

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Péter Komlós

May snowfall in Kékes, N Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Head of part foreign affairs cttee meets Albanian counterpart

National Election Committee meets

Mazsihisz presser on 2nd generation Holocaust survivors

Budapest Beer Week presser

TOP STORY

ORBÁN WITHDRAWS SUPPORT FOR WEBER

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has said “Hungary’s government and its head” cannot be in the position to support a European Commission presidential candidate who has announced that he does not want the vote of Hungarians.

Asked to comment on ruling Fidesz’s decision to withdraw support for Manfred Weber’s candidacy at a joint press conference held with Vice-Chancellor of Austria Heinz-Christian Strache, Orbán said Weber indicated he did not want to become commission president with the help of votes from Hungary. “This is a serious position and a violation of the principle to always respect voters,” Orbán said. The government does not consider any of the candidates in the EC presidential campaign to be suitable and “we are looking for a suitable candidate”. Orbán said hopefully the European Council would eventually have more members who belong to the right wing of the EPP or the parties to its right. As regards Fidesz’s EPP membership, he said the party did not see a place for itself in an EPP whose majority comprised “pro-migration forces”. “This was why we had to suspend our membership rights, to wait and see in which direction the party turns after the election,” Orbán said, adding that Fidesz would hold off on making a decision about its EPP membership until after the EP election.

ORBÁN: HUNGARY'S SOUTHERN BORDER SEAL GOOD FOR AUSTRIA

By protecting its southern border, Hungary also protects Austria's border, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after talks with Vice-Chancellor of Austria Heinz-Christian Strache. It took Strache and his Freedom Party for Austria to adopt an anti-migration stance and demonstrate sympathy for Hungary's border protection efforts, Orbán told a joint press conference after the meeting with Strache, who also leads the Freedom Party (FPO). The previous, left-wing government in Austria did everything in its power to prevent Hungary from building its border fence but everything changed with the right-wing government, he said. Changes are needed in Europe similar to those in Austria, Orbán added. If Austria's centre-right ruling party can work together with a patriotic rightist party then this should be possible elsewhere in Europe, he said, adding that what works in Vienna could also work in Brussels. Orbán described the European left-wing as "hopelessly pro-migration" and said if the centre-right parties were to work together with the left wing then sooner or later they would be forced to make a compromise. "Instead of a European grand coalition we intend to keep on the agenda the possibility of opening to the right," he said.

There was general agreement at the meeting that Christian culture must

be given priority, because respect for women, the freedom of speech and religion, and the equality of voting rights can only be maintained in a Christian cultural environment, Orbán said.

He also said they were in agreement that Hungarian-Austrian bilateral relations were orderly and successful. He added that he expected further cooperation between Hungary and Austria, describing them as two countries with successful economies. The European left has an economic programme involving tax increases, bureaucracy and growing debt, which is essentially "a socialist system" that Hungary has already experienced and "would not like to see Brussels experiment with", Orbán said.

On the subject of the renegotiation of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, Orbán said he would welcome "opening up the question of the treaty if we were able", adding that "we're forced into the treaty currently in effect".

Asked about Hungarian-Austrian cooperation, he said that although the two countries had some opposing interests, they could be managed "with good will and strength of spirit". Orbán said he was certain that Hungary and Austria could find solutions to all their disagreements. He said that on the issue of Austria's decision to cut family benefits for foreigners working in the country, they had decided not to address the matter until the European Court of Justice has reached its verdict.

Orbán also said Fidesz was keeping track of which parties and politicians

stood up for Hungary "whenever the European left launches an attack against Hungary". The prime minister said the FPO had clearly stood up for his country, adding that "we won't forget this."

HEINZ-CHRISTIAN STRACHE: FEDERAL EUROPE IS NEEDED

A federal rather than a centralised Europe is needed, Heinz-Christian Strache, Austria's vice-chancellor, said at a press conference on Monday after meeting Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Europe should keep its Christian values to the fore and should be capable of defending itself, he said. Strache, who also leads the Austrian Freedom Party, said Europe was in need of greater togetherness and greater acceptance. Individual parties within European party families should be treated as equals and with respect, he added. Europe, he said, was "seriously divided due to borders being flung open and the import of terrorists, which has led to a sense of impotence and fear among the population". Strache slammed the "irresponsible Willkommenskultur" in western Europe and the "stealthy Islamisation and displacement of the population."

He said "patriotic" parties were likely to do well in the European parliamentary elections and it was possible that a patriotic European group may be formed for the first time and even form a majority. The European People's Party should

therefore think again about its policy of excluding patriotic parties, he said.

Strache said Austria-Hungary ties had always been special and linked by close economic relations and a common history. Cooperation in the area of infrastructure and border protection is intensive, he said, adding that Hungary and Austria jointly fight cross-border crime, illegal migration and human trafficking. He thanked Orbán for protecting the bloc's external borders "responsibly" during the migration crisis. This has helped to stop illegal migration and changed how people think about migration in Europe, the Austrian vice-chancellor added.

Asked about his party's tendencies, Strache said the Freedom Party was not extremist, but a center-right-rightist formation which rejected everything related to fascism, national socialism and anti-Semitism.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EURASIAN FREE TRADE AREA IN HUNGARY, EUROPE'S INTEREST

Revisiting the concept of a Eurasian free trade area is in the interests of Hungary and Europe as a whole, the foreign minister said in Bratislava. Péter Szijjártó participated in a meeting focusing on trade, energy affairs and security issues attended by the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group, the Eastern Partnership countries and Romania, which holds the European Union's rotating presidency. Szijjártó

said it was "clearly in Europe's interest" to develop close cooperation with the most important global economic players, adding this meant that the continent should revisit the idea of establishing a Eurasian free trade area which would also serve Hungary's economic interests.

Hungary has annual trade turnover of 1,300 billion forints (EUR 4bn) with the six countries of the Eastern Partnership, Szijjártó said, adding that the fewer bureaucratic obstacles they faced the better. He said the concept of a European free trade area had emerged years ago, adding that "with China's Belt and Road initiative setting the pace of changes in the global economy" it was time for the idea to be put back on to the agenda.

On the subject of the Belt and Road initiative, Szijjártó said it would bring with it fundamental infrastructural developments aimed at tightening economic cooperation. "Overall, both free trade and tightening Eurasian economic cooperation are in our interest," the minister said.

Of the Eastern Partnership countries, Hungary is in the middle of implementing free trade agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and has proposed signing trade deals with Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan as well, he said.

The meeting also covered energy cooperation. On this subject, Szijjártó said it was in Hungary's interest for Azerbaijan to deliver enough gas to southeastern Europe via the southern gas corridor so that it also reaches

central Europe. "We're considering multiple scenarios when it comes to the diversification of Hungary's gas supplies, but unfortunately one solution is taking even longer than the other," Szijjártó said. "So it is important to keep [the option of importing] Azeri gas among the possible scenarios." He urged the EU to provide every means of support for the development of the southern gas corridor.

ORBÁN: EUROPE SHOULD TAKE OVER AUSTRIAN MODEL OF RIGHT-WING COOPERATION

Europe should take over "the Austrian model in which the centre-right is cooperating with the right wing", Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to the news site of the Austrian daily *Kleine Zeitung*.

"Seen from Budapest, this cooperation seems successful. There is stability with clear-cut objectives and tax cuts, suggesting that Austria is on the right track," Orbán said prior to his talks with Austrian Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache. Orbán praised Strache as someone who stood out against Europe's "decadent political field". This decadence, he said, was manifest in the European elite no longer trusting in the strength of political action.

"They simply want to continue what they have done so far, and resist if they face something new," he said. The European elite fails to believe in the strength of leading personalities, and

sees danger in those able to inspire the people, Orbán said.

Asked about Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party (EPP), he said there was a risk of a final break with the Christian Democrats but this scenario was not one that Fidesz cherished. Orbán said Christian Democrats were shifting to the left in Europe, especially in Germany. If they continue forming coalitions with the Socialists, the left wing, they will have to make compromises and lose their identity, he said, adding that Christian Democrats should be Christians and represent the Christian positions on family and national identity.

"I see great potential in the new parties getting stronger on what you call the outer edges of the political spectrum," he said. "They represent Christian values even if they do not call themselves Christian Democrats."

Asked about the policy of French National Rally leader Marine Le Pen, Orbán said that "France is a secular state and Le Pen pursues a secular policy. They do not want to see Islam break through. They give priority to Christian culture, and protect the family and the nation state. I think this is a positive effort but it arouses criticism within the EPP..." This endeavour, he said, would have two consequences. The EPP would lose its identity on the one hand, and contribute to building "a socialist Europe" no longer able to be competitive in the international arena. "There will be tax hikes, overregulation, a swarm of

bureaucrats ... It is the Austrians and the Germans who will pay the price for that."

A "liberal network" is at work in Europe, comprising civil organisations, think tanks, media outlets, leftist intellectuals, universities and politicians, Orbán said. They "can make a politician's life very difficult if they decide to go after him," he said.

Answering a question on the characteristics of illiberal democracy, Orbán said there were three things "setting us apart from liberals". The first is the conviction that the family is "fundamental", he said, adding that the concept of family is understood as based on the union of one man and one woman. This needs protection, he said. "Liberals say no to this. Family seems to be some sort of game to them with endless variations," he said. Illiberal democrats also feel it their responsibility to preserve the leading culture of their countries while respecting others, Orbán said. In Hungary, that "Leitkultur" is Christianity, he said. Thirdly, "liberal democrats are for migration and illiberals are against it. Illiberals could also be called Christian democrats," he said.

Regarding Europe's future, Orbán said that migration may result in "the fates of western and central Europe drifting apart". The children born today, "be they Christian or Muslim," will grow up in a world where "people in the West are different from us", and the differences will be "civilisational and not simply political". Keeping such

a Europe united will be very difficult, he said.

Support for the European Union is enormous in Hungary, Orbán said, adding that the reasons for that are more psychological than economic. "When we became members of the European Union, everyone thought we were home at last, back in the family. That is an extremely strong bond for Hungarians," he said. Hungarians, however, differentiate between Europe and Brussels "Eurocrats", he said. They feel Brussels does not respect nation states or understand that its migration policy is destroying the Europe they had fallen in love with, he said. The European Commission and a few member states such as France, Germany, the Nordic and the Benelux states want to manage migration while central European states want to stop it, he said. "The issue as we see it is not whether we can coexist but what can we do to stop that question from even arising," Orbán said.

LMP, MOMENTUM, JOBBIK CAMPAIGN IN WESTERN EUROPE

The opposition LMP, Momentum and Jobbik parties recently wrapped up campaigns in London, Munich and Vienna, respectively, calling on Hungarians living there to take part in the European Parliament elections, the top candidates of Momentum and Jobbik said. Jobbik's Márton Gyöngyösi told a press conference

he held jointly with Momentum's Katalin Cseh that at stake in the May 26 election was whether Hungarians would allow Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to "drive Hungary out of the European Union and isolate Hungary within the community of European states, turning it into a lagging, impoverished country". Gyöngyösi said Europeans needed to engage in "quality debates" on the reform of the EU, warning against the dangers of "circles organised by Viktor Orbán, among others, tearing down the bloc". Asked about Jobbik potentially cooperating with other opposition parties, Gyöngyösi said there would be more room for coordinating and working together with the other parties in the autumn local elections, adding that his party was ready to do so.

Cseh said some half a million Hungarians have moved abroad over the past ten years because they had been unhappy with the job Fidesz had done in government. She said this was reflected in Fidesz having received less than 10% of the vote among London-based Hungarians in last year's general election while LMP, Momentum and Jobbik had won a combined two-thirds of the vote. Cseh said Hungary should strive to attract back Hungarians who had moved to western Europe, work to improve its education and health-care systems and guarantee fair wages for workers. On the topic of inter-party cooperation, she said opposition MEPs "who side with Europe against Orbán"

would have a duty to work together and present a joint position on issues relating to the state of the rule of law in Hungary.

LMP CALLS ON GOVT TO BOOST CLIMATE PROTECTION EFFORTS

Green opposition LMP has submitted a draft resolution to parliament, calling on the government to declare curbing climate change and adapting to its effects a matter of strategic importance. LMP lawmaker Erzsébet Schmuck told a press conference that the draft resolution calls on the Hungarian government to stand up for defining and achieving climate protection targets in the European Union. It also proposes a Hungarian climate protection law to be enacted by Oct. 30 and a green programme by the end of November, outlining Hungary's full decarbonisation until 2050, Schmuck said. The government should also ensure that Hungarian and EU budget funds cannot be used for projects hindering climate protection and the adaptation to climate change, she said.

ÁDER SENDS CONDOLENCES OVER MOSCOW AIRCRAFT FIRE

Hungarian President János Áder expressed his sympathies to the casualties and families of the victims of an accident at Moscow's

Sheremetyevo airport, where an aircraft bound for Murmansk burst into flames during a crash landing, killing at least 41 on board. "I was deeply shaken by news of the disaster claiming so many lives," Áder wrote in his telegram to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

SZIJJÁRTÓ APPEALS TO ROMANIAN COUNTERPART OVER MILITARY CEMETERY DISPUTE

Hungary's foreign minister has asked his Romanian counterpart to call a stop to construction work in an Austro-Hungarian military cemetery in central Romania that may still hold as-yet undiscovered graves of Hungarian soldiers, the foreign ministry said. The Valea Uzului (Úzvölgye) military cemetery is the largest WW1 memorial site in Romania's Harghita County. However, the local council of the eastern Romanian town of Darmanesti, in Bacau County, has moved to establish a memorial site in the cemetery for Romanian soldiers who fell in the second world war. This has seen the erection of 52 concrete crosses and one large Orthodox cross in the fenced-off cemetery site holding the graves of some 600 soldiers of Austria-Hungary.

Péter Szijjártó held talks with Teodor Meleşcanu on the sidelines of a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership countries in Bratislava, discussing the ongoing construction

work in the cemetery. Szijjártó asked Meleşcanu to intervene with the local authorities in an effort to stop the construction work, saying that building new memorials over potential undiscovered graves would be disrespectful and would breach bilateral agreements.

TARLÓS: EXTRA FUNDING FOR CYCLE PATHS

The municipality of Budapest has earmarked an additional 800 million forints (EUR 2.4m) in its budget for the development of cycle paths, Mayor István Tarlós said on Monday. The state will provide matching funds of 800 million forints, Tarlós told a press conference. With a total of 1.6 billion forints, the first phase of the development of the European cycling route network Eurovelo will be implemented, he said. Over the past ten years, Budapest's leaders have invested far more money in cycling paths than previous municipal leaders, Tarlós said. The MOL BuBi bike-sharing scheme and the cycling path network have been expanded, and funding has been provided to promote the cycle to work scheme, he said. Máriusz Révész, government commissioner for an active Hungary, said promoting cycling would benefit car drivers as it reduces congestion.

Csaba Horváth, a Budapest assembly lawmaker for the opposition Socialists, said Tarlós and Révész had "kept secret" that 85% of the funding is European Union money. With the European

parliamentary elections around the corner, this is something Budapest residents should know, he added. Horváth said the cost per kilometre of 120-150 million forints was extremely high. The construction of cycling paths should not require substantial spending on associated projects, he argued.

GRIPENS TO MOVE BASE TEMPORARILY TO PÁPA

Hungarian defence force Gripen fighters, whose tasks include quick reaction alert duties, will be temporarily moved from Kecskemét air base, in central Hungary, to Pápa, in western Hungary, from Tuesday. The Kecskemét air base will be developed under the arrangements of the NATO Security Investment Programme and Hungary's Modern Cities scheme, the Defence Ministry said.

RETAIL SALES GROWTH SLOWS TO 4.9% IN MARCH

Retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 4.9% in March, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Growth slowed from 8.4% in the previous month. When adjusted for calendar year effects, retail sales were up an annual 5.9% in March. Adjusted food sales were up 1.0%, non-food sales climbed by 14.3% and vehicle fuel sales rose by 14.3%. For the period January-March, retail sales rose by an adjusted 6.5% and an unadjusted 6.1% year on year. Adjusted food sales

increased by 3.1%, non-food sales were up 10.6% and vehicle fuel sales climbed by 11.8%.

ING Bank senior analyst Péter Virovác said retail sales growth in March was slower than in February and below what analysts estimated. Low food sales were responsible for the surprise but much stronger data could come out in April. For 2019 as a whole retail sales could increase by 5-6%. Erste Bank junior analyst Zsombor Varga said that despite a slower pace retail sales growth is still stable, and raising wages, consumer confidence and a tight labour market continue to support domestic demand. Takarékbank analyst Gergely Suppan attributed lower sales growth entirely to calendar year effects. K&H Bank chief analyst Dávid Németh said retail sales could grow by 5-5.5% this year mainly because of the sales of durable consumer goods.

TAKARÉK GROUP LAUNCHES NEW COMMERCIAL BANK

Takarékbank, the new universal commercial bank of Hungary's integrated savings cooperatives, launched on Monday with 139 branches in seven of Hungary's 19 counties as well as the capital. The lender, created from the merger of Mohácsi Savings Bank, Pannon Savings Bank and B3 Savings Cooperative, has more than 140,000 retail and 28,000 corporate clients. The ratio of agribusinesses among

the corporate clients stands close to 10%. Takarékbank also serves 173 local councils.

By the end of October, eleven more savings cooperatives as well as Takaré Commercial Bank, formerly called FHB Bank, will merge with Takarékbank, giving it more than 1 million clients and lifting its total assets over 2,300 billion forints (EUR 7bn). With 750 branches, it will have the country's largest banking network.

Takarék group, which, in addition to Takarékbank, counts eleven regional savings cooperatives, Magyar Takarékszövetkezeti Bank (MTB) and savings cooperative integrator SZHISZ among its members, has total assets of close to 2,500 billion forints. Its market share is over 6.5%, making it the fourth-biggest banking group in Hungary.

V4 STARTUP FORCE PROGRAMME LAUNCHED IN BUDAPEST

V4 Startup Force, a programme for the development and international expansion of startups from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia was launched in Budapest on Monday, the organiser Design Terminal told MTI. One startup of each country will go on a "networking tour" in the Visegrad countries to build their networks with local businesses and startups, it said. The participating startups offer IT solutions to filmmakers, for quality assurance, security and marketing purposes, Design Terminal said. The International Visegrad Fund has funded the project.

BUDAPEST PARK NAMED AFTER JERUSALEM

A green space next to Budapest's Chain Bridge was named Jerusalem Park at a ceremony. Budapest Mayor István Tarlós said the park's proximity to the Chain Bridge spoke to its importance. He said that city leaders had taken the decision to name the park after the ancient capital of the Jewish state in 2018, on the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Israel. Tzipi Hotovely, Israel's deputy foreign minister, said Jerusalem Park is a "milestone" for Israeli-Hungarian ties and called it "another important step" towards "moving the Hungarian embassy to Jerusalem".