

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President János Áder visits facility biomonitoring bees in Sopron University

MTV / Szilárd Koszticsák

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP election campaign events

Official for Hungarian communities abroad visits Bethlen Gábor College in Aiud

Presser on Hungarian Accreditation Cttee becoming member of EQAR

Stats Office first estimate on industrial output in March 2019

TOP STORY

EC RAISES HUNGARY GDP FORECASTS

The European Commission raised its projection for Hungary's GDP growth this year to 3.7% from 3.4% in its latest quarterly forecast. The EC also raised the forecast for next year's growth to 2.8% from 2.6%.

Hungary's updated Convergence Programme puts growth in both years at 4.0%. The EC acknowledged Hungary's economy grew at a pace of 4.9% in 2018, driven by construction investment, but said the expansion is "nearing its limits". "Growth is set to lose momentum as capacity constraints limit the further expansion of domestic demand, while external demand remains subdued," the EC said. The forecast projects private consumption growth will slow from 5.4% in 2018 to 4.9% in 2019 and 3.8% in 2020. The EC projects investment growth will decelerate from 16.5% in 2018 to 10.4% in 2019 and just 2.4% in 2020. The forecast augurs "subdued" exports with slow growth in key export markets, while "buoyant" domestic demand is expected to keep import growth high, leading to current account deficits in 2019 and 2020. Consumer price inflation is set to rise to 3.2% in both 2019 and 2020, driven up by rapid growth of unit labour costs and consumption. The EC sees the general government deficit narrowing to 1.8% of GDP in 2019 and 1.6% in 2020.

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NÉMETH URGES 'MOMENTUM' TO EU ENLARGEMENT

The European Union's enlargement process "must be given momentum" after the upcoming European parliamentary elections, Zsolt Németh, head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said, urging the EU to start accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia.

Speaking after talks with his Albanian counterpart Mimi Kodheli, Németh said the EU has become "introverted" in recent years and "abandoned" countries in the Western Balkans in their efforts to build stability. The next European Commission and the new European Parliament "will have to make enlargement policy a priority", he said. Németh added that the Hungarian government disagrees with French President Emmanuel Macron's position that gives priority to reforms with further enlargement to follow. Enlargement must be part and parcel of those reforms, he insisted.

The European Council should start accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia as early as in June, Németh said, adding that foreign ministers of the Visegrad countries are planning to adopt a joint statement in support of the two countries' accession late in May. Németh called it "unacceptable" that the Dutch parliament had decided to suspend Albania's visa-free status and interpreted it as "halting integration processes under way".

Németh spoke highly of relations between Hungary and Albania, mentioning Hungarian retail bank OTP's acquisition of one of the largest Albanian banks and a direct flight between the two countries as examples of recent developments. He voiced hope that business cooperation will be extended in food production and water management. Albania will host a Hungarian cultural festival in the last quarter of 2019, as part of which a monument will be erected to Albania's Queen Geraldine, born a Hungarian countess, in Tirana, while Budapest will pay a similar tribute to Albania's King George Castriot.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCHEME IN SERBIA BENEFITS BOTH COUNTRIES

The Hungarian government's economic development programme geared towards Vojvodina benefits both the Hungarian and Serbian economies, the foreign minister said in Bačka Topola (Topolya), in Serbia's Vojvodina. Addressing the inauguration ceremony of Hungarian agribusiness KITE's new logistics base in the town, Péter Szijjártó said political relations between Hungary and Serbia were "better than ever", adding that this had made it possible for the government to support the investments of Hungarian companies in Serbia. In recent years, Hungary has maintained a growth rate that was at

first close to, and eventually exceeded the European Union average, the minister said. This was what, he said, had allowed more and more Hungarian companies to invest abroad, improve their market positions and turn their profits to the development of the Hungarian economy.

Szijjártó said that in the future, companies that invest abroad would be key elements in the growth of Hungary's economy. He noted that the Hungarian government recently adopted a strategy whose first phase includes a 10 billion forint (EUR 30.9m) allocation for supporting Hungarian companies that invest in Serbia.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the new base of feed producer Gebi, Szijjártó called the base a "Carpathian Basin success story", saying that it demonstrated the strength of "the new central Europe" that he said had become the continent's engine of growth. Szijjártó said Hungary over the years had gone from being "part of the problem to part of the solution" in the EU, adding that this had enabled the government to provide greater support to ethnic Hungarian communities than ever before. Hungary can guarantee that Hungarians living beyond the border can make a living in their homeland, the minister said. Over the past three years, the Hungarian government has supported 10,426 bids for economic development projects in Vojvodina with a total of 38.3 billion forints, which have generated 75.4 billion forints' worth of investments, he added.

ORBÁN CONDOLES OVER DEATH OF HUNGARIAN-BORN US HISTORIAN JOHN LUKACS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has expressed his condolences over the death of Hungarian-born US historian John Lukacs, his press chief said. Lukacs, who emigrated from Hungary in 1946, died Monday at the age of 95.

In his letter of condolence to Lukacs's family, Orbán said he was shocked to learn that "the internationally-renowned figure in historical studies and recipient of the Hungarian Corvin Chain Award, John Lukacs, is no longer with us". The prime minister said Lukacs, "with his wide-ranging knowledge and perception, served not only his homeland and adopted home, but the whole world." "We are grateful that he remained proud of his Hungarian origin even as a renowned professor and represented the central European perspective without which we could barely understand 20th-century Western and European history," Orbán added.

After emigrating to the US, Lukacs finished his studies at Cambridge University. He was professor of history at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia between 1947 and 1994 and served as guest professor in Budapest's Corvinus University and Eötvös Loránd University several times from 1991.

ÁDER: HUNGARY DOUBLES FORESTS IN PAST 100 YEARS

Hungary has doubled the size of its forests since 1921, President János Áder told students at Sopron University. Hungary lost nearly 90% of its forests when two-thirds of its territory ceded to neighbouring countries under the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty, which concluded the first world war, the president said. He went on to say that the remaining woodlands, 11% of the country in 1921, have been increased to 21% by now. He added that the objective was to have forests on 27% of the country's territory.

On the subject of sustainability, Áder said that in the past 100 years the global population has grown three times, water consumption six times, and energy consumption nine times as large. The world annually uses 1.7 times the Earth's resources, which is unsustainable, he warned.

Áder urged a paradigm shift to create an economy resembling the cycles of nature, adding that the technology was in place but "social and political commitments" were also needed. He advocated "prevention, reduction, re-use and recycling", saying that "unless we change our practices, life will be overshadowed by sad social trends". Over-population and climate change will lead to less and less soil and drinking water, which paves the way for famine, epidemics, economic failure, wars and mass migration; "we are already impacted by that trend", the president said.

PALKOVICS: HUNGARY 'EXTREMELY ATTRACTIVE' TO FOREIGN INVESTORS

The number of foreign investments seen in Hungary in recent years shows that the country is an "extremely attractive" destination for investors, the innovation and technology minister said in Brussels. Speaking to Hungarian reporters during a break in a European business summit, László Palkovics said that there were "still many who are unaware of the economic progress Hungary has made since 2010".

Last year, a total of 98 major foreign companies decided to invest in building factories or research institutions or pursuing other forms of business in Hungary, the minister noted, saying this was a testament to the progress made by the economy. Certain economic players, however, are still unaware that Hungary's economy grew by nearly 5% last year or that the unemployment rate had fallen to 3.6% from above 10% nine years ago.

JOBBIK: FIDESZ 'BUILDING VIRTUAL REALITY' WITH CAMPAIGN

The opposition nationalist Jobbik party has accused ruling Fidesz of "building a virtual reality" by "fearmongering over immigration and terrorism" in its European parliamentary election campaign while the government had let 86,000 migrants into Hungary over the past three years.

Lawmaker Ádám Mirkóczki, the head of parliament's national security committee, said the stakes of the May 26 election were starting to be about "how many people are willing to swallow the orange pill", referring to Fidesz's colour. He said those who did "can continue to live in fear in this virtual reality, waiting for the government to protect them from danger". Mirkóczki said Jobbik considered the tactics of "fearmongering with fake news, lies and distortions" to be "just as serious an attack on society" as the failure to guarantee the safety of the Hungarian people. He criticised a recent campaign video released by Fidesz, saying there were multiple statements in the video that did not correspond with information recently shared with the national security committee by Hungary's intelligence services and the Counter Terrorism Centre (TEK).

Mirkóczki said that based on intelligence information shared at a national security briefing in late March, the video's claims that a Syrian terrorist suspect arrested in Hungary last year had been in the possession of a prepaid bank card and that Hungary had been his intended destination, were untrue. The Jobbik MP said he will ask the interior ministry "whether the authorities had misled the national security committee" about the case of the terrorist suspect. He said if it turned out that the intelligence services had told the truth, Fidesz would have to retract the video and apologise to the Hungarian people.

Fidesz said in response that all opposition parties were pro-migration and Jobbik, too, was defending the pro-migration policies of Brussels. "In the pursuit of power and money", Jobbik has changed completely and it is now protecting the pro-migration interests of Brussels even more fervently than [US billionaire George] Soros and [Democratic Coalition leader Ferenc] Gyurcsány, Fidesz added.

SOCIALISTS: EUROPE SOCIAL, COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

The opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance sees Europe as a social and cooperative community that guarantees the financial and physical security of its citizens, the Socialist party leader told current news channel M1, using the slot allotted to his party to present its programme for the May 26 European parliamentary elections.

Bertalan Tóth, who also tops the Socialist-Párbeszéd list of MEP candidates, said the ruling Fidesz party's engagement with "extremist politicians" and the party's shift to the right served no purpose other than to diminish common European norms so that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán can go on "building his empire" and enriching his family and friends.

He said that in the meantime thousands are evicted from their homes, the country's health-care system is in ruins and Hungarian wages do not even reach two-thirds of the European average. A "social Europe"

would mean introducing a European minimum wage of at least 240,000 forints (EUR 740) and a minimum pension of 95,000 forints. A European family allowance of 48,000 forints should also be introduced, Tóth said.

"We are also calling for measures ensuring that EU funds are spent on health care, education and the improvement of the working environment instead of enriching the prime minister and his circle of cronies," Tóth said. To ensure transparency, Hungary should join the European Prosecutor's office, he said. Regarding illegal migration, Tóth said border protection in Europe should be a joint responsibility of the bloc.

DK PROPOSES DECLARING EUROPE DAY HOLIDAY

The leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) has submitted a bill to parliament proposing that May 9, Europe Day, be declared a public holiday in Hungary. Klára Dobrev, the party's top candidate in the upcoming European parliamentary elections, noted that French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann had proposed the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the European Union, on this day in 1950.

Answering a question on the government's Hungary Helps programme, which ploughed 8.5 billion forints (EUR 26.2m) into supporting Christian communities abroad, Dobrev said she would only spend on renovating churches "once

Hungarian schools and hospitals are capable of providing adequate food and services to everyone.”

On the border seal at the country's southern border, Dobrev said the EU has solved the 2015 migration crisis. However, dismantling the border fence the government has built on the Hungary-Serbia border would cost “gargantuan amounts of money” which should rather be spent on schools and hospitals, she said.

In response to DK's proposal for Europe Day, ruling Fidesz said that “if it depended on DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány and other pro-migration politicians, Europe's remaining days would be numbered.” Brussels and the European left want to “flood” the continent with migrants and replace its Christian culture to give way to masses from other civilisations, it added. Fidesz stressed the need to “stop pro-migration forces” on May 26, stating that these forces would “destroy Europe and the future of our children.”

LMP CALLS FOR EU TO HELP PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Green opposition LMP called for domestic and European Union schemes to help people living with disabilities exercise their voting rights as well as access housing and employment. Gábor Vágó, the party's top candidate in the upcoming European parliamentary elections, said access to mobile ballot boxes should

be made easier to help people with disabilities vote on May 26. The EU should also fund housing for people with disabilities and their access to the job market, Vágó said. He insisted that the Hungarian government did not value people living with disabilities or their carers. LMP lawmaker Péter Ungár called for higher wages for special needs professionals and allowances for people taking care of an adult disabled family member in their homes.

CEU SIGNS COOPERATION PACT WITH GERMAN UNIVERSITY TUM

The Technical University of Munich (TUM) and Central European University (CEU), located in Budapest, signed a cooperation agreement, CEU announced on its website. The agreement was signed by President Prof. Herrmann, leading a delegation from TUM to CEU, and CEU Rector Michael Ignatieff.

“The parties understand that the offer of the Bavarian government to support TUM's engagement in Budapest is conditional on the ability of CEU to operate freely as a US-degree granting institution in Hungary,” the announcement said. “In this light, both parties call on the Hungarian government to provide CEU with the legal guarantees that would make it possible to inaugurate this new chapter in Hungarian and Bavarian academic and scientific cooperation,” CEU added.

CEU Deputy Rector Zsolt Enyedi said Bavaria and German carmaker

BMW both provided significant financial support to CEU and hoped that this would entice the Hungarian government to recognise CEU as a US-degree granting higher education institution. Enyedi said a related agreement with the Hungarian government would benefit Hungary's higher education sector, Hungarian society and CEU.

Hungary tightened rules governing the operations of foreign universities in the country in 2017, requiring foreign colleges and universities in Hungary to operate on the basis of an interstate agreement and to run a campus in the country in which they are based.

Last December, CEU announced that it will relocate all its US-accredited courses to Vienna for the start of the 2019/2020 academic year. The university said then that over the course of 20 months, it had taken all steps to comply with Hungarian legislation, launching educational activities in the US that were certified by US authorities. But it said the Hungarian government had made it clear that it had no intention of signing the agreement it had negotiated with the State of New York on ensuring CEU's operations in Budapest for the long term.

In March, Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics said the matter of CEU had been brought up at his talks with Federal Minister of Education and Research Anja Karliczek in Berlin. The minister said he had confirmed the Hungarian government's support for a proposal by European

People's Party group leader and Spitzenkandidat Manfred Weber on the university forming a partnership with the Technical University of Munich and carmaker BMW.

AZBEJ: HUNGARY HELPS SCHEME HAILED IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

The government's Hungary Helps scheme, which coordinates humanitarian efforts in crisis areas, has attracted much respect in North Rhine-Westphalia, the state secretary in charge of persecuted Christians Tristan Azbej said at the end of a visit to Germany's most populous state.

Azbej held talks in Düsseldorf with the local government minister in charge of European Union affairs Stephan Holthoff-Pförtner, as well as several senior Landtag members and church leaders.

It depended on the political affiliation of the negotiating partners to what extent they represented the "west European and German pro-migration position" but some politicians from the Landtag shared the Hungarian view that mass migration has serious security risks, for instance

due to the activities of human smugglers, he said. The Hungarian government's anti-migration policy was judged differently by the different negotiating partners but "we could always find some shared views" and everybody said Hungary's humanitarian policies and the Hungary Helps scheme were exemplary, he added.

GOVT WELCOMES CROATIA'S ETHNIC HUNGARIAN HMDK VICTORY

The Hungarian government has welcomed the "sweeping victory" of Croatia's ethnic Hungarian HMDK party in the neighbouring country's minority self-government election held on May 5. Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén and Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary for ethnic Hungarian communities abroad, congratulated HMDK leader Róbert Jankovics and party members on their "historic success", in a joint statement. In Sunday's vote a total of 365 Hungarian representatives were elected to fill posts in 11 counties, Jankovics said. The outcome of the vote is "a victory"

for not only HMDK but the exemplary collaboration of Hungarians in Croatia, they said. It is "a big success for a small community" which can be presented as a model for Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin and around the world, Semjén and Potápi said.

THOUSANDS OF HUNGARIANS DIAGNOSED WITH ASTHMA EACH YEAR

Fully 300,000 asthma patients receive medical care in Hungary and 150,000 are estimated to live with the condition, experts said. Fully 15,000-20,000 patients are diagnosed with asthma each year in Hungary and 15,000-30,000 live with chronic asthma, Lilla Tamási, a pulmonologist at the Budapest Semmelweis University, said on World Asthma Day, adding that chronic sufferers receive advanced treatments.

A major problem is that around 50% of the asthma patients fail to regularly take their drugs 90% of which are paid for by the national health insurance fund, said Tamási, who is the deputy director of the university's Pulmonology Clinic. World Asthma Day is marked on the first Tuesday of May.