

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Italian Deputy PM Matteo Salvini at a meeting in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Moody's assesses Hungary's credit rating

Foreign Minister Szijjártó receives Turkish colleague Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

Conference marking World Poultry Day

EP election campaign events

TOP STORY

ORBÁN LAUDS SALVINI

Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini, meeting in Budapest, expressed agreement on the importance of strong nation states, preserving Europe's Christian culture and defending Europe's borders.

Orbán told a joint press conference held with the Italian deputy PM and interior minister that they were both convinced that the bedrock of strong Europe was strong and successful nation states. The continent must prioritise a European culture founded on Christian values, and Europe's borders must be protected against "the invasion of migrants", he said. Orbán praised Salvini for his efforts curb migration at sea as Hungary had done on land. He said Europeans would be "better off" listening to Italy and Hungary when it came to border protection instead of French President Emmanuel Macron. Orbán called Salvini's visit an "honour", saying cooperation between their two countries' governments was at an all-time high.

The prime minister said he had told the Italian deputy PM that Hungary had spent more than one billion euros on its border protection measures and that Brussels had not reimbursed any of those costs. He also noted a Hungarian proposal for the establishment of a new body of Schengen interior ministers that would be charged with handling migration policy.

ORBÁN: EPP SHOULD JOIN ANTI-MIGRATION FORCES

After the European Parliament elections, the European Union will be governed either by “pro-migration or anti-migration forces”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at a joint press conference held with Matteo Salvini. The European People’s Party, he said, had both kinds of politicians in its ranks, whereas the left only had politicians who supported migration and parties to the right of the EPP only politicians who opposed it. He said Fidesz wanted the EPP to cooperate with anti-migration forces, adding, however, that this was a minority view within the grouping. Whether Fidesz remained a member of the EPP, he said, depended on “which way the EPP will turn”. Orbán said if the EPP “ties itself to the left”, which he said was “constantly losing the support of the people”, it would be hard to find a place for Fidesz in that sort of grouping. The prime minister urged the EPP to be open to cooperating with parties to its right, such as Italy’s ruling Liga party. Europe needs an alliance of anti-migration political forces, he said. “We’re tired ... of parties with barely visible support lecturing parties that have significant voter support in their own countries,” Orbán said. He said this was what had happened with Fidesz in the EPP. He added that the party of Frans Timmermans, the Spitzenkandidat of the European Socialists, “has practically ceased to exist as a serious party”.

Asked if Fidesz would join Salvini’s alliance of right-wing parties, Orbán said Hungarians decided for themselves whom they chose to cooperate with.

Commenting on Bavarian state prime minister Markus Soeder’s criticism of his meeting with Salvini, Orbán said: “We expect more respect.” “We will publicly and openly look for ways to cooperate with Mr Salvini,” he said, adding, however, that he could not give any specific answers concerning any cooperation between Fidesz and Liga before the EP election. Orbán said he wanted to cooperate with ambitious people who were willing to act “instead of the current Brussels bubble” which he said had “lost touch with the real world”.

The prime minister said he saw four problems that could only be solved by new a European leadership. He said these were Europe’s failure to protect itself and respect its member states, the leadership’s refusal to listen to the people, and the “constant weakening” of the bloc’s economy. Orbán expressed agreement with Salvini that Europe needed to “open a new chapter”.

Salvini said that what Europe needed was not a distribution system for migrants but rather a Europe capable of protecting its borders on sea and land. Hungary conducts lawful checks on people attempting to enter the country, the Liga party’s leader said, adding that Hungary had sealed the border quickly and efficiently. Salvini said the situation would change for

Europe and its peoples after the May 26 EP election. “We aim to define” the EU and its transformation and offer alternatives to the current European leadership, he added. A “great alliance” will be formed by those who care for Europe’s future, Salvini said.

He insisted that a leftist leadership would lead to “an Islamic caliphate in Europe”. Salvini pledged to “do everything to save the continent from that sad end”.

Regarding migration, Salvini said “the open port policy” had resulted “in many dead” while the policy of control had succeeded in reducing the number of casualties. The current EU policy risks upsetting the peace, he said. Integration is possible only if the number of migrants is kept under control, he said. Hungary and Italy acknowledges the rights of “real refugees” and works to stop those “who do not flee from war but intend to bring that war to Europe”. The policy of Europe having a place for everyone has “turned the Mediterranean into a mass grave”, he said.

He said his Liga party would “represent the Europe of the future”. Salvini also thanked Orbán for an interview he gave to Italian daily La Stampa. If the European People’s Party shared Orbán’s views, “then an alliance would be a beautiful thing”, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: TRUMP, ORBÁN MEETING ‘TO BE MOMENTOUS’

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s “working meeting” with US President Donald

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Trump in Washington, DC, on May 13 will be “momentous”, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a press conference in Brussels. The Hungarian government received the official invitation on Wednesday, and it has already confirmed it, the minister said. The talks will touch on the region’s security, energy supply, the two countries’ bilateral ties and defence cooperation, he said. “Hungary, of course, sees the US as a strategic partner. Our views are on many issues similar to that of the current US administration. We think similarly about migration, the protection of Christianity and security,” he said. The US is also Hungary’s most important exports market outside the EU, Szijjártó added.

Meanwhile, asked about reports that the EU ignored the Hungarian government’s last-minute veto of the EU position regarding Israel at the UN Security Council on Monday -- going ahead with a statement of its common position regardless -- Szijjártó said a fair and balanced position should be maintained. Hungary, he added, would not aid the adoption of any document that does not help to solve the Middle East crisis. Every word, he said, counted and the text had been constantly evolving. Since various changes had not made it to the final document, Hungary withheld its approval of the common position, the minister said. The Finnish ambassador to the UN had correctly stated at the beginning of his speech that the declaration was that of 27 countries rather than the position of the community, but then he spoke

on behalf of the EU as a whole, “which was wrong and unacceptable,” Szijjártó said.

GULYÁS ACCUSES EC OF HYPOCRISY ON MIGRATION

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, accused the European Commission of hypocrisy on the issue of illegal migration, saying it had failed to sanction member states that had fallen foul of their duty to protect the EU’s external borders. Asked in an interview with the Friends of Hungary Foundation’s Ungarn Heute blog about the EC’s rejection of the charge that it had taken away member states’ power to formulate migration policies, Gulyás said the commission was “not practising what it preaches”. So far, there have been no consequences for a member state breaching its obligation to protect the bloc’s external borders, he said, adding that the EC was also trying to push through a migrant distribution quota scheme “benefitting people applying for asylum instead of refugees”.

Meanwhile, asked about ruling Fidesz’s dispute with the European People’s Party over its membership in the centre-right grouping, Gulyás said the question of potentially quitting the EPP would not be on Fidesz’s agenda until after the European Parliament elections. “We don’t want to skirt anything,” Gulyás said. “If they’re not happy to have us somewhere, then we don’t want to stay.” The PM’s Office

chief added, however, that as long as Fidesz was a member of the EPP, it would not look for a new political family, only new allies.

He said Fidesz’s past successes were independent of the EPP or any other political grouping. “It is, however, a fact that today the grouping’s most successful and strongest party is Fidesz,” Gulyás added. He said this meant that the EPP needed Fidesz more than Fidesz needed the EPP. Gulyás said that out of solidarity with the EPP, Fidesz preferred not to discuss its disagreements with its political family in the middle of the EP election campaign.

PINTÉR: HUNGARY, ITALY HOLD IDENTICAL VIEWS ON BORDER PROTECTION

Hungary and Italy have identical views on protecting Europe’s borders and on how to prevent “masses of people, terrorists and other unwelcome persons” from entering the European Union, Hungarian Interior Minister Sándor Pintér said after talks with Matteo Salvini, his Italian counterpart. At a joint press conference after the meeting, Pintér thanked Italy for its efforts to “keep uninvited guests outside the EU’s borders.” He praised Italy’s “results” in accomplishing that feat on sea, saying that the country’s efforts benefitted all EU countries, including Hungary. New arrivals should not be distributed within the EU but stopped from reaching it, Pintér said. The Visegrad Group realises that non-

EU countries need help in “vetting” people on their way to the EU, so Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are “going to great effort” in Libya as well as in the Balkans, where they support local border protection units, he said.

Salvini said that they had paid “an interesting visit” to the border crossing between Hungary and Serbia at Röszke, where Hungary operates a transit zone for migrants seeking asylum. The Hungarian government has “quickly and effectively” taken control of some 600km of the border, thus putting an end to people smuggling and trafficking, Salvini said. Italy and Hungary both hope that the “new Europe” after the May 26 elections would show greater commitment to protecting its borders, he added. He said the problem did not lie with the redistribution of migrants already in the EU but rather with how to stop a new wave of migrants from entering the bloc. Salvini said the Hungarian and Italian governments shared the position that “the new Europe” should protect its external borders both on land and at sea from May 27 onwards. The Italian politician said their position was also the identical on the issue of repatriating migrants. He said a joint fight was being waged to review all trade and financial agreements with non-EU countries that fail to help in the repatriation of migrants from their territories. Salvini thanked Hungary for the aid it provided to Libya. “If all countries were this committed to

preventing human smuggling, Europe would face a lot less crime,” he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY WOULD ‘GLADLY’ DIVERSIFY ENERGY SUPPLIES IF IT COULD

Hungary would “gladly” diversify its energy supplies, but doing so requires proper infrastructure and the necessary investment decisions, the foreign minister said. These steps depend on Hungary’s international partners, Péter Szijjártó told a US-EU energy conference in Brussels. Fully 100% of Hungary’s natural gas supply is imported from Russia, the minister noted, explaining that this was due to current limitations in infrastructure. He said that while there was “a lot of talk” about the diversification of energy supplies, Hungary had yet to see any progress on this front. Speaking at a press conference after the meeting, Szijjártó said energy security in central Europe remained a “deeply critical issue”, especially given what he said was a lack of progress in the investment projects that would help diversify the region’s energy supplies. “Whether we can become somewhat independent of our only existing energy source will depend on our friends who are constantly calling on us do diversify our supplies and our allies,” Szijjártó said. He said the start of the extraction of the Black Sea gas field would depend on Romania and the consortium of ExxonMobil and OMV. But due to Romanian regulations,

the consortium has not yet been able to move forward with the project, Szijjártó added. He said the same was the case with LNG terminal being built in Croatia. He noted that while Hungary has made an offer to buy a 25% stake in the terminal, Zagreb had yet to comment on it. Szijjártó said it appeared the Croatian government was tying the terminal’s ownership to the purchase of capacity, adding, however, that the latter was not currently in Hungary’s interest. Szijjártó said the Hungarian government was also looking to import gas via the Turkish Stream pipeline in the medium term. He said that once the Poland-Slovakia gas interconnection project is completed in 2021, Hungary will have physical access to Poland’s LNG terminal.

On the sidelines of the conference, Szijjártó held talks with European energy commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete, United States Energy Secretary Rick Perry, the Lithuanian and Portuguese energy ministers and a director of ExxonMobil.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CENTRAL EUROPE INTERESTED IN GOOD EAST-WEST TIES

Central Europe has a clear interest in good ties between East and West, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after receiving his Kyrgyz counterpart. Good ties embrace the opportunity for meaningful dialogue and a mutually beneficial Eurasian economic cooperation, Szijjártó added. Both countries are active

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participants of the Chinese Belt and Road initiative, now one of the world's largest economic development schemes and a key guarantee of free trade, he said. Global free trade is talked about in vain if the necessary infrastructure is missing, Szijjártó said, adding that the Chinese initiative was precisely an attempt to create such conditions. He noted that last year Hungary secured observer status in the Turkic Council whose European representation would soon be located in Budapest. This will open up opportunities in Budapest to establish fresh economic, commercial, cultural and educational cooperation with Turkey and Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan, he said.

Szijjarto said Hungarian economic interests were clearly identifiable in Kyrgyzstan. Pharmaceuticals account for 90% of Hungarian exports worth over 10 million US dollars, while water technology also provides an area of opportunity for Hungarian businesses. A 30 million dollar Eximbank credit line has been opened to provide financial support for bilateral business cooperation. Also talks on an investment protection agreement and a pact on avoiding double taxation are ongoing, he added. Hungary backs Kyrgyzstan's application to the UN Security Council, he said, underscoring the important role played by Kyrgyzstan in the fight against terrorism. Chingiz Aidarbekov praised bilateral ties and welcomed Hungary's observer status in the Turkic Council. Kyrgyzstan, he added, had quality organic products to offer Hungary's market. He also pointed to the deepening of cultural relations.

DK: 'SHAMEFUL' ORBÁN TALKING TO SALVINI

The opposition Democratic Coalition's group spokesman has slammed a meeting between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini as "shameful". Zsolt Gréczy told a press conference in front of the prime minister's office that Orbán was making Budapest the meeting point of "neo-fascists, neo-Nazis and Eurosceptics". Such politicians are uninterested in the European Union's success, he said, insisting that Budapest was an outpost of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who, he added, was seeing to Europe's disintegration and of the peace, security and prosperity that it has created. He called Salvini, the Italian deputy PM and interior minister who heads the Liga party, one of Europe's "losers". Referring to Hans Christian Strache, Gréczy added that soon "an Austrian extremist politician" would pay a visit to Hungary, "yet more proof that Orbán wants to leave the European People's Party". During the press conference, some DK activists held up posters with slogans such as "Fascists Go Home!"; "Mussolini Equals Salvini 2019".

SOCIALISTS-PÁRBESEZÉD CALLS ON GOVT TO ABANDON "NEO-FASCIST" TREND

The opposition Socialist-Párbeszed alliance has demanded that the government abandon its "foreign

policy pushing Hungary in a neo-fascist direction". Referring to Matteo Salvini's visit to Budapest, Socialist MEP candidate Barnabás Mester told a press conference in front of Parliament that the Italian deputy PM and interior minister and Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, who is to visit Hungary on Monday, had "no room in Hungary or in the European community". He said Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had "no room in the European community, either, if he is their friend". Mester called on the government to drop its "far-right propaganda inciting hatred" and to show commitment to pro-European policies aimed at "edging Hungary towards the euro zone and seeking joint European solutions".

Párbeszed spokesman Richárd Barabás dismissed Orbán's talks with Salvini as "nonsense", noting that whereas Salvini supports European plans to distribute migrants among member states, Orbán is against any such scheme. The two politicians "are linked by Russian President Vladimir Putin," he insisted. "They are advanced posts for Russia to weaken European unity."

Answering a question about press reports that Orbán was scheduled to have talks with US President Donald Trump on May 13, Mester said that "Trump fits the pattern marked by Salvini and Strache". He said that strengthening bilateral ties with the US was necessary, but added that "Trump's America does not need to be considered a benchmark for Hungary".



Answering a question about recent remarks by a Socialist MP saying that “there are too many rats in Hungary” and a conservative Jobbik leader calling government members “crooks and swine”, Barabás said that the ruling Fidesz party was to blame for “overwrought public communications”. Fidesz “incites fear and hatred rather than making policy.” Mester added that it was a part of freedom of expression for “a public figure to call another a crook”.

PUZSÉR OFFERS COOPERATION TO OPPOSITION IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Róbert Puzsér, an independent Budapest mayoral candidate backed by opposition Jobbik and LMP parties, has put forward an offer to cooperate with the rest of the opposition with a view to defeating Fidesz in the autumn local elections. Puzsér said he and his team were convinced that the opposition could replicate the joint campaign that propelled Péter Márki-Zay to the mayorship of Hódmezővásárhely, in south-eastern Hungary, in February 2018. The opposition parties had all backed Márki-Zay in that election. Puzsér said this meant that Fidesz could only be ousted “from the centre and not from the far left”. He said his offer comprised a “fair” division of the metropolitan districts among the opposition parties, a “minimum joint platform” that included an anti-corruption package, and a primary to select a

joint Budapest mayoral candidate not organised by the Socialist Party.

ORBÁN MEETS SENIOR OFFICIAL OF KNORR- BREMSE IN BUDAPEST

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met Heinz Hermann Thiele, honorary chairman of the supervisory board of Germany’s Knorr-Bremse AG. They discussed the implementation of the self-driving vehicle test track of Zalaegerszeg at the meeting, also attended by Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics and István Lepsényi, CEO of Valor Hungariae, a state-owned company aimed to promote the market presence of Hungarian innovations in Hungary and abroad. Phase one of the investment is scheduled to be inaugurated at the end of May. Knorr-Bremse was among the first to join the companies that intend to use the test track. Other topics of discussion included Knorr-Bremse’s plans to set up an innovation centre in Budapest as well as the company’s plans for further investments and developments in Hungary. The company has two production bases in Hungary, as well as an R+D centre.

FEB TRADE SURPLUS REVISED DOWN TO EUR 816 M

Hungary’s February trade surplus was revised downwards to 816 million euros in a second reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office

(KSH). In the first reading, published on April 8, KSH had put the surplus at 891 million euros. The trade surplus was down 26 million euros from the same month a year earlier. Exports rose by 6.2% in euro terms to 9.058 billion euros and imports rose by 7.3% to 8.242 billion euros. Both growth rates were revised down from the first reading. In volume terms, February exports rose by 6.5% and imports rose by an annual 6.6%. Hungary’s terms of trade worsened by 0.9% from February 2018 as forint-term import prices rose by 2.9% and forint-term export prices rose by 2.0%. The forint weakened 2.1% to the euro and 11% to the US dollar in one year. Trade with other EU member states accounted for 82% of Hungary’s exports and 76% of the country’s imports. In January-February, exports rose by 6.5% both in volume and in euros to 18.062 billion euros. Imports increased by 7.7% in volume terms and rose by 8.5% to 16.854 billion euros. The surplus narrowed by 241 million euros to 1.208 billion euros, the revised figures show.

Terms of trade deteriorated by 0.9% in the first two months as export prices rose by 2.7% and import prices rose by 3.6% in forint terms. The forint weakened 2.8% to the euro and 11% to the dollar in the period.

SZEGED COURT HANDS GERMAN NATIONAL LIFE SENTENCE FOR MURDER

A court in Szeged handed down a sentence of life imprisonment to a

German national accused of having murdered an acquaintance and severely injuring another person in southern Hungary in 2017. The 53-year-old man of Turkish origin is accused of firing shots in a car park along the M5 motorway outside the village of Csengele near the Serbian border on the morning of December 5 in a premeditated act. One of the two men targeted died while the other suffered critical injuries. Under the ruling, the man will be eligible for parole in 30 years' time at the earliest. The court also decided the man will be expelled from Hungary following the completion of his sentence and will be banned

from entering the country for a period of ten years.

25TH POLISH FILM FESTIVAL TO MARK SEVERAL ANNIVERSARIES

The Polish Film Festival, a showcase of old and new titles, will mark several anniversaries this year, the director of the Polish Institute said. The festival between May 9 and 15 will feature films to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII, the founding of the Budapest Polish Institute in May in the same year, and the 50th death anniversary of legendary jazz composer Krzysztof Komeda, Joanna

Urbanska told public broadcaster M1. The festival will open with Denis Delic's title Squadron 303 which pays tribute to Polish pilots who fought against the German Luftwaffe defending the UK during the Battle of Britain, she said. On May 10, eminent director Krzysztof Zanussi's recent drama Ether, on experiments by a military doctor, will be shown, she added. The festival will also pay tribute to Komeda who composed the soundtrack for several early films of Roman Polanski and Andrzej Wajda.

Polanski's films Men and a Wardrobe, and Knife in the Water will be in the programme, along with Wajda's Innocent Sorcerers.