

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zoltán Máthé

Interior designer György Selmeczi presents a so-far unknown Gustav Klimt plaque discovered in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Commemoration of Budapest ghetto liberation

Inauguration of plaque honouring Hungary's Olympic gold medallist speed skating team

Presser for 5th Budapest International Documentary Festival

Budapest Stock Exchange's award ceremony

TOP STORY

FIDESZ: 'SOROS'S PEOPLE HAVE COME FORWARD'

Billionaire George Soros's "people have again revealed themselves" in the European parliament, ruling Fidesz group spokesman János Halász said.

The commissioner for migration and a "pro-migration chorus" of MEPs were once again "preaching" about the settlement of migrants in Tuesday's EP session, Halász said.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the commissioner in charge of the European Commission's migration policy, repeated that a sustainable and predictable mechanism for solidarity was needed in order to organise the settlement of migrants, Halász noted. This suggests that the EC is once again pushing for migrant quotas, he added.

The Democratic Coalition's Péter Niedermüller argued that member states should increase their financial contributions with a view to managing migration, Halász said. "It has again become completely clear that the EC and the pro-migration majority in the EP are acting in line with the 'Soros plan'," he said. "It is no accident that Soros recently met EC leaders at least 20 times. He is the puppet master of the EC, the EP and the Hungarian opposition parties. If it was up to them, they would turn Europe into a continent of migrants, and this is what's at stake in the European parliamentary elections," he added.

SZILI URGES ROMANIA HUNGARIANS TO RESUBMIT ETHNIC MINORITY BILL

Ethnic Hungarian organisations in Romania should jointly rework an ethnic minority bill that has been “stuck” in the Romanian parliament for over 10 years, Katalin Szili, the Hungarian prime minister’s commissioner, said in an interview published in Romanian daily Bihari Napló.

In the interview, Szili suggested that Romania Hungarians work together on an education bill, too, and added that “Hungarian deputies should promote a position in the Romanian legislation which is backed by the whole Hungarian community.” Concerning endeavours to achieve territorial autonomy for ethnic Hungarians living in a large bloc in Romania, Szili noted that ethnic Hungarian parties RMDSZ, MPP and SZNT now agreed that, geographically, the desired status should cover the historical area of Szekler Land. Whether Romania’s constitution should be amended to grant autonomy to that region “can be decided when we are at the bridge; we should cross it once we have at all established dialogue with the Romanian majority”, she added.

Szili said she hoped that the Romanian government would realise that the Hungarian community is not seeking ways to break away from Romania but “to achieve self-government and self-determination

within the Romanian state based on the European Union’s subsidiarity principle”. “I ask the Romanian government and state for nothing other than to consider leaders of the Hungarian communities as partners and at least sit down with them and clarify the terminology,” Szili said in her interview.

PAKS UPGRADE STATE SECRETARY SACKED

President János Áder has relieved Attila Aszódi, the state secretary for the upgrade of the Paks nuclear power plant, of his post, effective January 15, a resolution published in the official gazette Magyar Közlöny shows. Aszódi, fired on the recommendation of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, was appointed in 2017. Between 2014 and 2017, he was a government commissioner in charge of the Paks upgrade. A minister without portfolio in charge of implementing the Paks upgrade, János Süli, was appointed as commissioner in 2017. The state of Russia is financing most of the cost of the 12.5 billion euro upgrade of Paks, Hungary’s sole commercial nuclear power plant.

OPPOSITION TO QUERY STATE-OWNED FIRMS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOUR CODE AMENDMENT

Parliament’s opposition parties said they will ask state-owned companies whether they plan on implementing

the labour code’s new rules on overtime. Ildikó Borbély Bangó, the Socialist Party’s deputy group leader, told a press conference she held jointly with other opposition politicians that the opposition will send out letters to state-owned company executives asking them if they will “enforce the slave law”. She noted that there are currently 200 companies in Hungary funded from taxpayer money. Bangó said the opposition parties will visit the premises of a state-owned company each week to ask their management about the implementation of the new overtime rules.

The Liberal Party’s Anett Bósz, who sits in parliament as an independent, called on the companies in question to honour the prime minister’s promise that under the new rules, employees will still receive their overtime pay at the end of the month. Zsolt Gréczy of the Democratic Coalition said the polls showed that the new rules were unpopular, adding that “a slew of multinational companies” were also refusing to implement them. LMP’s Antal Csárdi said the implementation of the new rules could lead to accidents at transportation companies. This was why, he said, it was important to know whether Budapest transport authority BKK, railway company MÁV and bus company Volán plan on enforcing them. Bence Tordai of Párbeszéd said the parties would encourage the workers of state-owned companies to join a planned national strike on Saturday. He said the opposition hopes the strike comes to

fruition and that it will be accompanied by demonstrations in all major cities. Tamás Pintér of conservative Jobbik said the “slave law” transcended party lines and that the opposition was united in calling for its repeal. The amendments to the labour code, approved by parliament in December, raised the annual threshold for overtime from 250 to 400 hours.

LMP DEMANDS TOTAL COST FIGURE FOR PAKS ENLARGEMENT

The government should “come clean” and release the total cost of the Paks nuclear plant upgrade project, a board member of opposition LMP said. Szabolcs Turcsán also raised what additional cost “several years of delay” in the implementation would incur. He referred to the Hungary-Russia agreement under which the project is to be implemented as “the worst deal of the century”, insisting that the project had “failed”. He called on the entire government to take responsibility. Turcsán called for a referendum to be held on the upgrade. “Hungary will only become [energy] independent if it switches to renewables,” he added.

DK CALLS ON GOVT TO SCRAP SUBSIDIES FOR COMPANIES WITH THIRD COUNTRY EMPLOYEES

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) is submitting a proposal to

parliament on scrapping Hungarian and EU employment subsidies for companies with non-EU workers, the leftist party’s deputy parliamentary group leader said. Hungary has become a target country for workers from outside the EU, mainly from Ukraine, Gergely Arató said. Responding to a written question from DK lawmaker Lajos Oláh, the government admitted to having granted work permits for over 26,000 non-EU workers over the past three years, Arató said. DK proposes subsidising companies that aid the employment of EU citizens instead, in line with EU law recommendations, he said. Gábor Nemes, DK’s specialist in employment affairs, said that the government was trying to remedy the workforce shortage by importing “tens of thousands of non-EU citizens, mainly Ukrainians”, which keeps wages low.

FOUR-DAY WEEKEND RAISES GUEST NIGHTS IN NOV

Guest nights in Hungary rose by 3.7% year on year to 1,983,000 in November, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) show. Guest nights spent by domestic travellers climbed by 5.9% to 993,000 as Hungarians used a four-day weekend for the All Saints’ Day holiday for recreation. Guest nights spent by foreign visitors rose by 1.6% to 990,000 during the period.

Revenue of commercial accommodations increased by 7.1% to 37 billion forints. At hotels, the average occupancy rate stood at 58.2%, up 1.0 percentage point from the same month a year earlier. Total revenue per available room (TREVPAR) at hotels climbed by 6.1% to 20,586 forints (EUR 64).

Commenting on the data, Zoltán Guller, head of the Hungarian Tourism Agency, said that the number of big-spending tourists (usually from the US, China, Israel, Canada and Spain) had grown significantly in November year on year. Key indicators show Hungary performing better in November than Austria and the Czech Republic, he said, adding that the Hungarian government was supporting tourism with over 800 billion forints in grants.

MORE THAN 315,000 COMPANIES OPT FOR SMALL BUSINESS TAX

The number of Hungarian companies opting to pay the itemised tax for small businesses, known by its Hungarian acronym “kata”, stood over 315,000 on January 1, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. Businesses that opt for kata pay a flat monthly 50,000 forints (EUR 155) instead of corporate or payroll tax. The annual revenue threshold for kata companies is 12 million forints. Varga noted that the annual VAT exemption threshold had been raised from 8 million forints to 12 million, level with the kata revenue threshold, from 2019.

FAG INAUGURATES BEARINGS FACTORY IN E HUNGARY

FAG Hungary, a unit of Germany's Schaeffler group, has inaugurated a 25 billion forint (EUR 77bn) bearings factory in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, creating 500 jobs, the foreign affairs and trade minister said. The investment was supported with a 3.2 billion forint grant by the Hungarian government, Péter Szijjártó said at the opening ceremony. The minister said Debrecen is the host city of one-third of the record 98 large-scale foreign investment projects implemented or launched in Hungary last year, due to no small extent to a BMW factory to be built there.

Regional head Rainer Lindner and Chief Operating Officer Andreas Schick both confirmed that Schaeffler is committed to the developments in Debrecen. Headcount at FAG is now close to 1,600, which could be increased to 2,000 in the coming years, they said. Managing director of FAG

Magyarország Péter Szabó said the company, established 20 years ago, now produces 25 million tapered roller bearings and 500 million tapered rollers a year on an area of 58,000sqms.

BUDAPEST DANCE FESTIVAL HOSTS 9 PREMIERES FOR GRAND OPENING OF NEW HOME

The Budapest Dance Festival will feature nine premieres and altogether 24 shows between February 15 and March 2 at the new National Dance Theatre in Budapest's Millenáris Park, organisers said. The Canadian Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, with a performance to the music of singer-poet-songwriter Leonard Cohen, will be the star of the event. Also, Swiss choreographer Philippe Saire will stage a performance for children and one for adults. French Company Wang Ramirez, whose contemporary performances draw on hip-hop, will perform for the first time in Hungary. Győr Ballet and the Hungarian Academy of Music's orchestra will open

the festival with a piece on Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 and PianoPlays, a performance inspired by the music of Wagner and Liszt, organisers said.

BUDAPEST SPAS ATTRACTED 4.5 MILLION VISITORS LAST YEAR

Budapest spas attracted 4.5 million visitors in 2017, an increase of 7.3% year on year, the marketing director for spa operator Budapest Gyógyfürdői és Hévízei (BGYH) said in Tuesday's issue of business daily Világgazdaság. Visitor numbers were up in spite of an unseasonably cold and wet June, Szilvia Czinege told the paper. The Széchenyi baths alone drew 1.7 million visitors, she added. Turnover at the Palatinus baths was up 31% and turnover at the Paskál increased more than 13%. Both baths have recently been upgraded. Visitor numbers at the Gellért baths were up 6%, coming close to 660,000. Revenue of BGYH rose by 7.3% to 15 billion forints (EUR 46m) last year.