

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Marton Mönus

Formula Renault race car to participate in the Hungarian Grand Prix

UPCOMING EVENTS

Italian interior minister visits Hungary

Szijjártó meets Kyrgyz counterpart in Budapest

International Eucharist Congress presser

KSH releases foreign trade turnover for Feb

TOP STORY

‘EPP SHOULD WORK WITH SALVINI’

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has said in an interview to Italian newspaper La Stampa that the European People’s Party should work together with the right wing led by Matteo Salvini if it wants to get ahead.

If the EPP nails its colours to the mast of the left wing, however, it will “commit suicide” and “sink”, Orbán said. Ahead of Salvini’s visit to Hungary, the Hungarian prime minister called the Liga party’s leader Europe’s most important figure for “halting migration and transforming the European Union”. He said the EPP was in decline and the bloc had fewer and fewer prime ministers. From May, the grouping would have fewer mandates, he predicted.

Asked whether the ruling Fidesz party was expecting to be excluded from the formation, Orbán insisted the EPP now faced judgement by the electorate. “We don’t as yet know what kind of formation Salvini will be able to establish, but let’s hope it is strong,” he said, adding that the EPP should work together with Europe’s right wing. He said the Salvini-led right wing and Silvio Berlusconi’s party would have key roles.

Salvini, in his capacity as Italy’s deputy PM and interior minister, will be arriving in Hungary on Thursday. A visit to the Röszke border station will be on his itinerary.

ORBÁN: SALVINI ‘HERO’

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called Matteo Salvini a hero. “He is the hero who stopped migration via the sea, as we did on land,” he said in an interview to La Stampa.

Meanwhile, Orbán called the Dublin Regulation that sets the first country of arrival as the place to lodge an asylum request “dead”. “It’s a law that no one sticks to,” he said, adding that there was no common European solution to migration. He said a body of Schengen interior ministers similar to the council of EU finance ministers should be set up to find intergovernmental solutions to the issue.

Asked about nationalism, Orbán said he did not share the negative assessment of nationalism. “The Brussels elite says we are feeding nationalism, but we think that the Brussels elite, by building an empire, is generating a great threat. But fine, let’s leave behind the fight over nationalism-related terminology and write that I’m a patriot.”

SZIJJÁRTÓ SAYS UN OFFICIAL ‘DEFENDING TERRORIST’

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, in a letter to United Nations Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, has expressed “astonishment and shock” over her “defence of a terrorist”. Szijjártó said it was “shocking” that the rapporteur had played the role

of “defence lawyer for a terrorist who led an attack against Hungarian police who were protecting Hungary’s borders”. Szijjártó wrote in response to a letter in which Ní Aoláin had said that Hungary had harmed the rights of Ahmed H, a Syrian national sentenced in Hungary on terrorism charges after a migrant riot at Hungary’s southern borders in 2015. She criticised both Hungary’s laws and the proceedings, saying the defendant was not a terrorist and his human rights had been violated. In his response, Szijjártó asked whether it was “normal to cross the border shouting into a loudhailer, inciting an attack and throwing rocks at border police”. He also asked if she “really means to launch a procedure against a country protecting its borders and the security of its citizens over the sentencing of a terrorist”. “It is shameful that you spend members’ payments, including funds from Hungary’s taxpayers, to encourage terrorists to violate the borders of sovereign countries and to attack the police,” Szijjártó wrote.

Earlier in Bratislava, the minister accused the UN of encouraging “terrorism and migration”. Speaking after a meeting of foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group and Turkey, Szijjártó noted that a UN commissioner for human rights planned to launch a procedure against Hungary in connection with a Syrian national sentenced in Hungary on terrorism charges. The UN “should fight terrorism and terrorists, but the organisation is doing just the opposite thus

encouraging terrorists,” Szijjártó said. “It is shocking that the UN has sided with terrorists and finds excuses for them.” The UN “encourages the two most dangerous trends in the world: migration and terrorism, tendencies that reinforce each other,” Szijjártó said. Turkey, he added, had a crucial role in managing the pressure of migration. Answering a question about Turkey’s European integration, Szijjártó criticised “some countries” for being “hypocritical” and presenting different positions in public and when “being among themselves”. He urged that the EU should build a strategic partnership with Turkey and stop “playing such an unfair game”.

Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák said that the talks focused on the Middle East with special regard to Syria, Iran, migration, and the Israeli-Palestinian situation. He called Turkey an important partner in terms of security, and thanked Turkey for observing its agreement with the EU on migration. Turkey’s EU accession is being blocked for political reasons, but the integration talks should not be dropped, he added. Answering a question about Turkey’s integration, Czech Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček said that “the entry criteria must be met”. Marcin Przydacz, Poland’s deputy state secretary for foreign affairs, said that issues in the Middle East or the Mediterranean “cannot be discussed without Turkey”. Concerning Turkey’s EU integration, he said that “after Brexit we should demonstrate that apart from quitting, joining is possible, too”.

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Turkish foreign minister, said that “Turkey has wished to join the EU for over 60 years and it has never said anything else than that it is working to meet the criteria”. He said he was aware that the entry process was blocked for political reasons but added that “if the EU does not want us, it has to make a decision”.

ORBÁN ON FACEBOOK: ‘WE MUST PROTECT EUROPE NOW!’

In a video message on Facebook, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told his followers they must “protect Europe now”. Orbán, in Warsaw participating in a meeting of countries that joined the European Union 15 years ago, insisted that central European countries, due to the hard work of their citizens, had tapped the potential of EU membership. “This is what we want to do in the future too,” Orbán said, adding that Europe and its national and Christian culture must be protected. “We must choose leaders who don’t allow Europe to become a continent of immigrants,” he said, adding that pro-migration politicians should be voted out. “This is the task of the next few weeks,” Orbán said.

SOCIALISTS-PÁRBESZÉD: GOVERNMENT ‘ENEMY’ OF WORKERS

The government is an “enemy” of Hungarian workers and “uses European Union funds for its own ends,” Socialist

Party leader Bertalan Tóth told participants of a May Day celebration of his party. The government has “looted EU funds and built a media and business empire that stifles free speech,” he said. Tóth insisted that two-thirds of Hungary’s employees earned a wage below the average and hundreds of thousands of families lived in “worker poverty”.

Párbeszéd co-leader Gergely Karácsony said Hungary’s voters should “make a commitment to rejoin the EU” at the upcoming European Parliament elections because the country is now “getting further and further away [from it]”. The problems Europe face cannot be resolved unless “a Europe that focuses on the people” is created, he said. He warned that “troublemakers like [Prime Minister Viktor] Orbán” could “wreck European unity”.

DOBREV: ‘NO LIFE’ OUTSIDE EU

“It is not true that there is life outside the European Union,” Klára Dobrev, top candidate of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) for the European parliamentary elections, told a May Day celebration of her party. “What’s on the outside is chaos, poverty and ruin.” Hungary has no other option than to be “an equal member in a strong European community”, she said, arguing for the creation of a United States of Europe with a uniform minimum wage, family allowance and pension. Global challenges such as climate change,

poverty caused by globalisation, and international terrorism, can only be met through cooperation within Europe, she said.

SOCIALISTS-PÁRBESZÉD MARK HUNGARY’S 15TH EU ANNIVERSARY

Leaders of the opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance advocated “a strong Europe focusing on its people” at a press conference marking the 15th anniversary of Hungary’s membership of the European Union. At the time of Hungary’s EU accession “people were dreaming of belonging to a community approaching western living standards, where thinking, the press and education are free, where citizens are protected by law and where governments are accountable,” Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth said. “That dream has not come true,” Tóth said. “What we have today is just the opposite.”

Ruling Fidesz said in reaction that the real threats to Europe were “pro-migration Brussels bureaucrats, the Socialists and other pro-migration parties wanting to flood Europe with migrants”. Hungarians are still committed to Europe and the EU, the party’s parliamentary group said in a statement.

PUZSÉR: EU WILL NOT LIBERATE THE HUNGARIANS

The dispute between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Brussels is a fake fight,

Róbert Puzsér, the opposition Jobbik and LMP parties' Budapest mayoral candidate, has said. Speaking at a May 1 celebration in Budapest, he said Orbán needed the European Union's money and the EU needed a skilled but cheap Hungarian workforce. The EU, he added, was not truly interested in the rule of law in the Carpathian Basin. "They're not going to liberate us."

He called Orbán Russian President Vladimir Putin's "forward officer", adding that the legacy of Hungary's founder, King St. Stephen, was that the country belonged to the West. "Two of our revolutions were crushed by the Russians and, given a third, that would also be crushed," he said. Hungary, he said, had a choice between turning to the East for oil and gas, or to the West for freedom.

When it was put to him that opinion polls had found him to be the least popular politician since the 1989-1990 change in political system, he said the results of surveys could not be taken at face value.

POLLSTER FINDS MAJORITY CONDEMNS SOCIALIST POLITICIAN'S 'RATS' COMMENT

A survey by the Nézőpont Institute suggests that a majority of Hungarians and two-thirds of opposition supporters have a dim view of a comment by Socialist politician Ildikó Borbély Bangó berating Fidesz supporters. When asked about public support for the ruling Fidesz party in a

recent television interview, the party's deputy parliamentary group leader suggested that "there are many rats" in the country. Nézőpont said 54% of Hungarians were "outraged" by the Socialist politician's comment and 78% considered it inappropriate for politicians to use such language. Fully two-thirds of opposition sympathisers also condemned the expression.

The survey also found that Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi had also outraged many Hungarians by suggesting the Fidesz administration should be referred to as a "rat government", with 52% percent finding the expression "appalling". The representative survey of 500 adults was conducted online.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY, TUNISIA RELATIONS GATHER MOMENTUM

Trade turnover between Tunisia and Hungary has been growing steadily for five years, reaching 154 billion dollars last year, and economic cooperation is expected to gather further momentum, a government official said in Budapest after the fourth meeting of the Hungarian-Tunisian economic committee.

Tunisia is an important partner to Hungary in north Africa, with balanced and constant political ties, Tamás Vargha, the foreign ministry's state secretary, said. The parties signed three cooperation agreements at the meeting on culture, education and waste management, and further agreements are expected in health care, social services, he said.

Vargha said that the launch of a new direct flight between Budapest and Tunis had been discussed. Hungary will increase the number of scholarships offered to Tunisian students by 50 in 2019-2021, raising the number of Tunisian students and researchers in Hungary to 200, he said. The Hungarian Export Promotion Agency (HEPA) organised a business forum ahead of the meeting, which was attended by 65 Hungarian and 12 Tunisian companies, he said.

Hatem Ferjani, the Tunisian state secretary for economic diplomacy, called the talks fruitful and said they would enrich both countries. The agreements signed on Tuesday will impact sectors with large value added capacity, he said.

KÖVÉR: HUNGARY, MOROCCO TIES PROGRESSING

Morocco-Hungary ties are developing well in the areas of trade, the economy, tourism, education and culture, Speaker of Parliament László Kövér said after talks with his counterpart Habib el-Malki during his visit to Morocco. Kövér told MTI that ties have been boosted thanks to a new direct flight between the two countries. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Hungary-Morocco diplomacy and the two parliaments have just signed a cooperation pact, he said, adding that this year the president of the upper house and members of the Hungarian-Moroccan friendship committee are scheduled

to visit Hungary. Kövér noted that his counterpart expressed interest in the Visegrád Group and said he would further consolidate his interest with Slovak, Czech and Polish partners at the June meeting of speakers. He said Morocco was considered as “a true friend of Hungary” and a key partner in north Africa and the Arab region. Kövér also suggested Moroccan businesspeople should visit Hungary, and the prime minister agreed.

TRAINING KEY PART OF MILITARY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME, SAYS DEFENCE MINISTER

The training of soldiers is a crucial part of Hungary’s multi-year defence and military development programme, the defence minister said. Hungary needs a strong and competent military capable of carrying out its duties both at a national level and as part of an alliance, Tibor Benkő said. One main area of focus has been making sure that the military is adequately trained and ready to use the newly purchased equipment, including the new helicopters, when they arrive, he said.

The Hungarian Armed Forces is in need of at least 100-120 pilots, Benkő said, noting that this was why Hungary had restarted the training of pilots in Szolnok, in central Hungary. The minister said that over the past four years some 200 Hungarian officers and junior officers had taken part in multi-semester training programmes across various prestigious institutions around the world. He noted

that a Hungarian general, Sándor Vass, currently serves as cyber advisor to the top commander of NATO.

The minister also touched on the need to respond to new types of security threats, such as cyber threats. To ensure that the military is adequately trained to counter these threats, Hungary will launch a cyber academy later this year, he said. Benkő noted that Hungary’s military development scheme also aimed to revive the country’s arms industry. He said the arms plant in Kiskunfélegyháza, in southern Hungary, currently assembling small arms would begin mass production in the second half of the year.

NBH POLICYMAKERS KEEP BASE RATE ON HOLD

The central bank’s Monetary Council kept the bank’s key rate on hold at 0.90% at a monthly policy meeting. The Council also left the O/N central bank deposit rate at -0.05%. The Council has left the base rate on hold since signalling an end to an easing cycle at a policy meeting in the spring of 2016. At the previous policy meeting, the Council raised the O/N deposit rate by 10bp, marking the first policy tightening in years. In a statement released after the meeting, the Council reiterated guidance issued after the monthly policy meeting in March.

The Council said inflation “will fluctuate around” the 3% central bank target in the coming quarters, while the measure of core inflation excluding

indirect tax effects -- a bellwether indicator of underlying inflation -- is “expected to continue to rise until the autumn months and then to decline from the end of 2019”. The Council noted that “persistently buoyant” domestic demand is boosting the pace of price increases, while weakening external activity is restraining that pace, and said it would assess the effects of this “dichotomy” on the maintenance of price stability over the 5-8 quarter horizon of monetary policy. “The monetary policy stance will continue to be accommodative, economic agents’ financing costs will remain favourable,” the Council said.

GROSS WAGES UP 12% IN FEB

The average gross wage for full-time workers in Hungary rose by an annual 12.1% to 345,860 forints (EUR 1,070) in February, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Net wages grew at the same pace, reaching 229,997 forints.

Wage growth in Hungary has been in the double digits for two years, since the government, employers and unions agreed on a series of minimum wage increases paired with payroll tax cuts. Calculating with twelve-month CPI of 3.1% in February, real wages increased by 8.7%.

Excluding the 111,600 Hungarians in fostered work programmes, the average gross wage rose by 11.2 to 356,572 forints, while net wages grew at the same rate to 237,120 forints. Full-time fostered workers earned a gross

81,339 forints in February, 0.7% less than a year earlier.

KSH noted changes to its data sourcing first appearing in the January statistics: it is phasing out its practice of monthly data collection and instead getting data on wages and headcount from the National Tax and Customs Authority (NAV) and, in the case of the public sector, from the State Treasury. While reducing the data provision burden, the new sources bring a richer set of data, KSH said.

ING Bank senior analyst Péter Virovác said the agreement on minimum wage rises was the main

driver of overall wage growth, but the narrower range of non-wage benefits with tax preferences was also a contributing factor, as employers made up for the discontinuation of some such benefits with higher remuneration. Takarékbank analyst András Horváth forecast full-year wage growth of just over 10%, supported by the labour shortage.

HUNGARY PPI STEADY AT 2.7% IN MARCH

Factory gate prices in Hungary increased by an annual 2.7% in

March, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The producer price index was unchanged from the previous month, when it declined to the lowest level in nearly a year. Prices for domestic sale were up 5.5% in March and export prices rose by 1.4%. Among prices for domestic sale, manufacturing sector prices were up 4.8% and energy prices rose by 6.8%. For the period January-March, industrial producer prices were up 3.1%, as domestic prices rose by 5.6% and export prices by 1.9%.