

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Hungary's largest solar power plant inaugurated in Paks

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**President Áder addresses virtual power plant programme event in Budapest**

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry's conference**

**Govt official for ethnic Hungarians abroad visits Transcarpathia**

**Retail figures for January 2019 released**

## TOP STORY

### KOVÁCS: 'SOROS POLITICAL PLAYER FOR DECADES'

Hungarian state secretary for international communications and relations Zoltán Kovács has told the BBC in an interview that financier George Soros became a political player two decades ago.

This was clear from Soros's own statements as well as from the activities of the Open Society Foundation and Project Syndicate, which he said were the main conduits of the billionaire's ideas about Europe.

Soros's institutional network wields great power without ever having had an electoral mandate, he added. NGOs linked to Soros have nothing to do with civil society, he said, adding that civil society is something that is built from the ground up. Asked about an allegation by the head of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee NGO concerning harassment by the government, Kovács said the dispute was with a few dozen organisations and had nothing to do with civil groups run by ordinary people. He said that ever since the migration crisis, the gap between the "western European left-liberal political elite" and voters in European Union member states had grown.

Meanwhile, Kovács denied that the Central European University had left Budapest, saying that only one part of the CEU's activities, which breached Hungarian laws, had left the country.

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## **ORBÁN HAILS MACRON'S EU REFORM INITIATIVE**

Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister, hailed French President Emmanuel Macron's call for launching talks on reforming the European Union.

"This could mark the beginning of a serious European debate," Orbán said in a statement sent to Reuters by email. "In the details, of course, we have differences of views, but far more important than these differing opinions is that this initiative be a good start to a serious and constructive dialogue on the future of Europe," he said.

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## **FIDESZ MP: NGOS MUST COMPLY WITH HUNGARIAN LAW**

In Hungary, civil organisations "operate freely" and "are thriving", a ruling Fidesz lawmaker said after a meeting of the justice committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). But every single civil organisation must stick to the law, and that applies to NGOs that support illegal migration, Barna Pál Zsigmond told MTI by phone from Paris. Overall, 60,000 civil organisations operate in Hungary, and only around a dozen are "regularly in the government's crosshairs". He said he had made it clear to the CoE committee that the government cannot tolerate the activities of NGOs that aid illegal migration and break Hungarian laws. The Hungarian people have made it

clear that they "want nothing to do with illegal migration", he added.

The debate in PACE's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights is a part of the upcoming European parliamentary election, Zsigmond said. Referring to financier George Soros, he said it was "strange" that a "pro-Soros Ukrainian rapporteur" had proposed putting the situation of NGOs in Hungary, and the country's "Stop Soros" package of laws against supporting illegal migration, on the agenda.

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## **FIDESZ SPOX RESPONDS TO CRITICISM FROM EPP**

"Representing the opinion of the Hungarian people in Brussels is more important than party discipline," János Halász, spokesman for the parliamentary group of ruling Fidesz, said in response to recent criticism from the European People's Party, in Budapest. "This is a big family of parties; each party has its position and Fidesz has its own. We think that it is important to preserve European Christian values, and to maintain security and provide protection to our communities," he insisted, and argued that "this is the position Hungarian voters authorised us to put forward".

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## **KÖVÉR INAUGURATES MEMORIAL PLAQUE TO HUNGARIAN EXPLORER IN UGANDA**

Hungarian Speaker of Parliament László Kövér inaugurated a memorial

plaque to Hungarian-born explorer Lady Florence Baker at the Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda. Ephraim Kamuntu, Uganda's tourism minister, also attended the event. Lady Baker, born as Flóra Sass in Aiud (Nagyenyed) in 1841, was the first European woman to reach the falls and the Albert Lake with her husband Samuel White Baker. The memorial plaque was initiated by the African-Hungarian Union and the Hungarian embassy in Nairobi, Kenya.

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## **JOBBIK TO PASTE OVER GOVT BILLBOARDS**

The conservative Jobbik party launched a campaign to "correct" the government's billboards by pasting strips of paper over its slogans, the party spokesman said. Jobbik wants to communicate that while "Brussels has not settled a single person in Hungary in the last three years," the Hungarian government has "let in 86,000 immigrants", Péter Jakab said. The cheap work force allowed into the country from Ukraine keeps wages low, he said, insisting that immigrants "are granted more rights than those born here". He cited as an example free accommodation, travel and language courses for Venezuelans coming to the country. "If there is in fact a state of emergency due to mass migration, that was caused by the Hungarian government"

Jakab called it unacceptable that the Hungarian government vetoed the EU's pact with the Arab League at a summit held on Feb. 24-25 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. That pact would have been a tool to control migration at the countries of origin. "It seems the Orbán

government is hoping for more illegal migrants coming to Hungary so that they can use them in the campaign." Regarding an initiative by members of the European People's Party to exclude Fidesz from the party family, Jakab said that Prime Minister "Viktor Orbán would do anything for power and money, he would even jeopardise Hungary's EU membership." Fidesz's "opening to the East will bring about a closure to the West," he said.

### **GYURCSÁNY CRITICISES GERMAN LEADERS FOR 'LENIENCE' - FAZ**

Opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) leader Ferenc Gyurcsány has criticised Germany's leading politicians for their "lenient attitude" towards the Hungarian prime minister, in an article published by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Germany's leaders are "playing tactical games" whereas "they are aware of what is happening in Hungary and how dangerous this is for Europe", Gyurcsány wrote. "I understand that the interests of German car makers are important and that employers are allowed to require workers to do 400 hours overtime under a new Hungarian law. I understand that the unity of the European People's Party is also important and that it should have a majority in the European Parliament. But is that worth giving up everything? Freedom, democracy, human dignity, and the ideals of the

rule of law?" Gyurcsány wrote. The DK leader insisted that Hungary's PM Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen French and Matteo Salvini Italian party leaders have "brought about an era of hatred and animosity" and called on politicians to "drop their tactics".

### **SOCIALISTS PREPARING FOR EP ELECTION TOGETHER WITH SISTER PARTIES**

The opposition Socialists have signed a cooperation agreement with Germany's SPD and other European parties to mobilise Hungarian voters living outside Hungary before the upcoming European parliamentary elections, Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi said in Brussels.

Speaking to the Hungarian press, Ujhelyi said that "hundreds of thousands" of young Hungarian emigres abroad "monitor from a distance what is happening at home, and how (PM Viktor) Orbán's regime is pushing away the European community". "European voters are at a historic turning point. We must choose between Orbanistan and Europe. We need to decide if we want to live behind spiritual iron curtains in a Europe in which nation states are at constant war or live in security as part of a unified and strong alliance," Ujhelyi said.

### **SOCIALISTS TERMINATE PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MESTERHÁZY**

The opposition Socialist Party's disciplinary body has decided to

terminate proceedings against former party leader Attila Mesterházy due to a lack of evidence against him in connection with a complaint that he allegedly made and leaked a video recording of a board meeting held to discuss the party's European Parliament list. The party's board decided unanimously to terminate the proceedings, though the decision can be appealed within 15 days.

Ferenc Kurtyán, a member of the party's Szekszárd chapter, proposed that Mesterházy be expelled from the party in connection with a Feb. 15 board meeting. According to press reports, a debate was held on the position on the EP list of Socialist MEPs István Ujhelyi and Tibor Szanyi, the party's deputy leader, after which Ujhelyi was ranked second. Mesterházy on Friday denied leaking details of the meeting or the video recording. He also spoke in support of Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth and said it was right that he should head the party's EP list.

### **LAW ON LEGISLATION AMENDED IN LINE WITH ÁDER'S COMMENTS**

Parliament approved an amendment to the law on legislation taking into consideration comments by President János Áder who returned it to parliament last year. The amendment was originally approved last November and Áder returned it saying that it caused incoherence with Hungary's basic law.

The amended law adjusted in line with Áder's comments was approved

in a vote of 120 for, 25 against and 29 abstentions. The amendment submitted by Justice Minister László Trócsányi aims to ensure that the reasonings of bills are made public.

### **NEW PUBLIC MEDIA BODY TO CHECK BALANCE, LEGAL CONFORMITY OF CONTENT DURING EP CAMPAIGN**

Hungary's public media is setting up a Public Media Election Office on Monday to ensure that public media content meets the requirements of the Public Service Code during the European Parliament election and campaign period. The body is headed by Menyhért Dobos, the head of Duna Media Services Nonprofit Zrt., and will oversee the legal conformity and balance of political advertisements. President of the Republic János Áder has set May 26 as the date of the EP elections in Hungary.

### **RETAIL SALES UP 5.4% IN JAN**

Retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 5.4% in January, the Central Statistical Office said in a first reading of data. Adjusted for calendar year effects,

retail sales were also up 5.4%. Adjusted food sales increased by 3.9% while non-food sales rose by 6.4%. Vehicle fuel sales increased by 7.2%.

### **OVER 20 MW SOLAR PLANT INAUGURATED AT PAKS**

A new solar plant built at a cost of 9 billion forints (EUR 28.5m) outside Paks, just a few kilometres from Hungary's sole nuclear plant, was inaugurated. With its output of 20.6 megawatts, the new plant will serve some 8,500 households.

In his opening address, Péter Kaderják, state secretary at the innovation and technology ministry, said that the new plant makes Paks "not only the centre of nuclear energy production in Hungary but that of renewable energies, too". The constructor MVM Group has financed 65% of the project from its own coffers, and used European Union funding to cover the rest.

### **HUNGARY TO EXTRADITE HACKER TO PORTUGAL**

The Budapest Metropolitan Court ruled to extradite a Portuguese man wanted in his home country because of cybercrime. Hungarian police

apprehended him on January 16 under a European arrest warrant, the court told MTI.

The maximum sentence for cybercrime in Portugal is ten years in prison. Since the man refused to accept a simplified extradition procedure but demanded the application of the specialty principle, the Portuguese authorities can take him to court exclusively in connection with the offence that the extradition was based on. The man was unable to provide evidence showing that his right to a fair procedure or his personal safety would be at risk in Portugal but submitted an appeal against the ruling.

According to press reports, the man is the owner and editor of the website Football Leaks, which was the first to publish documents with rape accusations against footballer Cristiano Ronaldo by model Kathryn Mayorga. He moved to Budapest several years ago and has been studying in the city on a scholarship. Hungarian news website Index citing the Portuguese press said that the European arrest warrant had been issued against him because he had illegally acquired correspondence by employees and the management of Benfica.