

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Márton Mönus

Restored Matthias oratory of Budapest's Inner City Parish Church

UPCOMING EVENTS

Govt official attends Day of Hungarian Culture event in Vojvodina

Mi Hazánk Movement presents EP election programme

22nd Budapest Burns Supper commemorating Scottish poet Robert Burns

Events marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: EP DEBATE ON HUNGARY 'SOROS RALLY'

The European Parliament's debate on the rule of law in Hungary will be a "George Soros-type séance, an election rally, a campaign event", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio.

Orbán said he had always fought for "the Hungarian national interest" but he would not aid and abet next week's "pro-migration campaign event" in Brussels. The European left wing's Spitzenkandidat, Frans Timmermans is "Soros's man", he said, referring to the American-Hungarian billionaire. "Soros is now open about wanting to take over European institutions," he insisted.

The progress of the infringement procedures against Hungary, which the European Commission decided to step up on Thursday, is also a sign of Soros's big influence "and that he wants to increase it even further", Orbán said. This attempt should be thwarted at May's EP election, "where we want pro-migration MEPs to be left in minority", he said.

Regarding the EP's decision to triple the funding of "Soros's NGOs", Orbán said that this was "a decision executing point six of the Soros-plan". The initiative to couple funding with the rule of law in member states was a "primitive proposal" contrary to EU rules, he said. Such a ruling would need the votes of all member states, and he would never vote for it.

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ORBÁN HAILS OUTCOME OF FAMILY POLICY CONSULTATION

Some 1.38 million people completed the “National Consultation” survey sent to Hungarian households in the autumn, showing the readiness of Hungarians to “take action in great numbers” when truly important issues are raised, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio.

The prime minister said he had asked the Head of the Prime Minister’s Office, Gergely Gulyás, to prepare a proposal addressing the contemporary challenges child protection services face and the government’s potential responses. Regarding family policy, Orbán called it a “historic decision” that Hungarians wanted to see demographic problems solved with strategic family policy rather than through immigration. Katalin Novák, the state secretary for youth and family affairs, laid out a “long and very expensive” action plan to protect families, he said. This puts the protection of young families first, he said. It would be “worthwhile” enshrining some elements of family policy in the constitution, Orbán said in response to a question, adding that he would “tread carefully here”.

On the topic of the economy, Orbán said Hungary “is among the world’s top ten countries from the point of view of investments”. The goal, he said, was to raise Hungary’s

level of economic growth by at least 2% above the European average each year. In connection with the reduction of public debt, he said Hungary’s economy was sufficiently strong for the public debt level to be reduced to below 50% from the current 71% in a couple of years, but this would mean less money being spent on economic development. A balance must be struck between these two aims, he added.

Referring to the death of Andrew G Vajna, the government commissioner responsible for the development of the national film industry, Orbán said Vajna had loved his country and it spoke volumes that he had created the most heart-rending film about the 1956 revolution, Freedom. “He was a great man and his passing is a serious loss.”

GOVT OFFICIAL: NO POWER SUPPLY WITHOUT PAKS 2

Hungary will have no long-term secure power supply without the expansion of its sole nuclear plant, Paks 2, and there’s no doubt about its competitiveness, János Süli, the minister without portfolio responsible for overseeing the project, said. Speaking before a conference on Hungary’s long-term electricity supply and the role of nuclear power, Süli said the expansion of the nuclear power plant would not stand in opposition to renewables but the two in tandem would address the question of the

country’s electricity supply over the long term. He said a study prepared by the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency presented at the Budapest conference showed what was the ratio of renewables and nuclear energy that could be reached economically to deliver affordable prices for residential and industrial consumers.

AUDI HUNGARIA STRIKE ENTERS SECOND DAY; WAGE TALKS CONTINUE

A strike over higher pay continued at German carmaker Audi’s base in Győr (NW Hungary) for the second day, even as management and union leaders continued to negotiate.

Production at the base has come to a “practical halt” since the strike started at 6:00 in the morning on Thursday, said Tibor Szimacsek, one of the leaders of the Audi Hungaria Independent Union (AHFSZ).

The union is demanding a wage increase of at least 18%, but no less than 75,000 forints a month. They also want the annual threshold for non-wage benefits raised to 787,000 forints from 620,000 forints.

Management last proposed a wage increase on a scale “nearly the same” as an earlier offer to raise wages 20% over two years, union leaders said.

Audi Hungaria employs some 13,000 people at its base in Győr (NW Hungary). AHFSZ counts about 9,000 of those workers among its members.

SOCIALISTS CALL ON GOVT TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE

The Socialist party called on the government to improve the state of health care in the country urgently. Deputy parliamentary group leader Ildikó Borbély Bangó said 30,000 die each year due to a lack of adequate care. Over 1,400 villages have no pharmacies, 334 GP's practices are not filled, and one-third of GPs are above the age of 60, she said. There is a dire shortage of dentists and district nurses too, she said. The government is failing to heed the proposals of professionals, Bangó said, calling on the government to "dust off" the Hungarian Medical Chamber's 12-point proposal from 2017 to improve health-care services.

RATE OF POPULATION DECREASE MODERATES IN FIRST 11 MONTHS OF 2018

The rate of decrease in Hungary's population in the first eleven months of 2018 moderated as the number of births fell less than in the same period of the previous year, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Between January and November, there were 82,580 births, 1.7% less than in the same period of 2017, while there were 118,693 deaths, 1.2% less. The natural population decrease was 36,113 in the period, as against 36,155 in January-November 2017 -- a 0.1% improvement.

In the first ten months of last year, there were 48,725 marriages, 447 more than in 2017.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, NATIONAL GALLERY TO SHOW MICHELANGELO, RUBENS, DALÍ IN 2019

Drawings by Michelangelo, works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Flemish Baroque masters, surrealist paintings by Magritte and Dalí and photographs by Brassai, are in the 2019 exhibition schedule of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Hungarian National Gallery, the museums' director-general László Baán said. The Museum of Fine Arts, which reopened after a revamp last autumn, will present a Michelangelo exhibition from April. Thirty masterpieces by Rubens and ten by Van Dyck will be included in the Flemish Baroque show to open in October, Baán said. The Hungarian National Gallery will present a large surrealist exhibition including works by Magritte, Miró, Dali and Picasso, to be followed by a photography exhibition by Brassai, and a show by the early 20th century Hungarian painter István Farkas, he added.

DK DEMANDS TO VIEW SURVEYS THAT FORMED BASIS OF 'STOP SOROS' CAMPAIGN

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) wants the Prime

Minister's Office to present the surveys that formed the basis of a government campaign dubbed "Stop Soros," the party's deputy group leader said.

Citing a recent interview published in Switzerland by the business partner of ruling Fidesz's late campaign advisor, Arthur Finkelstein, DK's Gergely Arató told a press conference in front of the PM's Office that he would file a lawsuit if the office refused to present the documents.

According to Hungarian news portal 24.hu, George Birnbaum said in the interview that a phone survey had been carried out to assess whether US billionaire George Soros was well-known enough in Hungary to build a negative campaign around him.

A cabinet office state secretary said in reaction to DK's demands that there had been no need for the government to conduct any survey because Soros had published his "plans" himself. Csaba Dömötör said that according to a plan Soros had published in writing, Europe should take in one million migrants a year and provide all of them with 9 million forints' (EUR 28,300) worth of financial aid over their first two years in the EU. The plan, he said, also called for the establishment of a mandatory immigration system. He also cited Soros as saying that national borders presented obstacles to this plan.