

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Márton Mónus

Exhibition of photographs by American filmmaker David Lynch opens in Budapest's Art Hall

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP election campaign events

Paks unions stage warning strike

Carnival in Szentendre

6th Szekler Ball in Budapest

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ CHIDES WESTERN INTEGRATION MODELS

Hungary's foreign minister said it has become clear that the Western models of European integration do not work, arguing that they have led to the emergence of parallel societies, which he said pose security risks due to cultural differences.

Migration still poses a security risk and the Western Balkans region is still experiencing migration pressure, Péter Szijjártó told public news channel M1. Szijjártó said that at his talks with the interior ministers of the Western Balkan countries this past week, the ministers told him that their countries were seeing an inflow of illegal migrants. They also confirmed, he said, that mercenaries of the Islamic State terrorist group were trying to return to Europe.

The minister was also asked to comment on press reports that on Thursday three parties within the European People's Party called for the expulsion of Hungary's ruling Fidesz from the group. Szijjártó said debates within the EPP on whether Europe's demographic challenges and labour shortages should be resolved through immigration dated back to 2011. Hungary had already said back then that immigration was not the answer, but the debate has now intensified, he said, arguing that at stake in the upcoming European parliamentary elections was whether the EP would be controlled by a pro-migration or anti-migration majority.

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ÁDER SETS DATE OF EP ELECTIONS FOR MAY 26

Hungarian President János Áder has set the date of the European parliamentary elections in Hungary for May 26, the president's office said. This is the fourth occasion Hungarians will decide on their parliamentary deputies in the EP. "In pursuance of my constitutional duty, in line with European Union regulations and the provisions of our Fundamental Law, I have set the date of the European parliamentary elections in Hungary for May 26, 2019," the president wrote. Áder said the elections will give all Hungarians with voting rights the chance to influence the future of the European Union for the next five years. Hungary will again send 21 deputies to the legislative body.

FIDESZ WIDENS LEAD OVER OPPOSITION IN NEW POLL

The Fidesz-Christian Democrat (KDNP) alliance leads the polls among decided voters for the European parliamentary elections with 54%, which would increase the number of seats held by the ruling parties to 14 from 12 in the EP, a fresh poll by the Nézőpont Institute commissioned by daily Magyar Nemzet shows. The ruling parties' popularity increased by 7% since last year's general election, the poll showed.

Of the opposition parties, conservative Jobbik's support dropped

to 13% among decided voters, which would translate to three seats in the EP, Nézőpont said. The Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance has 11%, which would mean two seats in the EP. The leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) is backed by 6% and LMP by 5%, which would be worth one seat for each party. The Momentum Movement and the satirical Two-tailed Dog party would each garner 4%, and the radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party 3%. Among the whole population, Fidesz-KDNP has the support of 40%, Jobbik 8%, the Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance 7%, DK 4%, LMP 3%, with Momentum, the Two-tailed Dog party and Mi Hazánk at 2% each, the poll showed. The poll was conducted between January 31 and February 22 by phone, with a representative sample of 5,000 people.

PAKS UNIONS ANNOUNCE WARNING STRIKE OVER GUARD OUTSOURCING

Two unions at Hungary's sole nuclear power plant in Paks have announced a two-hour warning strike for March 2 in protest against the outsourcing of security guards. The management of the Paks plant announced last June its action plan to transfer before the end of next month 42 of the guards into a company owned by MVM Paksi Atomerőmű, following a review by the national police. The unions said that the guards would be employed under unfavourable terms that include a reduction of their annual income by

over one million forints (EUR 3,100) as a result of cuts to wage supplements and fringe benefits. The two unions staged a demonstration in Budapest earlier on Thursday after talks with management on maintaining the benefits failed.

BAKONDI: BRUSSELS ADMITS TO ITS 'PRO-MIGRATION PLANS'

Brussels has admitted to its "pro-migration plans", the prime minister's chief security advisor said in an interview to Friday's edition of the daily Magyar Hírlap. Though the European Commission denies its "plans", György Bakondi said, the intentions of the "Brussels bureaucrats" are clear, and they will attempt to carry out their plans after the European parliamentary elections. Bakondi said the government's media campaign on the EU's alleged plans to promote migration were justified because of this. Commenting on the European Parliament's proposal for migrant visas, he said those holding such a document could not be detained at Europe's borders and deporting them would become impossible. On the issuance of anonymous debit cards to migrants, Bakondi said it would be impossible to monitor the cards if the person who it is issued to leaves the country where they received it.

Commenting on a declaration adopted at the EU-Arab League migration summit which was also signed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Bakondi

said there were no contradictions between the declaration and the Hungarian government's migration policy. Hungary does not support illegal migration, he noted. The drafting of the document was a drawn-out process, he said, adding that thanks to Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó's veto, the provisions of the UN's global migration compact were left out of the declaration. Bakondi said this was important because, although the UN had said that its migration compact would not be binding, it had now become clear that its provisions could be incorporated into international law. Asked about the current migration situation in Europe, Bakondi said there are some 70,000 illegal migrants en route to Europe along the Balkan route, with more on the way. The security situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is critical, he said, adding that the migrant routes going through Italy and Spain were also highly active. As regards Hungary, Bakondi said some 1,500 migrants have attempted to breach Hungary's border fence so far this year, of whom 204 were caught before they entered the country, and 1,282 were escorted back to the other side of the fence.

KÖVÉR: FIRST MEETING WITH UGANDAN COUNTERPART 'HISTORIC'

Hungary's Parliamentary Speaker László Kövér attributed historic significance to his first official meeting with Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, his Ugandan counterpart,

in Kampala which he said elevated bilateral parliamentary ties to a top level. The parliaments of Hungary and Uganda established relations at the Inter-Parliamentary Union's 126th assembly meeting in Kampala in 2012. As a next step towards expanding ties, a Ugandan-Hungarian Friendship Chapter has been formed in the Ugandan parliament to cooperate with the Sub-Saharan Friendship Group of the Hungarian parliament, Zoltán Szilágyi, parliament's press chief, said. Kövér told his partner that the inter-governmental education agreement and the letter of intent signed on development cooperation by the two countries' foreign ministers in Budapest last autumn were a milestone in bilateral diplomatic relations.

The house speaker also held talks with Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, with the two leaders discussing cooperation possibilities in the pharmaceutical sector and in water management. Museveni told Kövér that as a leading host country of domestic refugees on the African continent, Uganda faces a challenge of providing for about 1.2 million people in its territory. Kövér in response said that Hungary respects Uganda's refugee policy and will support countries that offer refuge as an immediate neighbour to people forced to leave their homeland. As a concrete form of help, Kövér

noted the water purification plant the Hungarian state plans to build at a refugee camp in Uganda with a view to providing drinking water to up to 250,000 people.

DK CALLS FOR COMMON EU POLICY TO TAX MULTINATIONALS

The leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on EU member states to create a common policy to tax multinational companies. Klára Dobrev, who heads the party's EP election list, told a press conference that according to a European Commission survey, the "tax havens" within the EU are Belgium, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta and Hungary. These are the countries most lenient towards multinational companies trying to avoid paying taxes, she said. Dobrev said the government of Viktor Orbán was "one of the most corporate-friendly governments" in the bloc. Hungarian citizens benefit little, however, she said, arguing that these companies paid either little or no taxes and offered lower wages than would be expected. A strong united states of Europe is necessary because if member states unite and negotiate as one, they could "collect" the nearly 150 billion euros "disappearing every year in the tax havens", Dobrev said. This money could be used to fund the introduction of the European minimum wage, the European minimum pension and the European family allowance, she said.

MI HAZÁNK ADVOCATES SCHOOL SEGREGATION

The radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party says Hungary's education system is in need of segregation. Dóra Dúró, the party's deputy leader, said that boarding schools or "special" and "parallel" classes should be created for students "who are incapable of adhering to community norms".

Mi Hazánk proposes that students who have trouble following social norms should be placed in boarding schools where they can be taught responsibility, work ethic and the need to study. Under the party's plan, a committee of social, child protection and education experts would decide whether a child in question should be placed in such an institution, Dúró said. She said the system currently in place penalised families who for safety reasons are often forced to transfer their children to schools located far from their homes. Citing figures from the Central Statistical Office (KSH), Dúró said the share of disadvantaged students exceeds 40% in five of Hungary's 19 counties. She said that although Mi Hazánk's segregation model was not based on ethnicity, it was "undeniable" that conflicts in Hungary's school system often stemmed from "Hungarian-Gypsy coexistence".

Dúró said the number of conflicts would only rise, arguing that "the Hungarian population declines by

half with every generation, while the Gypsy population doubles, also with every generation". The government has spent 160 billion forints (EUR 506m) on various special "catch-up" education programmes for Roma children over a period of five years, but they have not yielded any results, Dúró insisted. She said such a model was no longer sustainable, arguing that Hungarian politics "should get behind decent families".

KSH REVISES UP Q4 GDP GROWTH TO 5.1%

Hungary's fourth-quarter GDP rose by an annual 5.1%, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of data. KSH raised the figure from 5.0% in a first reading released on February 14, mainly on the better than expected performance of market-based services. KSH also revised upward the growth rates for Q3 and Q1, to 5.1% and 4.6%, respectively. The rate was 4.9% in Q2. The revisions lifted full-year growth to 4.9%.

HUNGARY PMI RISES TO 55.7 IN FEBRUARY

Hungary's seasonally-adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) rose to 55.7 in February from 54.7 in January, the Hungarian Association of Logistics, Purchasing and Inventory Management (Halpim), which compiles the index, said. An index value above 50 shows expansion in the manufacturing sector, while a value

under 50 signals contraction. Among the sub-indices that comprise the PMI, the new orders index rose slightly and remained over the 50 threshold. The production volume index was higher and continued to show expansion. The employment index also continued to show growth, but declined from January. Delivery times were longer in February. Purchased inventories climbed for the sixth month in a row.

F. SEGURA TO INVEST HUF 4.2 BN IN UPGRADE, EXPANSION IN HUNGARY

Spanish-owned automotive industry supplier F. Segura Hungaria will invest 4.2 billion forints (EUR 13.3m) in upgrades and added capacity at its base in Szolnok, central Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. The government is supporting the investment, which will create 80 jobs, with a 1 billion forint grant, Szijjártó said. He called the investment significant for the Hungarian automotive industry, noting that F. Segura Hungaria will be a supplier of the local plants of Audi and Mercedes and later to the new plant of BMW and the engineering centre of Jaguar.

Company chairman Francisco Segura Hervas said the investment would include establishing a cloud-based solution to aggregate intelligent devices. "We're living in the age of the fourth industrial revolution" and digital strategies will determine who is successful in future, he added.

TOURISM INDUSTRY OPPOSED TO MOVING LOW-COST FLIGHTS OUT OF CAPITAL

Moving low-cost flights from Liszt Ferenc International to an alternative airport outside of the capital would be a “tactical error” and does not have the support of the tourism industry, the chairman of the Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association (MSZESZ) told daily Magyar Nemzet. Tamás Flesch told the paper the tourism industry is opposed to moving low-fare flights out of the capital, especially at a time when the sector is generating record turnover. “Forcing tourists to come to the capital from Győr, Debrecen, Tököl or Kecskemét at additional costs would be a tactical error,” he said. He argued that capacity should first be expanded at Liszt

Ferenc, but also acknowledged the need to improve arrivals’ reception at the airport. Budapest Mayor István Tarlós recently proposed banning flights at Liszt Ferenc between midnight and 5:00 in the morning to ease noise pollution. He also floated the idea of building a smaller airport for low-fare airlines or moving them to another airport outside of the capital.

Hungarian low-fare airline Wizz Air already operates flights from Debrecen, in the east of the country, and the government has allocated funding to convert an air base in Kecskemét, in central Hungary, into a joint civilian-military airport. Debrecen is about two-and-a-half hours from Budapest by car. Kecskemét is about an hour away from the capital. Magyar Nemzet learnt from a source in the government that moving low-cost airlines from the capital to an alternative airport is “not on the agenda”.

RED BULL AIR RACE TO BE HELD IN ZAMÁRDI

This year’s Red Bull Air Race will be held in July in Zamárdi, with the race taking place over Lake Balaton, organisers said. 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. Zamárdi mayor Gyula Csákovics said earlier that visitors could watch the race from Zamárdi’s 3km-long beach, while pilots could use nearby airports in Sármellék, Siófok or Szentkirályszabadja. The town of Keszthely, on the south-west shore of Lake Balaton, had also vied for holding the race, partnering with the neighbouring spa town of Hévíz.