

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Balloons at anti-govt demo in front of Parliament

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monetary Council rate setting meeting

Szijjártó meets counterpart from Eritrea

Presser at Puskás Ferenc Stadium 500 days ahead of 2020 soccer European championships

Signing of cooperation agreement between foreign ministry, PE University

TOP STORY

KOVÁCS: EUROPEAN BODIES HIJACKED

Hungary's government spokesman accuses "left-wing and liberal migration policy advocates" of hijacking European institutions and using them to promote their own agenda.

This was happening "not only during the campaign period but also before it", Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, told Hungarian journalists in Brussels. The Hungarian government does not expect anything good to come out of Wednesday's European parliamentary debate, "obviously a political campaign, part of a witch hunt against Hungary", he said. "There's nothing, no new event, that justifies putting Hungary back on the agenda by the European Parliament," he said, adding that Hungary's government would not be represented in Brussels at the debate accordingly.

Kovács said that ever since the Hungarian government had adopted a strong position on the issue of migration, procedural issues related to justice and rule of law had been launched against the country. "How is it possible for European institutions, and the European Commission in particular, to shape the rules to meet their political role and purpose?" he said.

KOVÁCS: TIMMERMANS 'PROBLEMATIC'

Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, singled out European Commission first vice-president Frans Timmermans for his political role and opinions, which he added were not only problematic in terms of the European Parliament election campaign but also when it came to the workings of the commission itself. Timmermans, the left-wing's Spitzenkandidat for EC president, "is one of the most vocal advocates against Hungary for procedures that are obviously there for political reasons," Kovács told a news conference. "Hungary is making its case because it thinks European Union institutions should not be allowed to be occupied by the left wing and Soros organisations," he said, referring to billionaire George Soros.

In an international press conference, Kovács said that Soros, who had never received a democratic mandate, had made himself an active political actor, tripling his support for NGOs. Such organisations that back leftist political forces are gaining influence in Europe's political life, he said.

Kovács said Hungary found it regrettable that European institutions were becoming the backdrop to a political campaign. Hopefully, he added, the May EP elections would result in the European Commission no longer remaining a political institution.

FIDESZ CALLS ON 'PRO-MIGRATION MEPS' COUNTRIES TO TAKE IN AHMED H.'

Since pro-migration MEPs have been campaigning on behalf of Ahmed H., who has been convicted under Hungarian terrorism laws for inciting a riot on the Hungary-Serbia border in 2015, "they should take in" the Syrian, Fidesz's communications director said. Balázs Hidvéghi told a news conference in Budapest that he had written a letter to two dozen MEPs who had demanded the release of Ahmed H. a few months ago. He insisted these MEPs had defended "terrorist" Ahmed H., and they had even appeared in a campaign photograph for one of the organisations linked to billionaire George Soros. "If they care so much about his freedom, they should lobby their government to welcome Ahmed H. into their country," he said.

The people in Brussels who supported Ahmed H. generally occupied Liberal, Socialist, Green and Communist EP seats and had campaigned for "mass migration". They were also "on Soros's list of trusted allies" in the European Parliament, he insisted.

Hidvéghi said he had written to Dutch Green MEP Judith Sargentini among other pro-migration politicians. "[She] is Soros's main ally ... and continually attacks Hungary for its refusal to become an immigrant country." He said his letter would also be received by German Alliance '90/

The Greens MEP Ska Keller, "known for wanting to build migrant villages in eastern Europe", and Anna Gomes, a Portuguese MEP who blames Hungary for the failure of the EU migrant quota system. Also Malin Bjork, a Swedish Left Party and the European United Left-Nordic Green MEP, will receive his letter because she maintains that it would "not only be possible but also very welcome" were the country to receive a few thousand migrants, he said. She is also among those who would withdraw funds from EU member states that refuse to accommodate migrants, the Fidesz politician said.

The Syrian migrant spent 40 months in prison for inciting a riot in 2015 on the Hungary-Serbia border. He was released from prison on Jan. 19 after serving two-thirds of his term, taking into account time spent in pre-trial detention. Under the same ruling, he is to be expelled from the country upon his release. A government spokesman said on Jan. 19 that Ahmed H. will remain in detention until Hungary can reach an agreement with Cyprus, his former place of residence, concerning his return.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, POLAND AGAINST UN MIGRATION COMPACT 'BROUGHT THROUGH BACK DOOR'

Hungary and Poland object to the United Nations migration compact and similar European Union plans being "brought in through the back door" by being inserted into various EU and UN

documents as separate paragraphs, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Polish Interior Minister Joachim Brudziński in Warsaw. It was a big disappointment to “both the international liberal political elite and a network supported by [US billionaire] George Soros” that last December 40 countries refused to vote in support of the UN global compact for migration, Szijjártó said. As a result, “these circles” lost the opportunity to create a new international legal precedent to force even those countries that oppose migration to become target countries for migrants, he said. Both Hungary and Poland voted against the compact, and thanks to their cooperation within the Visegrad Group, the mandatory migrant settlement quota was withdrawn from the EU agenda, Szijjártó said. These successes aimed at stopping migration generated “a desire for revenge by EU and UN bureaucrats,” he said. In addition to “taking revenge on central European countries for the failure of the mandatory migrant quota and the unenthusiastic reception of the global migration compact”, they keep trying to bring back the issue “through the back door”, he said. There has been a “clearly noticeable effort to revive the [pact] by inserting separate paragraphs into various UN and EU documents,” in order to create an international legal point of reference, he said.

Commenting on his talks, Szijjártó said he and Brudziński had agreed that the two countries would join forces to prevent attempts to revive either the migration package or the mandatory

migrant settlement quota. He added that both Poland and Hungary were against plans to strip individual countries of their powers over border protection. “We insist that border protection ... must remain one hundred percent within nations’ sphere of authority,” he said. “Only we can decide whom to allow into our countries and whom we want to live together with,” he said, adding that he had agreed with Brudziński to continue providing humanitarian help to countries that are sources of migration. They highlighted the importance of supporting persecuted Christian communities, and they also agreed to better coordinate on aid work, he added.

During his visit to Warsaw, Szijjártó also met Rafal Milczarski, managing director of Polish national airlines LOT, and Andrzej Adamczyk, the minister of infrastructure. Talks are in an advanced stage on LOT launching short- and long-haul flights from Budapest, and “some serious announcements” are expected concerning these plans in the next few weeks, he said. The talks with Adamczyk focused on speeding up preparatory work on a Budapest-Warsaw fast rail link, he added.

ORBÁN CONFIRMS GOVT COMMITMENT TO STRONG HUNGARIAN FIRMS, SUCCESSFUL TOWNS

The government considers strong Hungarian firms and successful towns key conditions for the country's stable future, Prime Minister Viktor

Orbán said at the inauguration of a water fowl processing plant in the southern Hungarian town of Mélykút. The latest facility of Hunent will have a daily capacity for culling 50,000 ducks or 25,000 geese. Over half of the 40 million euro investment project was financed by the Moscow-based International Investment Bank (IIB) while the government contributed 4 billion forints (EUR 12.6m). The fowl abattoir will create 350 jobs. The plant will help Hungary keep its place as the second largest producer of quality duck meat in Europe, trailing only France, Orbán said. A robust national economy needs both multinational and Hungarian companies, the prime minister said, adding that “we will be satisfied only when Hungarian companies will be the stronger.”

István Kiss, the head of Hunent's board of directors, noted that the company currently has 700 employees and a revenue of 20 billion forints. Hunent is also planning to build another processing plant until 2020, he said.

IIB board member Nikolai Kosov said that the Mélykút plant is one of the most cutting-edge plants in the Hungarian farm industry and as such, an “excellent example of a good investment”. It will help Hungary expand trade relations, he said.

PRESELECTION OF LEFT-WING MAYORAL CANDIDATE STARTS IN BUDAPEST

The preselection of the left-wing opposition candidate for mayor of

Budapest has started and will run through February 3. The two candidates, Csaba Horváth of the Socialists and Gergely Karácsony of Párbeszéd, will compete during this week but on Sunday they will sign “an alliance for the future” with other parties, civilians and Budapest voters, the Socialists’ Budapest president Zsolt Molnár told reporters. Budapest Mayor István Tarlós of the ruling Fidesz party has many supporters but “it is far from impossible to defeat him”, he said. The municipal elections, especially the election of the Budapest mayor scheduled for this autumn, will be crucial because the opposition will have a better chance in the 2022 parliamentary elections if it wins in Budapest this year, he added. Molnár asked Budapest’s residents to support Horváth but added that after Sunday the Socialists will fully support whichever candidate wins the preselection.

LMP MARKS HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Discrimination and aggression are no solution, the opposition LMP party said in a statement on Sunday, marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in 1945. Human dignity should be protected not only from physical aggression but from the harm caused by written and verbal abuse or political propaganda, the statement signed by co-leaders Márta Demeter and László Lóránt Keresztes said.

GKI RAISES 2019 GDP GROWTH FORECAST TO 3.4%

Economic research institute GKI has raised its projection for this year’s GDP growth to 3.4% from 3.2% in a forecast released in December. GKI expects EU transfers to continue to grow in 2019, but puts investment growth at only around 5%. Hungary’s government projects the economy will grow 3.9% this year, the latest forecast by the finance ministry shows.

STRIKE IN HUNGARY FORCES AUDI TO PAUSE PRODUCTION IN INGOLSTADT

German carmaker Audi has been forced to pause production at its headquarters in Ingolstadt because of a strike in Hungary, a company spokesman confirmed for broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk. Audi is shutting down production in Ingolstadt on Monday and Tuesday because its base in Győr, in north-western Hungary, has stopped delivering engines. Audi uses just-in-time production and its inventories are not large, the broadcaster noted.

The Audi Hungária Independent Union (AHFSZ) started a week-long strike over wages on Thursday, bringing production at the plant in Győr to a “practical halt”. The union is demanding a wage increase of at least 18%.

STATE ACQUIRES 20% STAKE IN ÓZD STEELWORKS FOR EUR 30M

The Hungarian state has acquired a 20% stake in Ózd Steelworks, in north-eastern Hungary, from Germany’s Max Aicher group for more than 30 million euros, Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics announced. The majority owner of the Ózd Steelworks is investing 60 million euros in the company to boost efficiency and broaden the production palette to include higher quality, more complex output, Palkovics said. The state’s acquisition of equity in the company ensures the security of the existing 500 workplaces at Ózd Steelworks and could create more jobs, he added.

ORBÁN: INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT BANK IN HUNGARY ‘SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT’

The establishment of the International Investment Bank’s headquarters in Budapest was the main topic of discussions between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Nikolay Kosov, the IIB’s President, at the prime minister’s offices in Budapest. Kosov briefed Orbán about the bank’s activities and future plans, the PM’s chief communications officer, Bertalan Havasi, told MTI. He noted that IIB member states unanimously voted to relocate the bank’s headquarters

to Hungary and authorised the bank to sign the relevant accord at a board meeting last December. The establishment of the headquarters in Hungary will strengthen Budapest as a financial centre, he said, adding that currently there are five supranational development banks in the European Union, but none are based in the central European region. "The IIB's move to Budapest can be seen as a significant step forward," Havasi said.

GULYÁS: GOVT, MUNICIPALITY AGREE FUNDING DEAL FOR BUDAPEST THEATRES

Budapest theatres run by the municipality will receive fixed government funding this year to make up for funds lost due to the abolishment of the financing system dubbed "tao", under which companies donated a part of their corporate tax for cultural purposes, the head of the Prime Minister's Office and the mayor of Budapest announced at a joint press conference. Gergely Gulyás said Budapest Mayor István Tarlós "fought" for increased funding for the 11 theatres run by the municipality. The

government will provide 3.5 billion forints (EUR 11m) and the municipality will have the freedom to allocate the funding. Gulyás pointed to general public agreement over abuses in the "tao" system. This will be replaced by "a clear, regulated and transparent system," he said. Theatres received 2.6 billion forints in 2017 under "tao" and an estimated 3.3 billion last year, he noted. Tarlós said the government had guaranteed this year's funding and this arrangement would endure "as long as I'm in office".

In response to a question concerning funding for other theatres, Péter Fekete, state secretary for culture of the ministry of human resources, said negotiations with provincial theatres, alternative theatres, puppet theatres and other types of theatre were ongoing. Alternative theatres would, he said, receive the financing they need to operate.

FARM MINISTER: EC PROPOSAL TO CUT RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING 'UNACCEPTABLE'

The European Commission's proposal to cut funding for Hungary's rural

development by more than 26 percent during the next EU budgetary period is "unacceptable", the farm minister told the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels. István Nagy told the body that in order to tackle tasks faced by Hungary's farming sector and maintain the level of investment funding required to preserve its competitiveness, the current level of EU funding must be maintained in 2021-2027, the farm ministry said in a statement. The meeting adopted a joint statement signed by 17 EU member states calling for the maintenance of current funding levels.

The EC's proposal for rules Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rules would set stricter requirements for farmers which, Nagy said, cannot be met if subsidies for them are cut simultaneously. At the meeting, EU farm ministers continued to debate the implementation of new CAP rules. Nagy said Hungary would only accept a deal that guarantees a simplified system ensuring the fastest and smoothest payment of subsidies to farmers.

A decision on the next EU budget, including CAP funding adjustments, is expected to be taken by the European Council this autumn.