

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Exhibition on post-WWI years in House of Terror Museum

MTI/Zsolt Szegedváry

UPCOMING EVENTS

Bread of the Hungarians donation ceremony

25th congress of Hungarian Catholic families

KSH releases migration, retail figures for Sept.

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ SLAMS UN MIGRATION PACT

The United Nations global compact for migration is designed to “legalise illegal migration”, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said.

“This is utterly unacceptable and harms the sovereignty of member states, including Hungary,” he told a press conference in Budapest. The Hungarian government considers the UN plan an “extremely biased pro-migration document, which is harmful and dangerous”, Szijjártó said. The UN is about to make the same mistake as the European Union, “which has sought to base its migration policy on mandatory migrant quotas”, he said. “The UN package is even more dangerous because it is a global initiative,” he said. “Its impact will be greater than a continental policy and poses a risk to the entire globe.” The main point of contention over the package is whether or not it is mandatory, since the document contains the word “mandatory” eighty times, so the claim that the document only makes recommendations is false, Szijjártó said. It states, for instance, that countries should undertake to inform migrants about migration routes and run information campaigns for people who want to leave their homelands, he said. Also, it would require countries to help migrants reunite with their families, he said.

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**SZIJJÁRTÓ: ‘HUNGARY
WON’T VOTE’**

“It is clearer than day that the [UN] global migration compact, just like the originally voluntary migrant quota, would become a point of reference and a binding basis for rulings in international law,” Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, noting that Hungary has decided not to take part in the compact’s adoption process in order to make it clear that the document is not binding in whatsoever. He insisted that “serious efforts” in Europe are being made “to create mixed societies” and to make people increasingly distant from their own cultural, legal and religious identities. “For example, we’d like to celebrate Christmas and call it Christmas as we have always done,” the minister said.

He noted that eight countries were refusing to support the package, which, according to the current agenda, may be voted on at the UN General Assembly this year. “Hungary will not vote,” he said.

Meanwhile, responding to a question concerning a statement by Renata Deskoska, Macedonia’s justice minister, in connection with former PM Nikola Gruevski, saying that Hungary had never in the past had a problem about extraditing anyone to Macedonia and had never questioned Macedonia’s judicial measures, Szijjártó said that Hungary abstained from commenting on other

countries’ domestic matters unless they concerned steps taken against Hungarian minorities or were an attack on Hungary. He noted, however, that the European Commission’s latest country report on Macedonia expressed concern about the dangers of political influence on the country’s justice system and court proceedings. Further, the Council of Europe has written about prison conditions in Macedonia that fail to live up to human rights norms, with access to health care and other everyday items denied to inmates who face a violent environment, he added.

The decision to grant asylum to Gruevski was not taken by the government but by the relevant authority independently of the government, Szijjártó said. He added that Hungary will continue to support Macedonia’s Euro-Atlantic integration process.

Reacting to a tweet by Johannes Hahn, European commissioner for European neighbourhood policy and enlargement negotiations, expressing surprise that Hungary supported Macedonia’s EU membership but did not regard it as a safe country, Szijjártó said Hahn would do better if he opened his ears to the Western Balkans and helped speed up their European integration process. He added that Hahn’s job performance was “scandalous”.

Asked about Michael Roth, German minister of state for Europe, who said that asylum was not intended as “a gift that heads of government hand out to

their mates on the run”, Szijjártó said, “There’s nothing new under the sun”. He added that there was no question concerning Hungary about which Roth “has not said something fantastically wise”, and as usual he was now giving his opinion “on matters about which he has no idea”.

**SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-
RUSSIA TIES BACK ON
TRACK**

Hungarian-Russian relations are now back on track after a decline caused by the international sanctions imposed on Moscow, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a meeting of the Hungary-Russia intergovernmental economic cooperation committee in Budapest. Though western European countries today are still concluding far more lucrative deals with Russia, relations between Budapest and Moscow are fast expanding in line with Hungary’s interests, Szijjártó said. After declining for several years, trade between the countries jumped by 17% in the first eight months of 2018, Szijjártó noted. Sanctions against Russia have cost Hungary 7 billion euros in lost exports, but Hungarian companies’ activities in Russia may compensate for that, he said. As an example, the minister noted that Hungarian oil and gas company MOL’s investments in Russia have surpassed 1.3 billion euros, and a Russian-Hungarian consortium won a 1 billion euro tender for machine production in Egypt. Hungary sees

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Russia as an important partner, he said. It strikes the balance between heeding its importance while complying with its obligations in respect of EU unity, he added.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary will re-join the International Bank for Economic Cooperation (IBEC), Szijjártó said. The headquarters of the International Investment Bank (IIB) will move to Hungary in early 2019, he said, further strengthening the country's economic position.

Russian Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova said that cooperation should continue to boost investment and trade. Russia remains a reliable source of energy and partner, she said. The committee has also signed a cooperation agreement on setting up a Russian-Hungarian oncology institute in Budapest, which will further strengthen the countries' ties in health care, she said. A new working group will also be set up to promote cooperation in machine production for helicopter, ship and farm machinery production, she said. After the meeting, the two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement on the mutual recognition of academic qualifications awarded in Hungary and Russia.

DEFENCE CTTEE ASKS FOR DEMETER TO BE WITHDRAWN FROM NATO PARLT ASSEMBLY

Parliament's defence and law enforcement committee has asked House Speaker László Kövér to

withdraw LMP co-leader Márta Demeter, the deputy head of the committee, from NATO's Parliamentary Assembly. Fidesz's Lajos Kósa, the committee head, said that Demeter had "crossed a line when she disclosed classified information" in mid-October. Demeter had turned to the interior and defence ministers for information about one of the daughters of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, alleging she had flown from Cyprus to Hungary aboard a military aircraft. Demeter's information proved false as it turned out that the daughter of a Hungarian officer, who has the same name as Orbán's daughter, had been among the passengers.

Making classified military information public is an action that has to have consequences, Kósa said. The proposal was approved with 4 votes in favour from ruling party lawmakers and one against, from Demeter herself. Hungary delegates seven lawmakers in the NATO parliamentary assembly, Kósa noted, four from the ruling and three from opposition parties. They "want to keep that ratio", Kósa said, adding that the opposition was free to delegate another member of the LMP party.

GOVT SPOX: EU'S REJECTION OF ITALY'S DRAFT BUDGET POLITICALLY MOTIVATED

Government spokesman Zoltán Kovács, in an interview to Thursday's edition of conservative Italian daily

Libero, said the European Union "passed a political judgement" when it recently rejected the Italian government's draft budget. The Hungarian government rarely comments on EU decisions regarding other member states, but "it seems obvious" that the EU "expressed a political opinion" about Italy's draft budget when it should have undertaken a strictly technical and procedural assessment, Kovács told the paper.

Libero interviewed the government spokesman during his visit to Rome just as the European Commission announced that it was launching an excessive deficit procedure against Italy over the government's draft budget.

Kovács said the EU's rules should apply equally to every member state. He said that whenever Italy and Hungary break the rules, they get sanctioned, but when France or Germany do so, they get off scot-free. The government spokesman said the bloc's rules should be changed so that they can be complied with. He said Italy would be capable of drafting a budget without exceeding the EU's deficit rules. Had Hungary joined the euro zone, it would not have been capable of accomplishing the economic feats that it has, he said. Hungary will adopt the common currency "when we are ready, when there are new rules and we get guarantees", Kovács added.

Kovács said Brussels was also mulling a sanctions procedure against Hungary

over its migration policy. "But this is another form of intervention that does not fall within the scope of the EU's scope of authority," he said, adding that Hungary was right to implement the measures it has and he expressed hope the EU would decide against imposing sanctions on the country.

PENSION BOND COULD BE PRICED SIMILARLY TO BABY BONDS

Retirement bonds planned by the government may be priced similarly to baby bonds that carry a 3% premium over inflation, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The premium could vary depending on the age of bond buyers, Varga said on the sidelines of a conference of the Association of Hungarian Insurance Companies (Mabisz). The long-term bonds would mature when their owners reach retirement age and would either be paid in a lump sum with interest or in monthly installments. The minister added that the government was planning to launch the retirement bond to complement already available retirement savings schemes such as private pension funds. He said the new bond would be aimed at retail buyers rather than institutional investors.

Meanwhile, Varga said Hungary still aimed to lower the share of FX debt in its total debt stock further, as well as the share of foreign investors holding Hungarian government debt. It is not

in Hungary's interest to issue either a euro or a dollar bond at the start of the year, he added. The minister also said Budapest is still in touch with partners in China, where it issued panda bonds in July.

OPPOSITION, UNIONS SLAM FIDESZ PROPOSAL TO RAISE OVERTIME THRESHOLD

Opposition parties and trade unions slammed a bill submitted to parliament on Tuesday by lawmakers of the ruling Fidesz that would raise the upper threshold for annual overtime from 250 to 400 hours. Also, employers would only have to compensate employees every three years for overtime instead of the current 12 months.

Green opposition LMP said that the bill would "stealthily" introduce a six-day working week. Hungarian employees already work the longest hours in the European Union for "humiliatingly" low wages, deputy group leader Antal Csárdi said. "It seems the authors of the proposal have turned on their constituents to raise the profit of multinational companies," he said. The leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) called on Fidesz to withdraw the proposal. Lawmaker Gábor Nemes told a press conference that the proposal was "unprofessional and unfounded". Fidesz "did not consult anyone" before submitting it, he added. Whether it complies with EU regulations is also questionable, he said. Nemes noted

that the amendment would give employers the possibility to "request ten hours of work a day" of their employees.

Fidesz said that anyone who wants to work and earn more should be able to do so without being tangled up in red tape. It added that the Hungarian economy was performing well and the country was on a sustainable growth path, with more and more people in work earning higher wages. "It looks like a lot of people would gladly work even more," the statement said. "We'd like to dismantle these bureaucratic obstacles, given that we're the government of job-creation," it added.

INVESTIGATION DROPPED IN HEDVIG MALINA CASE

The Győr-Moson-Sopron County prosecutor's office has dropped an investigation and criminal proceedings in a case initiated by Slovak authorities against Hedvig Malina Zsák for alleged perjury and other crimes, the chief prosecutor of Győr-Moson-Sopron County said. Based on available data and physical evidence it is not possible to establish that Malina Zsák was not attacked and to draw the conclusion that she made a false statement, Péter Takács said.

Malina suffered a beating by two skinheads in the town of Nitra (Nyitra) in Slovakia in August 2006, allegedly due to her ethnicity. Later on, she was charged with providing false testimony.

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ORBÁN, HEMINGWAY INAUGURATE HONVÉD YOUTH ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Budapest Honvéd FC owner George F. Hemingway on Thursday inaugurated the football team's youth athlete training centre in Budapest. "This is a special event for Hungarian football. When Kispest [the Budapest district Honvéd is located in] did well, Hungarian football also did well," Orbán said at the inauguration. The government supports that every school child should engage in sports because "every nation will be shaped by its young ones". To the alumni of the Hungarian Football Academy, Honvéd's youth training arm, Orbán said that "the most important thing is to become good at competition. Then you know something you can use in all walks of life," he said. The training centre contains seven standard football fields, and several pitches for five-a-side football.

TAX OFFICE UNCOVERS SERIES OF SCAMS BY FREIGHT FORWARDERS

Tax office NAV, with the help of the national toll payment services company NUSZ, has uncovered a series of scams worth several billion forints committed by freight forwarders, NAV's criminal deputy director, Péter Zámbo, said. The analysis of databases received

from NUSZ revealed violations that appeared to have been committed by independent companies, but in reality they were all linked to an organised criminal group, he said. The freight forwarders in question failed to pay their public contributions and tolls which enabled them to offer their services nearly 20 percent cheaper, he said. The fines imposed as a result of unpaid tolls between 2016 and 2018 totalled 3.5 billion forints (EUR 10.9m) but the forwarders involved companies without assets in order to avoid payment. Additionally, they failed to pay 129 million forints worth of VAT, corporate tax and contributions linked to employment, Zámbo said. Two people have been placed under house arrest and the authorities are continuing the search for further assets that can be seized. If convicted, the perpetrators face up to 20 years in prison, he said.

SZILI: EU SHOULD HAVE THE POWER TO PROTECT INDIGENOUS MINORITY RIGHTS

Protecting the rights of indigenous minorities should be brought under the scope of the European Union, the prime ministerial commissioner in charge of minority protection and autonomy told a conference. Katalin Szili, addressing a Carpathian Basin rights conference, insisted the European Union was "loath" to deal with the issue. She said the EU addressed the state's attitude towards

minorities up to the point that "a country passes the EU recruitment exam" but then failed to follow up. The EU does not bother to deal with the issue of autonomy, saying the matter is up to member states, she said. Szili outlined the tasks related to protecting indigenous minorities. First and foremost, the issue of minorities and autonomy should be kept on the agenda of international forums, she said. Whenever the law is broken, these breaches must be highlighted, she added.

APPEALS COURT FINES SUSPECTS IN STEM CELL CASE

The court of appeals of Budapest has upheld fines on businessman Imre Pákh and others for applying illegal stem cell treatments, for remuneration, on patients in a serious or terminal condition, but threw out their prison sentences. The public prosecutor pressed charges against the defendants in 2012 for 21 illegal procedures performed between 2007 and 2009. According to the primary sentence passed in the repeat procedure in 2016, the defendants misled their patients concerning the treatment and violated the rules of research on living people as well as the prohibition of abusing the human body. The defendants were then handed 10-12 months suspended prison sentences. Pákh was fined 9 million forints (EUR 28,000), and smaller fines were imposed on several others.

The court of appeals, in its final sentence, accepted the fact that the defendants had informed their patients that the efficacy of their treatments was unproven and that the patients signed relevant waivers, and acquitted them of charges of fraudulent activities and misleading or harming their patients. The court also appreciated the argument that the defendants were seeking to finance further stem cell research from their profits and obtain legal permits they did not have at the time of the procedures.

PARLIAMENT GREEN-LIGHTS BILL ON CHANGING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT RULES

Parliament's legislative committee has voted to allow changes to the law on public procurement that would broaden the range of exemptions from the procedure to be further debated. Under the proposal, which the national assembly will vote on next week, goods produced or services provided by "start-up cooperatives" -- companies with an annual turnover of no more than 10 million forints (EUR 3,100) -- could in the future be purchased without a public procurement procedure. According to the justification of the proposal, the change will help local ventures and

ensure that public institutions obtain goods produced locally. The design and manufacture of high state awards would also be exempted from public procurement requirements.

GOVT OFFICIAL PRAISES HUNGARY-SLOVAKIA COOPERATION

Levente Magyar, state secretary at the foreign ministry, attended a session of the Hungary-Slovakia joint economic committee in Komárom, in northern Hungary, and said that the two countries had notched up a number of achievements in bilateral cooperation in recent years. The official said the electricity grids of the two countries still needed to be connected, but preparations to do so were under way. Concerning plans for more transport links, Magyar noted a new bridge being built across the River Danube near Komárom, and reconstruction of the M15 motorway, which will provide fast road access between Budapest and the Slovak capital. Magyar said bilateral trade was "outstanding", and added that Hungary and Slovakia would make efforts to further increase the current 35-40 percent contribution of small and medium-sized ventures to trade turnover. The Hungarian government is providing loans and

grants to encourage small companies to embark on cross-border ventures, he said.

GROSS WAGES UP 10.4% YY IN SEPT

The average gross wage in Hungary rose by an annual 10.4% to 322,752 forints (EUR 1,003) in September, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Net wages grew at the same pace as gross wages, also climbing 10.4% to 214,630 forints. KSH noted that wages have been boosted by high labour demand, a higher minimum wage and pay increases for workers at state-owned utilities companies.

SLIPKNOT, SLASH, ROBIN SCHULZ TO PLAY AT 2019 VOLT FESTIVAL

The 27th VOLT festival will be held in the western Hungarian town of Sopron between June 26 and 29, 2019, and will feature performers such as US metal bands Slipknot and the Slash ft. Myles Kennedy and The Conspirators. Austrian performer Parovoz, German DJ Robin Schulz and US singer LP will also perform. The festival will also feature Hungarian performers Tankcsapda, Rúzsa Magdi, Majka and Punnany Massif. VOLT drew over 150,000 visitors in 2018.