

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Attila Balázs

European Day of Speech and Language Therapy marked

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP election campaign events

**Events marking Szekler
Independence Day**

**Commemorations of mid-war
Czechoslovakia's Hungarian politician
János Esterházy**

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: 'FIDESZ UNDER PRO-MIGRATION ATTACK'

Hungary's Fidesz party has been "attacked by pro-migration forces" within the European People's Party, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio.

In his interview, he insisted that those forces seek to "turn the whole EPP into an international pro-migration organisation" while "Hungarians want to thwart that". "No compromise is possible when it comes to migration and protecting Christian culture," Orbán said. "Christian culture is an asset... we don't want to become a mixed country, we want no migration, we want to preserve our security and through our family policy we will be able to ensure Hungary's biological future without migrants," he said.

"Some" parties within the EPP wish to "build a Europe with a mixed population and bring in migrants" whereas others including Fidesz "want to preserve Christian culture and protect borders". Hungary was the first to prove that migration can be stopped, and that is why "we are now in the focus of debates," he went on to say. "We have several options; Fidesz will decide whether they are within the EPP or outside," Orbán said, adding that he has recently had talks with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and EPP group leader Manfred Weber.

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ORBÁN CALLS FOR REFORMING EPP

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio that he was seeking to “change, reform” the EPP so that “it also embraces anti-migration forces” but said that “this dispute might reveal that our place is not within the EPP but outside”. “If it turns out that we need to come up with a new initiative in Europe, the first place we will have talks is Poland,” Orbán said, and noted that Poland’s Law and Justice party is not a member of the EPP. Orbán announced that he would visit Poland on Sunday to attend a celebration of Poland’s NATO membership anniversary, and that his Polish counterpart Mateusz Morawiecki would address celebrations on Hungary’s March 15 national holiday in Budapest.

Concerning his proposal to set up an interior ministers’ council for the Schengen zone, Orbán said that “since the European Commission has not been able to cope with migration”, relevant decisions should be “returned to the nation states which can resolve the problem”. Under the proposal, the new council with new authorisations would ensure protection of the Schengen borders. He added that if the interior ministers had been in charge of issues around migration in the past 3-4 years, “Europe would now be a more protected, safer place”. Orbán insisted that a population boom outside Europe, wars and the climate change will make “millions, later tens of millions of

migrants” find a new life elsewhere. This challenge will “determine the life of the next generations,” he added. He went on to say that “governments that turn a blind eye to this historical trend commit a crime against their own people”.

ORBÁN: ‘EUROPE A CONTINENT OF EMPTY CRADLES’

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public radio that Europe today is “a continent of empty cradles”, a problem which the Hungarian government seeks to resolve “through Hungarian children rather than migrants”. Hungary needs to be made “a family-friendly country” building once again “the good peace times”, he added. Four components of the government’s recent family support programme will start on July 1, Orbán said, adding that further components exempting mothers with four children from the personal income tax and extending the maternity allowance to grandparents will take effect on January 1 next year. Orbán dismissed critical remarks concerning the family assistance programme and said that “one thinks as if we were sane but not everybody else”. “The regular trend in life is that one has a father and a mother, who raise him, teach him a lot of things, and then he will start his own family later on - that is (the ideal) I am trying to promote”. “The position of a small but provocative minority must not be considered as normal and should be shrugged off like a dog shakes off water”, Orbán added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: ‘HUNGARY NOT TO GIVE UP ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AT ANY PRESSURE’

The Hungarian government will continue to protect the rights of ethnic Hungarian communities, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a plenary session of the Forum of Hungarian Lawmakers from the Carpathian Basin (KMKF) in Budapest. “We will not sacrifice the rights of Hungarian communities on the altar of any geopolitical interest, despite any pressure even from a good friend”, Szijjártó said. Concerning Ukraine, Szijjártó said that the government would not give up its position to thwart NATO-Ukraine summits and decline to support Ukraine’s EU or NATO integration as long as the Ukrainian government maintains its “anti-Hungarian” policy, “not even under pressure from any great or strong friend”. The Ukrainian government’s measures concerning the local community of some 150,000 ethnic Hungarians is against European values and international regulations, Szijjártó said and warned that planned measures under which the community would be divided up among three different administrative districts could create an even more difficult situation.

Szijjártó said that the Hungarian government’s foreign policy would “continue to focus on central Europe with special regard to the Carpathian

Basin. He insisted that the region has now become “the engine of Europe’s economic growth” and that political alliance between its countries was unprecedentedly close. He added that the Hungarian government’s strategy to build friendly ties with its neighbours concerning “practical and pragmatic issues” has improved conditions for ethnic Hungarians.

Economic cooperation between Hungary and other countries in the Carpathian Basin has increased dynamically in the past decade, with a 61% increase in foreign trade, which has created “such economic interdependence which necessitates closer cooperation in other areas of life, too,” Szijjártó said.

According to Szijjártó, the government’s economic programme to promote ethnic Hungarian businesses helped some 37,000 small and medium-size ventures in the past three years to grants totalling 60.8 billion forints (EUR 192.4m), prompting investment amounting to 108 billion forints. He said that the programme would continue in 2019, with a combined budget of 38.5 billion forints in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. With the exception of Ukraine, leaders in each neighbouring country could be convinced that they should not “be hostile” towards the Hungarian government’s programme, Szijjártó said, adding that “despite stormy conditions” Hungary would continue its programme also in Ukraine with a budget of 5.2 billion forints.

KÖVÉR SEES ‘NOVEL WARFARE’ AGAINST EUROPE

Europe is facing a “new kind of warfare” in the “global fight for resources”, House Speaker László Kövér told a plenary session of the Forum of Hungarian Lawmakers from the Carpathian Basin (KMKF) in Budapest. Kövér said the fight was aimed at “subjecting and exploiting Europe” as well as “removing the community’s natural identity”. He warned that “without that identity the communities and individuals cannot realise, promote or protect their own interests and they are easy to subject and control”. That is why, he said, “all institutions protecting the natural European identities, such as the family, the Christian churches and nation states, are the target of political, legal and mental attacks”. The house speaker proposed that the KMKF should adopt a “Central European-Hungarian identity protection report” in March each year, to be offered to the governments in the region as well as to institutions of the European Union. Kövér also suggested that 2020 be declared a year of Hungarian national cohesion.

SURVEY - VAST MAJORITY SUPPORTS GOVERNMENT’S FAMILY POLICY

The government’s recent family policy measures were backed by 79% of respondents in a recent Nézőpont

survey, with the rate of support exceeding 50% even among opposition voters. The results of the survey were conducted on a representative sample of 1,000 adults. The idea of putting families into the centre of government support was backed by 97% of ruling Fidesz voters, 67% of Jobbik supporters, 60% of Socialist and Democratic Coalition voters and 61% of pro-LMP respondents. Eighty-five% of those asked considered it important for families to have a home of their own. The rate was even higher (87%) among under-29 respondents, among whom the share of homeowners is merely 35%. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced a plan for new family assistance measures in February, envisaging preferential loans for family home purchases (csok) and newly-weds, personal income tax exemptions for women who raise at least four children, support for large families making mortgage repayments, a three-year programme to expand crèche places, a subsidy for large families purchasing a bigger car.

CZEGLÉDY HOUSE ARREST LIFTED

The house arrest of left-wing politician and fixer Csaba Czeplédy, who was indicted for tax fraud to the tune of six billion forints (EUR 18.9m) in February, has been lifted, he said in a Facebook post. Czeplédy was a local government representative in Szombathely, in western Hungary, representing Éljen Szombathely-Socialists-DK-Együtt. He also worked as a lawyer for

the Democratic Coalition (DK) party and the Socialists. In July 2018, he was charged with financial fraud and the forgery of public documents. He was put in pre-trial detention in July 2017 which was changed to house arrest in December 2018.

HUNGARY CPI 3.1% IN FEB, JUST OVER NBH TARGET

Consumer prices in Hungary rose by an annual 3.1% in February, over the National Bank of Hungary's 3.0% mid-term target for price stability, data from the Central Statistical Office (KSH) showed. CPI accelerated from 2.7% in January. It stood also at 2.7% in December, slowing from 3.1% in November. CPI harmonised for better comparison with other EU member states was 3.2%. Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and fuel prices, was 3.5%. CPI calculated with a basket of goods and services used by pensioners stood at 3.2%. In a monthly analysis released after the publication of the KSH data, the National Bank of

Hungary (NBH) attributed the rise in core inflation mainly to price rises of processed foods and industrial goods, with price rises of fresh foods and vehicle fuels also playing a part. The NBH acknowledged that all three of its measures of underlying inflation rose. The indicator for core inflation excluding the effects of indirect taxes stood at 3.2% in February, rising from 3.0% in the previous month. The NBH's rate-setting Monetary Council has said recently it is paying "even more attention than usual" to developments in the measures of underlying inflation capturing persistent inflationary trends, making the indicators, especially the core inflation excluding indirect tax effects one, a bellwether for a shift in monetary policy.

BUDGET POSTS HUF 67.3 BN SURPLUS BY END OF FEBRUARY

Hungary's cash-flow-based budget, excluding local councils, ran a 67.3

billion forint (EUR 213m) surplus at the end of February, the finance ministry said in a preliminary release. The deficit target for the full year is 998.4 billion forints. In February alone, the budget deficit came to around 177.2 billion forints but January had a surplus of 244.5 billion forints. Main expenditure items in February included spending on measures to promote social goals and development programmes. The ministry said the numbers reflect rising wages stemming from the government's six-year wage agreement with employers and unions, higher number of employed workers, increasing household consumption, government support for families' home purchases and measures to whiten the economy. The government has a full-year deficit target of 1.8% of GDP calculating with EU methodology and expects the level of government debt to fall, the ministry said.