

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Pruning grapevines near Villány, southern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATO defence ministers meet in Brussels

Stats office releases 2018 construction figures, Dec industrial output data

Parliament's budget committee meets

President hosts dinner in honour of Franciscan monk Csaba Böjte's 60th birthday

TOP STORY

ORBÁN ADDRESSES YOUNG SCIENTISTS

The prime minister called for joint efforts to promote Hungary's academic reputation and competitiveness in an open letter to young scientists who have recently voiced their disapproval of the government's planned changes to the science academy.

The scientists, all winners of scholarships in a government programme that helped them return to Hungary from other countries, had said in their earlier letter to Viktor Orbán that "the current changes, implemented without meaningful consultations and the uncertainty arising from it will destroy the basis for Hungary's innovation potential in the long term". Signatories to the letter called on the government to suspend the "rushed and ill-considered" changes to research and innovation financing.

Orbán said that "we are on the same foundations: we all seek the benefit of Hungarian science and that of the Hungarian people." He added, however, that "the academic community and the government may see certain issues from different viewpoints and may have different approaches". Concerning the planned changes, Orbán argued that "increasing the value added of domestic industry is not possible unless research institutes concentrate their resources both in basic research and innovation" and said that scientists would be provided state financing for "clear-cut areas" of research.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: FAMILY SUPPORT SOLUTION TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES, NOT MIGRATION

Unlike Brussels, Hungary and Bulgaria believe that the answer to demographic challenges is family support rather than migration, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Bulgaria’s deputy prime minister, Mariana Nikolova. “We will never allow them to force us to change this approach,” Szijjártó told a joint press conference. He said Hungary and Bulgaria were in agreement regarding the most important issues and Bulgaria continued to be Hungary’s strategic ally in terms of European issues.

Hungary and Bulgaria maintain friendly relations, he said, and it is important to further develop these. The two countries have faced many similar challenges in the recent period and have given similar responses to them, he added. Both countries faced economic, security and demographic challenges and the responses by both governments have been successful, he said. The two governments are in agreement that migration is not the right response to demographic challenges, and these should be solved through family support, Szijjártó said. Increasingly value-added jobs are being created in Hungary, and last year was the first time that the rate of Hungarians returning from abroad outpaced emigrant workers, he added.

Hungary and Bulgaria are also in agreement that it is every state’s responsibility to protect its own borders and guarantee the security of its citizens. The protection of external borders is a priority for both countries, he said. Bulgaria employs serious border protection infrastructure to protect the EU’s external border and Hungary does the same, he added. Building a fence has proven a successful response to security challenges in both countries, he added. Szijjártó noted that Bulgaria is not a Schengen member, and he lamented that despite the fact that Bulgaria has been able to protect its borders, it has been denied membership of the area. At the same time, there are Schengen member states that have been unable to protect their borders, he added. Cooperation between Hungary and Bulgaria in border protection will be maintained, Szijjártó said. Last year, 44 Hungarian police served on the Bulgarian-Turkish border and Hungary also provided technical help for Bulgaria, he added. Neither Bulgaria nor Hungary voted in support of the United Nations Global Migration Compact because it carries the threat of further waves of migrants, he said.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said it was important that Hungarian companies carry out significant investments abroad. OTP Bank is poised to become one of the largest players on the Bulgarian market and pharmaceuticals company Richter is involved in increasingly widespread activities. Cooperation between Hungarian and Bulgarian companies has

been helped by a 165 million euro credit line offered by Eximbank, he added. Concerning talks about the next seven-year EU budget, both Hungary and Bulgaria insist that cohesion resources should continue to play an important role, he said.

Nikolova said Hungary was an important partner, and she expressed thanks for the support Bulgaria received from Hungary for its Schengen membership endeavours, as well as help to stop the wave of migrants on the Bulgarian-Turkish border, an external European Union border.

Hungary-Bulgaria ties are characterised by “dynamic dialogue”, Szijjártó said, adding that cooperation both at the bilateral and European level was “broad”. Hungary and Bulgaria share standpoints on major issues such as the situation in the Western Balkans and the EU’s cohesion and farm policies, he said. Noting that Hungary is a major business partner of Bulgaria’s and one of the country’s largest investors, Nikolova called for a further tightening of economic ties.

Answering a question, Szijjártó said Hungary wants to beef up the protection of its strategic facilities and is planning to buy an intermediate air-defence missile system. He added that “talks will soon enter the final phase” but said that it was necessary that parliament’s defence committee “make legal conditions and processes for the purchase simpler”. He also said it was “too early to talk about sums”.

Szijjártó also said that talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in



Budapest on Monday had not touched on either Hungarian or US domestic affairs and focused instead on bilateral cooperation as well as “international developments that could influence it”.

SCIENCE ACADEMY EMPLOYEES STAGE PROTEST AGAINST REORGANISATION

Employees of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) on Tuesday staged a demonstration at the Academy's building on Budapest's Széchenyi Square to take a stand for the Academy's unity and autonomy, and protest against government plans to reorganise its structure and funding. The demonstration was timed to coincide with MTA's board meeting scheduled to decide on the academy's approach to the government's plans, Emese Szilágyi, of the organiser Forum of Academic Employees (ADF), told MTI.

Adrienn Szilágyi, an employee of MTA's Institute of History, said that the innovation and technology ministry's plan to fund the academy fully from tenders is “actually an austerity measure ... that will thwart the operation of the Academy and lead to its collapse”. “We understand that reforms are necessary but not without the consent of MTA employees and not to their detriment,” she said. The ADF aims to preserve the Academy's professional and financial independence, she said.

MTA President László Lovász met the demonstrators in front of the building to

receive a document protesting against the planned changes. After speeches by psychologist Csaba Pléh and linguist István Kenesei, the protesters formed a human chain around the building.

At a press conference in December 2018, Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics said that the structure of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences had stayed the same over the past 80 years. The ministry had been tasked with redefining allocations for research and redesigning the entire system, Palkovics said. “Top researchers, rather than institutions, should be supported financially,” he said. “Changes under way have nothing to do either with the Academy or its network's independence since all of the latter body's rights are enshrined in the constitution”, he said.

Meanwhile, ethnic Hungarian leaders of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj (Kolozsvár), Romania, which boasts a long-standing tradition in Hungarian-language courses and has many Hungarian students, issued a statement together with the Romanian national institute for ethnic minority research, expressing concern over the planned changes. Some hundred people staged a silent protest in front of the Hungarian Consulate-General in Cluj on Tuesday.

ORBÁN TO PROPOSE MATOLCSY AS NBH GOV FOR ANOTHER TERM

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will propose György Matolcsy for another term as governor of the National Bank

of Hungary (NBH), the PM's press chief said. Matolcsy's six-year mandate as NBH governor ends on March 3, 2019. The NBH governor is appointed by the president of Hungary based on the proposal of the prime minister, after a hearing before a parliamentary committee. There is a two-term limit for NBH governor.

KOVÁCS: POMPEO'S BUDAPEST VISIT 'HISTORIC'

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Budapest on Monday was “historic” and “the beginning of a new era”, a top Hungarian government official has said. Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, on a three-day official visit to the US capital for talks with Republican and Democratic party legislators and government officials, gave a lecture on Hungarian domestic politics and on the upcoming European Parliament elections to American journalists in Washington, DC. Kovács noted the similarity of US and Hungarian approaches to the issue of illegal immigration. “The anti-migration stance of central European countries derives from our historical experiences,” he told MTI. “Sovereignty is highly important to us.” NATO, he added, is of key importance for Hungary. Hungary is increasing its financial contribution to NATO and is preparing to develop its military strength, he added.

Meanwhile, commenting on the European Parliament elections, Kovács

said left-wing parties on the continent were ready to “hitch up” with the far right. He said this was also true in Hungary, as the left wing was about to form an alliance with Jobbik, “which always has been anti-Semitic and xenophobic”. “Jobbik has turned into a pro-migration party and has decided to work with the left,” Kovács said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME, BILATERAL TIES IN MOLDOVA

Hungary supports the EU’s Eastern Partnership programme that covers Moldova as well, the Hungarian foreign minister said in Chişinău on the sidelines of high-level talks with Moldovan officials. Péter Szijjártó met President Igor Dodon, Prime Minister Pavel Filip, Foreign Minister Tudor Ulianoschi and House Speaker Andrian Candu to discuss EU-related and bilateral affairs.

The Eastern Partnership programme must be based on mutual respect without allowing it to be used as a means to interfere in the participating countries’ domestic affairs, Szijjártó told MTI by phone. The minister called Moldova a highly important partner for Hungary, one that can serve as a link between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union. The Hungarian government respects Moldova’s policy of giving priority to its national interests, he said, adding that Hungary will help Chişinău in setting up a network of foreign affairs institutions.

Moldova’s newly established Diplomatic Academy and Hungary’s

Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade signed a cooperation agreement during Szijjártó’s visit.

Concerning economic and financial issues, Szijjártó expressed the Hungarian government’s disapproval of Brussels’ decision to suspend its Macro-Financial Assistance to Moldova. Hungary at the same time supports that Moldova be granted observer status in the “16+1” cooperation between central Europe and China, the foreign minister said. He said that under an agreement concluded in Chişinău, Hungarian companies will carry out development projects in water management with Chinese funding. The minister said that Hungary’s exports to Moldova first exceeded 100 million euros last year.

HOLLIK: SOROS PROMOTES COOPERATION BETWEEN ‘PRO-MIGRATION’ FORCES

US financier George Soros has again “attacked” Hungary in a recent article “because the Hungarian people decided that they would not allow Hungary to be turned into a migrant destination”, the government spokesman said. István Hollik said that the article, entitled Europe, Please Wake Up, is a call for cooperation between “pro-migration forces” and the author “seeks to see a Soros list everywhere in Europe including Hungary”. Hollik insisted that Soros’s goal has remained unchanged: “he still wants to force his will upon Europe and the Hungarian people and he wants to settle migrants”. For Soros, that will be

at stake in the European parliamentary elections, and “for us that we should not give in to that pro-migration pressure”, the government spokesman said.

HUNGARY REJECTS EC PROPOSAL ON QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING FOR TAX POLICY

Hungary rejects a proposal by the European Commission to adopt qualified majority voting to clear some elements of European Union tax policy, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said after a meeting of EU finance ministers in Brussels. Hungary does not support proposals that restrict the sovereignty of member states’ tax policy, Varga said. Ministers at the meeting in Brussels exchanged views on the EC’s communication “Towards more efficient and democratic decision-making in EU tax policy” which suggests a roadmap for a progressive and targeted transition to qualified majority voting in certain areas of EU taxation policy.

LMP: GOVT’S STRATEGIC PARTNER BREAKS LAW WITH IMPUNITY

The opposition LMP party has said it is “unacceptable” that a multinational company which has a strategic partnership with Hungary’s government “is breaking Hungarian laws” and making trade union endeavours impossible to carry out. The Hungarian Suzuki company last week laid off a worker just after he had been elected

secretary of a newly formed trade union of metalworkers. Antal Csárdi, a lawmaker of the green party, said that it was not the first time that Suzuki had fallen foul of Hungarian laws and he demanded that the government respond to the company's alleged transgressions. He said that without the enforcement of worker rights there will be no demographic turnabout. Meanwhile, addressing criticism of LMP's readiness to cooperate with nationalist party Jobbik, Csárdi said Jobbik was undergoing major change and it was time "to stop demonising Jobbik". It is necessary to work with them, he added.

BUDAPEST CORVINUS UNIVERSITY TO MAINTAIN FREE COURSES

Corvinus University of Budapest will continue offering tuition-free courses, the university's chancellor said. A Corvinus scholarship will be created from the assets of a foundation that will take over the university, enabling tuition-free study, said Lívia Pavlik, who is also ministerial commissioner at the ministry of innovation and technology. The government has already decided on the new model and, accordingly, the Maecenas Universitatis Corvini Foundation will be set up to take over the operational rights of the university, Pavlik told public current affairs channel M1. The university will not operate as a budget-financed body and this will enable it to better adapt to market conditions and react to new challenges, she added. Plans are for the foundation to take over the

university from July. The government and the university's management expect this will make operations more effective and standards higher, ultimately leading to Corvinus belonging to the top 100 European universities, she said.

EU CITIZENS IN HUNGARY CAN VOTE FOR HUNGARIAN PARTY LISTS

In the European Parliament (EP) elections, European Union citizens resident in Hungary may vote for Hungarian party lists. The National Election Office has informed the citizens concerned that they may apply to register in Hungary by May 10. In Hungary, elections can only be held on Sunday, so the EP vote is expected to be held on May 26. Almost 113,000 EU citizens residing in Hungary have already informed the election office of their intention to vote in Hungary in the EP elections instead of their home country. EU citizens in Hungary have been informed in English, German and French that if they want to vote for a Hungarian party list, they may register in person or by letter at their local electoral office. The application can also be submitted online at www.valasztas.hu.

INFLATION STEADY AT 2.7% IN JAN

Consumer prices in Hungary grew by an annual 2.7% in January, in line with rate of inflation in December, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Headline CPI earlier slowed from 3.1% in November

and 3.8% in October, which were above the National Bank of Hungary's 3% medium-term "price stability" target.

GUEST NIGHTS UP 1.6% IN DEC, UP 3.8% IN 2018

Guest nights spent in Hungarian commercial lodgings increased by 1.6% year on year to 1,903,000 in December, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Nights spent by domestic tourists went up 2.3% to 951,000 in December while those spent by foreign visitors inched up 0.9% to 952,000. Revenue increased by 6.7% to 38 billion forints. Average occupancy in hotels was 52%, up 0.4 of a percentage point from the same month a year earlier. Total revenue per available room (TREVPAR) at hotels climbed by 6.2% to 20,510 forints. In the full year of 2018, guest nights grew by 3.8% year on year to 30,914,000.

TEENAGERS TO ATTEND LANGUAGE COURSES ABROAD

Under a government scheme to improve the language skills of students, 140,000 9th and 11th graders will have the opportunity to attend language courses abroad for two two-week periods each year, the human resources minister told a press conference. Miklós Kásler said the scheme starting in the 2020-2021 school year will cost the central budget 90 billion forints (EUR 282m) per year, and would help young people "acquire practical language skills". State Secretary József Bódis

said both schools and individual students may compete for the scholarships.

AIRPORT NOISE POLLUTION TALKS UNDER WAY

Talks initiated by Budapest Mayor István Tarlós are under way concerning noise pollution in the vicinity of Liszt Ferenc International Airport, the ministry of innovation and technology said. Representatives of the metropolitan council, the ministry, Budapest Airport, HungaroControl and civil organisations have been involved in talks since January to assess possible measures aimed at meeting the demands of local residents affected by the noise, the ministry said in a statement.

Stricter regulations were introduced last year in line with European requirements. An infringement procedure against Hungary would have gone ahead without the changes, the statement added. "Thanks to the new regulations, noise from the airport is affecting smaller areas and fewer residents," the ministry said. Currently, however, the noise pollution is not shared equally between various areas and consultations are justified at the level of the metropolitan council to review various proposals, the ministry added.

HUNGARIAN TECHNOLOGY BEHIND GHANA WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

Hungarian technology is behind a new wastewater treatment plant

being built in Ghana, a foreign ministry official said. In Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city with a population of about two million, the cornerstone of the 10 million euro plant funded by Hungary's Eximbank was laid on Monday, said István Joó, a deputy state secretary of the ministry, said during a visit to Ghana. The plant has been designed and is being built by Pureco Kft. "This is a major success for Hungary, as Ghanaian investors ended up backing Hungarian technology amid strong competition" Joó said. The plant will help to improve the lives of more than 100,000 people from mid-2020. The company has also started talks on building further wastewater treatment plants, he added.