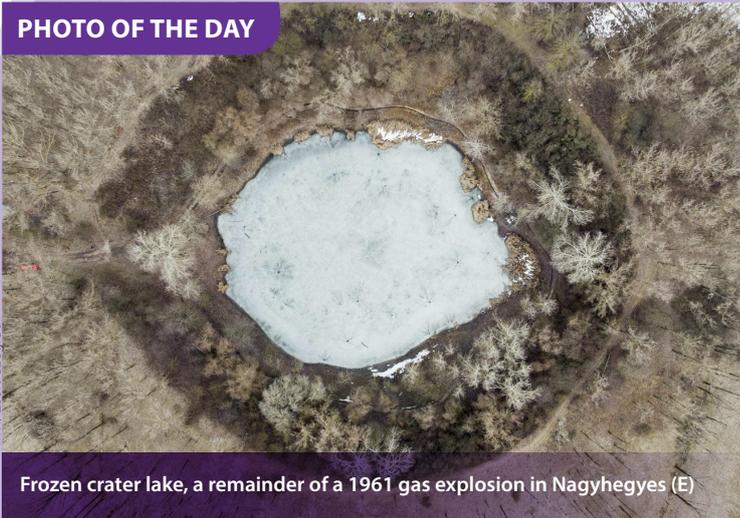


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zsolt Czeglédi

Frozen crater lake, a remainder of a 1961 gas explosion in Nagyhegyes (E)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Defence Minister Tibor Benkő presents 2018 assessment

Budapest Airport presser on ongoing, planned developments

Avatar: Discover Pandora exhibition shown first time in Europe

Stats office first estimate on retail trade in Dec 2018

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: BRUSSELS 'LIE' REVEALED

"Pro-migration leaders in Brussels have again been found siding with the United Nations Global Migration Compact," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels.

"They want to pass the package despite nine EU members voting against it," Szijjártó said after a meeting of foreign ministers of the EU and Arab League. "Plans have been made both in New York and Brussels to have components of the pact passed, failing the package being adopted wholesale". "Hungary does not support the migration compact and has made clear that it will resist any subsequent attempt to adopt it," Szijjártó said. The Hungarian government "will not talk about migration as something to be handled as if there were no security considerations," the minister said. Hungary, he added, "will carry on refusing to conspire to bring back the UN compact through the back door."

Concerning a draft of the meeting's closing statement, Szijjártó said the migration compact "cannot be incorporated". "It would only trigger another wave of migration and neglect the rights of those who want to live peacefully in their own country." Szijjártó added, however, that the EU should cooperate with the Arab League in a number of areas to promote security, stability and economic development.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: COOPERATION NEEDED TO PREVENT TERRORISTS ENTERING EUROPE

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó called for strong border protection and close cooperation between the EU and Arab League to prevent members of the Islamic State terrorist organisation from entering Europe. Citing a forecast, Szijjártó said that the population of the Arab states was expected to grow from 398 million in 2015 to 520 million by 2030, and said that countries in Africa and in the Middle East should be helped keep their people at home. "If we don't succeed, Hungary will be subjected to a significant security risk," he said. Hungary, as a Visegrad group member, is cooperating with Tunisia and Libya in border protection, and is also pursuing its Hungary Helps scheme to assist persecuted Christians. Hungary has financed hospitals and schools in Syria and Iraq, and provides scholarships to students from Arab countries, Szijjártó added.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the foreign minister had bilateral talks with his counterparts from Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Lebanon and Palestine.

GULYÁS: HUNGARY ATTACKED FOR IMMIGRATION POLICY

The European Parliament election campaign is not the forum to chew over the politically motivated Article 7

procedure launched against Hungary, a government official said in Bucharest. But, in this respect at least, European Union presidency-holder Romania "does not lack good will" towards Hungary, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said. After meeting George Ciamba, the Romanian minister for European affairs, Gulyás said Article 7 had been launched against Hungary by pro-migration forces in European Parliament who disfavoured the country's policy on migration. "We're hopeful the May [EP] elections will bring about a shift in power relations ... [and] the procedure won't last long," he said.

The standpoints on migration of Romania and Hungary are similar, he said, adding that illegal migration "should be prevented". A key goal of the Romanian presidency is to join the Schengen area with no internal border controls. For this reason, Hungary's view is the Schengen issue should not be linked to other preconditions, he said. Gulyás said several salient issues of direct relevance to Hungary were on the Romanian EU presidency's agenda, some with overlapping Hungarian-Romanian interests, such as the budget for the next seven-year EU cycle. Cohesion and farm subsidies should not be reduced and monies lost due to Brexit should be compensated for by increased in-payments by member states, he added. "It's also clearly in our common interest that no tension between southern and central Europe should emerge to impede adoption of

the budget," he said. "So we believe that the budget proposals on the table are not suitable to be accepted at this point." "But it's not a matter of indifference which of the most important issues are decided when, and these issues must be defined during Romania's presidency," Gulyás said.

Meanwhile, Gulyás noted that he and Hunor Kelemen, the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ leader, had discussed preparations for EP elections. "We hope the RMDSZ will be strongly represented in the EP while Hungarian representation in the EP also strengthens within the [European People's Party]," he said.

KOVÁCS: ALL ELEMENTS OF HUNGARY'S POLICIES FOLLOW FROM ANTI- MIGRATION STAND

Every element of Hungarian government policymaking follows from its anti-migration standpoint, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, said. The driving force behind Hungary's economic strategy is that the economy should not depend on migration but on capturing local resources available in central Europe, he told Hungarian and British media in the Hungarian embassy in London. Hungary does not plan to address the demands of its labour market by "making use of the several hundred thousands of outsiders who turn up every year", he added.

Kovács said the Hungarian government's standpoint on almost every issue connected to the European Union and public life in Hungary leads back to the issue of migration and how the resulting problems are tackled. Decisions made in areas such as demographics, social institutions, social measures and institutional policies follow from the government's clear anti-migration position, he said, adding that Hungary's era of cheap labour is bygone and its government is creating an employment environment that caters to high value-added production and high-level skills.

Kovács said that whereas it was possible to address labour shortages and the resulting structural problems by employing migrants, there was a better solution in the form of fostering an environment that helps Hungarian families bring up more children. "This is the path we have chosen." In the past eight years, the Hungarian government has developed a system where the support granted to families exceeds 4% of GDP, he said. Kovács added that this was among the highest within the OECD group of developed countries.

Commenting on recent amendments to the labour code, he insisted that these were fully in line with European norms. In most western European countries, the top limits and recommendations for overtime work exceed the levels included in the Hungarian law, he said. Accusations that the amendments are anti-worker and unusual in western Europe "are simply lies and lack any factual basis",

he added. The protests of recent months in Hungary have been part of the European parliamentary election campaign. Surveys show that Hungary's opposition is more fragmented than ever and the parties are responding to their need to attract attention to themselves. They have zeroed in on a single issue and found a wayward way of demonstrating, he said.

FIDESZ: 'PRO-MIGRATION' POLITICS TO COMPROMISE EUROPE'S SECURITY

Europe's "pro-migration politicians will destroy the continent's security," János Halász, parliamentary spokesman of ruling Fidesz, said in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. Europe "is increasingly suffering from the fallout of migration," he insisted, adding that "wherever migrants have appeared, there is a threat of terrorism, violence, crime and anti-Semitic attacks in succession". "Still, the European Parliament's pro-migration majority and the European Commission's pro-migration leadership are churning out more and more proposals to increase migration," he added. The upcoming EP elections will be a "fight between pro-migration and anti-migration forces", Halász said. He called EP president candidate Frans Timmermans George Soros's man" and insisted that "if it is up to Timmermans and other pro-migration politicians, Europe will be flooded by migrants and Europe's security will be destroyed for good".

COURT RULES TEN GUILTY FOR RED SLUDGE DISASTER

A court has found ten people guilty in a retrial of the 2010 red sludge disaster. In the Győr court's non-final ruling, eight were sentenced to prison, six of them receiving suspended terms. The managing director of Mal Zrt, the company that operated the red sludge reservoir which burst and flooded three villages near Ajka, was sentenced to two years and six months. The technical deputy managing director received two years. In addition to six suspended prison sentences, one person was fined and another reprimanded.

The disaster on October 4, 2010 claimed ten lives and resulted in two hundred injuries and hundreds of buildings became unsuitable for accommodation.

CZEGLÉDY INDICTED FOR BUDGETARY FRAUD

The Csongrád County Prosecutor's office indicted left-wing politician and fixer Csaba Czeglédy for budgetary fraud to the tune of six billion forints (EUR 18.9m). Czeglédy and twenty others were charged with operating a network for fraudulent invoicing in connection with student employment company Human Operátor between 2011 and 2017. Nine of the accused have entered a plea deal with the authorities, the prosecutor's office said.

Czeglédy was earlier charged with financial fraud and forgery of public documents. He was put in pre-trial detention in July 2017 which was changed to house arrest in December 2018. Czeglédy was a local government representative in Szombathely, in western Hungary, representing Éljen Szombathely-Socialists-DK-Együtt. He also worked as a lawyer for the Democratic Coalition (DK) party and the Socialists.

Ruling Fidesz lawmaker Gyula Budai said that the indictment was proof that “the opposition is full of corruption issues” and “the Socialists are still covering up for” Czeglédy. Budai told MTI that he was still waiting for a response from DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány about what “dirty work” Czeglédy had done for them and for Altus, a company owned by Gyurcsány’s wife. Neither has a response been forthcoming as to who received the 6.2 billion forints which, Budai said, had ended up in the party coffers of the Socialists and DK, funding their various campaigns. Czeglédy may know some secrets which could sully Gyurcsány, his party and the Socialists if they were revealed, the Fidesz lawmaker added.

VARGA DISCUSSES STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC TIES WITH KAZAKHSTAN

Hungarian Finance Minister Mihály Varga held talks in Kazakhstan with Kairat Kelimbetov, head of the Astana International Financial Centre, on strengthening the two countries’ economic ties. The centre was opened along with the Astana International Stock Exchange, in 2018, to boost financial cooperation between countries of the Eurasian Economic Union, China, Mongolia, the Middle East and Europe. It offers great opportunities to Hungarian financial and economic players, and has a chance to become an important tie between central Asia, China and Europe, Varga said.

Hungary’s Eximbank supports Hungarian companies in Kazakhstan with a 420 million euro credit line. Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown dynamically since 2016, with trade in goods jumping nearly 40% in January-October 2018, surpassing 600 million dollars. There

is significant demand for Hungarian pharmaceutical and chemical products and cooperation in water management also has great potential, Varga said.

MATOLCSY: HUNGARY TO ADOPT EURO ‘IN COMING DECADES’

Hungary will adopt the euro “in the coming decades” and needs to learn from the lessons of the past concerning the processes affecting the common currency, National Bank of Hungary (NBH) governor György Matolcsy said in a presentation delivered at the central bank’s annual Lamfalussy Lectures. An entirely “mature euro” is necessary for the common currency to be able to withstand future crises, Matolcsy said, noting that when the euro was introduced, Europe was enjoying prosperous times and there was no thought of another economic crisis.

The NBH organises the Lamfalussy Lectures each year to honour Sándor Lamfalussy, the Hungarian-born “father” of the euro.