

PHOTO OF THE DAY



A girl lights first Advent candle on International Day of Persons with Disabilities

MTVA/Marton Mönus

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parliament's foreign affairs, justice, cultural committees meet

Energy conference in Budapest

Intl conference on tourism and security opens in western Hungary

State secy's presser on Christmas consumer protection inspections

TOP STORY

CEU CONFIRMS MOVE TO VIENNA

Budapest's Central European University (CEU) will launch all US-accredited degree programs in Vienna in September 2019, the university said.

CEU said in a statement that it was making the announcement in order to guarantee that it can recruit students in time for the beginning of the next academic year. "Over the course of 20 months, CEU has taken all steps to comply with Hungarian legislation, launching educational activities in the US that were certified by US authorities. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government has made it clear it has no intention of signing the agreement that it negotiated over a year ago with the State of New York, which would ensure CEU's operations in Budapest for the long term," the statement added.

"CEU has been forced out," the university's president and rector Michael Ignatieff said. "This is unprecedented. A US institution has been driven out of a country that is a NATO ally. A European institution has been ousted from a member state of the EU." Hungary's amended higher education act requires foreign colleges and universities in Hungary to operate on the basis of an interstate agreement and to run a campus in the country in which they are based.

GOVT SPOKESMAN: CEU MOVE TO VIENNA 'POLITICAL BLUFF'

Hungary's government spokesman called the Central European University's Monday announcement to move courses to Vienna "a political bluff". "The George Soros-founded university will keep several of its courses running in Budapest," István Hollik said in a video message posted on the government's portal kormany.hu. He said "this makes it clear to everybody that the whole affair is nothing else, but the usual political bluff by Soros which the government does not wish to deal with."

István Hiller, deputy speaker of parliament for the opposition Socialists, said that "ousting" CEU from Budapest is nothing else but "a political decision". Speaking to reporters, he argued that the university had fulfilled all the criteria set by the government and the amended education law. He called the affair "a violation of academic and scientific freedom", adding that "it is unprecedented in Hungary's post-transition history that an institution recognised by an allied state has been driven out of the country".

The leftist Democratic Coalition said the Hungarian government has chased CEU away from Hungary, calling the day of the announcement "a dark day for Hungarian higher education, academic autonomy and academic life." The decision carries the

message that Hungary does not need knowledge, innovation or responsible thinking, DK's deputy group leader Gergely Arató said. The system that closes university faculties is "nothing else but dictatorship", he said.

CEU SAYS 'EVICTION' FROM HUNGARY 'FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM'

Announcing the relocation of its US-accredited degree programmes to Vienna from September 2019, the Central European University called the "arbitrary eviction of a reputable university" a "flagrant violation of academic freedom" and "a dark day for Europe and a dark day for Hungary." The university further regretted that the Hungarian government had "refused to listen to the representations they received from members of the US Congress, the Office of the Governor of the State of New York, the Venice Commission, members of the European Parliament, leaders of universities around the world, over two dozen Nobel Laureates, but above all, the thousands of Hungarians from all walks of life who demonstrated peacefully and called for 'free universities in a free country'". It said that CEU is registered in Austria to issue US-accredited degrees and will welcome all incoming students to its Vienna location in September 2019, adding that enrolled students will complete their studies in Budapest.

Speaking at a press conference, Michael Ignatieff, CEU's president and rector, said the university fulfilled all of its legal obligations according to the State of New York, but the Hungarian government had refused to accept this stance. He said CEU had sought to fulfil its obligations under the amended higher education act, but for the sake of the students, it could not wait any longer. The rector said he believed the government had no intention of resolving CEU's situation.

CEU deputy rector Zsolt Enyedi said CEU had lost hope of extending its operating permit. Deputy rector Éva Fodor said the most important thing for CEU over the coming period would be ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning at the university does not decline. She said CEU also had to focus on preserving its unity, stressing that it would remain a single institution despite the fact that it would operate at multiple venues.

In a press statement released by the US State Department, a spokesperson said the US government was "disappointed" that the Hungarian government and CEU had not concluded an agreement that would allow the university to continue its US-accredited programmes in Hungary. "Since the Hungarian government amended its law on higher education in April 2017, we have worked diligently with both parties to find a solution that would allow CEU to preserve these programs in Hungary," Heather Nauert said in the statement. "The United States

values the role that CEU and other American educational institutions play in building connections between the Hungarian and American people and strengthening the transatlantic bond. The departure of these U.S.-accredited programs from Hungary will be a loss for the CEU community, for the United States, and for Hungary," she added.

CEU is accredited in the US and Hungary with 1,200 master's and doctoral students in the humanities, social sciences, business, law, cognitive and network science. The university employs 770 staff and faculty. It contributed 25 million euros (8 billion forints) to the Hungarian economy each year in taxes, pension and health contributions, and payments to suppliers, the university said.

ORBÁN: NO ECONOMIC ISSUE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUNGARIAN- CROATIAN FRIENDSHIP

Addressing a joint press conference with his Croatian counterpart Andrej Plenković in Zagreb, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said he could not name any economic issue that was more important than the 800 years of friendship shared by Hungary and Croatia. Orbán, who is on his first visit to Croatia in seven years, said after talks with Plenković that the lack of energy that currently characterises Hungarian-Croatian ties was "unnatural". He said he had arrived in Croatia to help put bilateral relations back on the right track. "The thorn must be removed

from beneath the nail, and then everything will be alright," Orbán said. "This is what we would like."

Orbán said he and Plenković had made progress in their talks on the two countries' ties both in their private meeting and the plenary meeting between their delegations. "We have common ground in terms of a historical perspective," Orbán said. "We want a strong Europe, we want to strengthen cooperation among European nations and we'd be happy to see Croatia join the Schengen zone as soon as possible, because this too will strengthen Europe." Further, both sides see bilateral economic cooperation as excellent, Orbán said. Bilateral trade turnover is constantly rising, as is the number of Hungarian investments in Croatia and more and more Hungarian tourists are visiting the country, he said. The prime minister also said Croatian and Hungarian minority groups both enjoy living in each other's countries. Hungarians living in Croatia are content with their government and speak respectfully about Croatia and Croats living in Hungary are also enjoying the strongest support they have seen from Budapest in a long time, Orbán said.

Asked about the dispute surrounding Hungarian oil and gas company MOL and Croatian energy company INA, Orbán said that if Croats and Hungarians were incapable of working together on a business matter, then they should not, and Croatia should buy back INA. MOL holds just under half of INA's shares but has

management rights in the company. The other big stakeholder is the state of Croatia. The sides have long been at odds over INA's strategy. Asked about the case of MOL President-CEO Zsolt Hernádi, for whom there is an international arrest warrant in place, Orbán said Hungary considered the case a legal matter. "Politics never gets involved in legal matters in our country," he added. Justice must take its own course according to its own logic, the prime minister said. Orbán said he would not make any backroom deals regarding any legal matter and that he insisted on the separation of international political relations and legal matters.

On the topic of the LNG terminal under construction in Croatia, Orbán said the role of natural gas was declining in Hungary's energy mix, as Hungary is busy expanding its nuclear plant and building solar farms. However, given that it will take years before these new energy sources are ready to be tapped, natural gas will remain important, Orbán said, adding that price was the key when it came to gas supply. The cheapest way for Hungary to get gas is to import it from Russia, he said. The second cheapest option is Romania, followed by Slovakia and Croatia is only the fourth cheapest, he added. "This is a matter of price for us," the prime minister said. "If we can find a business model that presents Hungary with an acceptable price, we will cooperate."

Plenković said Orbán's visit would play an important role in advancing

the two countries' relations. Annual bilateral trade turnover is at 2 billion euros, he said, adding that some 600,000 Hungarian tourists have visited Croatia this year. On the topic of the MOL-INA dispute, Plenković said the issue had been making bilateral ties difficult for ten years now. Both governments want to settle the dispute, Plenković said, adding that it was important not to let the issue continue to affect bilateral ties. In response to a question, Plenković said the Croatian government still intended to buy out MOL's stake in INA, but it was all a question of price. "But until then ... the aim is for both companies to function well."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, CROATIA SHOULD FURTHER BOOST ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Economic cooperation between Hungary and Croatia benefits both countries overall, but there are areas where ties could be further boosted, the foreign minister said in Zagreb. Péter Szijjártó, who is accompanying Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on an official visit to Croatia, said that trade between the two countries exceeded 2 billion euros last year, noting the 420 million euro credit line opened by Eximbank to help Hungarian businesses boost their investments in Croatia.

Szjártó said the government's 500 million forint funding allocated annually to northern Croatia's

Drávaszög economic development scheme over the last two years has been increased to 1 billion (EUR 3.1m) for 2019. It will support farm and enterprise development projects, he said. With the acquisition of a Croatian bank, Hungary's leading OTP would soon become the fourth largest financial player in Croatia, he said. Szjártó said he proposed increasing the number of border crossing points from the current seven to boost both countries' competitiveness.

ORBÁN EXPRESSES SYMPATHY ON PASSING OF US PRESIDENT GEORGE HW BUSH

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has expressed sympathy over the death of President George HW Bush in a letter sent to his family, Orbán's press chief said. Orbán said it was with great sadness that he had learnt about the passing of Bush last Friday, whom he described as a great American patriot and a friend of Hungary, Bertalan Havasi said. Hungarians will always remember him and remain thankful for what he did for the dismantling of the iron curtain and the liberation of Hungary and central Europe from Soviet oppression, the prime minister said in the letter. The president's visit in Hungary in 1989 was seen as encouragement in a critical period, he added. Hungarians will never forget his respectable and strong dedication to historic changes in the region, Orbán said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS US ASSISTANT SECY FOR ENERGY RESOURCES

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó met Francis Fannon, the assistant secretary for the Bureau of Energy Resources at the US Department of State, to discuss the diversification of Hungary's energy resources. The country's energy diversification is a matter of national security as well as an economic issue, the ministry's statement said. Achieving this goal "depends not only on us", it said. At the meeting in Budapest, Szijjártó asked Fannon to help "foster the willingness of other central European countries to cooperate in improving the region's energy supply", the statement said.

SZÁVAY TO RESIGN MP SEAT

Conservative opposition Jobbik MP István Szávay said on his Facebook page that he would resign his seat in parliament. Commercial news channel Hír TV aired last Wednesday an audio recording in which Szávay told fellow party members at a party congress that he had verbally and physically insulted a woman in a pub who he said had called him 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 assaulted her. In Monday's Facebook entry, Szávay said

that by resigning his seat he was taking “responsibility in a proportionate manner” for everything that had been “said in a secretly recorded private conversation six months ago.” Last Thursday, Szávay announced that he was resigning from his posts of Jobbik deputy group leader and parliamentary notary.

VESTFROST TO SPEND HUF 4.4 BN ON EXPANSION IN SE HUNGARY

Danish refrigerator manufacturer Vestfrost is investing 4.4 billion forints (EUR 13.6m) to expand its production and storage capacity in Csongrád, southeast Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a press conference. The investment, which is supported with a 1.05 billion forint government grant, will create 93 jobs, he said. Vestfrost exports 98% of its products, which makes it a significant factor in

Hungary’s economic performance, he said.

Szijjártó praised Danish-Hungarian economic relations, saying that 150 Danish companies have invested over 230 billion forints in the country and employ over 15,000 people. Trade between the two countries grew by 13% in 2017, he noted, with the volume over 1.3 billion euros. Modern technologies brought by those companies help Hungary to transition to a new economic era, Szijjártó said.

HUNGARY PMI FALLS TO 53.5 IN NOVEMBER

Hungary’s seasonally-adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) fell to 53.5 points in November from a revised 57.1 points in October, the Hungarian Association of Logistics, Purchasing and Inventory Management (Halpim), which compiles the index, said. In its

original data release on November 5, Halpim said the PMI was at 57.3 points in October but it revised the number slightly downwards in the Monday release. An index value above 50 shows expansion in the manufacturing sector, while a value under 50 signals contraction.

In November, among the sub-indices that comprise the PMI, the production volume index fell from October but remained above the 50 mark now for the 39th month in a row. The new orders index was down but stayed above 50 points, showing an expansion of new orders. The current figure was below average. Delivery times were longer than in October and the sub-index was below 50 now for the 13th month in a row. Purchased stocks increased in November for the third month in a row. The employment sub-index was above 50 and showed an expansion in employment figures for the fourth successive month.