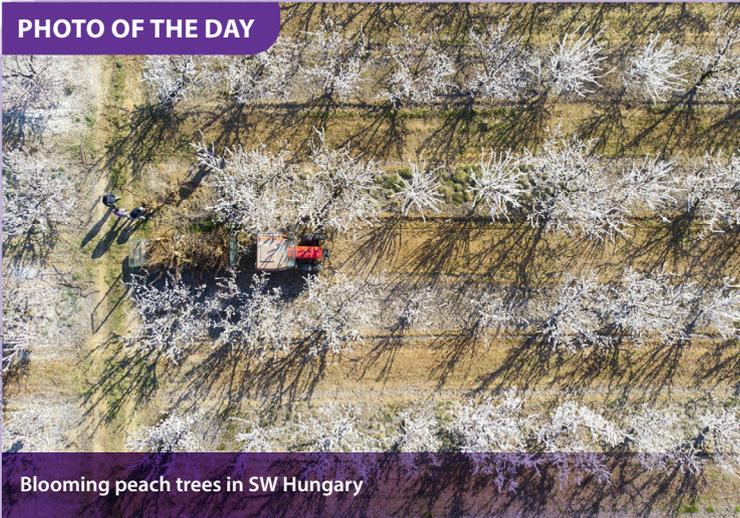


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

Blooming peach trees in SW Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parliament holds plenary session

Human resources minister addresses Trianon conference

German Justice Minister Katarina Barley meets Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth in Budapest

Parliamentary speakers of V4, Benelux meet in W Slovakia

TOP STORY

ORBÁN URGES SWIFT ACTION ON MIGRATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, speaking at a conference on migration in Budapest, called for swift action to be taken on migration and border protection and he also called for European unity.

"We must act now," Orbán told the Budapest Migration Conference organised by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium. If European policymakers fail to make decisions straightaway, then it will be impossible to stop later what has already begun, he said, citing UN data indicating that the population of Africa will rise by half a billion people in 13 years and the gap between the quality of life in Africa and Europe will widen. "Migration pressure from Africa will surely grow." Orbán urged help to be given to Africans in their home countries rather than in Europe. The migration policies of eastern and western parts of Europe must be reconciled now, since this would be impossible later on, he said. Current EU leaders and structures are not up to the task of resolving the problem of migration, he said, adding that the European Commission should be stripped of its powers over migration policymaking and border protection, and a body of Schengen area interior ministers established to address the issue. "If, at least, we achieve this after the European elections, it will have been worth holding them."

ORBÁN: HUNGARY NEEDS BIG WESTERN ALLY

The key issue for Hungary is whether a major European country pursues the Hungarian approach to the issue of migration, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told a conference on migration in Budapest. This, he added, was likely to be Italy, because it is a country of borders, with a maritime one. "Our energies are finite," Orbán said. "We need a big country from western Europe that finally says the same as us."

For western Europe, managing the coexistence of indigenous citizens with other peoples is of key importance, but for central Europe "there aren't any such masses and all efforts must go towards making sure there aren't any in future either," he said. Hungary's current outsized role in the debate is a function of its geography and history, he said, noting that when migrants choose to come to Europe overland, they must arrive at the southern borders of Hungary. "Neither Hungary nor its political leaders, including me, want to play a leading role in Europe," he said, adding, however, that ordinary Hungarians never again wanted to experience hundreds of thousands of military-age men traversing the country. "This is why a fence was built and why the government has stood up to mainstream Europe," he said.

The prime minister also said Europe should be led by institutions. It was not designed for individuals and strong political figures, he said, adding that

the European political concept of maintaining strong institutions was right. European "soft power", he said, was 85% dominated by think-tanks, NGOs, universities and the media of the left-liberal wing which acted in concert. "This is the reason why, when a western European thinks like a Hungarian and says what he thinks, the 85% shreds it to pieces by the next morning," he said. But in central Europe "the proportion is 50-50 or even moving in a slightly more conservative direction." "Here in central Europe, I can survive this but not in the West."

ORBÁN URGES VOTERS TO 'BACK HUNGARIAN INTERESTS' AT EP ELECTION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in a radio interview, urged all Hungarians "who love their country and support its interests" to participate in the European Parliament election on May 26. "Brussels must be shown that what is happening in Hungary is what the Hungarian people want," Orbán told public radio. "It is not in Brussels in the offices of parties pushed and pulled to the left and George Soros-type civil organisations that will decide what happens in Hungary and Europe," Orbán said. "We are not going to follow the dictates of Brussels if these are no good for Hungarians," he added.

Commenting on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement that it is unacceptable for certain member states to bar migrants, Orbán said pro-migration countries

and their leaders had not given up on their "plan to change central Europe". "But central Europeans have the moral upper hand because, unlike westerners, they don't impose their ideas about how to live on others," he said. "Hungary will not give up its fundamental rights ... and Hungarians will continue to make decisions on important issues that determine people's lives here," he added. "The Brussels elite lives in a bubble and has lost touch with reality," he said, adding that national interests must be firmly planted and given priority.

Commenting on the ruling Fidesz party's membership of the European People's Party, Orbán said: "we have won time". Given that 13 parties requested Fidesz's expulsion from the EPP, the outcome was acceptable, he added. "After the European elections, we in Fidesz will decide what's best for Hungary; whether to carry on as part of the EPP or find our place in a new party grouping." All of the 13 parties that wanted to expel Fidesz "are pro-migration", he added. The Hungarian ruling party, he said, is governing for a fourth term and it was the most successful European party in the last three EP elections. Had the dispute reached a point going beyond a solution, Fidesz would have quit the EPP, Orbán said.

The prime minister said the EPP's pro-migration wing was open about its plans to make a grand coalition after the EP, making arrangements behind the scenes with the greens, the liberals and the Socialists, he said. "They also

know that Fidesz would never support this, the same way as Fidesz would never enter a grand coalition at home with DK," the party of the former Socialist prime minister, he added. When after the EP elections Fidesz decides whether or not to remain an EPP member, then one decisive factor will be whether double standards still apply, whether the EPP becomes pro-migration and whether it stands in support of Christian values or continues to shift to the left, Orbán said.

Orbán noted that the ruling coalition in The Netherlands had lost its majority in the upper house and the party of Frans Timmermans had thereby suffered a defeat. While Timmermans, the lead candidate of the Party of European Socialists (PES) for President of the European Commission, is visiting Budapest and other European cities "to lecture us about democracy, his party has just been sent away with a flea in their ear by the people at home". "The likes of Timmermans, who are chased away by voters at home, must not be given positions in Brussels because this weakens EU cooperation," he said.

Commenting on the two months before the EP election and referring to the government's recent billboard information campaign, Orbán said: "They're a bit angry with us in Brussels". "But people need reminding ... that even a few weeks ago, the EP approved, with support from Hungary's left-wing MEPs, the tripling of the budget for migration in the next seven-year budget period."

Orbán said the task ahead was to continue informing people about

the plans of Brussels. He said that hopefully, after the EP elections, "better times will come along so we can build a new Europe with Hungary's active participation."

SYRIAN MAN ARRESTED ON SUSPICION OF TERRORISM

A Syrian man suspected of acts of terrorism and carrying out multiple executions in his homeland in 2016 has been taken into custody, the Budapest public prosecutor said on Sunday. The metropolitan investigative prosecutor's office requested the arrest of the suspected Islamic State member, and a central district court judge today ordered the arrest of the man known as F. Hassan to last for the duration of a month. The Syrian is thought to have been a high-ranking IS leader who organised suicide bombings and at least 20 executions. His lawyer, László Kelen, told public affairs channel M1 that the suspect denies the charges.

On Saturday, Hungary's Counter Terrorism Centre (TEK) has said it was working together with Europol and the police forces and secret services of various countries to assess the past criminal activities and network of links maintained in Europe by the Syrian who had successfully applied for asylum in Greece. The municipal chief prosecutor said the 27-year-old is believed to have participated in Islamic State executions in Homs in 2016. Before arriving in Hungary, the suspect had visited a number of other European countries, TEK said.

The suspect was first detained at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International airport on Dec. 30 after producing forged travel documents for himself and a woman in his company. In a court proceeding he was handed a suspended prison sentence for "human smuggling and other crimes" and was awaiting expulsion from the country, the statement said. The Belgian authorities and Eurojust informed the Hungarian authorities of the man's suspected terrorist activities, it added.

PÁRBEZÉD POLITICIAN RANKS FOURTH ON JOINT EP LIST WITH SOCIALISTS

The Socialist Party's national board has approved its joint European Parliament electoral list with the Párbeszéd party. Benedek Jávör, an MEP who heads the Párbeszéd list, ranks fourth on the joint one. Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth told a press conference that the ruling Fidesz was no longer able to represent Hungary's interests in the European Parliament, so this task would now fall to the Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance. He described the alliance as a left-green coalition "that fights for a social Europe, paying special attention to climate protection". Tóth said it was regrettable that the joint list did not include names from more opposition parties as broader cooperation would "thwart [Prime Minister Viktor] Orbán's populist, far-right aspirations".

Gergely Karácsony, Párbeszéd's co-leader, said his party's board should approve the joint list since its MEP

candidate had a “good chance” of getting into the EP. He said only the Socialists and Párbeszéd among Hungary’s opposition parties were capable of thinking in terms of an alliance. Whereas it had appeared realistic in the past few months that the opposition would “make a joint offer to the electorate”, the fact that a common platform had not emerged had not been the fault of the Socialists or Párbeszéd, he said, adding that hopefully the opposition would come together for the October local elections.

The Socialist Party’s Ágnes Kunhalmi said she was still open to any pro-European organisation keen to fight for Hungarian and European democracy. “Orban has fallen into a difficult position but he has not failed,” she said, adding that the Hungarian opposition voters must fight hard to keep Orbán at bay in the EP elections. Kunhalmi also said a decision was made for the Socialists and Párbeszéd to cooperate closely in the local elections, and this meant jointly negotiating with other parties and mounting a joint campaign.

Meanwhile, Tóth also referred to the body of “wise men” set up by the European People’s Party to examine “not only Fidesz but Hungary too”. He said the Socialists would also establish a similar body with a view to discussing the rule of law in Hungary with the EPP and how EU and public monies are spent. Tóth will join former Hungarian EU commissioner Péter Balázs, former Socialist lawmaker László Donáth and Péter Bárándy, a former justice minister, in forming its own group of wise men, he noted.

DK: LAW CHANGE COULD PAVE THE WAY FOR EP ELECTION FRAUD

The opposition Democratic Coalition has said a change in Hungary’s election law approved in December allowing the possibility of postal voting in the European Parliament elections opens the door to election fraud. DK lawmaker Gergely Arató told a press conference on Saturday that the list of Hungarians beyond borders entitled to a postal vote has not been made public. A Hungarian-Slovak dual citizen may therefore cast a vote in Slovakia before posting their ballot paper to Hungary, he said. Also, if they have a Hungarian address, they would be able to cast their vote in the normal way by crossing into Hungary as well as making use of their postal vote, he said. Rules prohibit double votes, he noted, yet no mechanisms are available to ensure the rule is not breached. DK has therefore turned to the European Commission and the European People’s Party, as well as to the top candidate of the European Socialist Party, pointing out the anomaly and how it could affect European politics, Arató said.

NOVÁK: FIDESZ ‘CANNOT STAY’ IF EPP MOVES TO THE LEFT

Fidesz “cannot stay in the European People’s Party” if the EPP moves to the left “instead of representing our traditional values,” Katalin Novák, the

ruling party’s deputy leader in charge of foreign affairs, told the daily Magyar Hírlap in an interview. “We’ve moved apart but we’re not yet divorced,” she said, referring to talks between Fidesz and the rest of the EPP in Brussels last week. Novák said there was no point in talking about ultimatums in connection with the EPP’s decision to freeze Fidesz’s voting rights among other measures. “We’re not in a subordinate relationship,” she said. “That’s why we’ve said we could not have been suspended or excluded beyond our will.” “In Brussels, we gave each other a chance to assess what outlook we have for the future,” she added.

Novák said EPP group leader Manfred Weber’s conditions of ending the poster campaign and making an apology had been met, but the issue of the Central European University was not a “decisive issue” in the EPP-Fidesz relationship. “Fidesz will examine the proposal” regarding the CEU, she added. No commission of inquiry making a unilateral decision would be arriving in Hungary, she said, adding the two sides would “continue to engage in dialogue”. “The situation is like in a marriage when the relationship gets to the point that things must be thought through,” Novák said. After May, Fidesz will assess in which political community it can best represent the interests of Hungarians. “This will determine what political community we’ll belong to.”

She said the possibility “cannot be excluded” that Fidesz would continue to work inside the EPP. But

the big question, she added, was whether “member parties cotton on that turning to the left means losing”. The EPP, she said, only had a future as a right-wing party alliance, and if it moved further to the left, Fidesz would have no place in it. Novák said that hopefully other EPP members would no longer single Fidesz out but address the electorate instead and say what Europe they want: “whether to say yes or no to mass immigration, or the family and Christianity.”

ÁDER INAUGURATES BUST OF BARTÓK IN POLAND

President János Áder and his counterpart Andrzej Duda inaugurated a bust of Hungarian composer and pianist Béla Bartók in Kielce, in southern Poland as part of events marking the day of Hungarian-Polish friendship. The bronze bust was erected in an avenue in the centre of Kielce, which already includes more than forty other statues, including those of painters Marc Chagall and Salvador Dalí and composer Igor Stravinsky. The presidents also lit candles at a memorial dedicated to scouts killed in WW2 and laid a wreath at the memorial plaque of the victims of the Smolensk air disaster of 2010. Earlier in the day, the presidents attended a mass delivered by Bishop of Kielce Jan Piotrowski and András Veres, Bishop of Győr, in western Hungary, who is president of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

The annual Polish-Hungarian friendship celebrations date back to

March 24, 2006, when the two countries’ presidents at the time, Lech Kaczynski of Poland and László Sólyom of Hungary, inaugurated a memorial in Győr.

On Friday, Duda decorated Áder with the Order of the White Eagle, the highest Polish state honour, in recognition of the Hungarian President’s merits in promoting Hungarian-Polish friendship and his support for Poland.

In his speech, Áder noted that other holders of the honour included Karol Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Paul II, Jozef Pilsudski, Poland’s inter-war leader, and “my predecessor and esteemed professor, one-time Hungarian President Ferenc Mádl”.

PROTECTION OF NATIONAL BORDERS ‘RIGHTFUL INTEREST’

The protection of national borders is a rightful interest of countries and migration must be regulated, Andrew Veprek, deputy assistant secretary at the bureau of population, refugees and migration in the US Department of State said at a migration conference in Budapest. Uncontrolled mass migration is a global phenomenon, he told the conference organised by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium. The term should be understood to include temporary, voluntary and also forced migration.

Hungarian Justice Minister László Trócsányi told the conference that only a Europe of strong nation states was capable of addressing the great challenges of the day, including

migration. He expressed hope that instead of “lecturing each other”, European Union countries can engage in a sensible debate about migration and security.

Azbej Tristan, Hungarian state secretary in charge of helping persecuted Christians, told the conference that the next European Commission should spend at least as much on helping persecuted Christians and people in their own countries as managing and supporting migration today. Hungary Helps will be developed into a V4 Helps scheme to give aid to persecuted Christians, he said.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, told the conference that Europe was synonymous with the idea of joining forces and forging compromises. “Never before have we needed Europe as much as we need it today but never before has Europe been as divided as it is today,” he said, urging member states to join forces, even if they greatly differ from each other, “because Europe cannot work without compromise.” Sarkozy said Hungary was “a thoroughly European country thanks to its values, culture and history, and also a democratic country.” Referring to ruling Fidesz’s election victory in 2010, 2014 and 2018, he said “if somebody wins the election three times in a row in an unstable world, they deserve respect.”

Former Czech president Václav Klaus said mass migration was the greatest challenge of the current era. It is important to differentiate between individual migration and mass



migration which, he said, endangers social cohesion and results in cultural, social and political conflict.

Alexander Downer, Australia's former foreign minister, slammed Europe's migration policy as "disastrous" and "appalling". He said the false assessment of the situation undermined political security as most voters shunned those who believe that migration cannot be handled in a globalised world and therefore should not be stopped.

Jaime Mayor Oreja, Spain's former interior minister and a former vice-president of the EPP, said that

alongside the crisis of migration was a deeper one in which the continent's soul, values and personality had been lost among the EU's "countless institutions". EU member states, rather than being threatened by political extremism, were vulnerable to an "extreme lack of order". Without renewal, Europe won't handle migration effectively, he said. This is why it must come to understand where it has made a mistake as well as when and why it lost its Christian values, he added.

George Borjas, professor of economics and social policy at

the Harvard Kennedy School, said migration should not be interpreted simply as an international movement of labour or as a commercial process devoid of cultural or civilisational ramifications.

David Coleman, a professor of demography at the University of Oxford, anticipated a new migration wave from Africa tied to a population explosion there in parallel with demographic decline in Europe. He said migration was not the right solution to an aging society as it would result in uncontrollable population growth and changes in ethnic proportions.