

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Balázs Mohai

New Year's Eve celebrations in Budapest's Heroes' Square

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases Sept-Nov jobs report

TOP STORY

GULYÁS: MOST OF OPPOSITION ANTI-DEMOCRATIC

The majority of the opposition do not respect the basic values of democracy, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, has said.

In a democratic decision-making system, it is the majority in parliament that has the right to pass laws and attempts to prevent this process are an attack on representative democracy, Gulyás told commercial news channel ATV. This is what happened during the last session of parliament this year, and the actions of opposition MPs that followed at the public media headquarters "were illegal", he added.

The only mistake that the public TV might have made is that they allowed protesting opposition MPs to enter the headquarters, he said. In line with the law on the legal standing of MPs, they are not allowed to disrupt the operation of public institutions. Yet the opposition MPs wanted to do just that by reading out their petition on-air, he added.

On another subject, Gulyás said he trusted Fidesz would remain one of the strongest members of the European People's Party after next year's European Parliamentary election, noting none of the almost 50 member parties of the EPP had matched Fidesz's electoral support in the last two EP elections.

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GULYÁS DOWNPLAYS DECEMBER DEMONSTRATIONS

Commenting on the protests that took place in Hungary at the end of 2018, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said that in a country of ten million it was "easy to radicalise a few thousand people" and make them hate the government. The opposition's policies are targeted at a "hard core" of dissatisfied voters and the possibility of winning majority support was out of reach, he said. It is possible that the protest will continue through January and February and will not end before May's European Parliamentary elections, but they will not attract mass support, Gulyás insisted.

Referring to recent amendments to the labour code regarding overtime, he said that contrary to the claims of protesters, Hungary does not have a "slave law" and so there is nothing that needs to be amended. Overtime regulations will apply on a voluntary basis and "it is simply silly" to talk about "enslavement", so the law was only an excuse to protest, he said.

GULYÁS DISMISSES CONCERNS OVER DECISION TO MOVE IMRE NAGY STATUE

"There is no problem at all with Imre Nagy," the head of the Prime Minister's Office told commercial news channel ATV, dismissing concerns over the government's decision to move the statue of the 1956-era leader. He said

the statue was removed from the edge of Kossuth Square near Parliament as part of a programme to restore fine works of art that preceded the Communist dictatorship and Nazi occupation. They are not replacing the statue but restoring the area to its original state, which has been named Martyrs' Square specifically after the victims of the 1919 Red Terror, he added.

Referring to criticism over the prime minister's move to the Buda Castle District, he said, "It's no good constantly bringing up the Horthy era", adding that the situation then was "different". He said that, as a minister, he would remain in the Parliament building together with hundreds of his colleagues as there was no room for them to move to the new Prime Minister's Office.

MATERNITY BENEFITS RAISED, NEW HOME-CARE SUBSIDY INTRODUCED FOR 2019

Hungary's government has increased general maternity benefits as well as maternity benefits for university students or graduates and introduced a new subsidy for parents tending to permanently sick children at home for 2019, the human resources ministry said. As of January 1, eligible mothers are entitled to a maximum of 208,600 forints (EUR 649) a month in maternity benefits, the ministry told MTI. Female university students enrolled in a bachelor's programme will be eligible for 104,300 forints in support

and students enrolled in a master's programme for 136,500 forints. Female university students or graduates are eligible for an extra year of child support up to the child's second birthday.

One of the major changes for this year is that home caregivers of severely disabled children or children suffering from a debilitating illness will be eligible to receive 100,000 forints per month, irrespective of the child's age, the ministry added.

ÁDER: "IT'S UP TO US TO DECIDE WHAT TO SAY 'NO' OR 'YES' TO"

János Áder, Hungary's president, addressed fellow citizens on New Year's Day in a public media broadcast just after midnight, wishing them a happy New Year and urging them to "say 'no' to all things that poison our everyday lives" and to "say 'yes' to all things that are the way we want to see the future, our own and our children's lives". The president said Hungarians could also say "no" to frugality, cynicism, short-sighted thinking and actions that hurt "our fellow citizens in their religion, identity and dignity". He said the nation could also reject "the irresponsible exploitation of our environment" or the "ruthless reality poisoning our waters, polluting the air and exhausting our future".

"But we can also say 'yeses'," Áder continued. Hungarians can say "yes" to "the peace of our homes, taking care of one another, recognising achievements, fair competition and good intentions

that help our friends". "We can say 'yes' to the Hungarian nation, our belonging together in the Carpathian Basin, representing Hungarian interests, upholding our traditions and preserving our mother tongue," the president said.

DÖMÖTÖR: GOVT AIMS TO MAINTAIN HUNGARY'S SECURITY

The Hungarian government's main aim in 2019 is to maintain a strengthening and thriving Hungary that retains its security, a Cabinet Office official said. The government is working for a country in which work is valued, families with children are supported, and in which all social groups can take steps forward, Csaba Dömötör, the parliamentary state secretary of the Cabinet Office, told a press conference. Hungary is starting the new year with a growing economy, and annual growth in 2019 is expected to be around 5% thanks to government measures, he added.

Dömötör noted that tax breaks for families with two children will increase to 40,000 forints per month. In December, the home-creation scheme also expanded with more credit available, he added. Dömötör also referred to a new deal based on an agreement between the employers and

employees to hike the basic minimum wage to 149,000 forints and that of skilled workers to 195,000 forints next year. The 8% increase will be followed by the same rate of increase in 2020. The government is also helping businesses to raise wages by further cutting employer tax burdens, he said.

Dömötör said an important change in the area of social policy is that home caregivers of severely disabled children or children suffering from a debilitating illness will be eligible to receive 100,000 forints per month. From January, pay for home caregivers will rise by 15%, while by 2022 it will have risen by 30%.

He also noted a growth in pensions of 2.7% and higher wages for nurses among other boons for public sector employees. Referring to recent changes in the labour code that has sparked protests, he said overtime will be paid monthly and any extra work undertaken would be voluntary.

AMBULANCE SERVICE RESPONDS TO 3,000 EMERGENCIES OVER NEW YEAR'S EVE

Hungary's ambulance service responded to 2,890 emergencies

during New Year's Eve celebrations, 830 of which were called in from Budapest, the service's communications chief said. Most of the calls came in between midnight and 4am on Tuesday morning, Pál Győrfi told MTI. Of the calls, nine incidents were in connection with fireworks causing hand, face or eye injuries. Many of the calls involved traffic accidents, scuffles, carbon monoxide poisonings and sickness. In addition, 139 people – among them 37 minors – needed to be hospitalised for treatment for alcohol or other substance-related intoxication, Győrfi said.

Firefighters responded to 53 fires and 62 incidents requiring rescue efforts, the national disaster management authority's spokesman said. Altogether 25 of the incidents involved fires caused by fireworks, Dániel Mukics told MTI.

There were two road fatalities on New Year's Eve, the national police said on its website. A further seven accidents ended with serious injuries, while 15 others ended with minor injuries, they added. Police caught four drunk drivers and took altogether 104 people into custody.

