelines of a security forum. According to the proposal, both governments would refrain from pursuing any policy that could lead to the assimilation of a national community or change the ethnic mix in any single region. Further, it would secure national minorities their language rights in the areas of education, religion, culture and administration. Szijjártó said Ukraine promised to study the proposal. Hopefully, at the next meeting in Milan on Dec. 7, a bilateral discussion of the proposal will ensue based on merit, he said, adding that "rebuilding confidence requires several small steps to be taken." It has been a positive development that a signature drive initiating the deportation of ethnic Hungarians from Transcarpathia has been removed from the Ukrainian parliament's website, Szijjártó said.

"We consider it a very positive sign that Ukraine has taken it seriously that this issue is completely unsuitable to Europe in the 21st century," he said. He added that Klimkin has recently expressed agreement with the view

that "it would not be an exaggeration" to describe the petition as "disgusting."

He said it was also a positive development that the Ukrainian authorities had launched an investigation regarding the appearance of "billboards with misleading information about ethnic Hungarian leaders."

Under a new agreement, the Ukrainian government will appoint an official in charge of cross-border cooperation, Szijjártó said. Hungarian deputy foreign minister Levente Magyar and the newly appointed Ukrainian official will meet as soon as possible in order to pave the way for the smooth continuation of an economic programme for Transcarpathia.

In order to restore trust, Szijjártó told Klimkin that Budapest was ready to activate a 50 million dollar credit line to finance road building in Transcarpathia. Hungary is also ready to continue a scheme offering camps for children from families who had been affected by the fights in eastern Ukraine.

Szijjártó said he had informed Klimkin that Hungary would continue to offer one hundred scholarships annually to Ukrainian students in Hungarian universities. "It is in Hungary's interest that the conflict which has developed should be resolved as soon as possible," Szijjártó said.

KÖVÉR, CROATIAN COUNTERPART LAY CORNERSTONE FOR ETHNIC HUNGARIAN CENTRE

Politicians are obliged to maintain good neighbourly relations and

help their ethnic minorities abroad, house speaker László Kövér said after meeting Croatian counterpart Gordan Jandroković in Osijek (Eszék), in NE Croatia, on Wednesday.

The house speakers laid the cornerstone of a students' hostel for the Hungarian educational and cultural centre of Croatia. Kövér said the southern Hungarian city of Pécs and Osijek were home to some of the most important educational facilities of local ethnic minorities.

Jandroković said minority protection are exemplary in both Croatia and Hungary and ethnic Croats in Hungary are satisfied with the conditions provided by Hungary.

The Hungarian educational and cultural centre of Croatia was opened in September 1999 but has not had a hostel so far.

The Croatian government supports the construction of the new building with 8.5 million kunas.

ORBÁN 'NOT PRESENT' WHEN V4-JAPAN STATEMENT REMOVED FROM AGENDA

Contrary to reports, Hungary's prime minister did not object to issuing a joint statement after the Visegrad Group-Japan summit, news portal Origo said, adding that the decision not to issue a statement was made in Viktor Orbán's absence at the request of Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. Origo cited people involved in the summit as saying that Babiš had

agreed with Japan's PM before the summit meeting that the V4 did not have the authority to pronounce on global policy issues.

Orbán was not present at the time because a meeting of the European People's Party he was attending had overrun, the portal said. Origo said the summit had been a success from an economic diplomacy point of view. It also reported Japan's PM as praising the V4's stance on migration. Hungary's foreign ministry declined to comment on any non-attributed sources concerning the meeting of V4 premiers.

GOVT SPOX: ALL 'ATTACKS' ON HUNGARY ROOTED IN MIGRATION

According to the government "migration has been clearly behind all recent attacks on Hungary", government spokesman Zoltan Kovács said. Reacting to remarks by Manfred Weber, group leader of the European People's Party in the European Parliament, Kovács said that "mixing up disputes on European Union procedures (against Hungary) concerning the country's rule of law with disputes concerning migration policy is unacceptable".

Kovács insisted that earlier disputes concerning the rule of law or Hungary's media law had been "settled in the legal sense" while current, open issues had "clearly been raised because of Hungary's position on migration".

Answering another question about European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's suggestion that Europe should celebrate the upcoming centenary of the merger of Transylvania and Romania, Kovács said that Juncker had "spoken in line with his state" and that "his lack of historical facts confirms his being unfit for his position".

SZIJJÁRTÓ URGES FAST- TRACK EU INTEGRATION OF WESTERN BALKANS IN WARSAW

Hungary urges that the European Union integration process of countries in the Western Balkans should be sped up radically, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó told a roundtable organised on the sidelines of the Warsaw Security Forum. Szijjártó noted unresolved historical tensions between nations of the region, and insisted that they could only be settled through "novel approaches such as new forms of integration".

Szijjártó urged that all chapters in the accession talks of Serbia and Montenegro should be opened up and also pointed to little progress in negotiations between the EU and Albania. He suggested that the European Commission should encourage applicant countries through giving positive feedback rather than "incessantly complaining about Russia and other factors hindering European integration". The enlargement of the EU in the Western Balkans is a security issue for Europe, Szijjártó said.

V4 TO HELP BOLSTER LIBYAN COAST GUARD

The Visegrad Group (V4) countries are spending 35 million euros in North Africa to strengthen the Libyan coast guard with a view to halting illegal migration to Europe, a government official said. Szabolcs Takács, state secretary of EU affairs, met Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini after a Hungarian embassy reception in Rome commemorating the October 23 national holiday. He underlined Hungary's solidarity with Italy and its support for Rome in its fight against illegal migration. "We share the Italian government's view that illegal migrants heading to Europe must be stopped at the African coast," he said. Italy has financially supported the Libyan coast guard and measures to counteract people trafficking, he noted, adding that the V4 wants to contribute to these efforts. By banning ships transporting migrants, Italy has shown that maritime illegal migration can be stopped, he said, adding that Salvini's migration policy was an example of how illegal migration does not have to be accepted or simply managed. "We concur that if we stop illegal migration outside Europe, there's no need for an internal debate in Europe," Takács said.

GOVT, NGO SETS UP 'CRISIS CLINICS' NATIONWIDE TO HELP VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Seven "crisis clinics" are being set up nationwide to help victims of domestic violence. People will have the chance to turn to staff at the clinics when there are signs of violence but before anything gets out of hand, Katalin Novak, the state secretary of family and youth affairs at the ministry of human resources, said. Commenting on the joint campaign headed by the Hungarian Ecumenical Aid organisation and the human resources ministry, she said the government is ploughing 3 billion forints (EUR 9.3m) into the clinics run by NGOs, including the Ecumenical Aid. The primary aim is to help prevent physical violence, she added.

HUNGARY RECOGNISED IN US FOR HELPING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

Hungary is appreciated not only for its efforts to protect Christians but also for its zero tolerance for anti-Semitism, the state secretary for aiding persecuted Christians said at a conference on religious freedom and human rights in New York. Tristan Azbej outlined Hungarian government measures to support persecuted Christians, especially

those in the Middle East, at the event organised by the Anglosphere Society held to mark the 20th anniversary of the US 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. Azbej told MTI that the speakers recognised Hungary's role in "creating a model for protecting Christianity and religious freedom in general".

Azbej was one of the keynote speakers at the conference that included Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, Lord David Alton, Baron of Liverpool, and Sam Brownback, US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. At the conference coinciding with the anniversary of Hungary's 1956 anti-Soviet uprising, Archbishop Dolan and Lord Alton expressed appreciation for Hungarians' "love of freedom". They highlighted "efforts by a nation to protect persecuted Christians and their freedom", Azbej noted.

SOCIALISTS, PÁRBESZÉD SUBMIT EDUCATION BILL AIMING FOR FAIRER SYSTEM

The Socialist and Párbeszéd parties have submitted to parliament an education bill which aims for a fairer system, with the involvement of other opposition parties and civil organisations. Hungary's education system "is in crisis", Socialist MP Ágnes Kunhalmi said. The number of functionally illiterate school-leavers is rising and teacher

shortages are getting to be an acute problem, she added. "Middle-class families are rescuing their children from the public education system," Kunhalmi insisted. "Vocational training isn't going anywhere," she added. The draft prepared in January by two teacher movements and signed by nine parties and non-parliamentary organisations has been submitted in form of a decree proposal, Kunhalmi said.

Párbeszéd MP Bence Tordai said the bill put the principle of student equality at its heart. "We want every student to have the opportunity to earn qualifications based on their performance and skills, irrespective of their family background," he said. Among the proposed measures are uniform school-leaving exams in secondary schools and ensuring that students gain equal access to higher education. It also proposes ideological neutrality in education and urges eliminating segregation in schools, Tordai said.

DK OBJECTS TO PLAN TO ALLOW VOTING IN EP ELECTION FROM OUTSIDE EU

The opposition Democratic Coalition has said it objects to a plan by Hungary's ruling parties to allow Hungarian citizens living outside the European Union to vote in next year's European Parliament elections. "Fidesz wants to make election fraud legal," Ágnes Vadai, DK's deputy group leader, said. Only by Hungarians who live in

Hungary should decide on whom to send to the EP, she said.

In reaction, Fidesz said that "DK has never objected to the European directive that enables Hungarian citizens in neighbouring countries to have European voting rights" and concluded that "they in fact hate ethnic Hungarians". "They would strip our own citizens of their voting rights while the European Left seeks to grant voting rights to migrants", Fidesz said.

RETAIL SALES UP 6.3% IN AUG

August retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 6.3%, up from 5.4% in July, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of data. Retail sales rose by 6.8%, adjusted for calendar-year effects. Adjusted food sales were up 4.5% and non-food sales rose by 10.2%, while fuel sales increased by 6.2%. In January-August, retail sales rose by an unadjusted 6.6% and an adjusted 6.7% from the same period a year earlier. Adjusted food sales increased by 4.1%, non-food sales by 9.8% and fuel sales by 7%.

NBH OFFICIALS URGE BANKS TO BROADEN BUSINESS, CUT COSTS

National Bank of Hungary officials suggested local banks need to broaden their business and bring costs in line with regional peers in an article published on the central bank's home page. Local banks' profit structure is unhealthy and inappropriate considering Hungary's economy, as revenue and costs are high compared to total assets, deputy governor Márton Nagy and director Ádám Banai said in the article. The ratio of local banks' outstanding credit to GDP is well under that in other countries, such as the Czech Republic, which is one of the main reasons for the high costs, they added.

Boosting lending to the average level in the region would eliminate about half of the difference between the costs of Hungarian banks and Czech banks, while market consolidation, cost cuts and improved efficiency would take care of the other half, according to the article. The price

of financial services and of credit, would fall as a result, it said.

Hungarian banks shouldn't focus on providing expensive products to a narrow range of clients, rather they should serve a wider scope of clients, efficiently and at the lowest cost possible, Nagy and Banai said.

FAKE MEDICINES WORTH OVER EUR 460,000 SEIZED IN HUNGARY

Hungarian authorities have seized fake medicines worth over 150 million forints (EUR 465,000) as part of an international operation to combat drug counterfeiting. As part of Operation Pangea, an international week of action tackling the online sale of counterfeit and illicit medicines organised by Interpol between 9 and 16 October, 500 tonnes of fake drugs worth over EUR 12 million were seized in 116 countries. Lívía Ilku, the head of Hungary's anti-counterfeiting team, said that the action also aimed to draw people's attention to the risk of using fake medicines which are more and more prevalent, especially the Internet.