

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

First Sunday of Advent in Debrecen (E)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visits Croatia

Plenary session of parliament

CEU press conference on future of university

Opening of "Budapest Energy Summit 2018" conference

TOP STORY

EU TO PROBE AUSTRIAN FAMILY BENEFITS

Due to a joint action by the V4 member states, the European Union will launch a probe into rules adopted by Austria reducing family allowances to children of non-Austrian EU workers, the state secretary for family and youth affairs said.

"The Visegrad countries have taken a successful joint action against Austria's decision to reduce family benefits to children of EU citizens working in Austria, including Hungarians, from January 1," Katalin Novák said.

Austria is going to lower family benefits to EU workers employed in Austria on their children not living in the country from January 1, 2019.

After the V4 countries as well as Lithuania, Slovenia and Bulgaria called on the European Commission to take the necessary measures, European Commissioner Marianne Thyssen said the EC would launch a probe into the Austrian decision's compatibility with EU law.

The seven countries concerned argued that the Austrian decision severely infringes EU law, the principles of equal treatment and coordination in social security, and constitutes unjustified discrimination as the foreign workers pay the same taxes and contributions as Austrian citizens.

Thyssen said the EC is convinced that all EU citizens are entitled to the same rights, and nobody should be discriminated against in terms of child benefits either.

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ORBÁN: VISEGRAD GROUP THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview with Czech commercial television Barrandov, said the Visegrad Group (V4) was the future of Europe.

Orbán argued that the rate of economic growth in the V4 countries was twice as fast as the average European growth, adding that the V4 were the continent's engine of growth. "I trust that what is good for the V4 will also be good for the whole of Europe," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN- CZECH ECONOMIC COOPERATION AT NEW LEVEL

Economic cooperation between Hungary and the Czech Republic "has reached a new level" over the recent period, the foreign affairs and trade minister said in Prague.

Based on the currently available data, the volume of trade between the two nations will be close to ten billion euros by the end of the year, Péter Szijjártó told public media. This clearly demonstrates "the new dimension" of bilateral ties, he added.

There have been a number of Hungarian businesses that have had success on the Czech market. Hungarian oil and gas company MOL, for example, operates 306 petrol stations in the country and has become the number two oil and gas

company in the Czech Republic, he said.

The Czech Republic is also MOL's second biggest market. Drugmakers Gedeon Richter and Egis also have leading products on the Czech pharmaceutical market, while Czech conglomerate Agrofert has acquired stakes in Hungarian baked goods, agricultural and food companies, he said.

Szjijártó noted that earlier this year, the PPF Group agreed to buy the assets of Telenor Hungary and that Czech carmaker Skoda won a contract to supply Budapest with 21 trolleybuses.

On another subject, the minister said bilateral defence cooperation had also entered "a new dimension", noting that Hungary has bought two trainer and two reconnaissance aircraft from the Czech Republic. In addition, Hungarian air cadets are being trained by Czech instructors. Hungary has purchased licences from the Czech Republic for the production of firearms, he said.

The two countries are cooperating in the development of a high-speed rail network connecting the capitals of the Visegrad Group countries. The feasibility study will be finalised by 2020, and the V4 have put together a four-party working group for the project, Szijjártó said.

Hungary and the Czech Republic are also collaborating in the field of nuclear energy, he said, adding that there are five Czech companies involved in the operation of Hungary's nuclear power plant in Paks.

ORBÁN TO HOLD TALKS IN CROATIA

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will pay an official visit to Zagreb on Monday at the invitation Andrej Plenković, his counterpart, Orbán's press chief said. After their talks, the two prime ministers will give a joint press conference, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. Orbán will later hold talks with Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the Croatian president, as well as with Gordan Jandroković, the speaker of parliament.

ÁDER SENDS CONDOLENCES OVER BUSH'S DEATH

President János Áder has sent condolences over the death of former US President George H.W. Bush to his US counterpart Donald Trump, Áder's office said. Áder said he was deeply saddened by learning about the death of the US's 41st president, calling him a highly regarded statesman. George H.W. Bush played an outstanding role in shaping the history of the late 20th century, Áder said, noting the former US president's immense contribution to a peaceful ending of the cold war and support for post-Soviet states in building a free and democratic system. The Hungarian people will keep special memory of his visits to Budapest during which he spoke out as an advocate for multiparty

democracy, he said. George H.W. Bush was the first US president to visit Hungary, in 1989. The passing of Bush is a great loss not only to the US, but to all of its allies and friends, Áder said.

FIDESZ-KDNP SUSPECT BRUSSELS LOADING LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY ONTO 'MIGRANT CARDS'

Hungary's ruling parties have reason to believe that Brussels has transferred large amounts of money onto debit cards for "a lot of migrants", the parliamentary spokesman of the junior governing Christian Democrats (KDNP) said. More and more "migrant cards" are surfacing, with the latest one being found just 200 km from the Hungarian border in Bosnia, Lőrinc Nacsa said. Hungary's ruling parties have been waiting for weeks for the European Commission to answer their questions about debit cards issued to migrants. The government wants to know how much money the EC has transferred onto these cards and in doing so how many people it has helped enter Europe, Nacsa said.

The spokesman called it "outrageous" that Brussels was "transferring the money of EU citizens to migrants" and refusing to answer the Hungarian government's questions. He said the current EU leadership should be ousted and replaced by one that puts the safety and interests of European families first.

ATLANTIC COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT FOR STRENGTHENING US-HUNGARY ALLIANCE

Damon Wilson, Executive Vice President of the Atlantic Council, stressed the need to further strengthen Hungary's alliance with the United States at a gala dinner held in Washington, DC. The two countries must further strengthen their military alliance and work together to help integrate Hungary's neighbours with western democracies, Wilson said, addressing the annual event of the Hungarian-American Coalition (HAC) at the Hungarian embassy. "We need a strategic dialogue between Washington and Budapest", he said.

In her address, HAC President Andrea Lauer Rice paid tribute to József Antall, Hungary's first post-communist prime minister, who died 25 years ago. She noted Antall's commitment towards supporting Hungarian communities beyond the borders. The event, organised for the 27th time, was attended by former New York governor George Pataki and former US ambassador to Hungary April Foley.

CHRISTDEMS: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY CRUCIAL FOR EUROPE'S FUTURE

Preserving Europe's Christian roots and the character of its nation states "is not possible without Christian Democratic foundations", leaders of Hungary's co-ruling KDNP said at the party's national board meeting.

Christian Democrat leader and deputy PM Zsolt Semjén said that his party was to "ensure stable ideological foundations, a link to Christian Democratic ideals for the governing [Fidesz-KDNP] alliance".

János Latorcai, the head of the party's national board, said that the success of Christian policy-making lay largely in personal credibility. "We need to be able to reach out to all people for whom Christian cultural values and the future of European nations are important," he insisted.

The board meeting was attended by nearly 300 delegates.

GULYÁS: GOVT TO SPEND OVER HUF 150 BN ON HUNGARIAN VILLAGE PROGRAMME IN 2019

The government will spend at least 150 billion forints (EUR 464m) on developments as part of the Hungarian Village programme in 2019 in order to maintain or increase populations in rural areas, Gergely Gulyás, the minister heading the Prime Minister's Office, said in Vitnyéd, in north-western Hungary.

Gulyás said the government aims to keep quality of life in villages as high as possible as well as to significantly improve access to public services even in the smallest communities. To this end, the government will set aside 150 billion forints for three target areas of the Hungarian Village programme.

The minister said 75 billion forints will be earmarked for developing public services, 25 billion on home purchase

subsidies aimed to help village residents stay in their communities and at least a further 50 billion for developing the road network. Talks are underway on government funding of a further 25 billion forints, which will also be made available for road development in small communities.

Of the 150 billion forints of funding, 25 billion will be financed from the Road Fund and 125 billion from the general budget reserves.

IZER: HUNGARY LEADS EUROPE IN DECLINE OF TAX-TO-GDP RATIO

Hungary's tax-to-GDP ratio - the sum of taxes and net social contributions as a percentage of GDP - fell by 0.9 percentage point last year, the biggest decline in the European Union, state secretary of the finance ministry Norbert Izer told MTI, citing fresh data released by Eurostat.

The data show Hungary's tax-to-GDP ratio fell to 38.4% from 39.3% in 2016 while the average ratio increased to 40.2% from 39.9% in the European Union.

With the lowering of the corporate tax rate to 9% in 2017, Hungary not only became more attractive to international investors, but also left a total of 150

billion forints with more than 580,000 domestic businesses, Izer said.

The government's tax policy focuses on cutting taxes and simplifying tax administration and the tax cuts will continue, he said.

Hungary will be able to retain its excellent position in the EU ranking, Izer said, adding that the government aims to halve the time businesses spend on tax-related administration by 2021.

CONTINENTAL TOBACCO INAUGURATES HUF 1.1 BN EXPANSION

The local unit of Germany's Continental Tobacco inaugurated a 1.1 billion forint (EUR 4m) expansion at its base in Sátoraljaújhely, in north-eastern Hungary. Continental Dohányipari was awarded a 544 million forint grant from the government for the project, the biggest the company has ever received, said CEO Csaba Fűzi. Finance Minister Mihály Varga noted the grant was of a type the government awards to big companies ineligible for European Union funding. The investment will broaden the product palette to include tobacco for water pipes as well as cigarillos. It will raise headcount by 20 to 420.

SOCCER - ROSSI: CROATIA TOP FAVOURITE IN EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Croatia's national eleven is top favourite in qualification group E for the 2020 European Championship, Marco Rossi, Hungary's national coach, said. Group E features Croatia, Wales, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan, with the top two teams automatically qualifying for Euro 2020.

"Croatia is by far the best squad in the group. As for the others, it will be mainly up to us what results we achieve," Rossi told the website of the Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ). "The Croats don't need to be introduced to anyone, the runner-up in this year's World Cup represents a different quality than the other four teams. Hungary will probably wage a tough battle with Wales and Slovakia for the second place. Nor should we underrate the Azeri team," the Italian coach of the Hungarian team said.

MLSZ President Sándor Csányi said that "Hungary and Hungarian fans will in any case benefit from the European Championship because Budapest will co-host the tournament."