

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Budapest Christmas tram

UPCOMING EVENTS

FoodConf food science and technology conference opens

Stats office publishes report on living standards in 2017

World AIDS Day conference presser

KSH releases industrial prices (Oct), foreign trade turnover (Sept)

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CENTRAL EUROPE TO 'STAY EU'S GROWTH ENGINE'

Central Europe will “stay the continent’s engine of growth” giving the region a confidence boost in the debate about the future of Europe, the foreign minister said in Bratislava.

Addressing a press conference after a meeting with his Visegrad Four counterparts, Péter Szijjártó described the atmosphere at the meeting as “particularly good”, saying that this was because last quarter’s growth data had “once again revealed that central Europe is still Europe’s engine of growth”. Szijjártó said the central European region’s economic growth was “twice as dynamic” as the average European growth.

Parties at the talks discussed details of a donation to Libya aimed at mitigating the effects of migration, Szijjártó said, and suggested that similar cooperation with Tunisia should be launched.

On another subject, Szijjártó voiced Hungary’s commitment to supporting “its central European friends in any European dispute”. He said it applied to Poland, and called the European Council’s Wednesday decision “unfair and wrong” under which another hearing will be held in the EU’s Article 7 procedure against that country. “We find this absolutely unnecessary, as Poland has answered all questions,” Szijjártó said.

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ORBÁN EXPECTS 'COMPLICATED NEGOTIATIONS' ABOUT EU BUDGET

The negotiations about the European Union's next seven-year budget are expected to be complicated but they will result in an agreement, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

More than a dozen EU member states have identical interests concerning the 2021-2027 budget which will be the most important issue after next year's European Parliamentary elections, Orbán told public media upon arriving at a summit of the Friends of Cohesion group in Bratislava.

"There are diverse interests, but a few of us share the same ones and ... we call ourselves the friends of cohesion," Orbán said. The positions will be coordinated and a united stand formulated against the groups that have opposite interests, he said. "This is a complex series of actions but they usually result in success," he added.

The members of the group first met in Bucharest in 2012. Organisers said the summit is expected to be attended by leaders of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovenia, representatives from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania, as well as EU commissioners Maroš Šefčovič and Günther Oettinger.

HUNGARY MEPS DIVIDED ON EP REPORT CALLING FOR GRUEVSKI'S EXTRADITION

Hungarian MEPs were divided on a report passed by the European Parliament calling on Hungary to extradite former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Ruling Fidesz called the document an "ideologically-driven attack" on Hungary, while opposition MEPs supported it.

The report, which MEPs passed with 470 votes in favour and 116 against, calls on the Hungarian authorities to hand over all of their information on Gruevski's case.

Fidesz MEP László Tókécs said in reaction the Hungarian authorities had handled the former Macedonian prime minister's case lawfully. He speculated that "the migration issue and the Soros lobby" were behind the push to "oust and convict" Gruevski.

Socialist Party MEP Tibor Szanyi accused the European People's Party of aiding and abetting Fidesz, saying that the Gruevski case was "further proof" that EPP was "incapable of keeping [Hungarian Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán, this real dictator, on a tight leash".

Csaba Molnár and Péter Niedermüller of the leftist opposition Democratic Coalition said "the Orbán government has embarrassed Hungary on a global scale". "We European Hungarians won't put up with Orbán turning our country into a collection

site for failed politicians, criminals and terrorists," they said.

State secretary for international communications Zoltán Kovács said in reaction that the "European Parliament's pro-migration majority proved once again that only migrants matter to them, and they go after everyone who protects the borders". "In the Sargentini report, the European Parliament defended Ahmed H, who had been convicted of committing a terrorist act, ignoring that he attacked Hungarian police officers and wanted to break through the fence," Kovács wrote in a Facebook post. "Meanwhile, the EP immediately attacked the former Macedonian prime minister who had built a fence in an effort to stop migrants," the state secretary added.

SZÁVAY RESIGNS FROM POSTS OF JOBBIK DEPUTY GROUP LEADER, PARLIAMENTARY NOTARY

Deputy group leader of conservative opposition Jobbik and parliamentary notary István Szávay said that he had resigned from both of his posts with immediate effect. Commercial news channel Hír TV presented on Wednesday a sound recording in which Szávay told fellow party members at a congress to re-elect officials that he had verbally and physically insulted a woman in a pub for saying he was a "stinking Nazi". He later confirmed that the audio recording including anti-Semitic

comments was authentic but stated that he was only joking when he said that he had physically insulted her.

In a message posted on his Facebook page, Szávay said he had informed Jobbik group leader Márton Gyöngyösi about his resignation which Gyöngyösi accepted.

KÖVÉR PRESSES FOR STRONGER HUNGARY- DANISH PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

Hungary's Parliamentary Speaker László Kövér held talks with his Danish counterpart Pia Kjaersgaard and proposed strengthening political and inter-parliamentary cooperation between the two nations, the press chief of Hungary's parliament, Zoltán Szilágyi, told MTI.

Kövért praised bilateral economic cooperation, noting that the presence of and investments by Danish businesses in Hungary gave Hungarians thousands of jobs. He said that Denmark is the 16th largest investor in Hungary, noting that bilateral trade increased by 13% last year and by 15% so far this year.

The house speaker visited the Confederation of Danish Industry and held talks with its deputy director on Hungarian-Danish business relations and investments. Kövért also held talks with Finn Mortensen, executive director of the State of Green NGO who briefed him about Denmark's high-tech industry and water management technologies, as

well as about the areas of renewable energy, waste management and energy efficiency.

In an interview to the Danish parliament's journal, Kövért was asked whether the Hungarian government's "anti-EU or at least eurosceptic rhetoric" could ultimately indicate Hungary's intention of being the next to desert the bloc after Britain.

Kövért said that "Hungarian society is more committed to the EU than the bloc's average. If we were eurosceptic and tried to quit the EU, we would not get support from a majority of Hungarians. While criticising the EU institutions, we would like to strengthen the community."

LMP CALLS ON GOVT TO FIGHT TO LOWER CO2 EMISSIONS

Green opposition LMP has called on the government to fight to lower carbon dioxide emissions and support the fight against climate change at international forums. Erzsébet Schmuck, who heads the parliamentary committee for sustainable development, said that the government should increase green areas which can absorb greenhouse gases and give priority to brownfield investments over greenfield projects. She cited a recent report by the UN World Meteorological Organisation saying that in 2017, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the air was record high. This is a consequence of growing emissions, lack of green areas,

and the saturation of oceans, which also absorb some of the gases, she said.

Despite promises, politicians have failed to make the decisions that could reduce climate change, Schmuck said. She noted that fulfilling the commitments of the 2015 Paris Agreement would only be enough to keep global warming under 3 °C from pre-industrial levels.

Schmuck criticised the government for its failure to take the dangers of climate change seriously and for its steps to eliminate the institutions for environmental protection. She said the National Strategy on Climate Change ignored that CO2 emissions have been growing in Hungary since 2015.

HUNGARY GROWTH TO REMAIN ABOVE EU AVERAGE UNTIL AT LEAST 2021

Hungary's GDP growth rate is set to remain above the European Union's average growth rate of 2.5% until at least 2021, but some estimates say it could exceed the EU average all the way through 2023, the head of the Fiscal Council said.

This above-average growth, however, is not unique to Hungary, Árpád Kovács told a business conference in Sopron, in western Hungary. All four of the Visegrad Group countries are growing faster than the EU average, he said. He also said that Hungary was in the lower tier of the bloc's "overachievers".

On another subject, the fiscal council head said Hungary's budget was in good shape.

Kovács also said that 2017 was the first year when the total amount of EU funds allocated to Hungary exceeded the country's public debt. Meanwhile, he predicted that an economic crisis would hit around 2020-2022, adding, however, that its impact would be less severe than that of the 2008 crisis. He said there were a variety of ways Hungary could prepare for a crisis so as to ensure that its budget remains stable and its public debt declines.

HEALTH-CARE WAGES TO GROW BY 72% OVER NEXT FOUR YEARS

The wages of health-care sector public workers, district nurses and health-care workers without higher education qualifications will go up by 72% over the next four years, the human resources minister said. The pay rises will be implemented in four phases between 2019 and 2022, Miklós Kásler said. The health-care workers concerned will first see their wages increase by 8% in July 2019, then by 14% in January 2020. Wages will increase again by 20% in November of that year and then by another 30% in 2021, the minister said. The government will spend 14.1 billion forints (EUR 43.5m) on the pay hikes next year and 79.4 billion forints in 2020, he said.

Kásler also announced that the government would consolidate 55

billion forints worth of debt amassed by hospitals. The government has also discussed the reform of basic care and emergency care services as well as its five national health schemes, the minister added.

HANON SYSTEMS TO INVEST HUF 36.7 BN IN HUNGARY

South Korean thermal and energy management solutions company Hanon Systems will invest 36.7 billion forints (EUR 113.6m) to expand its operations in Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. Hanon Systems Hungary will expand capacity at its base in the central Hungarian city of Székesfehérvár and set up new bases in Pécs, in southern Hungary, and in the northern town of Rétság, Szijjártó said. The government is supporting the investments, which will create 516 jobs, with a 7.5 billion forints grant, he added.

The largest will be the investment in Pécs, which will create 450 jobs. The Pécs and Székesfehérvár plants will manufacture compressors for car plants such as Volkswagen, Audi and others, the minister said. The plant in Rétság will make aluminium castings, he said.

The investment also brings state-of-the-art technology to Hungary, Szijjártó said. South Korean companies are in the vanguard of technological progress. That Hungarian-South Korean bilateral trade has grown by an annual 54% in September is

therefore a great achievement, he said. Hanon Vice-President Min Sung said that the sites were picked due to good experience with investment in Hungary, excellent work force and good infrastructure.

HUNGARY INVESTMENT VOLUME CLIMBS OVER 22% IN Q3

Investment volume in Hungary climbed by an annual 22.1% in the third quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Growth accelerated from 15.3% in Q2 and 10.8% in Q1. Construction investments were up by 25.1% in Q3 and investments in machinery rose by 18.5%. In absolute terms, construction investments reached 1,285.9 billion forints (EUR 3.9bn) and machinery investments added up to 903.6 billion forints during the period. Investment volume in the construction sector increased by 25.0% and manufacturing sector investments edged up 3.2%. Investments in the logistics sector jumped by 41.8%.

Commenting on the data, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said investments were gaining momentum in Hungary, with new projects set to start in the car industry as well as the energy and manufacturing sectors over the coming period. The country's high investment volume and industrial output momentum will allow the economy to continue to expand, Varga said, adding that his ministry expects GDP growth to again exceed 4% in the fourth quarter.

The minister said the economy was strong enough to maintain this level of growth throughout 2019 and that the government projects a GDP growth rate of 4% next year, too.

WIZZ AIR OPENS TRAINING CENTRE IN BUDAPEST

Low-cost airlines Wizz Air opened a new training centre in Budapest, built with a budget of 30 million euros. The facility, equipped with two full flight simulators, has capacity to train 300 pilots and flight attendants at a time.

Wizz Air chief József Váradi said that in 2018 the company has launched 130 new flights and employed another 1,000 people. So far, Wizz Air has made investments worth 2.6 billion dollars and its turnover has been up 20% since last year. By opening the new facility, Wizz Air has moved all its training activities to Budapest, Váradi said, and added that the company employed 250-300 new pilots and 500 flight attendants annually.

The ceremony was attended by Tamás Menczer, state secretary at the foreign ministry, who said that helping Hungarian companies to export opportunities and facilitating high value-added investments were

top priorities for the government. He argued that Wizz Air had a crucial role in those endeavours and noted that the airlines provided access to Budapest from 67 airports in 31 countries.

CHAIN BRIDGE TO BE LIT IN SCOTTISH NATIONAL COLOURS TO HONOUR ST ANDREW'S DAY

Budapest's Chain Bridge will be lit in blue and white, the Scottish national colours, on Friday and Saturday, in honour of that country's national holiday, St Andrew's day. Iain Lindsay, the UK's ambassador to Hungary, will address a short ceremony on Eötvös Square before the lights are turned on. The Chain Bridge will be lit from afternoon until midnight on both days. The building of Budapest's iconic bridge and the Castle Tunnel were overseen by Edinburgh-born engineer Adam Clark.

ÓBUDA UNIVERSITY, SIEMENS SIGN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

German engineering giant Siemens signed a partnership agreement

on developing a dual education programme with Óbuda University.

The company's practical electrical engineering course at Óbuda University will start in early 2019, Chairman-CEO of Siemens Hungary Dale A. Martin said.

LAND OF SMILES IN SHANGHAI OPERA

The romantic operetta *The Land of Smiles* by Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Lehar was shown for the first time in the Shanghai Opera on Wednesday. In a unique development, the performance has been adapted to stage in a Hungarian-Chinese coproduction symbolising "a meeting of the east and the west", organisers said. The story is also symbolic as it is revolving around the love of a European countess, Lisa and a Chinese prince, Sou-Chong.

The operetta, one of Lehar's latest works released in 1929, is performed in Shanghai by European and Chinese artists and musicians with the 200 costumes prepared in a workshop near the city. The production will travel on for further showings in China and Europe including Hungary on February 1 and 2.