

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balázs Szecssódi, PM's Office

Hungarian PM meets EPP group leader in Budapest

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**EP election campaign events**

**House speaker addresses Hungary NATO accession anniversary**

**Stats office publishes industrial output figures for Jan 2019**

**President opens Hungarian nature photographer's exhibition**

## TOP STORY

# ÁDER MARKS NATO ACCESSION ANNIVERSARY

Hungary's accession to NATO twenty years ago was a political and strategic decision but also an acknowledgement of the country's role in dismantling the Iron Curtain, the Hungarian president said in Prague.

Hungary "earned" its accession to the transatlantic alliance, János Áder said in his address at a conference marking the 20th anniversary of the Czech Republic's, Poland's and Hungary's NATO accession on March 12, 1999.

In the years since, Hungary has proven that it is "not merely a beneficiary but a resource and a contributor to NATO", Áder said. "We have learnt that preserving security cannot be done passively," the president said. This is one of the reasons why Hungary invests into renewing its armed forces and increasing its efficiency, he added. The Hungarian nation lost its battles for freedom and independence in the past in absence of allies, Áder said. "This was an experience that led to an overwhelming 85% support to Hungary's membership in NATO in a referendum held in 1997," he said. Hungarians understood that they had been given a chance which to miss would have been a serious mistake, Áder said.

Presidents Andrzej Duda of Poland, Miloš Zeman of the Czech Republic and Andrej Kiska of Slovakia also addressed the event in the Prague Castle.

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## **GULYÁS: 'DEBATE ON FIDESZ'S EPP MEMBERSHIP IS ACTUALLY ABOUT IMMIGRATION'**

The debate on ruling Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party (EPP) is actually about immigration, as the EPP members' approach to the issue is determined by their stance on migration, Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, said in Budapest. Earlier in the day Manfred Weber, EPP's group leader and Spitzenkandidat for the European parliamentary elections, held talks with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest.

Fidesz had several conflicts with the parties that initiated its exclusion from EPP even previously because almost all of them had voted in favour of mandatory migrant quotas, Gulyás told a press conference. He said Weber and Orbán shared the intention that Fidesz should remain an EPP member, with the two sides having an interest in an agreement. Gulyás added, however, that both sides have some "boundaries" which they are unwilling to go beyond. Orbán made it clear that Hungary cannot and does not want to make concessions in terms of defending its external borders, rejecting migration and protecting Christian culture, no matter what internal conflicts this approach generates within the EPP, he said.

The government welcomes that Weber has informed Orbán about

his plans, among which defending external borders and halting migration are priorities, Gulyás said, adding that this is why Hungary can support the German politician's quest to become president of the European Commission. Weber made it clear that if he were the EC president, he would take resolute action against migration and for the defence of external borders. "This is a common cause", Gulyás said. Weber also stressed the need to totally halt illegal immigration, he said.

Concerning Weber's previous requests to the Hungarian government, Gulyás quoted Orbán as saying that the billboards warning against measures planned by Brussels would be replaced by ones that promote the government's family policy measures. The prime minister also said he had not wanted to insult anyone with the expression "useful idiots" and if someone still feels offended, he is prepared to apologise, Gulyás said. The minister added that the government considers the future of the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest as guaranteed.

The two sides exchanged views about the future of Europe and the tasks of European institutions, too, Gulyás said. The next European Commission should focus in the most important issues, he said, noting that over the past few years the commission had failed to address the demographic situation, halt migration and keep Britain, Europe's second biggest economy, within the EU, Gulyás said.

## **WEBER: TALKS WITH ORBÁN CONSTRUCTIVE, NOT ALL PROBLEMS SOLVED**

Manfred Weber, the group leader of the European People's Party (EPP), said in Budapest that his talks with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had been constructive and covered several issues, but some problems had remained unresolved.

EPP has clear fundamental values which have to be respected by all EPP member parties, including Hungary's ruling Fidesz, Weber told journalists during his visit to the Great Synagogue in Dohány Street. "As a dialogue between the two sides is still under way, I cannot tell you what concrete steps the EPP is going to take in the near future," he said. The EPP group consists of 80 member parties, of which 13 initiated excluding Fidesz or suspending its membership, he said.

Weber welcomed the Hungarian government's decision to end the advertising campaign criticising the European Union's migration policies. It is essential for Fidesz to promise not to mount such campaigns in future, he said. The group leader said it would be an appropriate solution for Orbán to apologise for "problems" he had caused to EPP member parties.

Weber identified three major problems concerning Hungary, namely the EU's Article 7 proceedings launched against the country, the infringement procedures under way

in the European courts and the issue of the Central European University (CEU). Academic freedom is a fundamental value, he said, insisting that the CEU should stay in Budapest and continue to issue US accredited diplomas. Weber said he had held talks with the Technical University of Munich, German auto maker BMW and US universities on creating new teaching capacities enabling the university to stay in Budapest.

After paying tribute in the synagogue's garden, Weber said he was there "to make clear" that in making European policies small communities are always taken into consideration. Weber warned that anti-Semitism is on the rise all over in Europe, adding that politicians have the job to speak out for religious freedoms. He hailed the thriving of a strong Jewish community in Hungary.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES MAJOR INVESTMENT PROGRAMME IN UGANDA**

Hungary will implement "the largest foreign investment project in its history", worth 5.1 billion forints (EUR 16.2m), in Uganda, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told MTI by phone from Kampala. The project, implemented in cooperation with the Ugandan government, will "help locals and refugees prosper in the country so that they do not need to migrate to Europe", Szijjártó said. He noted that Uganda has accommodated some 1.5 million refugees from neighbouring

countries, the largest number in Africa. He added that Uganda is crucial for stability and peace in East Africa. As part of the project, Hungary will deploy a water purification system to serve the largest refugee camp in the country, accommodating some 200,000 people. Hungarian companies will also introduce a biometric personal identification system to register the refugees, and help with agricultural developments, Szijjártó added.

### **NÉMETH CALLS VISEGRAD COOPERATION 'SUCCESS STORY'**

Cooperation between the Visegrad Four countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - has been a success story, Zsolt Németh, head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, told MTI. "Some international partners" often see this platform as one "kept together by a negative force", he said. The V4 countries, however, are linked by a commitment to retaining the unity of the European Union rather than "an alleged conspiracy against the EU or a common migration policy", he said, adding that this commitment was also reflected by the Slovak V4 presidency's slogan: "A Dynamic Visegrad for Europe".

### **TAKÁCS ATTENDS EU MINISTERS' MEETING IN BUCHAREST**

Hungary strives to build a Europe which protects its borders rather than a "pro-migration community", Szabolcs

Takács, state secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, said on the sidelines of an informal meeting of European affairs ministers of the European Union, held in Bucharest.

Takács said that the meeting, dedicated to the future of the EU and its next budget, is "proof" that the greatest challenge for the community and "central theme" for the upcoming European elections was migration. "Europe is not divided between East and West but between different approaches to migration," he insisted.

The Hungarian government's position is different from that of "Brussels's mainstream" but "it does not mean being anti-European", Takács told MTI. "The Hungarian government stands on a basis of European values and is open to any constructive dialogue," he insisted.

### **ORBÁN OPENS FESTIVAL OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOLS IN BUDAPEST**

Hungary offers young people "a safe country and a secure future", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a speech opening a festival for students in vocational training, at Budapest's EXPO fair grounds. The Szakma Sztár Festival, featuring the finals of competitions for students in vocational training, will run until March 14. Orbán said that Hungary offers competitive vocational trainings for young people. Wages are growing dynamically, he said, in one of the safest countries in Europe. "We do not have migrants or terrorist attacks

but do have work, home and security," he said. "Our youth are the country's gold reserve," Orbán said. He said that spending "some time" abroad can be beneficial but "your future is here".

### **NÉZŐPONT: 61 MILLION IN CENTRAL EUROPE REJECT MIGRATION**

In central Europe, 61 million of the 83 million voters reject migration, a survey published by the Nézőpont Institute showed. The survey was conducted in nine countries on a sample of 1,000 asking the respondents' opinion on migration.

In Hungary, seven million of a total of eight million voters reject non-European migration. In the Czech Republic, 8 million, in Poland, 22 million are against it, Nézőpont found. The number of pro-migration voters is around or below 1 million in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia, it said. In total, 61 million voters in the region reject and 16 million approve of migration, it said.

The survey was conducted in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia in February.

### **HANKOOK WORKERS STRIKE OVER PAY**

Workers at Korean tyre maker Hankook's plant in Dunaújváros, in central Hungary, started a strike over remuneration at 2:00 in the afternoon on Tuesday, unions association VDSZ said. Tamás Székely, the head of VDSZ, told MTI that more than 80% of workers support the strike and plan to join it.

VDSZ said Hankook Tire Hungary's management had flatly rejected their demands. VDSZ also complained the company had suggested a strike could jeopardise workers' annual bonuses.

VDSZ entered talks with management demanding an 18% increase in base pay, an annual bonus equivalent to a full month's pay and a 5% premium for workers on an uninterrupted schedule. After workers staged a two-hour warning strike a week earlier, Hankook Tire

Hungary announced a 13.6% pay rise, with retroactive effect from January 1. Székely noted that the wage raise was performance-based which meant long-time employees at the company would get 10% more pay while new hires would get 20% more.

Hankook employs over 3,300 people in Hungary.

### **TERÉZ BLVD BOMBER SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT**

The appeals court of Budapest handed a life sentence to a man charged with exploding a self-made bomb in central Budapest's Teréz Boulevard in 2016, in which two police officers were critically wounded. Under the binding ruling, the perpetrator cannot be released for at least 30 years. The investigation established that the man had attacked the patrolling police to obtain their arms. During the investigation, the perpetrator had admitted to the charges but withdrew his confession during the primary court proceedings. He later refused to appear in the court.