

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Castle of Hajnáčka in southern Slovakia with light reflected by interstellar dust

UPCOMING EVENTS

Szijjártó holds talks with U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo

Presser by state secretary of youth and family affairs

Hungarian- Austrian ministers of technology sign agreement

TOP STORY

ORBÁN ANNOUNCES FAMILY PROTECTION MEASURES

Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister, announced a seven-point family protection action plan in his state-of-the-nation address, saying this is "Hungary's answer [to challenges], rather than immigration".

Orbán said every woman under 40 years of age will be eligible to a preferential loan when they first get married. The preferential loan of the family home purchase scheme (csok) will be extended; families raising two or more children will now also be able to use it for purchasing resale homes.

Until now, the government has undertaken to pay off 1 million forints of families' mortgages for every third and subsequent child. Now, the government will pay off 1 million forints when the second child is born, 4 million forints after the birth of the third child, and another 1 million forints after the birth of every subsequent child, he said.

Women who have had and raised at least four children will be exempt from personal income tax payment for the rest of their lives. Families raising at least three children will be eligible to a grant of 2.5 million forints to buy a new car seating at least seven people.

The government will create 21,000 crèche places over three years. Grandparents will also be eligible to a child-care fee and look after young children instead of the parents, he said.

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



ORBÁN: ‘HUNGARIANS HAVE FAITH IN THEIR FUTURE AGAIN’

“Hungarians have faith in their future again, we have created a national consensus on the issue of family,” Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in his traditional state-of-the-nation address in Budapest.

“Neither the third two-thirds majority, nor the outstanding economic growth were given to us as a present, Hungarians have worked hard for both,” Orbán said. Politics and the economy are deeply related and the achievements “can never be attributed to blind luck alone”, he added.

Orbán noted that in 2009, towards the end of left-wing rule, “our shared assets, reserves and future possibilities had all been used up”. Hungary needed more than just crisis management, it needed a complete renewal, a new direction, he said. Today, the number of marriages is increasing, infant mortality has been reduced, employment has grown from 55% to 70%, unemployment has been reduced to one-third of its earlier level, incomes are growing, and the minimum wage has more than doubled. “Thanks to the joint efforts of the past ten years, Hungarians have faith in their future again”, Orbán said.

Addressing successful entrepreneurs, Orbán asked them to make investments abroad and repatriate the profits, which could offset the amount

of the profit taken out of Hungary. He said this could take at least ten years.

As regards the “trunk” of the country, who are neither poor, nor well-to-do, Orbán said these people expect to have work, security and a home. He listed the 800,000 jobs created, the doubling of the minimum wage, the family tax benefit, free school dinners and textbooks, the child-care fee available to working mothers, the centrally mandated utility price cuts, stable pensions, all the things benefiting these social groups that his government has introduced.

“However, the toughest nut to crack will be to help lift the hundreds of thousands struggling with poverty,” he said. Orbán said his government has undertaken to fight poverty, and Hungary is a place where everyone will benefit from being Hungarian, and step by step, with persistent hard work, “we will eliminate poverty”.

He said everyone will have work and a home, every child will have access to crèche, kindergarten, school, school dinners and textbooks, there will be support for young people, and a respectable old age for seniors.

Orbán said “our national pride has its economic foundations”. “By its population, Hungary takes 88th place among the world’s nations, but it is 34th in terms of its export volume. This is thanks to the performance of Hungarian engineers and workers”, he said. “We have answers to the challenge of the global economic slowdown and will not give up our plan that Hungary’s economic growth

should exceed the EU average by at least 2 percentage points every year. Our greatest achievements are yet to come, we have just got into the swing of it,” he said.

ORBÁN: ‘OPPOSITION BUNCH OF PRO-IMMIGRATION POLITICIANS’

In his state-of-the-nation address, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called the Hungarian opposition “a bunch of pro-immigration politicians who are kept on a respirator by [US billionaire] George Soros and the EU bureaucrats”.

He said “it is a kind of political pornography” that the Socialists and the extreme right have formed a coalition. “We have to hear that listing MPs of Jewish origin is not anti-Semitism and he who says this wants to become mayor of Budapest instead of sneaking away. We can only say that this is a shame,” Orbán said.

The prime minister said it is a shame on the whole of Europe that the international left wing supports this and sends its leader here to give his blessing for this political aberration. Resorting to physical violence and running riot in parliament, the politicians of the opposition coalition seem like comedians rather than political leaders, he said.

The prime minister said that thirty years after the change of regime, we have to again “stand by our nationhood, our Christianity, we have to protect our families, our

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.



communities and our freedom as well". He said "there are once again forces advocating open societies and a world without nations, "fabricating" a supranational global government, and these are still controlled from abroad. He called Brussels "the citadel of new internationalism" and immigration "the instrument of this internationalism".

He said Brussels has worked out a seven-point plan of action for turning Europe into a continent of immigrants after the EP elections. Orbán said Brussels wants to introduce mandatory migrant quotas and curb the member states' rights to defend their border. Soros made no secret of his plan to defend migrants, an effort hindered by national boundaries, he said.

The European Parliament has voted for introducing migrant visas and increasing support for pro-immigration organisations. Further, plans are afoot to fine member states that do not obey, Orbán said. "The target countries for migrants are witnessing the emergence of a Christian-Muslim world with a shrinking rate of Christians. But we, central Europeans, still have a future of our own," he said, adding that the government's immigration policy will remain stable.

The prime minister called the European left wing "a vanguard of speculators, an advocate of cosmopolitanism, global government and worldwide migration, and a gravedigger of nations, families and the Christian way of life."

Orbán said "the battle has become open since Soros put the Socialist

[Frans] Timmermans at the head of the pro-immigration forces and the list of pro-immigration politicians. ... But we are determined to halt the pro-immigration majority."

"We wish to see Europe respect the nations' decisions on their future and accept that we, central Europeans, wish to advance on the road we have chosen," he said.

Orbán noted that the birth rate keeps declining all over Europe and that the western countries have reacted to the challenge with immigration. "Immigration, however, would mean that we have laid down our arms."

Orbán noted that fully 1.382 million "national consultation" questionnaires on the government's family protection measures have been returned, and 80% of the respondents expressed support for the government's family policy.

**OPPOSITION PARTIES
CRITICISE ORBÁN'S
ADDRESS**

Speakers at a joint demonstration of the opposition parties criticised Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's state-of-the-nation address and challenged him on the state of democracy in Budapest. About 1,000-1,500 demonstrators gathered in front of the President's Office and the Prime Minister's Office in Buda Castle, with activists holding flags of the Socialist, DK, Jobbik and Momentum parties.

Zsolt Gréczy, parliamentary spokesman of the leftist opposition DK, said Viktor Orbán is Hungary's

dictator and Hungary's form of government is dictatorship. He said Orbán's state-of-the-nation address ignored the deceived foreign currency loan holders, pensioners who do not receive their pension on time, and young people who cannot go to university to continue their education.

Péter Jakab, spokesman of Jobbik, said Orbán had "thrown ten thousand people out on the street" in three years, and "turned his childhood crony into the richest man in the country". Jakab said the State Audit Office (ÁSZ) is sanctioning the opposition in order to prevent them from campaigning in the European parliamentary election and the municipal election, accusing Fidesz of preparing for election fraud.

Erzsébet Schmuck, deputy parliamentary leader of the green LMP, said Orbán had made a huge mistake by adopting the "slave law" because this meant turning against Hungarian workers. She said the prime minister had announced his family policy measures because he had realised that he could not win the European parliamentary election by constantly talking about migrants.

Anett Bósz of the Liberals told her audience they needed to give courage and faith to those who were "trodden on" by the government, and to rebuild the rule of law and democracy.

Socialist MP Ildikó Borbély Bangó said members of the next generation will only be able to have a better life than their parents if they leave their country to study and build a future for themselves abroad.



Balázs Nemes, spokesman of Momentum, said “hope is spreading” because “the Fidesz regime has already failed in the capital”, and first major cities, and later smaller towns will follow suit.

Independent MP Bernadett Szél said Orbán wants to see “a stupid country with dumbed-down subjects”, this is why he chased away the country’s best university and enchains the others or converts them into private universities that “only his cronies can afford”. “The Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded by the greatest Hungarian and the smallest Hungarian wants to put it in the grave,” she said.

Protesters marched over to the headquarters of the State Audit Office to continue the demonstration. Representatives of the opposition parties said the governing Fidesz party is trying to use the office to hamper their activity by administrative means. At the end of the demonstration, protesters placed stickers with the words “Fidesz party headquarters” on the entrance of the ÁSZ headquarters.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR ACCELERATING WESTERN BALKANS’ EU INTEGRATION

Hungary and Romania, holding the EU’s rotating presidency, support giving a boost to the Western Balkans’ European integration, which also lies in the EU’s economic and security interests, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary’s

foreign minister, told Romanian news channel Digi 24.

Szjijártó, who attended an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Bucharest last week, said he would be optimistic if progress in this field only depended on the Romanian EU presidency. The majority of western European nations, however, share the EC president’s standpoint that there would be no enlargement in the coming five years, he said.

The central European countries have learned from their own experience that NATO and EU integration helped a lot in alleviating tensions between them, he said. This is why they press for accelerating the EU accession talks of Serbia and Macedonia.

“Serbia is crucial for the stability of the Balkans. Opening a chapter or two each year for negotiations is not adequate encouragement. But we should encourage and make it clear for them that it is worth focussing on accession as any other scenario would strengthen anti-European sentiments, a development all of us want to avoid,” Szijjártó said.

Asked about the EU procedures launched against Hungary and Romania for violations of the rule of law, Szijjártó said it would only make sense holding sober discussions on the issue if the European Commission once again operated in line with its original mission, as a technical body and a “guardian of the Treaties” and gave up its ambition of acting as a political organisation.

Frans Timmermans, who is attacking Hungary on political grounds on behalf of the European Commission, is Spitzenkandidat of the pro-migration European Socialists and a key player in the EP election campaign, Szijjártó said.

“Is there anyone who believes that if a government has violated the rule of law for eight years, it is still elected into power with a large majority in three consecutive elections as Fidesz was re-elected last spring? Such attacks are insulting Hungarian voters because they carry the message that the European institutions do not consider them mature enough for assessing developments in their country and making a decision on their future,” Szijjártó said.

He said these attacks are in fact targeted at Hungary’s firm anti-immigration policy. Today, the sharpest divide in Europe is not between East and West but in the assessment of migration, therefore, the future of the continent will also be determined by the outcome of the upcoming European election: whether those supporting or rejecting immigration will gain majority in the European parliament, Szijjártó added.

“The next European parliament, which will have a very different composition to the current one, will have to provide answers to the real questions facing us - migration, the fear of terrorism, Brexit, Europe’s energy supply,” the foreign minister said.



GYURCSÁNY CALLS REBELLION “PATRIOTIC DUTY”

Rebellion is a “patriotic duty” for those who are “fed up with the Orbán regime”, Ferenc Gyurcsány, leader of the leftist opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), said in Budapest.

“One who wishes to live as a Hungarian patriot in this world should revolt,” Gyurcsány said in a keynote speech assessing the past year. The judge who rejected to convict the homeless and the physicians and nurses who quit the Military Hospital which is in “dismal condition” and prefer to turn to the public were right to revolt, he said. Gyurcsány said that individual revolts would only succeed if the community as a whole will also revolt. “Last autumn brought hope; the country began to show resistance, maybe even to revolt,” he said.

Gyurcsány said he would not have thought that the demonstrations against the “slave law” would bring together first the opposition parties inside parliament, and later those outside it as well the way they did.

He admitted that the parties that are now trying to cooperate have a “complicated past”, but added that “I am less interested in the road than in the goal itself”. Gyurcsány said he does not expect anyone to arrive unblemished when joining this fight because the goal is to create a European, democratic and civic Hungary. When this has been

achieved, the parties that fought for this goal together will be able to clarify their differences under democratic circumstances, he said.

“[Viktor] Orbán’s government may be politically successful, but historically it is disgraceful and doomed to failure,” he said. Gyurcsány said that the politician who is unwilling to sign international agreements on the ways of solving the refugee problem wants to keep it unresolved which he thinks would help him remain in power.

The ex-premier said the European parliamentary election would be crucial. It will depend on its outcome whether Europe will be strong and serve the interests of its citizens, as envisaged by the policies of French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, or become a continent that is trying to scare its own population and lock itself up, as envisioned by Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini and Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orbán. “If the latter becomes reality, member states would sooner or later turn against each other, unleashing first trade wars, and later different ones”, Gyurcsány said.

Gyurcsány is a blatant liar, said Máté Kocsis, head of the ruling Fidesz party’s parliamentary group, commenting on the speech. Kocsis said Gyurcsány obviously cares only about money and power and will not refrain from either inciting violence or cooperating with an extremist, anti-Semitic party. He called DK the most vocal representative of the pro-immigration policy in Hungary.

OVER 80% OF HUNGARIANS SUPPORT GOVT FAMILY POLICY

Eight out of ten Hungarians are in favour of the government’s family support policy solutions, according to a fresh survey by pollster Nézőpont. The survey was conducted in November 2018, based on telephone interviews with 1,000 people.

The results show that 81% of respondents agree with placing family policy into focus, 68% support the government’s family home purchase subsidy scheme and 69% are in favour of giving more support to families. The institute said the family home purchase subsidy scheme is appreciated not only by large families; 67% of respondents younger than 18 years and 74% of families with a single child consider it a commendable initiative.

Advocating a turnaround of demographic trends can be considered a non-partisan cause as a significant majority of both left-wing and right-wing voters agree with increasing support for families, Nézőpont said.

NOVÁK: HUNGARY, US TO COOPERATE IN FAMILY POLICIES

Hungary and the United States are going to cooperate in family policies, Hungary’s state secretary for family and youth affairs said after talks with senior US officials in Washington.

Katalin Novák said that her negotiating partners - Garrett Grigsby, director of global affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services, and his chief adviser - showed keen interest in Hungary's family policy, appreciated its value-based approach, and offered cooperation. The two countries will organise a joint family policy conference in Washington in March, with Hungary outlining its taxation policies promoting families, she said.

Both countries reject the UN recommendations entitled Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, which would make abortion a general practice, Novák said. Hungary and the United States agree that access to abortion is an internal affair of each country, an issue that should not be regulated globally, she said.

MEP WINS SUIT AIMED AT DECLASSIFYING PAKS UPGRADE AGREEMENTS

The appeals court of Budapest has upheld a first-instance ruling in favour of Párbeszéd MEP Benedek Jávor, who sued the Hungarian government and Russia's Rosatom company to make agreements concerning an upgrade project of the Paks nuclear plant public, Jávor announced on Facebook. Jávor hailed the ruling as a "great victory helping Hungarian citizens to public information".

The appeals court's ruling will help reveal details of the

Hungary-Russia agreement signed in 2014, such as how much it would cost Hungary to terminate the contested deal, how much damages Russia could claim and "what technological, financial and legal construction" was set up to implement the project, he said.

Jávor said he had filed the suit in 2017 after the government, the Paks 2 project company and Rosatom refused to disclose even those documents that had not been officially classified. Jávor added, however, that he had doubts whether the government and Rosatom would disclose the requested documents and appeal to the supreme court against the recent ruling.

TRÓCSÁNYI: HUNGARY OPEN TO DEBATE ON STATE OF RULE OF LAW

Hungary is open to any debate on the status of the rule of law in the country, but these debates ought to be based on professional arguments rather than politically motivated accusations, the justice minister said in Bucharest, following an informal meeting of EU justice ministers.

László Trócsányi told Hungarian public media that he held bilateral talks with EU Justice Commissioner Vera Jourova, as well as with the EU affairs minister and the senate leader of Romania, which currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

Trócsányi told his negotiating partners that Hungary's government rejects double standards applied against the country and calls for a debate that is not politically motivated concerning the EU's Article 7 procedure launched against it.

The justice minister said he had met Hunor Kelemen, the head of the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party, to discuss preparations for the upcoming European parliamentary elections.

JOBBIK TO START SPRING PARLT SESSION WITH STRONG, UNITED GROUP

Conservative Jobbik will be represented in parliament by a strong and united group faithful to its creed during the spring session and will act in a similar spirit throughout 2019, the opposition party's group leader said, wrapping up their meeting in Mátrászentlászló.

Assessing the three-day meeting, Márton Gyöngyösi told reporters in nearby Gyöngyös that those were wrong who expected that ruling Fidesz's "intrigues" and fines by the State Audit Office (ÁSZ) would drive Jobbik "into depression".

The lawmakers agreed that the party will fight against Fidesz's "semi-feudal and dictatorial rule" in parliament and out in the street, Gyöngyösi said.

Jobbik will continue to represent Hungarian national interests and offer "an alternative" to Fidesz's policies, he said, adding that the

party was prepared to take “rather unconventional” actions.

The participants discussed the “exorbitant ÁSZ fines” of around one billion forints levied on the party, Gyöngyösi said, adding that they would seek to pay it in instalments. Jobbik will at the same time file a lawsuit with the European human rights court in Strasbourg and the European court in Luxembourg over the matter, he said.

The meeting approved that Jobbik will field a list of its own for the May EP elections and publish the names of their candidates soon, the group leader said, adding the party had already finalised its programme.

JOBBIK PROPOSES FREE BANK TRANSFERS FOR CUSTOMERS WITH AVERAGE OR LOWER INCOME

Conservative opposition Jobbik will initiate making basic bank transactions free for customers with an average or lower income, MP Dániel Z Kárpát said in Budapest.

Z Kárpát said research conducted by the National Bank of Hungary confirms that banking costs in proportion to income are the highest in Hungary in a European comparison. He said it was alarming that among people with a

lower income, German and Spanish account-holders pay one-third and Danish customers about one-fourth of Hungarian banking costs in proportion to their income. Therefore, Jobbik would like to see bank transfers and other basic transactions offered free of charge at least to customers with an average or lower income, and proposes that the government and the central bank should strive to reduce banking fees in general.

Jobbik believes the government should also take action in order to stop evictions, Z Kárpát said, noting that over 10,000 Hungarian families were evicted over the past three years due to “abuses” by financial institutions.