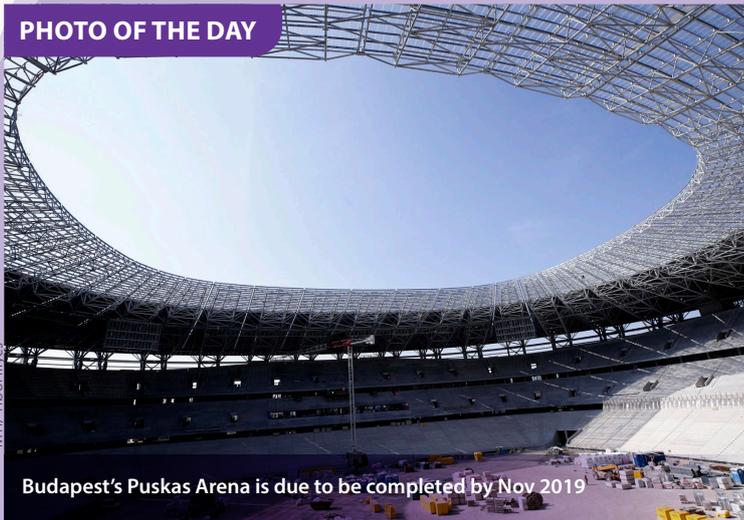


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Budapest's Puskas Arena is due to be completed by Nov 2019

MTI/Tibor Illés

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**NATO foreign ministers meet in Washington**

**Stats office releases Feb retail data**

**Data protection authority's presser on 2018 activities**

**Audit office presser on financial management of hospitals**

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY AGAINST QUALIFIED MAJORITY IN EU

Hungary does not support applying a qualified majority in the European Union's decisions on foreign policy, Zsolt Németh, head of the Hungarian Parliament's foreign policy committee, told MTI in Brussels.

Speaking after a meeting of member states' parliamentary foreign policy committees, Németh said the EU should pursue a "louder, clearer and bolder foreign policy", but without violating the sovereignty of member states or sowing further discord among them. The EU's foreign policy should not be burdened by contentious issues such as the acceptance of the "quota law", he said, calling compromise-based foreign policy decision making a great virtue of the European Union. A strong leadership would be able to represent and enforce those compromise-based decisions effectively in the international arena, he said. European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker's statement that no enlargement could be expected during his five-year tenure "had carried a negative message", he said. The position that the EU should be reformed comprehensively before further states can join the bloc is "dangerous" as it fails to calculate with the possibility of conflicts erupting in the Western Balkans, he said. The enlargement process can also add value to, and should go hand in hand with, the reforms, Németh said.

## ÁDER CONGRATULATES SLOVAKIA'S ČAPUTOVÁ

Hungarian President János Áder has sent a letter of congratulations to Zuzana Čaputová, who recently won the presidential election in Slovakia. "I think I can greet you as a leader ... who, like me, is committed to the development of relations between our countries and our region," the letter released by the President of the Republic's office said. Áder added that he trusted that he and Čaputová would contribute to the further enrichment of Hungarian-Slovak cooperation and he was ready to discuss this in person. "I'd gladly exchange views with you on matters such as sustainability and environmental issues that are important to us both, as well as on the future of our region and Europe," Áder wrote. He also expressed hope that he would continue "constructive dialogue" maintained with her predecessor, with a view to strengthening mutual trust and resolving outstanding issues. He wrote that the "openness" she had shown as regards national minority communities was a source of hope. Áder extended an invitation to his new Slovak counterpart to visit Budapest to discuss Hungary-Slovak relations and to review prospects for further cooperation.

## NOVÁK: GOVT FAMILY SUPPORT POLICY 'MODEL'

The Hungarian government's family support policy is seen as a model and

"a reference point" to be followed, Katalin Novák, the state secretary of the human resources ministry, said, summing up the recent 13th World Congress of Families in Verona. Participants in the congress were primarily interested in learning about the scheme's financing mechanism, Novák told public news channel M1, adding she had outlined the package of family support measures that parliament passed on Monday. These include granting an interest-free general purpose loan up to 10 million forints (EUR 31,100) to married couples who commit to having children and expanding the preferential home purchase subsidy scheme to include resale homes. The measures also include partially exempting families from mortgage repayments after the birth of their first child and granting up to 2.5 million forints for purchases of new, seven-passenger vehicles for families with at least three children. The bill on personal income tax exemption for women with four children and payments to grandparents who undertake child care is expected to come before parliament in the second half of the year, she said, adding that the development of nurseries is ongoing. She noted that the government will launch an information and awareness campaign to familiarise the general public with the measures.

In a separate interview, the state secretary told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio that "I want to give as much support as possible to those

in Hungary who are on the cusp of undertaking parenthood and to carers, as well as to families with up to two children." As regards the scheme's financing, Novák said the diligence of Hungarians had provided its foundations, noting that the number of employed has risen by one million since 2010.

## NÉMETH: UKRAINE ELECTION CONFIRMS COUNTRY NEEDS CHANGE

The first round of Ukraine's presidential election clearly indicated that the country wants change, Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said in Brussels. Speaking at a conference on humanitarian and minority rights held in the European Parliament, Németh said Hungary also believed Ukraine was in need of political change, both in terms of its relationships with its neighbours and the treatment of its ethnic Hungarian community living in Transcarpathia. He said Ukraine needed to establish peace with Russia in a way that enables its Western integration. But Ukraine will not be able to integrate into the West if it fails to respect the identities of its national minorities, Németh added. "Ukraine's western integration will not be possible if it turns into an authoritarian country that deepens tensions among its communities," Németh said. He also warned Ukraine of the consequences of failing to respect minorities' rights to the free use of their native language, minority

education and the principle of local governance. Németh also warned that Ukraine's minority laws were taking the country down the wrong path when it came to respecting the identities of its minority groups.

"From a legal perspective, the state of human rights and specifically minority rights is at a historic low in Ukraine," he said. "The last few years have been a period of regression." At stake in the country's presidential election, he said, was whether there would be a chance and political will to respect human and minority rights. Németh, however, expressed Hungary's optimism, saying that the presidential election brought with it a chance for Ukraine to make a fresh start. He voiced hope that Hungary and Ukraine and the Ukrainian government and the Transcarpathian Hungarian community will be able to turn their respective relationships around.

Fernand de Vareennes, the United Nations' special rapporteur on minority issues, told the conference that it was wrong to separate the concepts of minority rights and human rights, arguing that the former was an integral part of the latter group of rights. Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál emphasised the importance of keeping the situation of minority communities on the agenda, so that the issue of national and language minorities "can't just be discarded by citing the principle of subsidiarity". László Brenzovics, head of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ), said the majority

of Ukrainian voters were dissatisfied with the country's policies. "It's clear that the country wants change," he said. "Transcarpathia and the Transcarpathian Hungarian community want change, too."

### **ORBÁN, ALBA IULIA ARCHBISHOP DISCUSS PAPAL VISIT, INVESTMENTS FOR ROMANIAN HUNGARIANS**

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met György Jakubinyi, the archbishop of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár), to discuss Pope Francis's visit to Romania and investments crucial for the protection and religious life of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, the prime minister's press chief said. The archbishop briefed the prime minister on current affairs in the central Romanian archdiocese, Bertalan Havasi said. They discussed investments in the area, which the Hungarian government is ready to continue to fund as it did in the past, such as the reconstruction of the St Michael church in Cluj-Napoca (Koloszvár), in western Romania, Havasi said. Orbán and Jakubinyi also discussed Pope Francis's forthcoming visit to Romania. The pontiff will visit, among other sites, Șumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó), a traditional place of pilgrimage for Hungarians, in early June. The Hungarian government and the archdiocese will closely cooperate to ensure smooth organisation, Havasi said.

### **SOCIALISTS CALL ON FIDESZ MEPS 'TO FIGHT' TO BOOST EU FARMING SUBSIDIES**

The opposition Socialists have called on ruling Fidesz MEPs "to fight" to increase the level of EU subsidies for Hungarian farmers. Speaking at a press conference, a board member of the party asked why Fidesz MEPs had not voted in the European Parliament in favour of a proposal to increase farming subsidies by 20% if Fidesz were committed to supporting Hungarian farming. The Socialists are committed to farm subsidies, Gábor Harangozó said, adding that they called on the government to support a common budget with a minimum payment of 100,000 forints (EUR 310) per hectare and 30% co-financing so that "more money gets to the Hungarian countryside and villages". Harangozó noted that although Hungary is one of the recipients of the highest level of EU subsidies, the government only provides 15% co-financing, the lowest rate in Europe which compares with a rate of 30% or higher in all other EU members in the region.

Harangozó was responding to Monday's announcement by Zsolt Nyitrai, the prime minister's commissioner for social affairs, that farming experts will commence a nationwide tour to ask farmers for their opinion on how to boost their competitiveness. Hungary's rural development programmes are slow

to get off the ground, he said, noting “massive delays” in central funding allocations. Since January 11, lawfully buying and selling land has been “nigh impossible in absence of legislation regulating the terms of pricing in a contract,” Harangozó added. Also, he said it was unclear why no funds had been allocated for irrigation this year, the driest of the past 20 years. Had the government delivered investments promised in three election campaigns, up to ten times as much land could have been brought under irrigation, Harangozó said. He proposed building reservoirs to take advantage of Hungary’s vast water resources.

## **OPPOSITION MPS CALL ON FIDESZ’S PÓCS TO QUIT**

Ten opposition women lawmakers have turned to the parliamentary speaker calling for the resignation of Fidesz MP János Pócs, after a video emerged of him “humiliating” one of his employees. In the footage which surfaced last month, Pócs can be seen locking a Roma employee of his into a furnace and threatening to set him on fire.

Addressing a press conference with fellow Democratic Coalition, LMP, Socialist, Párbeszéd and independent lawmakers, nationalist Jobbik’s Andrea Varga-Damm said it was “unacceptable in today’s Hungarian democracy to stigmatise and humiliate a community in this way”. She said that if Pócs were a member of Jobbik, the chief public

prosecutor would have already ordered an investigation into the incident.

Tímea Szabó of Párbeszéd said Pócs’s actions were so “outrageous” that the politician should disappear from Hungarian public life altogether. She called on ruling Fidesz to publicly condemn Pócs’s actions and call for his resignation. Ágnes Vadai of the Democratic Coalition said that while Prime Minister Viktor Orbán “likes to present himself as someone who takes a stand against expressions of extremism”, he was unwilling to do what was necessary when it came to someone in his own party. The Socialist Party’s Zita Gurmai said that anyone who makes jokes about setting others on fire was not someone with a “bad humour”, but rather “simply a Nazi”. “In a normal country, a lawmaker would resign the day after such a video came out,” she said. “And if they didn’t, they should be expelled by their own party or group.”

The Liberal Party’s Anett Bósz, who sits as an independent in parliament, said the “Hungarian government’s anti-Semitism and racism are often not as covert as they seem”. She said Pócs had done “a great service to Fidesz by openly exposing the anti-Semitism and racism the Hungarian government keeps under wraps”. Bernadett Szél, another independent MP, also accused Pócs of being “openly anti-Semitic and openly racist”. She said the prime minister bore direct responsibility for tolerating the presence of “racist people” in his parliamentary group.

LMP’s Krisztina Hohn said Pócs’s actions were unworthy of a lawmaker.

Commenting on the presser, Fidesz group leader Máté Kocsis said the opposition was applying double standards in the matter. Kocsis, addressing a press conference on a different subject, said his party would not take part in the “opposition’s campaign game” in which the left “is fine with” lawmakers listing Jews or the vandalism of Jewish monuments, but demands that an MP resign after “some unfortunate friendly goofing around”. Asked to comment on the video itself, Kocsis said Pócs’s actions were “wrong and unfortunate” because “it can lead to harsh misunderstandings”. He said Pócs -- who at the time of the recording of the video was not an MP -- had given work to a lot of underprivileged Roma during his lifetime. Therefore every accusation of him being “anti-Roma” is false, Kocsis said.

## **HUNGARIAN HOUSEHOLDS NET FINANCIAL ASSETS REACH HUF 44,797 BN**

Net financial assets of Hungarian households rose by 10% to 44,797 billion forints (EUR 139bn) last year, financial accounts data compiled by the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) show. Households’ financial assets increased by 9% to 53,857 billion forints, while their liabilities rose by 4% to 9,060 billion forints. Households’ cash and deposits was up by 15% at 14,529 billion forints. Their

holdings of government securities rose by 15% to 5,779 billion forints. Their holdings of shares and stakes in companies climbed by 8% to 22,629 billion forints. Among liabilities, households' property loans were up by 10% at 3,353 billion forints, and their consumer loans edged up by 2% to 2,832 billion forints.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: NEW FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTRE INAUGURATED IN BUDAPEST**

International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF) is headquartering its global financial services centre in Budapest, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. The minister noted that tied to the investment by IFF, among the world's leading producers of flavouring and fragrances, is training aid of 4,000 euros available per employee. The Budapest headquarters, responsible for the company's entire financial coordination and complex

accounting, will have a headcount of 100, he added.

IFF's chief financial officer Richard O'Leary said the company had found a cost-efficient and business-friendly environment, and was planning for the long term in Hungary. IFF weighed the local infrastructure as well as the well-trained workforce when taking the decision on the centre's location, he added.

### **HUNGARIAN POLICE UNITS LEAVE FOR SERBIA, NORTH MACEDONIA**

Hungarian policemen continue to cooperate with local forces in protecting the borders between Serbia and North Macedonia as well as North Macedonia and Greece, the police website said. Thirty officers left Hungary for deployment in North Macedonia, and fifteen in Serbia. The police officers will be tasked with investigating and preventing illegal entry into Serbia and North Macedonia and arresting

people smugglers. The units will be equipped with off-road vehicles, night vision devices and thermal cameras.

### **AIRLINES TO ADD 15 FLIGHTS TO LISZT FERENC SUMMER TIMETABLE**

Airlines will launch fifteen more flights from Liszt Ferenc International this summer, operator Budapest Airport said. Shanghai Airlines will start flying between Shanghai and Budapest three times a week from June 7. Wizz Air will launch a daily flight to London Gatwick, Flydubai will offer a Dubai flight, and Poland's LOT will launch flights to Brussels and Bucharest. Air Canada Rouge's Toronto flight and American Airlines' Philadelphia flight will relaunch in the summer. The flights will raise passenger capacity at the airport in the period to the end of October to 12.4 million seats. Annualised passenger number growth slowed to 6.5% in the first quarter from 13.5% in the same period a year earlier.