

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamas Soki

End-of-winter Busó festival in Mohács, S Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP election campaign events

Plenary session of parliament

State secretary announces 2019/20 diaspora support schemes

Stats office releases foreign trade estimate for Dec 2018

TOP STORY

BRUSSELS 'WANTS TO BOOST IMMIGRATION'

According to the Hungarian government's response to the European Commission, Brussels intends to legalise and boost immigration.

The document is a detailed response to the commission's Feb. 28 statement criticising the government's communications regarding European Union policy on migration. The eight-page rebuttal presents the EU plans and decisions that the government says would increase migration into Europe. Csaba Dömötör, the state secretary of the cabinet office, said various public statements and voting records showed the intentions of the EU. "The plans reflect a clear intention: to legalise immigration rather than stop it," he said in a statement. "This intention is well served by the introduction of quotas, migrant bank cards and migrant visas."

Meanwhile, the Government Information Centre said the government advocated honest dialogue, even if this involved disputes. The statement published on the government's website kormany.hu refers to a Brussels resolution stating that "the possibilities for legal migration must be ensured". This, it added, "is extremely telling". "This is not a secret plot but an open intensification of cooperation on immigration," it added.

GOVT: SOROS BEHIND EC'S PLANS

Whereas the commission insists financier George Soros has nothing to do with the EU's migration policies, "the billionaire's published statements coincide with plans being made in Brussels", according to the Hungarian government's response to the European Commission. The government said the scheme to relocate migrations based on compulsory quotas had not been withdrawn and the rights of EU member states to protect their borders would be overruled. The commission, it added, supported the introduction of a migrant visa while, "bafflingly", denying such a plan. At the same time, no denial was given concerning money given to organisations that aid migration, it said. Already, "tens of thousands of migrants" receive topped-up bank cards, the government maintained. The commission has acknowledged funding the scheme for migrant bank cards, it said, adding that 64,000 people had received money through card.

In its rebuttal, the government also noted that the commission backed pilot projects that would legalise migration. Accordingly, EU member states would propose pilot schemes with African countries to "replace irregular migration flows with secure, orderly and well-managed legal migration opportunities". "The

European Commission therefore does not seek to stop migration but to legalise it," the government document said. Brussels, it insisted, planned to reduce the EU funds of member states that take an anti-migration stance. The commission's insistence that "there is no correlation between EU funding and support or rejection of migration" is untrue, the document adds. "We are committed Europeans and we won't surrender," the government said in the rebuttal. "We want a Europe that respects the rights of nation states, builds on its Christian values, protects its communities, and can maintain its long-term security. This is why we speak out whenever we see all this endangered," it added.

ORBÁN DISCUSSES HUNGARIAN-GERMAN TIES, MIGRATION, EP CAMPAIGN IN WELT AM SONNTAG

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has addressed Hungarian-German relations and his government's European Parliament election campaign focusing on migration in an interview to Welt am Sonntag. Orbán said the blot on otherwise "excellent" Hungarian-German relations was due to differences in their respective approaches to the issue of migration. "We insist on the right of nations to defend themselves, whereas Germany has a different philosophy," he told the conservative paper. The European Commission should be stripped

of migration as a policy area, the prime minister said. Instead, a new professional body under the authority of Schengen-zone interior ministers should take over that responsibility, he added.

Meanwhile, commenting on the government's current billboard campaign depicting European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and related criticism by the European People's Party, Orbán said its northern members were closer to French President Emmanuel Macron than to the German Christian Democratic Union. "Sadly, [the issue of] migration has sharpened differences here, too". Orbán insisted that the EPP, if it wanted to win in central Europe, must declare that "Juncker is the past" and Manfred Weber, the EPP's Spitzenkandidat, "the future". The prime minister characterised Juncker as a "nice man" for whom he harboured no animosity, but "any attempt" to exclude Fidesz from EPP was his "personal disloyalty", and "no one can expect us to accept this disloyalty, even if it is the disloyalty of a kind man". Orbán also dismissed the suggestion that the government's poster campaign was anti-Semitic, saying: "This seems like a German problem". Orbán said a new phase of the government's billboard campaign would concentrate on First Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, who is also the Spitzenkandidat of the European Socialists. Orbán insisted that the attack against the

government's billboard campaign had been launched by Europe's left wing. "The left wing always chooses someone as a target," Orbán said, adding that its aim was to weaken the European People's Party, of which Fidesz is a member, with a view to assuming power in Europe, which he characterised as a "power struggle" rather than an ideological one. "Not everyone understands this, but in the political literature, Lenin refers to 'useful idiots' who, while believing they are fighting an intellectual struggle, are actually serving the power interests of others and even opponents," Orbán said. Asked whether this was true of some EPP members, he said: "They see division as good instead of unity and the unifying of forces."

KOVÁCS: OPINION OF HUNGARIAN PEOPLE MORE IMPORTANT THAN PARTY DISCIPLINE

While the government listens to criticism, the opinion of the Hungarian people is more important than party discipline, the state secretary for international communications told public radio. Commenting on criticism of the Fidesz government by the European People's Party in connection with the government's billboard campaign, Zoltán Kovács said the government had a duty to inform the Hungarian people what was at stake in the upcoming European Parliament election. He said it had become clear in the past weeks that

the government's billboard campaign was factual. Kovács insisted that the European Commission's policies would make Europe into a continent of immigrants. The information campaign will continue until March 15, he said.

Asked about Fidesz's possible ejection from the European People's Party, Kovács said this would be "unreasonable". Fidesz, he added, represented common sense, in line with the opinions of the Hungarian people and more and more Europeans. Migration endangers the very foundations of European culture, he added.

Kovács said the commission was overreaching, preparing decisions secretly and forcing member states into a corner. He cited the decision on migrant relocation quotas, rejected twice by the European Council in 2015, yet eventually "forced" through. The EU, he said, should remain a forum of cooperation between equal member states. In cases where there is no complete agreement between them, there should be no compulsion to accept a given policy, he added.

SPAT AS SOCIALIST TRIES TO DELIVER EC'S RESPONSE ON GOVT MIGRATION CAMPAIGN TO FIDESZ HQ

An opposition Socialist MEP who tried to deliver a copy of the European Commission's critical response to the government's migration campaign to the ruling Fidesz party's HQ in

Budapest was stopped from entering the building on Sunday. Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch said István Ujhelyi had turned up to the headquarters, the venue of a Fidesz press conference, "unnecessarily". Ujhelyi said in a statement that he had gone to the press conference to give Deutsch a chance to defend the government's poster campaign, which he called a "big lie". At an impromptu press conference outside the building, the Socialist MEP accused the government of spreading "big lies" as part of a propaganda campaign, not only against the opposition parties, but also against the European Commission. Ujhelyi told MTI that he had intended to hand over to Deutsch a copy of the commission's refutation of claims made by the government as well as a copy of the Socialist Party's "Homeland. Love. Europe" programme which outlines the Socialists' European vision and commitments which are "radically opposed to Fidesz's lies". He said it was "pathetic" that Fidesz held briefings behind closed doors and was afraid of a real public debate. Deutsch, at his press conference, said the plans of Brussels with regard to migration were vastly similar to those of financier George Soros.

TWO-HOUR WARNING STRIKE HELD AT PAKS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Security guards of the Paks nuclear power plant on Saturday carried out a two-hour warning strike in protest

against the terms on which their jobs are being outsourced to a private firm. All 35 of the workers affected participated in the strike, the Paks plant's employees' union said in a statement. Plans to continue the strike in compliance with the law will be discussed on Monday afternoon, it added. The company that runs the plant, MVM Paksi Atomerőmű Zrt, took over guarding the facility for the strike's duration. A firm fully owned by MVM Paksi Atomerőmű, Atomix Kft, is slated to take over operations of the armed guards and pay the same wages to the employees. In the absence of an agreement on fringe benefits, the trade unions organised a demonstration on Tuesday in front of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology before Saturday's work stoppage. MVM has called the demands of the trade unions excessive and unfair.

SOCIALISTS: MATOLCSY PROGRAM NO SOLUTION TO EMIGRATION CRISIS

Central bank governor György Matolcsy's plan to staunch the flow of Hungarians leaving the country to work abroad is not a solution to the emigration crisis, a senior opposition Socialist Party official said. Dávid Bihal told a press conference that the Socialists offered "European solutions to the crisis". He insisted that Matolcsy's plan to entice 100,000 Hungarians home was an admission

of the government's failure in family and youth policy.

Hungary's Central Statistical Office estimates that 260,000-350,000 Hungarians live abroad while the UN reckons it is closer to 600,000.

Bihal said one key reason for emigration was that most young Hungarians think that it is impossible to get ahead in Hungary through hard work, the accumulation of knowledge and dedication alone. He insisted that the best way forward was to be "unscrupulous" and "serve the [ruling] Fidesz party". He accused the government of destroying the country's education system and "tossing Hungarian workers to multinationals". Matolcsy's scheme won't work, he said, because it emphasises wage rises in areas where there's a jobs shortage "while prescribing a nine-hour working day for civil servants, ridding them of their fringe benefits and reducing basic holiday days from 25 to 20". Whereas Matolcsy wants to launch awareness-raising campaigns for the state education and health systems, the government "has done nothing for years to solve health and education problems," he said.

LMP TO SUBMIT BILL INTRODUCING BUDAPEST CONGESTION FEE

Opposition green LMP will submit a bill on introducing a congestion charge in Budapest, a city deputy of the party

said. The measure would improve air quality and help eliminate traffic jams, József Gál told a press conference.

In 2013, under the leadership of Free Democrat Mayor Gábor Demszky, the Budapest municipality made a commitment to Brussels to enact a congestion charge in connection with construction of metro line 4, he said. "We can now be grateful that the much-maligned EU has not fined us yet," he added.

Gál noted that István Tarlós, the current mayor, has delayed introducing the fee, citing a national law that prohibits local governments from charging a congestion fee. Revenue from the fee could be spent on building further P+R carparks and developing public transport networks to help improve air quality, he said.

FIDESZ SPOX: BRUSSELS WANTS TO OPEN GATES TO MILLIONS OF ECONOMIC MIGRANTS

Brussels wants to open the gates to millions of economic migrants, the ruling Fidesz parliamentary group's spokesman told a news conference in the city of Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. János Halász said the plans for economic migrants were "Brussels' most dangerous". "It's not about refugees but about allowing millions of economic migrants into Europe," he said, adding that economic migrants were illegally entering Europe together with real refugees.

Referring to the European Commission's Thursday rebuttal of the government's charges against Brussels in connection with migration, he said: "Instead of refuting it, Brussels has confirmed that it wants to unleash millions of economic migrants on Europe." He cited the EC letter saying that legal migration opportunities should continue and legal migration rather acted as a deterrent against illegal migration. "If the gates are opened wider to millions of economic migrants from Africa and the Middle East, not only would be impossible to hold them back but they would be attracted to Europe," he said.

In connection with a demand by Manfred Weber, the head of the European People's Party, that the government halt its poster campaign depicting commission president Jean-Claude Juncker and financier George Soros, as well as demands by several EPP parties to exclude Fidesz from the party grouping, Halász said Fidesz saw its task as to protect European values and halt migration. The Hungarian people endorsed this policy in the last general election, he added. "For us, the opinion of the Hungarian people is more important than party discipline,"

he said. "We represent the interests and opinions of the Hungarian people in Brussels."

HUNGARY REQUEST EXTRADITION OF SUSPECTED SERBIAN- HUNGARIAN ASSASSIN

The Hungarian authorities have requested the extradition of a Serbian-Hungarian arrested in Prague who is suspected of being a hired killer, Budapest police said on Saturday. Serbian press outlets have reported the capture of the man known as D. Csaba from Čantavir (Csantavér) in Vojvodina. He is suspected of having killed people in the Netherlands, Budapest, and most recently in Belgrade. Serbia is also expected to request his extradition, according to Serbian police. According to police.hu, the 38-year-old man is thought to have carried out a murder in Budapest last September and the Hungarian authorities issued a European and international arrest warrant against him. Cooperation between the Hungarian police, Europol and Eurojust led to the Czech police's arrest of the man at a hotel in Prague on Friday evening.

RUSSIA IN SPOTLIGHT OF BUDAPEST SPRING FESTIVAL

Russian culture will be in the spotlight of this year's Budapest Spring Festival, which will feature classical music concerts, opera, dance and theatre performances and jazz shows between April 5 and 22. The festival will open in a highlight event with a performance of Mussorgsky's second and last completed opera Khovanshchina in the Palace of Arts (Müpa). Another highlight event is a concert performance of Tchaikovsky's last opera, Iolanta, by St Petersburg's Mariinsky Orchestra with renowned conductor Valery Gergiev on April 20. Gergiev will also be conductor at the two performances of Prokofiev's Cinderella by the Mariinsky Theatre's Ballet Company in the Erkel Theatre on April 22. The festival this year will celebrate Italian Renaissance master Michelangelo with an exhibition showing thirty of his drawings in the Museum of Fine Arts. On the spring festival's sidelines the Budapest Art Week will offer 70 exhibitions.