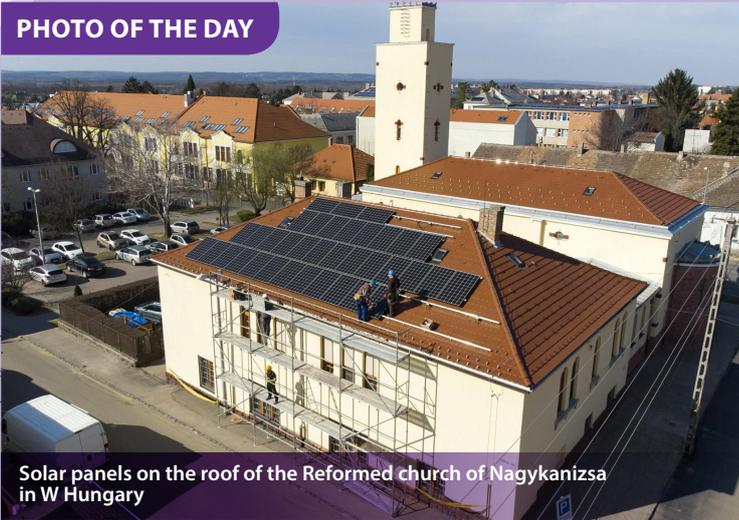


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Solar panels on the roof of the Reformed church of Nagykanizsa in W Hungary

MTI/György Varga

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Parliament holds plenary session**

**Stats office prelim report on retail trade in Jan 2019**

**Szijjártó at Austrian-owned paper plant expansion announcement**

**Farm minister presser "Petition for Hungarian Farmers"**

## TOP STORY

# GOVT SPOX SLAMS 'HYPOCRITICAL' CRITICS IN EPP

The government spokesman branded EPP politicians critical of Hungary's media campaign on the EU's plans to promote migration as "hypocritical", arguing that the campaign was far more low-key than the criticism the government has received over it.

Asked at a press conference why the government had decided to put European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker at the centre of the campaign, István Hollik said Juncker was one of the most prominent "pro-migration" politicians in Brussels. Hollik noted Juncker's past calls for the creation of legal migration routes to the European Union and his comments criticising the concept of national borders. Hollik said certain EPP politicians were applying double standards by calling Hungary out for "criticising the politician whose name is linked to the five most critical years of the European Commission". Hungary fulfils its Schengen commitments, protecting not only its own, but also the EU's external borders, he said. Hungary considers dangerous any measure that gives migrants the idea that they can depend on Europe financially, he added. The Hungarian government's position has remained unchanged for three years: help should be provided at the point where it is needed rather than "bringing trouble over to Europe", Hollik said.

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## **DK OUTLINES FAMILY POLICY PLAN**

Ferenc Gyurcsány, leader of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), outlined his party's family policy plan aimed at encouraging Hungarian couples to have children. The first part of DK's proposal calls for the repeal of the labour code amendment passed last December. Gyurcsány argued that people who are forced to work ten hours a day six days a week would not be too keen to have children. Families with small children must be guaranteed, he said, that they will not be evicted from their homes. Further, caregiving should be officially recognised as employment and caregivers should be paid at least the minimum wage. Gyurcsány also called for raising family benefits by 50% with immediate effect and for vacant general practitioner and paediatric practices to be filled. Further, the wages of health-care workers should be raised by at least 50%, he said. The wage increases should continue over the next four years, with wages rising by at least 15% every year, Gyurcsány added.

The former prime minister also called for creating the conditions for schools to provide modern education and language skills. Tuition fees should either be lowered or scrapped entirely and the number of students higher education institutions can admit should be increased, he added. He also said basic utilities should be

made free for everyone up to a certain consumption level.

Ruling Fidesz said in reaction that Gyurcsány's "real programme" involves supporting the settlement of migrants instead of families with children. Gyurcsány is attacking the government's family policy because he is a "pro-migration" politician, Fidesz said in a statement. He has refused to vote in support of increasing home-care fees, the introduction of home-care for children and all home creation support but when in power, he discontinued three-year child benefits and introduced austerity measures and raised taxes, it added.

The co-ruling Christian Democrats (KDNP) said Gyurcsány was "simply unable to accept that his family policy goes against common sense". "After taking Hungary's economy to the brink of bankruptcy during his reign, he would now offer public utility services for free and instead of supporting a work-based society, he would restore a system making families dependent on benefits," KDNP said in a statement.

## **GOVT ANNOUNCES SCHEMES FOR HUNGARIAN DIASPORA IN 2019/20**

The government has launched its regular two schemes for 2019/20 that help the Hungarian diaspora in preserving their identity, a senior government official said. The Petőfi Sándor programme, which focuses on small Hungarian communities in central and eastern Europe, will send

75 Hungarians to ten countries for nine months from September, the state secretary for ethnic Hungarian communities abroad told a press conference. Under the Körösi Csoma programme 150 Hungarians will get the opportunity to work in 29 countries in Europe, Asia, North and South America and in Australia for a period of six to nine months, Árpád János Potápi said. The amount earmarked in the central budget for the two schemes this year is 1 billion forints (EUR 3.1m), he said.

## **JOBBIK: CLAIMS OF HUNGARY CATCHING UP WITH AUSTRIA 'POLITICAL SCI-FI'**

Conservative opposition Jobbik branded as "political sci-fi" predictions by the central bank governor and the prime minister that Hungary's economy can catch up with that of Austria by 2030 or 2050. The government should renegotiate strategic agreements, support levelling wages across the European Union and promote the development of domestic small and medium-sized companies in order for Hungary to overtake some western European countries in terms of economic strength, Dániel Z Kárpát, Jobbik's deputy leader, said.

He said Hungary needed multinational companies that pay their fair share of taxes, adding, however, that it would be preferable if the government formed a strategic alliance with domestic SMEs. He criticised the government for having allowed

multinational corporations to “have shifted more than 20,000 billion forints’ (EUR 63.2bn) worth of untaxed profits’ out of the country since the beginning of the decade.

### **ELECTION CTTEE DISMISSES DK COMPLAINT OVER GOVT BILLBOARDS**

The National Election Committee dismissed a complaint submitted by the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) concerning a government billboard campaign featuring European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. In a vote, the committee supported a proposal by chairman Péter Rádi who said the committee was not entitled to assess DK’s complaint because it was not authorised to assess campaign activities outside the campaign period, a statement showed. The campaign period for the European parliamentary election starts on April 6 this year, it added.

In reaction, DK said Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó had “admitted in an interview with the BBC that the government’s new billboards showing Juncker serve the purpose of an election campaign”. If the government’s billboards are not part of an “election campaign as Szijjártó has stated” then posting them violates the election law but if they are, then

the billboards constitute “illicit party financing for [ruling] Fidesz worth billions of forints”, DK deputy leader Csaba Molnár said in a statement.

### **DECEMBER TRADE SURPLUS REVISED DOWN TO EUR 393 M**

Hungary’s 2018 December trade surplus was revised downwards to 393 million euros in a second reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH). In the first reading, published on February 8, KSH had put the December surplus at 398 million euros. Imports rose by an annual 5.3% in value terms to 7.265 billion euros. Exports were up 2.5% at 7.658 billion euros. The trade surplus was down 178 million euros from the same month a year earlier.

Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 80% of Hungary’s exports and 74% of the country’s imports. Hungary had a trade surplus of 717 million euros with EU countries and a trade deficit of 324 million euros with the rest of the world.

Hungary’s terms of trade worsened by 1.0% in December as import prices rose by 4.0% and export prices by only 3.0% in forint terms. The forint weakened 3.1% to the euro and strengthened 1.5% to the dollar during the period.

In the full year of 2018, Hungary’s trade surplus reached 5.557 billion euros, down from 8.078 billion in the same period a year earlier. Imports were up by 7.3% at 99.327 billion euros and exports rose by 4.2% to 104.885 billion euros.

Commenting on the data, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign affairs and trade minister, told public news channel M1 that Hungary’s export volume last year was a testament to the hard work of the Hungarian people. He attributed the country’s import volume to last year’s record-breaking investments. Hungary is attracting more and more investors, more and more factories are being built and being used by international corporations to produce goods to be exported, the minister said.

### **HUNGARY-CROATIA BORDER BRIDGE TO CLOSE DOWN FOR REPAIRS**

One of the two border crossing stations between Hungary’s Letenye and Goričan (Muracsány), in Croatia, will close down between March 18 and late July due to reconstruction of a bridge across the Mura river, the national police said. Drivers are advised to use Letenye-Goričan II, Barcs or Berzence for crossing into Croatia during the reconstruction works.