

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tamás Söki

The end-of-winter Busó festival in Mohács, in southern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foreign minister at event with F. Segura Hungária announcing investment in Szolnok

Stats office second estimate on GDP in Q4 2018

Matolcsy takes oath for second term as central bank governor

Govt official's presser on "March, month of caves" scheme

TOP STORY

ÁDER: NATO FACES NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES

NATO faces a variety of new security challenges, among them climate change, rising migration pressure and the increased threat of terrorism in Europe, the Hungarian president has said.

Speaking to Hungarian public media after a meeting of the heads of state of the Bucharest Nine (B9) group in Košice (Kassa) in eastern Slovakia, János Áder said the B9 leaders agreed that they should spend more on counter-terrorism. The presidents of the grouping comprising the Visegrad Group, the Baltic states, Bulgaria and Romania also agreed on the need to improve counter-terrorism information sharing and cooperation, Áder said. The president also underlined the importance of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's declaration that instead of increasing bureaucracy, NATO should be focused on boosting its defence capabilities.

Áder said it was right to expect NATO member states to spend 2% of their GDP on defence. Hungary has lagged behind in this respect, "but we've started to catch up", he said, noting that Hungary has vowed to bring its defence spending up to the required level by no later than 2024. The president said that about half of NATO's member countries meet the alliance's defence spending criterion.

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GOVT SPOX: EC RESPONSE TO GOVT CAMPAIGN 'TACIT ADMISSION'

The government spokesman said that the European Commission's response to a Hungarian government campaign about the EU's alleged plans to promote migration could be considered as "another tacit admission". István Hollik told a press conference that the EC had once again confirmed its plans for the forced settlement of migrants, the European Parliament's approval of migrant visas and the issuance of prepaid bank cards to migrants. The EC's response clearly shows that it wants to provide a possibility for legal migration, Hollik added. All the EC's proposals aim to encourage migration to Europe, he insisted, adding that the Hungarian government opposes this because it considers it dangerous. The government insists that all Hungarians be informed of these plans, the spokesman said.

In response to a question, Hollik confirmed a report by daily Népszava which said that Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, and Zoltán Balog, the head of the Foundation for Civic Hungary, had visited Berlin. Hollik said they had held talks with the new head of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) about Hungary-Germany relations. The reason for the meeting was the approaching anniversary of the Pan-European

Picnic peace demonstration and the inauguration of CDU's new leader, he added. It was a long meeting, held in good spirits, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY'S SOVEREIGNTY PRIORITY

Protecting Hungary's sovereignty was an important policy objective at bilateral talks with the United States on renewing the two countries' defence cooperation, the foreign minister told parliament's defence and law enforcement committee. Péter Sziijártó briefed the committee about the draft of a new bilateral defence cooperation agreement updating the one signed between the US and Hungary in 1997. The first draft of a new Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) was prepared in November 2017 and under a decision in February last year related talks were assigned to the Hungarian foreign ministry, the minister said. The current draft was prepared in a follow-up to talks with US State Secretary Mike Pompeo during his visit to Budapest earlier this month, he said.

The updated version includes references in the preamble to Hungarian laws, Sziijártó noted, adding that it is conform with Hungary's NATO and EU obligations. It also includes a provision on prospective military infrastructure development projects by the United States in Kecskemét, Tata, Várpalota and Pápa, the minister said. He said the draft would first need to be approved by the government to be later ratified by parliament, adding

that the defence committee's opinion would also be sought.

Answering a question, Sziijártó said the company Airbus has decided to build a plant for making helicopter parts in eastern Hungary to be selected from the two localities competing as finalists for the project.

CCOURT OKAYS BAN ON PROMOTION OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION BUT WARNS OF RESTRICTIONS

A recent prohibition on promoting illegal migration in the Hungarian penal code is not against the constitution, but its stipulations cannot be applied to activities "aimed at providing humanitarian treatment or reducing the suffering of the needy", the Constitutional Court said in a ruling published on Thursday. Providing humanitarian aid is outside the scope of the ban, the court said, adding that the ban shall not apply to "generous acts to meet a constitutional obligation to help the poor and vulnerable".

The top court's procedure was requested by Amnesty International Hungary, according to which the new stipulations are unclear and violate the freedom of expression, therefore they are against the constitution.

According to the court, illegal migration can only be promoted "deliberately and purposefully", in cases when the perpetrator is aware that they are acting on behalf of persons that are not being directly persecuted. The perpetrator is guilty

if they assist an entrant in obtaining a title for residency whereas they are aware that the person is staying illegally in the country, the ruling said. The ban only applies to “expressions aimed at enticing others to unlawful behaviours” rather than to expressing one’s opinion on migration such as in political discussions. “The risk to be avoided is not in the communication but activities that communication is aimed to elicit.”

CCOURT: GRANTING ASYLUM ‘NO CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION’

Granting asylum to entrants from countries where they were not subject to persecution “cannot be considered a constitutional obligation” for the Hungarian state, the Constitutional Court said in a ruling. The court added, however, that such entrants could be granted asylum “by parliament under its own rules”. The court insisted that asylum could be granted “under Hungary’s international obligations rather than as the applicant’s fundamental right”.

The ruling came in the wake of a request by Justice Minister László Trócsányi, who asked for the court’s position in a dispute with the European Commission, according to which stipulations in the Hungarian constitution pertaining to asylum are not in line with European law.

According to the top court, European law is applied in Hungary

on the basis of the constitution and the court’s interpretation of the fundamental law “shall not be overwritten by the interpretation of any other body”. They noted that “the contiguity of EU and national law does not normally lead to constitutional dilemmas since the two systems are based on shared values”. The Constitutional Court and the EU could have different positions on actual national norms, but “discrepancies can be eliminated through a respectful dialogue”, they added.

ORBÁN, KELEMEN: STRONG HUNGARIAN PRESENCE KEY GOAL IN EP ELECTIONS

Securing a strong Hungarian presence in the next European Parliament is a key goal for the May elections, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Romania’s ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party leader Hunor Kelemen agreed in Budapest.

Orbán congratulated Kelemen on his recent re-election to the post, the prime minister’s press chief said. The two politicians discussed preparations for the EP elections within the European People’s Party, Bertalan Havasi said. Orbán and Kelemen reviewed progress in Transylvanian economic development programmes part-funded by the Hungarian government. Kelemen said Romania’s ethnic Hungarian community shows a keen interest in the programmes, which help create jobs and promote economic growth in Transylvania.

SZIJJÁRTÓ ADVOCATES ‘EUROPE OF FAMILIES’

Europe cannot be strong unless it is built on families “because if it turns out to be a Europe of migrants, it will be weak”, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a conference in Budapest. At the conference entitled “Europe’s Future: Family or Migration” and organised by the Századvég Foundation, the minister said that the upcoming European parliamentary elections would decide if the EU is to become strong or weak in the future. To build a strong community Europe “needs to allow for competition also within, restore security for European citizens and families, preserve a Christian culture and European identity and have a fair debate over the next budget to put families rather than migrants in the focus,” Szijjártó insisted. Among challenges for the EU, the minister mentioned the security situation, the Ukraine conflict, energy security, a threat of terrorism caused by mass migration, Brexit and the emergence of parallel societies.

MATOLCSY REAPPOINTED NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR

President János Áder has re-appointed György Matolcsy as governor of the National Bank of Hungary for another term, on the proposal of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the president’s office announced. Matolcsy’s six-year

mandate as NBH governor will end on March 3, 2019, and his next term will start on March 4. The new-old governor will take his oath of office on Friday. There is a two-term limit for the post.

Earlier this week, Matolcsy told parliament's economic committee that over the past six years the central bank had been successful in fulfilling the requirements of its mandate and had contributed to Hungary's "exceptional growth turnaround". All of Hungary's micro and macroeconomic indicators are good, he said, adding that this was in part thanks to the work of the NBH.

JOBBIK: ORBÁN TAKING HUNGARY OUT OF EU AT STAKE IN EP ELECTIONS

Conservative opposition Jobbik has said that at stake in the European parliamentary elections this May was "whether we allow Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to steer Hungary out of the European Union". Deputy party leader Tibor Bana told a press conference that recent government measures, such as the approval of the Moscow-based International Investment Bank's move to Hungary, showed that Orbán would sacrifice Hungary's EU membership "in order to serve his own mafia network".

The move of the "KGB or Comecon bank" headquarters to Budapest will strengthen Hungary's "colonisation" by Russia, he said. The Hungarian government has become the "Russians' proconsul", he added. The

bank's employees will be eligible for tax exemption, they will be allowed unlimited travel to Hungary and they will be given diplomatic immunity, he said. Also, they will be exempt from control by the Hungarian financial supervisory authority and other authorities, he added. Bana said Orbán was taking orders from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

POLICE DROP INVESTIGATION INTO GRUEVSKI CASE

The national police (ORFK) have dropped an investigation into issues around former Macedonian prime minister Nikola Gruevski's flight to Hungary, ORFK told MTI. The investigation, launched in December last year "under suspicion of human smuggling and other crimes against an unidentified perpetrator" was terminated due to a lack of criminal activities, the police said. Before the announcement, several websites quoted the police's decision as saying that Gruevski had valid travel documents when crossing borders on his way from his country to Hungary.

Gruevski held office between 2006 and 2016. An arrest warrant was issued on November 12 after he had failed to start a two-year prison sentence for corruption. He announced on his Facebook page two days later that he was in Budapest and has submitted a request for political asylum. An international arrest warrant was issued in Skopje on the same day and he

announced a week later on his public media page that he had received the asylum status in Hungary.

OFFICIAL: MIGRATION STILL A THREAT

The threat posed by migration has not gone away, interior ministry state secretary Károly Konrád told a session of parliament's defence and law enforcement committee. The Balkan route is still active, with 70,000 migrants making their way to Europe through there, Konrád said. In Greece, there are currently 14,000 migrants waiting to continue their journey, he said, adding that a further 4 million people are on a standby in Turkey. Hungary, he said, was one of the safest countries, thanks in large part to the imposition of a state of emergency linked to the crisis of mass migration.

Police chief János Balogh told the committee that whereas in 2018 there was a daily average of 18 attempts at illegal entry into Hungary, this has increased to an average of 27 in 2019. This means migration is on the rise, he said.

DK ACCUSES GOVERNMENT OF 'ILLICIT CAMPAIGN'

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has filed a complaint with the National Election Committee saying that the government is "conducting an illicit campaign". DK deputy leader Csaba Molnár quoted Foreign Minister

Péter Szijjártó who had “let it slip” in an interview that the government’s recent billboard campaign with EC President Jean-Claude Juncker and US financier George Soros was “in fact an election campaign”. According to Molnár, Szijjártó has admitted that “the state uses taxpayers’ money to wage a campaign for (ruling) Fidesz”. The billboards, he said, “do not provide impartial information but echo the arguments of Fidesz politicians”.

Answering a question, Molnár said Fidesz should have been excluded from the European People’s Party long ago for rejecting its fundamental values. Should Fidesz stay a member, it will indicate that the EPP shares “the same non-Christian Democratic ideology that [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán represents”, he added. To another question, Molnár voiced hope that his party would retain its two seats in the European Parliament.

HUNGARY INVESTMENT VOLUME CLIMBS ALMOST 17% IN Q4

Investment volume in Hungary rose by 16.9% year-on-year in the fourth quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Growth slowed from 22.1% in Q3. Construction investments were up 24.0% and

investments in machinery rose by 8.9% in Q4. In absolute terms, construction investments reached 1,853.2 billion forints (EUR 5.86bn) and machinery investments added up to 1,298.4 billion forints during the period.

Manufacturing sector investments were up 18.5% to reach 844.2 billion forints in absolute terms, and real estate investments increased by 21.0% and stood at 536.9 billion forints. Investments in the logistics sector jumped 44.0% to 594.9 billion forints, investments in the commerce and vehicle repair sector fell by 5% to 135.8 billion forints, and investments in public administration and defence were down 3.1% to stand at 200.0 billion forints.

For the full year, investment volume in Hungary climbed 17.0% to 8,495.0 billion forints. Investments in manufacturing were up 6.3% and stood at 2,233.1 billion forints. Investments in the logistics sector rose by 33.5% to 1,429.4 billion forints, and investments in real estate climbed 17.3% to 1,407.3 billion forints, KSH said.

PPI FALLS TO 3.8% IN JANUARY

Industrial producer prices rose by 3.8% year-on-year in January, as price growth slowed for the sixth month

in a row, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Prices for domestic sales were up by 5.9% while export prices rose by 2.9%. Prices were impacted by higher wages, changes to the forint’s exchange rate and global crude prices. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial producer prices edged down 0.5% as domestic prices inched up by 0.5% and export prices were down 0.9%.

DAVID LYNCH PHOTO EXHIBITION OPENS IN BUDAPEST

An exhibition showing 55 photographs by American filmmaker, painter, musician and photographer David Lynch has opened in Budapest’s Art Hall (Műcsarnok). The show entitled “Small Stories” features the collection of individual shots and series assembled in 2013 and reflects on Lynch’s oeuvre, the curator told journalists. It presents images reflecting on his early experimental films and the TV series Twin Peaks, Klára Szarka said. The exhibition is shown in central Europe for the first time in Budapest and it is the opening programme of the 3rd Budapest Photo Festival, the festival’s director said.