

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Szilárd Koszticsák

Helicopter crew tactical trainer (HCTT) inaugurated in Szolnok (C Hungary)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**PM Orbán delivers state-of-the-nation speech**

**DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány addresses party congress**

**Opposition parties stage joint demonstration in front of PM's new offices**

## TOP STORY

# GULYÁS SLAMS EC VP FOR 'DOUBLE STANDARDS'

The head of the Prime Minister's Office has slammed Franz Timmermans, first vice-president of the European Commission, for remaining in his post while campaigning to become commission president.

Timmermans "plays the role of chief European Union official" while he is at the top of the "Socialists' pro-migration [EP election] list", Gergely Gulyás said at his regular press briefing. He insisted that applying those "double standards" was a result of "customised legislation" in the EU, and said as an example that the head of the secretariat of Hungarian MEPs in Brussels would be required to suspend his position if he were fielded in the election.

Gulyás said Timmermans enjoyed "revenues equal to 44 million forints (EUR 138,000)" while "promoting the pro-migration list". Concerning an upcoming visit by Timmermans to Budapest, Gulyás said the commission's first vice-president would be "witness to a wedding between the Hungarian post-communist Left and anti-Semites".

Earlier this week, the Hungarian government called on EC President Jean-Claude Juncker to withdraw Timmermans from the work of the commission for the duration of his campaign.

## **GULYÁS COMMENTS ON POMPEO'S FORTHCOMING VISIT**

Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, said that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's Monday visit to Hungary would be a major event. He told a press briefing that the United States is Hungary's "greatest ally in NATO". He added that Hungary has "no similar alliance with Russia but a reasonable business partnership with it is in the interest of the whole of Europe".

Answering a question, Gulyás said it was "no surprise" that Pompeo's agenda includes meetings with "organisations also financed from the US". According to press reports, Pompeo will meet leaders of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) and the Helsinki Committee.

## **GULYÁS: PM TO ROLL OUT FAMILY PROTECTION ACTION PLAN ON SUNDAY**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will roll out the government's action plan aimed at assisting families in his state-of-the-nation speech on Sunday, the head of the Prime Minister's Office told a press briefing. Gergely Gulyás said the government scheme "has had a history and if possible, it will be continued". He said that the country's economic achievements since 2010 "have made it possible for the central budget to contribute more and more towards family support" and allow for further

tax incentives for "those working and raising children". Gulyás also voiced hope that the government's measures would contribute to an increase in the number of births.

On another subject, Gulyás announced that the government has decided to buy out for 24 billion forints (EUR 75.2m) a building of Corvinus University funded through a public private partnership (PPP) scheme. Gulyás said this type of financing has proven to be "very expensive" and project costs are still being paid ten years after projects started. He said the cabinet has requested a summary on the continuing financial liabilities of the government from old PPP agreements.

Asked about the possible introduction of a code of ethics for lawmakers, Gulyás said he saw no need for imposing restrictions on the rights of MPs. He added, however, that last December, opposition lawmakers did restrict MP rights when they tried to disrupt the vote on the amendment to the labour code. Gulyás said that among such circumstances he did not see much of a point in introducing a code of ethics.

Commenting on the penalties proposed for the MPs who had disrupted the session, he said the actions of the opposition had been "significantly more serious" than something that could be settled by deducting one month's salary from them. He added the actions were "an attempt to prevent the normal operation of Hungary's constitutional order."

Commenting on a Venice Commission delegation collecting information in Budapest about public administration

courts, he said the Hungarian regulations fully stood the test of constitutional and international legal requirements.

He confirmed that the 2020 central budget is planned to be approved in the middle of the year, after the European parliamentary elections.

In reply to a question about the upgrade of the Paks nuclear power station, he said the project had suffered a one-year delay but it had no effect on its price.

Commenting on a legal dispute the Hungarian state had with the French voucher company Sodexo, Gulyás said Hungary would appeal the court ruling that imposed a fine on it but even if the appeal is rejected, it has been worth for the country to change its voucher system.

## **ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH FINA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed the various international aquatic sporting events to be hosted by Hungary over the coming years with FINA executive director Cornel Marculescu. The meeting held at the prime minister's office in the Carmelite monastery focused mainly on the FINA Champions Swim Series competition to be held at Budapest's Danube Arena on May 11-12. Parties at the talks agreed that Budapest has become an international hub of water sports. The meeting was also attended by Balázs Fürjes, government commissioner for major development projects in Budapest and international sports bids.

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## **PINTÉR: BORDER PROTECTION CRUCIAL FOR EUROPE'S SECURITY**

Hungary's position that border protection is crucial for Europe's security is being endorsed in more and more countries, Interior Minister Sándor Pintér said after a meeting of European Union interior and justice ministers in Bucharest. Illegal migration and protection of the Schengen borders are closely linked issues and "the idea is spreading within the EU that there is no point in talking about Schengen without protecting the external borders," he said.

The interior ministers agreed to raise the staff of EU border protection agency Frontex from the current 400 to 10,000 by the year 2027, he told Hungary's public media. In the first phase, a "robust" unit of 3,000 people will be on reserve in order to be able to assist member countries protect the external borders of the EU in case they need help, he added. "This is an opportunity to protect Europe's external borders and we support it (reinforcing Frontex)," Pintér said. Frontex, however, "must not harm the sovereignty of member states and must not arbitrarily take over border protection services" from any country, he added.

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## **BALOG ATTENDS NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST IN WASHINGTON**

It is important to have values spanning political divides, and Christianity is such

a set of values, Zoltán Balog, the prime minister's commissioner, told MTI, after attending the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington. Held every year on the first Thursday of February since 1953, the National Prayer Breakfast is hosted by the US Congress and attended by political and religious leaders from all over the world. "This was a gathering of people who ... work to put Christian values into practice at diverse areas of life," Balog said.

Balog said he had talks with Sam Brownback, the US Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom. They discussed the steps to follow the US-Hungarian cooperation agreement on helping persecuted Christians which the countries had signed last year, he said. Hungary held its own international prayer breakfast in 2017 and 2018 "with great success", with the Polish deputy prime minister and Brownback attending, Balog noted.

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## **LMP CALLS ON GOVT TO DRAFT CLIMATE LAW**

Green opposition LMP has called on the government to urgently prepare draft legislation on strategically important tasks resulting from climate change so that it can come before parliament in the spring season. Erzsébet Schmuck, the party's deputy group leader and head of parliament's sustainable development committee, said that the law should contain concrete aims and tasks designed to adjust to climate change and to reduce green-house

gas emissions. It should coordinate policies with the government's climate policy, and create a network of institutions and tools to fight climate change. Economic players and civil organisations should be included in the legislation process.

Hungary is one of the EU states most vulnerable to climate change, she said, adding that "everyone could feel" substantial rises in temperature in recent years and see that the country suffered from extreme weather and floods. The government has "put off action on climate change for years", and its climate strategy still envisages falling green-house gas emissions. In reality, Hungary's emissions have been rising by nearly 6% annually since 2014, she said.

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## **BUDGET POSTS HUF 244 BN SURPLUS IN JAN**

Hungary's cash-flow-based budget, excluding local councils, showed a 244 billion forint (EUR 764.5m) surplus in January, the finance minister said. "We're seeing one of those rare occasions of the past 20 years when advance payouts have left a surplus, rather than a deficit, in the budget," Mihály Varga told current affairs channel M1, commenting on the data. The deficit target for the full year is 998.4 billion forints.

Varga said tax revenues in January were 200 billion forints higher than in the same month a year ago. Hungary received transfers of more than 200 billion forints from the European

Union, and the government has made some 90 billion forints' worth of payments for EU projects, he said. The minister said the government's 1.8%-of-GDP deficit target for the full year, calculated according to EU accounting rules, was achievable.

### **HUNGARY TRADE SURPLUS REACHES EUR 398 M IN DECEMBER**

Hungary had a 398 million euro trade surplus in December, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data. The surplus narrowed by 173 million euros from the same month a year earlier. Exports rose by 2.7% year on year to 7.669 billion euros. Imports were up 5.4% at 7.271 billion euros. About 80% of exports and 74% of imports were traded with other European Union member states. For the full year 2018, exports were up 4.3% annually at 105.059 billion euros and imports rose by 6.9% to 99.018 billion.

The trade surplus for the period stood at 6.041 billion euros, down by 2.037 billion from the same period a year earlier.

### **DEFENCE MINISTER INAUGURATES HELICOPTER SIMULATOR IN C HUNGARY**

Defence Minister Tibor Benkő inaugurated a helicopter crew tactical trainer (HCTT) in Szolnok, central Hungary. The one billion forint (EUR 3.1m) investment was concluded with French cooperation, Benkő said, and is indispensable for the training of Hungarian soldiers. The minister expressed hope that the simulator will also contribute to training pilots from other countries.

### **HUNGEXPO TO GET 50 BILLION FORINTS UPGRADE**

The Hungexpo fairgrounds in the capital will undergo an almost 50 billion forints (EUR 156.6m) upgrade,

Budapest mayor Istvan Tarlós said in an interview in daily Magyar Nemzet. The project will involve eleven elements, Tarlós said, recounting decisions taken at the government's Wednesday cabinet meeting, in which which he also participated.

"It was also decided on Wednesday that our positions on matters affecting transportation in the project will be the final ones. That means that the capital will practically be in charge of shaping the public transportation developments," he added.

Tarlós noted that Hungexpo would host two big international events in the near future: the International Eucharistic Congress in 2020 and the World Hunting and Nature Expo in 2021. "These international events require the country and the capital to finish the investments on time. All this shows that the government sees the capital as a de facto partner in the Budapest development projects financed by the state," he added.