

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Györfy Varga

Revamped thermal pool at the Zalakaros Spa in western Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events marking Easter

National Election Committee meets

Lake Balaton boating season launched

2019 World Table Tennis Championships start in Budapest

TOP STORY

ORBÁN HAS TALKS WITH BRAZILIAN MP

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed the dangers of migration, Hungarian-Brazilian economic ties and the protection of Christian values with Brazilian congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro in his office.

Orbán and Bolsonaro were in agreement that their countries saw eye-to-eye on key political and strategic issues. They noted that Hungary and Brazil both rejected the United Nations' global migration compact. Both countries consider the representation of Christian values and national interests in foreign policy to be important and both reject the exertion of political pressure by "NGOs disguised as civil organisations", they said.

Parties at the talks highlighted farming technology, water management and the health industry as the primary areas of bilateral cooperation. The two countries will also bolster their research ties, they noted, adding that Hungary has pledged to increase the number of scholarships offered to Brazilian students.

On Wednesday, Bolsonaro met Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó. Szijjártó told public radio ahead of the meeting that trade turnover between the two countries exceeded 400 million dollars last year, which the minister called a good basis for bilateral cooperation.

V4, FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTERS DISCUSS EU SECURITY IN BRATISLAVA

The foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, met the French foreign minister in Bratislava to discuss issues regarding the future, security and competitiveness of the European Union. At a joint press conference with his counterparts after the event, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said the most important objectives for Hungary regarding the future of the EU are reviving the bloc's competitiveness and security.

Growth in central European countries has outstripped the EU average and its policies focusing on citizens' security have succeeded in stemming the inflow of migrants, he said. The bloc's competitiveness can only be maintained through a robust inner competition, Szijjártó said. Large countries should therefore refrain from passing regulations curbing the competitiveness of central and eastern European members, he added. One such regulation would be tax harmonisation, which would lead to steep tax hikes in those countries, he said.

Regarding security in Europe, Szijjártó said "it was high time" that the EU stopped "organising migration" and set about stopping it. Stopping migration is especially important now that the terrorist organisation Islamic State has been defeated and "thousands of mercenary terrorists are making their

way back to Europe", while tens of thousands of migrants are stranded in the Western Balkans, waiting for access to the EU, he said.

FINANCE MINISTER MEETS SINO-CEE FUND HEAD

Finance Minister Mihály Varga met Jiang Jianqing, president of the China - Central and Eastern Europe (SINO-CEE) Fund for talks on Thursday. A statement from the finance ministry quoted Varga as saying that the CEE region could continue to be "the engine of Europe's economic growth" and China considers Hungary as an attractive investment destination. The Hungarian economy, with its growth rate above the European Union average, tax cuts and competitive business environment offers better and better opportunities for investors, the minister said. Varga and Jiang also reviewed opportunities for Hungarian companies in China, mostly in infrastructure, industrial and farming projects, the statement said. Chinese companies have so far invested over 4 million dollars in Hungary, and currently employ more than 15,000 people in the country, the statement said.

GULYÁS: EU FUNDS TO SUPPORT MIGRANTS SHOULD BE SPENT ON BORDER CONTROL

Funds earmarked by the European Union for the support of migrants should instead be spent on protecting

the bloc's external borders, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said.

At his regular press briefing, Gergely Gulyás said it was "unacceptable" that while the EU was supporting "countless forms of migration" and providing migrants with financial aid with a view to helping with their integration, it had not supported Hungary's border protection efforts. The 300 billion forints (EUR 938.5m) Hungary has spent on border protection was financed entirely from the state budget, Gulyás said. The EU has not reimbursed any of those costs, he added. He welcomed that a provision opposed by the Hungarian government, under which the EU's border agency Frontex could intervene in a member state's border protection efforts without the country's consent, had been left out of an agreement recently approved by the European Parliament on bolstering the agency's staff. Gulyás said that next month, Europeans should elect a European Parliament that fights migration instead of supporting it.

Gulyás also said the government had discussed a strategy proposed by innovation minister László Palkovics on "switching over" public transport to electric vehicles and supplying as many buses from domestic production as possible. The government supports and finances the acquisition of 3,000 electric buses in the current term, he added. The target is that within three years, new buses introduced in public transport should be all electric, he said.

HUNGARIAN LEADERS EXPRESS CONDOLENCES OVER MADEIRA BUS ACCIDENT

President János Áder, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó have expressed condolences to the families of victims in a bus accident on the island of Madeira.

In a letter sent to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Orbán said he was deeply shocked to learn about the tragic bus accident "which claimed the lives of a number of your compatriots". "We will pray for the quick recovery of those injured and for the families of the victims," the letter said.

In a letter addressed to his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Áder said "I was shocked to hear the news of the tragic bus accident on the island of Madeira, which claimed the lives of many German citizens".

Speaking to public television, Szijjártó voiced hope that those injured in the crash would recover quickly and that the death toll would not rise.

Twenty-nine people were killed and 27 injured when a bus carrying German tourists veered off the road and rolled down a hillside in Madeira on Wednesday evening.

NATO: HUNGARY TO LEAD BALTIC AIR SPACE POLICING MISSION FROM MAY

Hungary will take over the rotating command of the NATO mission of

policing the security in the Baltic states' airspace in May, the alliance said. Spanish and UK air force units will also cooperate in the mission headquartered in Siauliai, Lithuania, it said. NATO has been policing the Baltic air space since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004. The rotating leadership of the mission has already fallen once to Hungary in 2015.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESS OF SCHEME TO PROMOTE ETHNIC HUNGARIAN BUSINESSES

The Hungarian government's programme to promote ethnic Hungarian companies in neighbouring countries has been "definitely successful", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after meeting leaders of Slovakia's Hungarian MKP party in Bratislava, and added that the scheme would be continued.

At a press conference held jointly with MKP head József Menyhárt, Szijjártó said that the government had allocated 10 billion forints (EUR 31.2m) to components of the programme in southern Slovakia's Hungarian community this year, mostly with regard to large agricultural projects. He added that 49 applications have been submitted, and winners will have been selected by the end of May.

The talks touched upon a Slovak law under which the Hungarian anthem cannot be sung in public, and MKP's launching a petition against the contested legislation. Szijjártó noted

that the Slovak president has vetoed the "anthem law" and voiced hope that once the law is amended Hungarians in Slovakia could freely use ethnic symbols.

LMP CALLS FOR COMMON EU ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

LMP sees climate change as the greatest challenge ahead, and its European parliamentary election campaign will focus on the fight for a united, common EU environmental policy, the secretary of the green opposition party's national board said.

"We want a Europe based on sustainable energy that phases out nuclear energy," Máté Kanász-Nagy told a press conference in Budapest. The party will also fight to ensure European wages for workers in Hungary, he said. The government should cut taxes on wages and compensate the loss of revenue by taxing multinational companies for pollution, he said. Many strategic partners of the current government, such as car manufacturers, would come under that heading, he said.

BAKONDI: BEEFED-UP FRONTEX NOT ENOUGH TO CONTAIN MASS MIGRANT FLOW

The European Union's move to bolster the staff of border agency Frontex to 10,000 will not be enough to protect the bloc's borders from a

massive inflow of migrants, the PM's chief security advisor said. Speaking to public current affairs channel M1, György Bakondi noted that the European Parliament on Wednesday approved an agreement to beef up Frontex staff to 5,000 officers before increasing their numbers to 10,000.

Bakondi welcomed that the provision opposed by the Hungarian government, under which Frontex could intervene in a member state's border protection efforts without the country's consent, had been left out of the agreement.

Bakondi said the decision to enhance the border agency's role was a part of the EP election campaign, arguing that it would only be implemented in the next parliamentary cycle. If the composition of the EP changes after the election and if the EU's top institutions will be headed by anti-migration politicians, it will be possible to enact decisions that are in line with the security needs of the European people, Bakondi said.

OPPOSITION MPS CALL FOR EXTENDING MORATORIUM ON FORCED EVICTIONS

Opposition women lawmakers are submitting a joint amendment

proposal to parliament to extend a moratorium on forced evictions from the end of April until the situation of FX loan holders is settled. Independent Bernadett Szél told a press conference that their common aim was to prevent forced evictions based on unfair contracts which have been condemned even by the European court (CJEU). The Hungarian government has now nothing to do but enforce the decision and not allow anyone to be thrown out on the street, she added. Conservative Jobbik MP Andrea Varga-Damm said "[Viktor] Orbán's government has failed to resolve the issue because they have acquired significant shares in the banks which are now practically making money for Orbán and the government oligarchs." Representatives of the NGO Adóskamara told the press conference that the moratorium on forced evictions must be extended and the situation of FX loan holders must be resolved in line with the CJEU's latest ruling. Europe's top court said in a ruling on March 14 that Hungarian laws should allow the cancellation of FX loan contracts if the contract includes an unfair provision relating to exchange-rate risk.

In 2014, the Hungarian parliament passed several laws designed to

amend unfair terms of FX loan contracts on which repayments skyrocketed when the forint plummeted during the 2008 financial crisis.

GOVT TO SUPPORT HUNGARIAN EDUCATION, CULTURE IN CARPATHIAN BASIN WITH EUR 5 M

The government has allocated 1.6 billion forints (EUR 5m) for bids aimed to support diaspora Hungarians with regard to Hungarian-language education and culture in the Carpathian Basin, a senior government official said. Some 1.1 billion forints have been allocated to support Hungarian education and culture in the region, and an additional 500 million forints for Hungarian diaspora communities around the world, Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad said. The former scheme aims to help ethnic Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin prosper in their homeland, he said. The latter allocation is offered for projects around the world to help the preservation of Hungarian culture and language and the deadline for implementation is the end of 2019 also, Potápi said.