

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Győr women's handball team defends title in Hungarian Cup final

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

EU affairs ministers meet in Brussels

Palace of Arts director's presser on arts centre's 2019/20 season

President gives talk on climate change in SW Hungary

TOP STORY

FIDESZ 'WANTS ANTI-MIGRATION EPP'

Fidesz wants a strong, united, Christian democratic European People's Party that opposes migration, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the PM's Office, has said.

Fidesz wants to remain in the centre-right bloc as long as there is a chance of the EPP embracing these values, Gulyás added. Fidesz has always distanced itself from making personal attacks against people within its political family, he told MTI, noting that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will head Fidesz's delegation to the EPP's political general assembly scheduled for Wednesday, where delegates are expected to vote on Fidesz's future in the grouping. "We'd like to see fair and clear conditions," Gulyás said. "We want to see a strong, united, Christian democratic EPP which opposes illegal immigration, and as long as there is hope and a good chance of this, we want to be a part of the EPP." He stressed, at the same time, Fidesz's position that no compromise was possible when it came to opposing immigration and protecting Christian culture. Concerning EPP chairman Joseph Daul and group leader Manfred Weber, Gulyás said that notwithstanding disagreements within the grouping, Fidesz had never personally criticised either and this principle would abide in the future, too.

RULE OF LAW ACTIONS AGAINST HUNGARY 'POLITICAL'

Asked about EPP group leader Manfred Weber's recent proposal to set up an independent body to monitor member states' adherence to the rule of law, Gulyás said Hungary's ruling Fidesz party had been borne out of the fight for freedom and the rule of law against a dictatorship. "So we consider the fundamental values of the democratic rule of law to be important," he said. The PM's Office chief added, however, the observance of the rule of law in the EU was not monitored on the basis of objective assessment but was tied to political muckraking. "That's why the rule of law is deteriorating in countries governed by anti-migration political forces but is in the best possible shape in countries governed by the pro-migration ones," he said. The Hungarian government "has often spoken out against this double standard", Gulyás noted, saying that there was "nothing wrong" with Hungary's rule of law institutions.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PROOF SURFACES OF ATTEMPTS TO MAKE UN MIGRATION COMPACT MANDATORY

"Tangible proof" has surfaced indicating that several committed supporters of the UN's migration compact want to make the pact mandatory for every EU member

state, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a press conference on the sidelines of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels. A "secret document" has been published on work by the European Commission's legal service to formulate "lengthy and devious" legal grounds for suggesting that the compact is, after all, mandatory for EU member states, he said. Although the document was not released the way the EC would have wanted it to be, Szijjártó said, the commission "has confirmed its existence". "It is Hungary's clear conviction that the package is not binding," the minister added.

Szijjártó insisted that the EC intends to have the EU's development policies implemented on the basis of the goals of the migration compact. The document also mandates that member states must contribute to achieving the EU's goals, including the implementation of the migration compact, he said.

The minister said it was clear that the compact had supporters in Brussels, arguing that "it is rare that legal opinions like this are not ordered publications". "This means that the battle hasn't ended," he said. "In fact, there's a new battle starting against Brussels' secret pro-migration plans". Hungary holds firm on its refusal to carry out "a single word or sentence" of the global migration compact, the minister said.

In response to a question on another subject, Szijjártó said Hungary's ruling Fidesz was the most successful member of the European People's

Party, arguing that it won three consecutive general elections. "Fidesz, which wants to remain a member of the EPP, would like to be a part of the debate that is not just about the future of the European Union, but also the position to be represented by the EPP in the future," he added.

ORBÁN SENDS CONDOLENCES TO NEW ZEALAND PM OVER CHRISTCHURCH ATTACK

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sent a letter of condolences to Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, expressing his sympathies over a terrorist attack which claimed 50 lives in two mosques in the city of Christchurch. "This brutal attack unfortunately once again proved that in the 21st century, hate, violence and terror knows no boundaries, or borders. I can assure you that Hungary and the Hungarian government condemns all forms of violence, and we will continue to support international efforts aimed at eradicating terrorism and violent extremism," the letter said.

TRÓCSÁNYI: INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES NOT IN DANGER

The newly established administrative courts do not threaten the independence of the judiciary in Hungary, and the Venice Commission's opinion on the matter was "balanced

and took the aims and efforts of the Hungarian government into account," Justice Minister László Trócsányi said in an interview published in daily Magyar Nemzet. The courts handling matters of public administration are set to start operating as an independent branch of the judiciary from January 1, 2020. Trócsányi had requested that the Council of Europe's Venice Commission review the procedure to avoid discrepancies between international and Hungarian legislation. The commission's opinion was published on Friday.

In the interview to Magyar Nemzet, Trócsányi said that besides criticism, the commission had also acknowledged the Hungarian government's efforts to align the country's legal system with "the country's traditions and European standards". The commission "conceded" that several countries operate administrative courts separately from other courts of justice, the minister said. The commission also said that ministerial oversight over the branch is justified, he added. In several European countries, courts are managed by the minister of justice, "with the appropriate checks and balances in place". This means that the minister is responsible for providing the equipment for the courts' smooth operation and prepares and submits the courts' budget to parliament. Regarding the wages of judges, he said that a wage raise in the sector is a priority of the 2020 budget. "I don't see why wages could not be raised starting from January 1, 2020," he said.

PM ADVISOR: 'IMPERIAL' APPROACH GAINING TRACTION IN EU

Concepts to "build an empire" and to punish nation states is gaining traction in the European Union instead of the notion of a useful and forward-looking alliance of free member states, the prime minister's chief domestic security advisor told public television. György Bakondi commented on the proposal of Manfred Weber, the European People's Party's group leader in the European Parliament, who said that an independent body comprising former constitutional judges, top judges and former members of the Court of Justice of the European Union should be set up to monitor the state of the rule of law in member states.

Bakondi also insisted that statements by some EU leaders and documents indicated that the UN's compact on migration would be made mandatory in EU legislation should "pro-migration forces" garner a majority at the European parliamentary elections in May. The Hungarian government continues to oppose such ideas at every forum, he said.

HUNGARIAN STATE OFFICIALS MARK NATIONAL HOLIDAY IN US, CANADA

Hungarian state officials addressed events marking the March 15 national holiday organised by

ethnic Hungarian communities in the US and Canada over the weekend. Ministerial commissioner at the prime minister's office Péter Szilágyi told an event in Los Angeles that "March 15 is a symbol of unity that transcends our differences." A statue of King Stephen who is considered to be the founder of the Hungarian state was inaugurated during the event held in a local church named after the king. In his speech, Szilágyi highlighted the participation of Hungarian emigrants who fled after 1849 in the American Civil War. State secretary in charge of ethnic Hungarian communities abroad Árpád János Potápi addressed events in Edmonton and Calgary in Canada on Saturday and Sunday. He said Hungarians disliked being told by others how to live their lives and described March 15 as "the birthday of Hungarian freedom." Referring to the upcoming European parliamentary election, he said that Hungarians can decide in May whether "we can protect our sovereignty from oppressive European powers or have to implement a central plan". Potápi told MTI that he had met local ethnic Hungarian leaders in Edmonton and Calgary, and visited churches and weekend schools. He said it was uplifting to meet young children who sometimes spoke better Hungarian than their parents and this was "partly thanks to the weekend schools operated

with support of the Hungarian government”.

MI HAZÁNK DEMANDS DISPATCHING HUNGARIAN TROOPS TO BORDERS, NOT AFGHANISTAN

Radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) has demanded that Hungarian troops should be dispatched to protect the country's borders instead of serving on missions in Afghanistan. The Hungarian army must serve Hungarian interests, the party's deputy leader, Előd Novák, told a press conference. He said that the billions of forints spent on foreign missions should rather be used to upgrade the Hungarian army and increase wages in the defence sector. “By joining NATO, Hungary has lost its independence. Our NATO membership mostly serves US interests and fails to protect Hungary from other NATO member states,” Novák said.

FIDESZ CALLS ON MAYOR TO REVEAL ‘SECRET MIGRATION PACT’

Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has called on György Gémesi, the Mayor

of Gödöllő, north-east of Budapest, “to reveal what kind of immigration pacts he is keeping from” local residents. Gémesi's party rejects the charge of entering into a secret pact on migration. Fidesz MP László Vécsey accused the mayor of “forming an alliance with one of Europe's most extreme pro-migration political groups”. Reports say that Gémesi's party, Új Kezdet, in February joined the European Democratic Party. Vécsey said the party sits in the European Parliament with “an extreme liberal group that fights for the introduction of the migrant quota”. He accused Gémesi of being “openly opposed to the will of the city”, insisting that 98% of local residents objected to the quota system for relocating migrants.

Új Kezdet said in a statement that it categorically rejected reports in Magyar Nemzet and Echo TV that it had joined Guy Verhofstadt's liberal ALDE group in the EP. Whereas the EDP and ALDE form a group in the EP, they are nonetheless two separate parties whose views differ on many issues, the statement said. Új Kezdet is not associated with ALDE and will not be in the future either, the statement added. The party promotes the EU's

efforts to handle the migration crisis at its source, thereby reducing migration, he said, adding that several parties within the EDP are pushing for decisive action to halt migration. The media outlets in question did not seek a comment from Új Kezdet, which regards the reports to be misleading, the statement said.

PARLIAMENT SUSPENDS IMMUNITY OF JOBBIK MP FARKAS

Parliament suspended the immunity of Jobbik lawmaker Gergely Farkas in a 151-6 vote. Chief Public Prosecutor Péter Polt last week proposed that the speaker of parliament suspend the Jobbik MP's immunity in connection with an investigation of election fraud. In the 2018 general election campaign, Farkas is suspected of having offered to “reimburse the costs” of around 600,000 forints (EUR 1,900) to an opponent, a candidate of the green opposition LMP party, if that candidate dropped out of the race. The prosecutor's office will hear Farkas as a suspect in the case. Farkas himself had agreed to the move to suspend his immunity.