

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

New dam under construction near Hajdúszoboszló in E Hungary

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Foreign minister meets Serbian EU integration minister in Budapest**

**Mercedes-Benz Hungary gives presser on 2018, plans for 2019**

**Cbank Monetary Council's rate-setting meeting**

**Stats office releases demography figures for 2018**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN WARNS OF MIGRATION DANGERS

The root cause of current tensions triggered by migration is bound to grow, Hungary's prime minister said at the first EU-Arab League summit in Egypt.

Viktor Orbán said the key question was whether "we want to take control of these trends or suffer them". "The power of demographics should never be underestimated," he said, adding that migration would grow as the population of the Arab world increased by 30% between 2015 and 2030. "Human smugglers, terrorist groups, NGOs, financial speculators and the media" exercised "strong influence on migration policies" and thereby on European-Arab relations, he said. "We'd like to see legitimate political leaders jointly set the direction of future events; which makes our today's declaration extremely important." Hungarian policies are based on the principle that help must be taken to where the trouble is instead of spreading the trouble, he said.

Hungary is clearly aware of the extent of its influence and pursues its foreign policy accordingly, he said. "We support the EU taking a stronger role in handling regional crises and assisting crisis-hit countries," Orbán added. But aid should go to those capable of creating stability instead of allocating it on an ideological basis, he added.

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**ORBÁN: HUNGARY ACTIVE IN INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán noted at the EU-Arab League summit in Egypt that Hungary was participating in international missions in Lebanon, Iraq, Libya and the Sahel zone, and the Visegrad Four countries are providing joint financial support for Libya's border protection efforts. Hungary is also involved in a joint V4-Germany project to help Morocco. Hungary grants 1,400 scholarships a year to young people from Arab League countries, with 2,300 such students currently pursuing their studies in Hungary, Orbán said. "We hope they will return home to help their country."

Orbán expressed thanks to Arab leaders who provide protection to Christian communities suffering from persecution in their respective countries and regions and asked them to continue their efforts.

**SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS ON UN TO DITCH PRO-MIGRATION STANCE**

If the UN does not give up its "completely biased" stance on migration, the danger to Europe in the coming months will be "extremely serious", Hungary's foreign minister told the UN Human Rights Council and the Conference on Disarmament meetings in Geneva. In his speeches to the respective bodies, Péter Szijjártó

said that whereas the global coalition fighting terrorism, including Hungary, had ejected Islamic State from 98% of the territory it had occupied, this did not mean the terrorist organisation's demise, since it had adopted a new strategy of returning its mercenaries to the countries they came from.

Around 5,000 are EU citizens, he noted, adding that the interception of IS members in Bosnia and Macedonia over the past weeks was evidence of the IS strategy. Given that the Balkans is their preferred route back, countries of the Western Balkans and central Europe must staunchly protect their borders, he added. Szijjártó called on the United Nations to abandon its policy of supporting migration, otherwise IS terrorists smuggling weapons capable of massive destruction could ride a wave of migration to Europe. The minister also urged the disarmament conference to work towards its goals speedily so that arms do not get into the hands of terrorists.

**GOVT OFFICIAL: EC WANTS TO TURN EUROPE INTO 'IMMIGRATION CONTINENT'**

The European Commission's approach to handling migration, and its attempt to turn Europe into an "immigration continent", are diametrically opposed to the wishes of the government and people of Hungary, the state secretary for international communication and relations told a press conference.

The Hungarian government has addressed repeatedly the commission's "attempts to hide the plans and ideas" still on the table regarding illegal migration, Zoltán Kovács said. One such plan is debit cards for migrants, basically a system of support created by circumventing the most important decision-making bodies, he said. Over 60,000 received such cards this January alone, with the whole programme costing over 110 million euros, Kovács said. The system of debit cards "begs a thousand questions", and demonstrates a will to legalise illegal migration, he said. Other elements of the system are the concept of migrant visas and the mandatory resettlement quota, which are still on the agenda, he said.

The commission is holding its fifth European Migration Forum in April, he noted. Although the official focus is the integration of migrants already in the EU, the invitation still talks about safe and regular migration to Europe, he said.

Asked about the Croatian Peasant Party's announcement to leave the European People's Party "to escape the party alliance with, among others, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán", Kovács said the party in question was rumoured to want to join the Green parliamentary group. "If this is true, that says everything", he said. "The question is rather what they were doing in the EPP in the first place. "The government is not concerned about "turbulence" surrounding ruling Fidesz in the EPP, "because we speak the truth", Kovács said.

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**SOCIALISTS UNVEIL EP ELECTION MANIFESTO**

The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) seeks to promote a “cooperative Europe free from hatred”, which serves the interests of both European and Hungarian citizens, according to its European parliamentary manifesto published on Monday. Party leader Bertalan Tóth outlined the document entitled “Homeland, Love, Europe” at a Budapest press conference. Tearing apart a government poster depicting businessman George Soros and EC President Jean-Claude Juncker, the Socialist leader said his action was a demonstration of the kind of Europe the Socialists didn’t want to see. Ruling Fidesz has made some totally unfounded statements and stirred the deepest fears of the public to win EP mandates, Tóth said. The Socialists, by contrast, want to see a “human-centred social Europe” which makes people’s everyday lives easier, he said.

Tóth stressed the need for European standards in education and health care, and joint European rules for defending the interests of workers and trade unions so as to prevent the precedents of multinational companies “ordering” Hungarian legislation. Besides effective border defence, the Socialist leader called for the protection of human rights and Hungary’s accession to the European Public Prosecutor’s Office.

MEP István Ujhelyi said that fighting global challenges could only be successful if Hungary were part of

a united and strong EU. Those who work against this are “enemies of the country”, he added. Viktor Orbán’s government “is taking Hungary out of Europe and causing tangible damage to the country,” he said. Talks are under way about the EU’s next budget and how Prime Minister Viktor Orbán can possibly fight for Hungarians’ interests when “he is being disowned even by the European People’s Party”.

Another Socialist MEP, Tibor Szanyi, said that one of the main targets of the next EU term was to ensure that social rights are upheld. He called for a reduction of VAT and for greater gender equality. He also proposed the implementation of a scheme dubbed “smart villages” which aims to improve living conditions in rural areas with the help of digital technology.

Tóth confirmed that the Socialists are ready to run a joint list with the small opposition Párbeszéd party. In response to a question, he said they would sit down with Párbeszéd and finalise the list this week, which will then have to be approved by both parties.

In response to a question as to whether the Socialists would rather support the notion of European nation states or a united states of Europe, he said the party stood in the middle, believing in a united Europe which can improve the living conditions of its citizens. A united states of Europe would be an inconceivable idea due to Europe’s diversity, he said. For extremists and populists, however, a Europe of nation states simply means

complying with fewer and fewer EU regulations, he added.

**DK: GOVT BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN BREACHES CAMPAIGN FINANCING RULES**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) will turn to the State Audit Office (ASZ) over the government’s recent billboard campaign, the leftist party’s parliamentary group spokesman said, claiming the campaign broke campaign financing rules. Referring to posters depicting Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, and billionaire George Soros in connection with migration, Zsolt Gréczy told a press conference that the “unlawful” campaign cost taxpayers billions of forints. The government has said it is providing information to the public about the plans of Brussels, Gréczy noted. He added that since the billboards contained no information whatsoever, the government’s claim was groundless. The DK politician said that since the audit office had turned a blind eye to the matter, DK was turning to its president in connection with the campaign.

Fidesz in response said that DK represented the interests of Brussels in Hungary. “Brussels has ordered [DK leader] Ferenc Gyurcsány and the company owned by his family to attack the government’s campaign because it directly supports that company run by [Gyurcsány’s wife] Klára Dobrev, the



leader of DK's European parliamentary election list," Fidesz said in a statement.

## **JOBBIK: SZABADSÁG SQUARE WWII MONUMENT TO SOVIET SOLDIERS SHOULD BE RELOCATED**

Hungary's nationalist Jobbik party has called for the monument to Soviet soldiers who lost their lives liberating Hungary to be relocated from Szabadság Square, in central Budapest, to an unspecified military cemetery. János Bencsik, the head of Jobbik's Budapest chapter, told a press conference held in front of the obelisk that more than 100 million people had fallen victim to Communism. This is why activists had covered the monument in black drapes, he said. Hungary, he added, was turning away from the West and towards "despots in the east" instead of ridding itself of its communist legacy.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ CONFIRMS HUNGARIAN-SLOVAK ALLIANCE**

Hungary and Slovakia are not only neighbours but allies, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Miroslav Lajčák, his Slovak counterpart. "Over the past few years, both countries have worked hard to achieve this reality," he told a joint press conference in Budapest. Cooperation between the two countries on issues regarding the future of the European Union is robust, he said, adding

that both Hungary and Slovakia have stood up to illegal migration and the introduction of mandatory resettlement quotas. In the debates over the EU's 2021-2027 financial cycle, both countries claim that central European nations have a right to EU cohesion funds under the EU treaties, he said.

Currently Slovakia holds the rolling presidency of the Visegrad Group, the closest and most effective alliance within the EU, he said. Despite repeated attempts to break this, cooperation remains close, and in the past few weeks alone V4 members have demonstrated their solidarity many times, he added. Fast improving Hungary-Slovakia relations are beneficial to ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and also to ethnic Slovaks in Hungary.

Bilateral trade exceeded 10 billion euros last year and Slovakia is Hungary's third most important trading partner, Szijjártó said. An economic development programme for southern Slovakia, which is inhabited by many ethnic Hungarians, will be continued and transport links are being developed, with a new public road bridge in Komárom and a high-speed road link in Rajka to be opened next year, he added. Three new bridges will be built across the River Ipoly with the help of EU funding, and the relaunch of two discontinued railway links is being planned, he said. An honorary consulate will be opened in Nitra (Nyitra) and a vice-consulate in Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya), also

demonstrating that Hungary considers bilateral relations as highly important, he said.

Szijjártó expressed thanks to the Slovak parliament for the declarations they issued in protection of Hungary and Poland against procedures by Brussels, and for legislation stipulating signs to be displayed in Hungarian as well as Slovak at minor railway stations.

Lajčák said it was "a point of pride" for the Slovak government that ties with Hungary "have never been as good as they are today". There are no taboos in bilateral dialogue, which is beneficial both for citizens and for economic cooperation, he said.

In response to a question, Szijjártó said "we have an ongoing dispute with Jean-Claude Juncker", the president of the European Commission, but this is not a new development. Juncker is "implementing the Soros plan" for migration, and the commission has done everything in its power to introduce quotas and exercise pressure on sovereign states to become immigrant countries, he added. US billionaire George Soros and Juncker openly talk about these efforts and "we do the same ... not leaving the attacks unmentioned", Szijjártó said.

## **VARGA: ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS RECOGNISED EVEN BY FORMER CRITICS**

Hungary's economic achievements have been recognised even by those that used to be the harshest

critics, the finance minister said in parliament commenting on the country's recent credit ratings. Fitch Ratings raised Hungary's Long-Term Foreign- and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings to 'BBB' from 'BBB-' at a scheduled review last Friday, a week after Standard and Poor's improved its rating of Hungarian long- and short-term government debt to 'BBB / A-2'.

The trends projected by the ratings agencies coincide with the government's expectations, Mihály Varga said. He also noted Statistical Office figures showing that Hungary's economy expanded by 5% in the last quarter of 2018 while euro zone and Germany expansion slowed down. Hungary is among the leaders both in European and regional terms, he added. Last year's 4.8% growth resulted from an economic path that pushes growth in every sector, unlike during the Socialist-led governments of the past that achieved growth through privatisation, Varga said. Public debt has been reduced from 83% of GDP to under 71% while the number of workers increased to 4.5

million from 3.8 million in 2010, Varga said. Hungary's unemployment rate at 3.6% is among the four best in the EU, he added. Gross wages grew by over 11% last year and inflation stayed under 3%, which means that the good economic performance can also be felt by the public, Varga said. Among the tasks, the minister mentioned increasing competitiveness, expanding employment, reducing the public debt and strengthening families.

### **DAY OF VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM MARKED**

Politicians addressed commemorations held in memory of the victims of Communism.

Under a parliamentary decree, February 25 has been observed as a memorial day of martyrs of Communism since 2000. On this day in 1947, leader of the Independent Smallholders' Party Béla Kovács was illegally detained and deported to the Soviet Union.

Addressing a commemoration in the Budapest House of Terror

Museum, László Trócsányi, the justice minister, said that between 1945 and 1988, three-quarters of death sentences were politically motivated and more than 900,000 people were executed due to the distorted legal system. The actual number of people murdered was much higher, he added. Nor was the communist regime "sparing" when it came to prison terms, Trócsányi said, adding that all prison sentences put together came to 7-8 million months. Addressing a commemoration at the site of a former prison in Budapest, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said the time had come to declare, irrespective of political orientation, that communism was Hungary's "common tragedy". Communism, one way or the other, afflicted almost every Hungarian family, he said. "The Hungarian nation has learnt that madness is contagious, and if we are not careful there'll be a new epidemic," he said. Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said Communism was the dead end of civilization.