

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



'The Triumph of the Body. Michelangelo and C16th Italian Art' show at the Museum of Fine Arts

MTI/Tibor Illés

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**PM Orbán unveils Fidesz's EP election programme**

**Charity gala event for Transcarpathian Hungarians**

**Parliament's foreign affairs cttee head Zsolt Németh at EU security conference in Bucharest**

## TOP STORY

# SZIJJÁRTÓ LAUDS NATO

NATO is "the most successful military alliance in human history", Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has said in Washington, DC.

Szijjártó noted that the 20th anniversary of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic's accession to the alliance is being marked this year alongside the celebration on NATO's 70th anniversary. "Only those who have experienced Communism can grasp the significance of this membership," said at a roundtable discussion he attended with his Polish and Czech counterparts, Tomáš Petříček and Jacek Czaputowicz, who focused on the challenge Russia poses to NATO, saying the Polish government welcomed the stronger US military presence in the country.

Szijjártó said the US had changed its policy towards central Europe root and branch, and Hungary welcomed this turnabout. "Instead of intervening [in domestic affairs], we see American policies based on mutual respect," he added. He also commented on Ukraine, referring to the situation of the Hungarian minority living there and restrictions to their rights, saying this reflected Ukraine's failure to observe NATO values.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ, LAJČÁK DISCUSS TIES, ANTHEM CONTROVERSY**

Hungarian-Slovak relations should be based on mutual respect, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told MTI by phone from Washington, DC, after meeting Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák on the sidelines of the celebration of NATO's 70th anniversary. The ethnic Hungarian community in Slovakia will be an asset in that process, Szijjártó said.

The ministers met after it came to light that Slovakia had accepted a law amendment in March banning the singing of a foreign country's anthem on its soil, unless an official delegation of that country was present. Szijjártó said he had discussed the issue with József Menyhárt, head of Slovakia's Party of the Hungarian Community, and Tibor Bastrnák, the group leader of Most-Híd, a junior ruling party. "We shall stay informed, watch upcoming events carefully and examine the legal ramifications; to our knowledge, a satisfying solution may be close by," he said. The amendment, due to come into effect on May 15, is said to be designed to ban the Hungarian anthem from sports events. Breaching the regulation is punishable with a fine of up to 7,000 euros.

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## **PALKOVICS VISITS US TO PROMOTE HUNGARIAN INNOVATION**

László Palkovics, the minister in charge of innovation and technology,

met Hungarian and US scientists working in Silicon Valley and held a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley after arriving in the US for a five-day visit to promote Hungarian innovation and deepen bilateral relations. Palkovics told MTI by phone that he had visited the Berkeley Lab Laser Accelerator (BELLA) Center and met Hungarian laser physicist Csaba Tóth who works there, as well as six Hungarian scientists who are members of the Silicon Valley Hungarian Innovation organisation. The mission of the organisation set up last year is to help Hungarian scientists maintain links, start projects and develop relations with US research centres, he added. "They are inviting Hungarian scientists here to California to introduce them to a culture of start-ups and show them how these systems work," Palkovics said.

After participating in a symposium at the University of California, Berkeley, focusing on the production and testing of self-driving cars in Hungary, Palkovics said "unique infrastructure is being developed in Hungary at the test track in Zalaegerszeg, which will have a decisive influence on future transport development and technologies". Commenting on his presentation held for experts, university teachers and students, he said, "We were able to show them that the research and development of self-driving vehicle systems in Hungary is on par with the US".

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## **JOBBIK CALLS ON FIDESZ TO DISTANCE ITSELF FROM 'CRIMINAL POLITICIANS'**

The opposition Jobbik party called on Fidesz to distance itself from "unacceptable" members of the ruling party and demand that they resign their mandates or expel them from the parliamentary group. Jobbik lawmaker Lajos Kepli said that, ahead of the European parliamentary elections, all parties must weed out "criminal politicians" from their ranks who have "criminally exploited their positions at the expense of others and public funds".

Kepli named György Simonka, a Fidesz MP whose immunity had been suspended on charges of committing budget fraud as part of a criminal organisation to the tune of 1.4 billion forints (EUR 3.3m). He also referred to Fidesz lawmaker Flórián Farkas, former leader of the National Roma Government, whom he accused of squandering 1.6 billion forints (EUR 5m) of public funding meant for employment projects for disadvantaged Roma.

He said the case of János Pócs – a Fidesz lawmaker seen in video footage locking a Roma employee in a furnace and threatening to light it – sent the message that people can be humiliated and their lives threatened with impunity. He added that, for anyone, this type of behaviour would be inhuman, but it was especially unworthy of a member of parliament.

He said if Fidesz refused to distance itself from such members, suspicions would be aroused that “this is the party’s modus operandi, that Fidesz ... expects its lawmakers to lord it over their fiefdoms, keeping citizens in fear and existential dependency”.

### **TAKÁCS: IRELAND AGAINST CURBING COHESION FUNDING**

Ireland is against reducing European Union cohesion funding in the next financial cycle and, like Hungary, backs tax policy as a national competence, Szabolcs Takács, the state secretary for EU affairs of the Prime Minister’s Office, said. Takács met Helen McEntee, Ireland’s minister of state for European affairs, as well as members of the Irish parliament’s EU committee, and gave a talk at the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin.

He told MTI by phone that Brexit was a topic of the talks and he told his counterpart that Hungary, like Ireland, had an interest in seeing an orderly withdrawal. Budapest also supports Dublin in opposing a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Takács also asked Ireland to show solidarity to Hungary in matters concerning it, including when it came to budget negotiations. Ireland, he added, held the position that cohesion funding and farming subsidies should be maintained. In the context of the European Parliament elections, Takács noted that Hungary is committed to the principles of a “traditional Christian

democracy” and sees Europe’s future in supporting families rather than migration. Also, both Ireland and Hungary want tax policy to remain a national competence, he said, adding that neither Dublin nor Budapest would accept a “federal bureaucracy in Brussels” subsuming tax policy under EU law.

### **FIDESZ: KARÁCSONY ‘COMPLETELY UNFIT’ TO LEAD 14TH DISTRICT**

Ruling Fidesz called opposition Párbeszéd’s co-leader Gergely Karácsony “completely unfit” to serve as mayor of Budapest’s 14th district, saying his district was the only one in Budapest with a loss-making street parking system. Fidesz is calling for an investigative committee to be set up to look into the state of the district’s parking system, Máté Kocsis, Fidesz’s parliamentary group leader, said. Karácsony should take responsibility for the contract he signed on the collection of street parking fees, he said, pointing out that it was his office that had prepared the contract and his local council that approved it. Kocsis said the district had incurred almost one billion forints (EUR 3.1m) in losses because of the contract.

Tamás Jelen, the head of Fidesz’s local branch, said his party would initiate a special session of the district council over the state of the street parking system. He said the local council budget had a surplus of 800 million forints when Karacsony took over the district’s

mayorship in 2014, but was now more than 2 billion forints in the red.

### **INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 5.9% IN FEB**

Industrial output in Hungary rose by an annual 5.9% in February, according to both unadjusted and working day-adjusted data, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial output was up 1%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data.

Analysts interviewed by MTI said the Hungarian industry’s performance surpassed expectations in February, suggesting greater-than-expected resilience against a deteriorating outlook on export markets. Dávid Németh of K&H Bank attributed the recent acceleration to new capacities added in the sector and forecast industrial output growth between 4% and 5% in 2019, but closer to 5% in light of the strong start to the year. Gergely Suppan of Takarékbank attributed the acceleration in vehicle manufacturing to the fact that the Audi plant in Győr likely made up for the output lost due to the strike in January. Takarékbank’s analysts project 5.5% output growth in the sector this year compared with 3.6% in 2018.

### **LMP URGES ‘RADICAL MEASURES’ TO PROMOTE ELECTRIC CARS**

The opposition LMP party has urged the government to take “radical measures”

to promote electric car use in Hungary so that the country is not left out from the "global electric car revolution". Like in Norway and China, steps must be taken to ensure that only electric and hybrid cars run in Hungary after 2030, Gábor Vágó who heads the green party's list for the European Parliament elections, said. Air pollution shortens the life expectancy of newborn Hungarians by three years, he added.

The party proposes setting up an electric switchover fund and taxing drivers of cars that emit carbon-dioxide, he said. The fund would be used to change city public transport vehicles to electric and develop the national electric charging network, he added. Supporting research is also vital for making electric cars affordable to everyone, he said. If the switchover of car factories in Hungary is not subsidised, then people will be buying electric cars from China in ten years' time and this will set back the Hungarian economy, he said.

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### **DROUGHT TO CUT GRAIN CROP 20-30%**

The worst drought conditions in decades are expected to reduce

Hungary's grain crop this year by 20-30%, the head of the National Association of Grain Growers said in Friday's issue of daily Magyar Nemzet. The drought will affect the wheat, rapeseed, oat and rye crops, József Vancsura told the paper. Rapeseed farmers are the hardest hit, as their ploughing situation is "catastrophic", he added. At least 20-30mm of precipitation will be necessary in the coming days to prevent further crop loss, Vancsura said.

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### **CHAMBER PROPOSES 30% PAY RISE FOR VOCATIONAL TEACHERS**

The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK) has proposed raising salaries of teachers at vocational schools by 30% to keep them from taking higher-paid positions outside of education, the chamber's head said in Friday's issue of daily Magyar Nemzet. The proposal is one of many the chamber has made to the government and could provide the basis for concrete measures, László Parragh told the paper. From September of next year, a system that

is even better tailored to the needs of businesses could be operating, he added.

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### **EXHIBITION OF RENAISSANCE MASTERS' DRAWINGS OPENS**

An exhibition of over 80 Renaissance drawings, including works by Michelangelo, da Vinci and Raphael, opened at Budapest's Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition dubbed "The triumph of the body – Michelangelo and sixteenth-century Italian draughtsmanship" is shown in the museum's recently renovated rooms, Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler said at the opening ceremony. The show also opens the 38th Budapest Spring Festival, Kásler noted. Budapest Mayor István Tarlós said that Michelangelo's works set an example to contemporary artists, "even from a distance of 500 years". He noted that the spring festival will host nearly 150 events at over 40 venues between April 5 and 22, with several star performers.