

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédy

Silver memorial coin marking the 175th anniversary of painter Mihály Munkácsy's birth

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foreign Minister Szijjártó meets Cape Verde counterpart

Stats office releases figures on 2018 wages, Dec 2018 retail

Budapest stand opens at Travel Expo

Lufthansa opens airplane parts repair centre in Budapest

House speaker meets Slovenian counterpart

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: TWO APPROACHES TO MIGRATION

"It has now become clear that migration can be approached from two entirely different directions," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told MTI in Istanbul on Wednesday, after a ministerial meeting in the Budapest Process forum.

At the conference, representatives of the European Commission "all did their best to highlight how good migration is for Europe" and insisted that further migration trends are needed, the minister said. Szijjártó said that "the unity of central Europe has again been demonstrated" adding that Austria and Italy joined the four Visegrad countries and declined to sign the meeting's closing document and its action plan.

Migration poses "further and extreme" risks for Europe, the minister insisted. He said former members of the Islamic State terrorist organisation recently had been arrested in Bosnia-Herzegovina and North Macedonia, calling those developments "alarming". He insisted that IS terrorists were returning to Europe "by the hundreds", increasing the threat of terrorism. "This must be stopped," he said. The situation in the Western Balkans is "more and more dramatic", Szijjártó said. He argued that currently there are 25,000 illegal migrants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while illegal migration to Greece has increased by one third.

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MENCZER: BUDAPEST PROCESS ISTANBUL ROUND 'BATTLE' BETWEEN SZIJJÁRTÓ, AVRAMOPOULOS

The Istanbul round of the Budapest Process interregional forum on migration witnessed a "battle" between Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and EU Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos, "George Soros's man", the state secretary for foreign affairs said. The foreign minister spoke up for the interests of Europeans, while the commissioner "solely promoted the interests of migrants", without saying a word in his ten-minute speech about the rights and security of Europeans, Tamás Menczer told MTI.

In his address, Szijjártó said that people passing through safe countries to reach Europe could not be considered refugees, adding that migration was not a basic human right. He also said that the security of Europeans comes first, Menczer said, adding that it was apparent that the EU commissioner, "a pro-migration extremist", was offended by the foreign minister's remarks and "threatened" countries that rejected cooperation with Brussels in relocating refugees in Europe. In his address, the foreign minister said it was extremely important that all decisions on migration must remain at the level of national sovereignty, and these decisions must be respected by other countries, Menczer said. Szijjártó also

said Hungary firmly rejected the policy that supports migration as a solution to the problems of population decline and a shortage of labour. Migration is the wrong response to these problems, Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary, however, respected the decisions of other countries and expected to be treated the same way.

CHIEF PROSECUTOR REJECTS COMPLAINTS BY LAWMAKERS

The chief prosecutor's office has rejected complaints made by lawmakers concerning their removal from public media (MTVA) headquarters after they staged a protest there last December. The deputies said they had been forcefully removed after attempting to have a declaration broadcast, and turned to the public prosecutor after their complaint was dismissed by the central prosecutor's office of investigations in January. The deputies insisted that they had entered the public media buildings in their official capacity and the security guards had acted unlawfully.

The prosecutor's office said in its justification of Wednesday's decision that "violence against an official person can only be committed if the person is acting lawfully". According to the prosecutor's office, the deputies had no legal basis to enter the building and its studios. Their action was "of a political nature", therefore "they are not entitled" to exemption from penal regulations, the office said, adding that

the security guards had acted "lawfully and in a proportionate manner" while the coercion they applied was "lawful and necessary".

On the night of December 16, a group of opposition MPs demonstrating against the passage of changes to the labour code entered public media MTVA headquarters and demanded that their petition be broadcast. After a sit-in for several hours, independent lawmakers Bernadett Szél and Ákos Hadházy were forcibly removed from the building by security staff.

The opposition MPs concerned have decided to file supplementary private charges. Szél said on Facebook that the prosecutor's decision had been "politically motivated" and "no meaningful investigation" had been carried out. Citing a legal opinion by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union NGO (TASZ), she said it was worth taking the prosecutor and the case to court. "In effect, we'll have to carry out the investigation, take on the role of prosecutor and bring the case to court," Szél said. "We have 60 days."

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY PASSES 2019 BUDGET

The municipal assembly of Budapest passed the city's budget for 2019. According to the budget decree, the capital will have revenues totalling 266 billion forints (EUR 837.8m), while total expenditure is expected to reach 380 billion forints. Under the decree, the difference should be covered from 25.3 billion forints left over from previous

years, a loan of 66.7 million forints as well as from domestic bond sales totalling nearly 28 billion forints. The city is also planning to repay 6 billion forints of its foreign debt. The assembly passed the decree with 20 votes for, 9 against and 1 abstention.

Gergely Karácsony, the left-wing opposition's contender to run Budapest, has said that this year's city budget is a testament to the capital's inability to finance its own operations. The Párbeszéd party's co-leader told a press conference in front of the Metropolitan Assembly that the budget was a "humiliation" for the city as its administration had only managed to fill the 67 billion forint hole (EUR 211m) by resorting to borrowing. Residents do not want the ongoing investments in Budapest that are deepening the hole, he added. A lot of money has been made available for the "Prime Minister's hobbies and misguided projects", yet the capital has been unable to launch developments using its own resources, he said. Several vital public services such as public transport, cleaning and car parks may deteriorate due to a lack of resources, he said, adding that Budapest residents were getting very little return on their tax contributions, he said.

Socialist councillor Csaba Horváth said the budget was a factor of Budapest's "continuing downslide". The city leadership is confronted by a 114 billion forint deficit this year in addition to a 67 billion loan to be taken

out after last year's deficit of 131 billion forints, Horváth said.

József Gál, a Budapest deputy of LMP, said Mayor István Tarlós had "failed" when it came to managing the city. "Budapest amasses a debt of 25 billion forints each year, the city's deficit this year will account for 67% of its revenues," he said. Gál also criticised the continuous increase in the cost of major investments, such as the upgrade of metro line 3, which would more than double in costs.

Marcell Tokody, a Budapest deputy for conservative Jobbik, said the budget showed that the city "is using up" its resources. The city will cover more than half of its 114 billion forint deficit this year by taking out a 67 billion forint loan, he noted, while revenues from the sale of investments in previous years will cover the rest, he said.

A councillor of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) said the assembly's 2019 budget showed that "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is still keeping Budapest on a respiratory machine, opening or closing off the oxygen tap as he pleases." The budget shows that the city does not have sufficient reserves to implement its own development projects and relies on state funding for investments, Erzsébet Gy Németh said. The fact that the city will be taking out a 67 billion forint loan contradicts Tarlós's earlier assertion that the city had cleared all its debt, she said.

SOCIALISTS SEEK TERMINATION OF EBRD AGREEMENT TO BENEFIT FOREX DEBTORS

The opposition Socialists have proposed that parliament should terminate an agreement between the government and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development signed in 2015 because its stipulations were aimed at "benefitting banks to the detriment of forex debtors". László Szakács, deputy leader of the Socialist Party, told a press conference that the contested agreement ensured that "banks would not suffer any losses" through the conversion of forex loans to forint ones, while paving the way for the eviction of mortgage borrowers in arrears.

On Tuesday, the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, threw out an earlier court decision which ruled in favour of a forex loan-holder, thereby annulling the complainant's loan agreement. Concerning the ruling, Szakács accused the court of disregarding the relevant domestic and European Union laws that protect loan-holders "against the formidable power of the banks".

Attorney László Ravasz, representing the Debtors' Chamber, said that the Kúria had "used all the procedural tricks at its disposal" to evade the issue of whether the bank had adequately informed its clients about possible risks. He insisted that neither Hungarian nor European law permitted contracts if the client was not adequately informed.

“The Kúria’s failure to examine that issue was unlawful,” he added.

ÁDER HOLDS TALKS WITH AUSTRIAN COUNTERPART

Economic relations between Hungary and Austria have intensified dynamically over the past seven years, President János Áder said after talks with his Austrian counterpart in Vienna. At a joint press conference with Alexander Van der Bellen, Áder noted that his first trip abroad as president had been to Austria. Several aspects of the two countries’ relations, including their economic ties, have progressed dynamically since then, he said. Austria is still one of Hungary’s major economic partners, Áder said, noting that it is the third largest foreign employer and investor in Hungary. Bilateral trade turnover was just under 11 billion euros last year, he added. Áder said he and Van der Bellen also discussed Hungary and Austria’s cooperation in fighting climate change. He said there are two forums scheduled for this year that will focus on the implementation of the Paris climate accord.

On another subject, the president said Hungary and Austria are divided over the use of nuclear energy. Whereas Austria opposes nuclear power, Hungary needs nuclear plants, Áder said, arguing that Hungary’s geographical characteristics differ from those of Austria. Áder pointed out to his colleague that both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN’s scientific body on nuclear energy

say that the goals of the Paris accords cannot be met without nuclear power.

He said they had also discussed the question of EU enlargement and the situation of the Western Balkans, adding that he and Van der Bellen were in agreement on the need to integrate the countries in that region into the bloc. Asked about the situation of Hungarians working and living in Austria, Áder said he wished all of Hungary’s neighbouring countries guaranteed the rights and living conditions to their minorities that Austria does.

Van der Bellen also noted the two countries’ close relations, stressing that it was in their interests to commit their futures to a strong European Union. He said there are 80,000 Hungarians working and living in Austria. Van der Bellen said both he and Áder were committed to fighting climate change. He thanked Áder for having been the first to support his proposals for combatting climate change at last year’s UN climate conference in Katowice. The Austrian president spoke highly of Hungary’s leading role in the EU in IT developments, noting, at the same time, the two countries’ disagreement on nuclear power. He promised that Hungary and Austria would jointly celebrate the 30th anniversary of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain.

Both heads of state were asked to comment on the Hungarian government’s recently launched media campaign on immigration. According to Austrian news agency APA, Áder declined to comment. “Many elections have been held in Hungary over the course of my

tenure in office (...) I have not commented on any campaign and I will hold myself to this again,” APA quoted the Hungarian president as saying. Van der Bellen said the claim that European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker supports illegal migration was “unacceptable”. He called on member states not to allow the emergence of new rifts during the European parliamentary election campaign.

PARLT OFFICIAL HOLDS TALKS ON CROATIAN EU PRESIDENCY, COOPERATION IN ZAGREB

With a vested interest in the success of the Croatian EU presidency in the first half of 2020, Hungary is prepared to share its related experience with Croatia, the head of the Hungarian parliament’s EU affairs committee said in Zagreb after meeting Croatian parliamentary officials. Richárd Hörcsik, an MP of ruling Fidesz, met Domagoj Ivan Milošević, head of the Croatian EU affairs committee, Deputy House Speaker Željko Reiner, Pero Ćosić, head of the committee for navigation, transport and infrastructure, and Zdravka Bušić, the state secretary in charge of preparations for the Croatian EU presidency.

Hörcsik stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between the central European nations “in the fight regarding the EU budget for 2021-2027”, noting that the EU is mulling cutting agriculture and cohesion funding. Hungary and Croatia should continue to cooperate within the

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Friends of Cohesion group to ensure that cohesion funds are not curbed, Hörcsik told MTI over the phone. Those monies are indispensable for the infrastructure projects planned in the region such as the development of border crossings, motorways and railways between the two countries, he said. Hörcsik confirmed that Hungary would be ready to support Croatia's accession to the Schengen area in 2020 once that country has met the professional and technical requirements.

SWEDISH AMBASSADOR SUMMONED OVER MINISTER'S REMARKS

The foreign ministry has summoned the Swedish ambassador to Hungary over recent remarks by Annika Strandhäll, Sweden's minister of social affairs, the ministry said in a statement. Strandhäll said on Twitter that developments in Hungary were "alarming". She said that the Hungarian government's latest family policies "reeked" of the 1930s and suggested that those policies affected "the independence women have fought for". In its statement, the Hungarian ministry expressed "outrage" at Strandhäll's accusation against the Hungarian government "of Nazism for helping families with children". "The pro-migration Swedish minister refuses to acknowledge that the Hungarian government is spending public money on Hungarian families rather than on migrants," the statement added.

NÉZŐPONT: HUNGARIANS SEE JOBBIK AS RACIST, ANTI-SEMITIC

Fully 43% of Hungarians regard the nationalist opposition Jobbik party as being racist, while 33% see it more specifically as anti-Semitic. Altogether 28% perceive Jobbik as Hungary's most radical party, according to a survey by the Nézőpont Institute. The report found that since last July, the number of people who think that Jobbik is characterised by anti-Semitism has risen by 10 percentage points, while those who see it as generally racist has gone up by 11 points. Nézőpont said this was probably due to "public scandals" that had enveloped the party in the past six months.

No other Hungarian political party reached the 10% threshold on the three questions. Fully 41% of left-wing sympathisers consider Jobbik to be composed of racists, while 33% of them see them as anti-Semitic. Thirty-six percent regard the party as radical.

Nézőpont said the strategy of left-wing opposition leaders of teaming up with Jobbik was dead on arrival since their sympathisers had a poor opinion of Jobbik. This is all the more the case in Budapest, where 44% of voters in the capital regard Jobbik as anti-Semitic and 50% as generally racist, according to the survey conducted with a representative sample of 1,000 voting-age adults between 25 and 29 January.

MINISTERIAL COMMISSIONER HAILS MEETING OF HUNGARIAN WEEKEND SCHOOLS

The government commissioner for Hungarian communities abroad has hailed the success of Hungarian Weekend Schools, a forum established last year for diaspora Hungarians that operates in parallel with the Hungarian Diaspora Council. In an interview to Magyar Nemzet on Wednesday, Péter Szilágyi noted that the weekend schools forum held its first meeting last year. The second meeting is taking place on Friday. Like the government's Kőrösi Csoma Sándor scheme, which aims to strengthen ties between Hungary and Hungarian communities worldwide, the new programme has helped to "revive" Hungarian diaspora communities, he said. "Families are willing to travel hundreds of kilometres to take their children to study at the weekend in [different] schools," he said, adding that it was the parents themselves who had taken the initiative before the custom became an official programme.

The secretariat for the policy for Hungarian communities abroad maintains contact with 200 such Hungarian schools around the world, Szilágyi said, adding that it is expected that some 110-120 participants from all over the world will attend Friday's event.

RED BULL AIR RACE ORGANISERS WEIGH MORE OFFERS AROUND LAKE BALATON

The organisers of the Red Bull Air Race have visited Zamárdi, on Lake Balaton, in their search for an alternative venue for this year's event, the town's mayor told MTI. The organisers negotiated with city leaders last week, and also met local officials from Fonyód, another city on the southern shore of Lake Balaton, said Gyula Csákovics. Visitors could watch the race from Zamárdi's 3km-long beach, while pilots could use nearby airports in Sármellék, Siófok or Szentkirályszabadja, he said. Hosting the race just a week after Balaton Sound, a music festival that draws tens of thousands of youth

to the same venue, wouldn't be a problem, "as that's what the high season is for", he added.

Budapest mayor István Tarlós recently said the capital would not issue a permit for the Red Bull Air Race, planned for July 12-14 of this year, because of "inadequate conditions", prompting a search by local organiser Hungaroring Sport for an alternative venue.

The city of Keszthely, on the south-west shore of Lake Balaton, has also indicated it would welcome the race in July, partnering with the neighbouring spa town of Hévíz.

TONY CURTIS EXHIBITION TO OPEN IN MÁTÉSZALKA

An exhibition of the personal effects of Hollywood star Tony

Curtis will open in August in the northeast Hungarian town of Mátészalka. Curtis was born as Bernát Schwartz in 1925 in New York, to Hungarian parents who emigrated from Mátészalka. He became a star of the silver screen, playing in over 140 productions including hits such as Spartacus, Some like it hot and Houdini. He received two Golden Globe awards and was once nominated for the Oscar prize. He received the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary, Officers' Cross, in 1996. He died in 2010. The material of the exhibition, consisting of about 20 household objects and paintings, was donated to Mátészalka by Curtis's widow, Jill-Curtis Weber, in 2017.