

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Balázs Mohai

Singer Joci Pápai, winner of the talent show "A Dal", will represent Hungary at the Eurovision song contest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Second day of EU-Arab League summit

Memorial day of the victims of Communist dictatorships

Szjijártó meets Slovak counterpart

Plenary session of parliament

TOP STORY

MURDERED ROMA REMEMBERED TEN YEARS ON

Staff of the Human Resources Ministry on Saturday laid a wreath at the graves of Roma murdered in Tatárszentgyörgy, in central Hungary, ten years ago.

Deputy state secretary for social inclusion Katalin Victor Langer laid the wreath with her colleagues from the Human Resources Ministry at the graves of Róbert Csorba and his five-year-old son. The two were shot fleeing their home which had been firebombed.

Six people were murdered in a spate of racially motivated attacks against Roma in nine communities in 2008-2009. Four men were convicted of the murders in January 2016. Three were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole and one to a thirteen-year prison term.

Commemorations for the victims were also held in Budapest. The organisers - Roma civil organisations, ethnic minority councils and activists - placed a memorial plaque in Budapest's Pope John Paul II Square. Afterward, they walked by torchlight to central Deák Square to attend a service for the victims in the Lutheran church there. János Pál Csóka, head of the Budapest Roma Ethnic Minority Council, said that the events of ten years ago were reminiscent of the Roma Holocaust "when our people were rounded up".

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GULYÁS DISCUSSES MIGRATION, EU AFFAIRS WITH SLOVENE OFFICIALS

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, on Friday discussed migration and the European Union's draft budget with Slovene officials in Ljubljana. Gulyás held talks with Foreign Minister Miro Cerar, state secretary for EU affairs Dobran Božič and Rudi Medved, the public administration minister. Gulyás said Slovenia supports the protection of the EU's external borders.

As regards the EU's 2021-2027 budget, he said that although Slovenia is a member of the euro zone, there are a number of areas and goals that the two countries can discuss with one another. On the topic of minority protection, he praised Slovenia's treatment of its Hungarian minority. Gulyás said Ljubljana was equally content with Hungary's minority policy. He said there was significant untapped potential in the two countries' economic ties, mainly in the area of infrastructure.

SEMJÉN, ETHNIC HUNGARIAN LEADERS SIGN DECLARATION ON COOPERATION IN EU

Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén and leaders of four organisations of ethnic Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin signed a declaration on cooperation within the EU, in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), in western Romania,

on Friday. Under the agreement they will jointly promote the interests of Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin in the European Union. They will also enforce the protection of the rights of indigenous minorities and press for the adoption of a European minority protection law. The agreement also calls for providing ethnic Hungarians satisfactory living conditions to keep them in their native land. It insists that the European Union should support this effort with growing rather than diminishing funds. The document was also signed by Hunor Kelemen for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), István Pásztor for Serbia's Vojvodina Alliance of Hungarians (VMSZ), József Menyhárt for Slovakia's Party of the Hungarian Community (MKP) and László Brenzovics for Ukraine's Hungarian Cultural Federation in Transcarpathia (KMKKSZ).

SEMJÉN HIGHLIGHTS COOPERATION BETWEEN RMDSZ, FIDESZ

Cooperation between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party's leader Hunor Kelemen is based on full trust but the alliance between RMDSZ and Hungary's ruling Fidesz party resulted from the will of Transylvania's ethnic Hungarian voters rather than from an accord between the two politicians, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said on Friday. "Nothing that weakens RMDSZ is acceptable", he said, adding that a weaker RMDSZ would no longer be

able to represent ethnic Hungarians efficiently in the Transylvanian municipalities and the Bucharest parliament. Turning to Romanian politicians attending the congress, Semjén said that neither RMDSZ, nor Hungary had ever demanded minority rights for which there are no precedents in the European Union. "If we accepted that some rights are due to others but not to ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania, we would accept that we are inferior to other nations. What is due to others is due to us, too. We ask you to understand that what we ask for is not extremity but normality," he said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: DENMARK OPEN TO COMPROMISE ON COHESION FUNDS IN NEXT EU BUDGET

Though Denmark is a net contributor to the European Union and supports cutting cohesion funds for the next EU budget, it understands Hungary's opposition to budget cuts and is open to a good compromise, state secretary at the Prime Minister's Office Szabolcs Takács said in Copenhagen after talks with Danish officials. Takács held talks with foreign ministry state secretary Jonas Bering Lüsberg, Vibeke Pasternak Jørgensen, chief advisor on EU affairs at the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the head of the Danish parliament's foreign affairs committee and the chief advisor to the finance minister. He told MTI over the phone that his discussions focused on the issues of migration and the next EU budget.

Takács said he told his negotiating partners that Hungary's priority as regards illegal immigration is the protection of the bloc's Schengen borders and stopping illegal migrants who try to reach Europe via the Western Balkans route. Hungary and Denmark agree on the importance of cooperating with sending countries and that this also has budgetary aspects, he said. Copenhagen, like Budapest, considers the mandatory redistribution of migrants across the EU to be a "misguided and unworkable" idea, he said. Takács highlighted the importance of the Danish parliament's Thursday decision to centre Denmark's migration policy on the repatriation of migrants rather than their integration into Danish society.

As regards the budget, Takács said he explained to Danish officials that Hungary does not consider cohesion funds to be humanitarian aid, as the older member states and western corporations also profit off them. He said his partners accepted Hungary's rejection of the European Commission's draft budget which would cut cohesion funding for the country by the maximum 24%.

ORBÁN TRAVELS TO EGYPT FOR EU-ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán left for Egypt Sunday morning to attend the first summit of European Union and Arab League leaders, the PM's press chief told MTI. Talks at the summit, to take place on Sunday and Monday, will focus on security,

migration and economic development, Bertalan Havasi said. Twenty-four heads of state and government from the EU are participating at the summit in Sharm El Sheikh. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk will also be at the meeting.

DOBREV TOPS DK'S MEP CANDIDATE LIST

The leftist opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has nominated Klára Dobrev, the wife of party leader Ferenc Gyurcsány, to lead its European parliamentary election list. DK managing director Csaba Molnár told a press conference that the party had full confidence in Dobrev's political abilities. Molnár, who himself is an MEP, also revealed the names of the top ten candidates on DK's election list. He himself is the second candidate, followed by DK spokesman Sándor Rónai. The remaining seven spots are filled by Attila Ara-Kovács, head of DK's foreign affairs cabinet, Jacint Horvath, a city councillor in Nagykanizsa, lawyer Mátyás Eörsi, Székesfehérvár city councillor Judit Földi Rácz, Győr city councillor Timea Glázer and Miklós Király, a university student. DK's other currently serving MEP, Péter Niedermüller, has decided not to seek another term, but will stay on as the party's deputy leader and will be in charge of its foreign policy, Molnár said. DK will decide on the rest of its candidate list at a later time, he added. DK seeks to win at least two mandates once again in the election, he said.

LMP TO FIELD OWN LIST FOR EP ELECTION

Green opposition LMP will field a list of its own candidates for the upcoming European Parliamentary election, with former MP Gábor Vágó at the top, party officials said. Members discussed at a party congress over the weekend campaigns for the Hungarian local council elections in the autumn as well as launching the campaign for the EP election in May, marking the party's tenth anniversary and laying out its strategy until 2022, party co-leader László Lóránt Keresztes said. In order to bring about "real change" and promote the party's environmental policy, local units of LMP are open to cooperating with any organisations at the local elections, other than the ruling parties and the radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) movement, he said. Keresztes said that LMP sees conservative Jobbik's shift towards becoming a people's party as authentic. As a consequence, anti-Semitic utterances have been brought to light, he added.

JÁVOR HEADS PÁRBESZÉD EP LIST

Párbeszéd MEP Benedek Jávor is heading the party's list for the upcoming European Parliament election, the party said at its congress on Sunday. At a joint press conference with Jávor on the sidelines of the congress, co-leader Gergely Karácsony said that Jávor is followed by former MP Dávid Dorosz

and co-leader Tímea Szabó on the list. The congress mandated Párbeszéd leaders to start talks with the Socialists on fielding a joint list of EP candidates, as the parties did in Hungary's parliamentary elections, Karácsony said. The alliance will welcome all pro-Europe forces, he said, but they accept the likelihood of the Socialists being Párbeszéd's only partners, he added.

Jávör said he will continue to represent values such as sustainability, transparency and justice in the EP. He vowed to be a "ruthless opponent" of the Orbán government, to do everything he can to stop the upgrade of Hungary's nuclear plant in Paks and to shine a light on corruption in Hungary.

This year's election in May will be more significant than usual, he said. The question is whether the EU will be able to strengthen cooperation within its own ranks or will shift towards disintegration, fragmentation and nationalist conflicts, as well as a regression to nation states, he said. Prime Minister Viktor Orban represents, in a single person, everything pro-Europe forces must stand up against together, he added.

SZILÁGYI: SURVIVAL OF JOBBIK AT STAKE IN EP ELECTION

The survival of Jobbik is at stake in May's European Parliament election, the conservative party's deputy parliamentary group leader and spokesman, György Szilágyi, said. Speaking after the party congress, Szilágyi said that winning enough votes

in the EP election would mean that (ruling) "Fidesz wouldn't dare to ban the party", which, he added, is currently the strongest opposition party. Szilágyi said Jobbik is fighting against a "dictatorship" which gets its power from "blackmail, corruption, accumulated assets, hands-on management of state institutions and its own media empire".

At the congress, the members adopted an amendment to the party's statutes that allows members to join another - still to be established - party parallel to their membership in Jobbik, "in justified cases" and with the express permission of the party leadership. Jobbik has recently opened 44 new offices and taken in 400 new members, and it aims to double that growth, Szilágyi said. Regarding cooperation with other opposition parties, Szilágyi said green LMP is the only party "Jobbik can see a closer cooperation with", but working with others on specific issues is unavoidable.

JOBBIK MP SAYS FIDESZ IS "ONLY CORPS ORGANISING IMMIGRATION" IN HUNGARY

An MP of conservative opposition party Jobbik believes governing Fidesz is the only "corps organising immigration" in Hungary. Anita Kőrösi Potocska said that data from the Central Statistical Office show that 86,000 immigrants arrived in Hungary in 2015-2017. She alleged that most of these entered the country using residency bonds, adding that immigration is "just business" for the government. She said Jobbik members had approved a declaration at the party

congress that the party would continue to fight even in the face of further attacks, similar to the sanctions levied by the State Audit Office. Jobbik is the only viable way out of the situation created under the current government, she added.

FITCH UPGRADES HUNGARY TO 'BBB'; OUTLOOK 'STABLE'

Fitch Ratings raised Hungary's Long-Term Foreign- and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings to 'BBB' from 'BBB-' at a scheduled review on Friday. The outlook for the ratings, two notches over the investment grade threshold, is 'stable'.

Fitch said a rapid external deleveraging was among the main drivers for the upgrade. It noted that Hungary's net external debt fell to an estimated 10.2% of GDP in 2018 from an average of 34.4% in 2013-2017, supported by consistent current account surpluses, stable net FDI inflows, and capital transfers from the European Union.

Finance Minister Mihaly Varga said Fitch Ratings' upgrade of Hungary can be added to the favourable feedback showing the economy is on the right track. He noted that the economy had expanded by 4.8% last year, three times the European average. "Now nobody can deny that the Hungarian economy is performing ever better and can continue to expand in the coming years," he added. The level of state debt relative to GDP is on a steady decline, the general government deficits are lower, the government is not privatising state assets, and the current account

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balance continues to show a surplus, he said. Hungary's economic growth, the government's economic policy, a disciplined fiscal policy, low inflation and the country's balanced position has led to the upgrade by Fitch, a week after another one by Standard and Poor's, he said.

Varga said Fitch had acknowledged a reduction in vulnerability, strong economic growth, a decline in public debt, low levels of FX debt, and an improvement in competitiveness in its analysis of Hungary. At the same time, the rating agency pointed out risks, notably signs of a slowdown in EU growth and challenges on the labour market, he added. Hungary's government has already acknowledged these risks and earlier started working on measures that aim to protect the economy, Varga said. The goal is reduce the unemployment rate further and to see wages continue to rise, he added.

INTERIOR MINISTER INAUGURATES PRISON COMPLEX IN 5 HUNGARY

The interior minister formally opened a prison complex in Kiskunhalas, in southern Hungary, in a ceremony on Friday. The prison, the first one built since 2003, meets high EU standards and has capacity to hold 472 male and female inmates, Sándor Pintér said at the event. Preparations to build another five prisons modelled on the Kiskunhalas facility are under way in an effort to ease overcrowding, he said.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS OPENS TECHNOLOGY CENTRE IN BUDAPEST

Oxford University Press (OUP) has announced the launch of a new

technology centre in Budapest. "We aim to expand the Budapest team to around 100 roles over the next 12-18 months, particularly focusing on IT professionals with skills in cloud systems, programming, and software testing amongst other things," OUP said. The publisher noted there is a "strong community of highly-trained developers" in the Hungarian capital. "We chose to build a new Technology Centre in Budapest due to Hungary's strong STEM focused education system and renowned technology community. The centre will support and develop our platforms and infrastructure, and enable us to evolve with our customers in a digital world," said OUP Director of Technology Graham Dear.