

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVI/Tamás Kovács

Ground-breaking ceremony for the Budapest Airport Arena

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Informal meeting of EU heads of state and government in Sibiu, Romania**

**Áder, Cardinal Erdő greet participants of International Eucharistic Congress**

**Szijjártó meets Brazilian counterpart**

**Presser on Valley of Arts festival**

**Stats office releases March foreign trade, April consumer prices data**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: MIGRATION TOP PRIORITY IN EP ELECTIONS

Hungary's prime minister called migration a top priority for all European countries in the European parliamentary elections, in a lecture in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), in north-western Romania.

Viktor Orbán said a big issue concerning the future is whether divergent opinions on migration can be narrowed and European unity restored.

He said at the Hungarian Sapientia University of Transylvania that policy thinking on migration was divided between Europe's concept of "how to live together" and central European ideas about what must be done to ensure that "we do not have to live together".

Orbán said western Europeans wanted to paper over the differences and "let in a large number of migrants" and thereby restore European unity. "We believe this is a price not worth paying for European unity", he added.

The prime minister said unfettered migration led to "mixed populations".

According to "liberal doctrines", the solution is for everyone to leave behind their traditions, he said. The European left "envisions a post-national and post-Christian period", so it does not want to stop migration, he said, adding that central Europeans "do not want mixed populations" because there are no good examples of it.

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**ORBÁN GIVES LECTURE AT CLUJ-NAPOCA HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY**

Giving a lecture at the Hungarian Sapientia University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), the prime minister said that Hungarian youth were offered “a safe, Christian Hungarian life of development”. “We are on the threshold of great times and great opportunities,” Viktor Orbán said.

Hungarians wanted to survive and continue their history dating back over a thousand years in the same place despite the continual challenges the country’s sovereignty has faced. “Hungarians want to strengthen and protect families” and address demographic issues through domestic policymaking.

Meanwhile, Orbán said Hungarians can be found in all corners of the world and it is important to connect these scattered parts of the nation and build a “global nation”. This increases the resources which can then be distributed between all Hungarians around the world, he added. It is also important to counterbalance the pressure of assimilation and be strong enough to preserve Hungarians in areas with mixed ethnicities, he said. The prime minister said Hungarians also pursued sovereignty-based policies, including the country’s NATO membership. “It is good that we are in the EU because we can serve our national targets

better this way.” It is also important that public debt should remain in Hungarian hands instead of being indebted to another country, he added. Regarding Hungary’s EU membership, he said: “The EU is not the aim for Hungarians, only a means”. Hungarians do not want to be subordinated to anyone, he added.

**ORBÁN, RMDSZ LEADER DISCUSS EP ELECTION PREPARATIONS**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed preparations for the upcoming European parliamentary elections with the leader of Romania’s ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár).

Speaking at a joint press conference with Hunor Kelemen, Orbán urged ethnic Hungarians in Romania to vote for RMDSZ’s candidates to ensure a stronger representation of Hungarians in Brussels. He said he was optimistic about the election with both his Fidesz party and RMDSZ having “good chances”. Asked about Fidesz’s membership in the European People’s Party, Orbán said that it was Fidesz that had suggested that it should not exercise its voting rights in the EPP as long as open issues are settled. “We suspended our participation,” he said, and added that “we are not going to wait for the EPP to make a decision, but will go ahead and make one on our own”.

“What matters is not the EPP, but where Fidesz will find its place to

appropriately represent Hungarian interests in a new European political situation following the election,” he said. Fidesz’s decision will fundamentally depend on the direction in which the EPP decides to go, he added.

Orbán said the EPP was preparing to enter into a strategic alliance with the European Left. This is unacceptable, Orbán said, and argued that “the entirety of the European Left has adopted a pro-migration stance”. Meanwhile, he said, stopping migration was the most important issue in central Europe. Orbán said this was the dilemma that would have to be resolved after the election. The EPP, he suggested, should follow Austria’s model, in which an EPP member made a coalition with a party on its right and “they are governing that country well”.

On another subject, Orbán said that bilateral ties with Serbia and Slovakia were “very good” but added that “it cannot be said about Hungary-Romania relations”. Hungary has recently made “spectacular progress” and the country “uses its increasing economic prowess to improve neighbourly relations”. That is why the Hungarian government has signed several agreements and launched joint projects with Serbia and Slovakia, he said. He voiced hope that a “similarly confidential” relationship could be developed with the Romanian government in the interest of meeting shared goals. He thanked Romania for its “excellent controls” over the EU’s external borders, and said that



Romania has demonstrated that it is worthy of becoming a member of the Schengen system.

Concerning migration, Orbán said that “those that make it clear that migrants should not cross the sea without permits and registration will save lives”. Since Italian deputy PM Matteo Salvini has warned against leaving Africa, the number of migrants and lives lost at sea “has radically decreased”, Orbán said. “This policy has saved more lives than a different policy luring migrants to set off,” he added.

Speaking at the joint press conference with Orbán, Kelemen stressed the importance of Transylvania Hungarians being present in the EP. He said both RMDSZ and Fidesz were involved in a campaign, adding that it was natural for the two parties to assist one another. Strong Hungarian representation in the EP was in the interest of all Hungarians, Kelemen said, arguing that the EU was on the verge of changes that concerned all of its citizens. “A smart person will try to influence change,” he said.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: STABILITY IN LEBANON IMPORTANT FOR HUNGARY**

Lebanon, as the nearest safe country to areas of strife, has taken in 1.5 million Syrian war refugees, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said. But these refugees must return home as soon as possible so Lebanon can maintain its stability, he said. Hungary

is helping to achieve this aim because it has an interest in stability in the Middle East, the minister told MTI by phone after talks in Beirut. Hungary is sending 54 soldiers to the UN mission in Lebanon to run a peacekeeping force with Polish soldiers, he said. They will be in place by the end of next year. He underlined Hungary’s position that the international community should stop encouraging migration and focus on how to help people who are inclined to leave their country stay where they are. Encouraging emigration only serves to upset the stability of countries located next to war zones, he said, adding that if Lebanon remained stable, refugees were less likely to make their way to Europe.

International efforts aimed at helping Iraq and Syria retake their territories that were occupied by the Islamic State militant group have been successful, Szijjártó said, noting that the global coalition fighting IS had ejected the group from 98% of the territory it had occupied. He said these efforts had made it possible for refugees who had fled those territories to return to their homelands. The minister said it was in Lebanon’s interest that the refugees it had taken in could also return home.

Szijjártó held talks with Lebanon’s Economy and Trade Minister Mansour Bteish, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil and Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch. At a joint press conference with Bassil, Szijjártó said that though Hungary

was proud of its Christian heritage, it was also aware of the responsibilities this came with. Among these, he said, was the duty to care for Christian communities in need.

“And we know that the Middle Eastern Christian communities are in need,” the minister said. “It would be easy to encourage them to leave their homelands, but instead we try to convince them to stay where they have lived for centuries. We do this, for instance, by providing them financial aid. We also do this in the case of the Lebanese Christian community,” he added.

Szijjártó said one of Hungary’s goals in the upcoming EP elections was to contribute to a change in the European Parliament and European Commission that will lead those institutions to favour keeping refugees in their homelands over immigration. Given the respect Hungary has for the care Lebanon provides for refugees, it regularly asks the European Union to increase its financial support for the country, Szijjártó said.

The minister said Hungary has allocated 1.5 million dollars towards the reconstruction and renovation of 33 Lebanese Christian churches. Szijjártó also said Hungary and Lebanon were preparing to sign a defence cooperation agreement that will see the two countries provide each other with technical assistance. Talks are also ongoing on re-establishing direct air links between the two countries, he said.

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## **COURT RULES IN FAVOUR OF BROAD INTERPRETATION OF SIGNATURE GATHERING**

Hungary's laws on election procedures allow parties to engage in campaign activities other than simply gathering nominating signatures, the Constitutional Court said. The court's decision is at loggerheads with a ruling by another top court, the Kúria, which earlier said the governing Fidesz party had transgressed the election rules while collecting signatures. The opposition Momentum Movement had attached video footage to its complaint showing that Fidesz activists in the underpass of Kálvin Square in Budapest on 8 April 2019 had displayed logos with the slogans "For us Hungary comes first in Brussels! May 26" and "I support Viktor Orbán's programme to stop migration!". Momentum claimed the signature forms were not official and the activists were indeed collecting signatures in support of Orbán's programme. Moreover, the activists were unable to show any information about how the data would be handled.

The Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, ruled that collecting signatures in support of an organisation was lawful only if voters were made aware of the exact purpose of their signatures and how the data would be used.

Fidesz and its Christian Democrat ally turned to the Constitutional Court with the complaint that the Kúria

had not allowed them the chance to comment on the matter and that the court had not taken into consideration the freedom of expression rights of organisations that collect signatures.

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## **JOBBIK: ELECTIONS ABOUT ELIMINATING CORRUPTION, INTRODUCING WAGE UNION**

Eliminating corruption, closing "an era of keeping wages artificially low" and introducing a European wage union is at stake in the May 26 European parliamentary election, György Szilágyi, the deputy parliamentary group leader of nationalist Jobbik, said. Szilágyi called on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the government to disclose the invoices for the prime minister's trips with private jets, and the resources they were funded from. Orbán's financial situation "does not seem to allow such spendings", Szilágyi said.

Jobbik also expects an answer on whether intergovernmental agreements have been signed on bringing "tens of thousands of Chinese guest workers" to Hungary for the construction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway, which is being co-funded by China. The answer to that question could determine Hungary's future and show that the government is filling vacancies with foreigners instead of raising wages and stopping emigration, he said.

Jobbik intends to clamp down ruthlessly on corruption, and therefore backs Hungary joining the European

Prosecutor's Office, Szilágyi said. "While we fight corruption, Orbán and his team are fighting to maintain it," he added. Szilágyi also called for making all government contracts public unless they are declared confidential for reasons of national security.

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## **DK URGES UNIFORM EUROPEAN TAX COLLECTION**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has urged that tax collection should be harmonised across the European Union. Klára Dobrev, top candidate of the leftist party for the upcoming European parliamentary elections, said EU members "cannot separately enforce their tax collection rights" and argued that nearly 150 billion euros "disappear" each year due to VAT fraud, and multinational companies evade taxes totalling between 100-150 billion euros. EU members, therefore, "need to collect some of their taxes together" because "national tax authorities are not strong enough to cope with the task", she said. The European Prosecutor could not only monitor utilisation of European funds but could combat large-scale VAT fraud committed by international gangs, Dobrev said.

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## **SOCIALIST-PÁRBESZÉD: ORBÁN RISKING HUNGARY EU MEMBERSHIP**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is "writing himself out of Europe" and risking

Hungary's EU membership in the process, Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi told a press conference. Ujhelyi called Orbán "the greatest weathervane in political history" who leaves his pro-Europe, right-wing, conservative political family to become a leader of a "neo-Fascist, Eurosceptic circle." Ujhelyi said that Orbán's illiberal system was incompatible with European values and Hungary's membership of the bloc. Hungarians, including the voters of the ruling Fidesz party, want to stay in the EU, he said.

Benedek Jávor, an MEP candidate of the Párbeszéd party, said Orbán was about to officially join a "European far-right, populist, Eurosceptic" group. Europe will actually benefit from having all those wanting to dismantle European cooperation "in the same basket", Jávor said. This also means that in the future, the government will be unable to stand up for Hungarian's interests at European forums; one more reason to have as many opposition MEPs in Brussels as possible, he said.

## **LMP: ELECTION ABOUT STOPPING EMIGRATION**

One of the most important issues of the upcoming European parliamentary elections is stopping the emigration of Hungarians, LMP co-leader Márta Demeter said. Speaking at a press conference in Nyíregyháza, in north-eastern Hungary, Demeter said one of the ways her party aimed to keep Hungarians in the country was by ensuring that European Union funding

to Hungary is not reduced in the next financial cycle.

If elected, LMP's MEPs will work to ensure that EU funds make their way directly to the Hungarian people in a transparent manner, "bypassing corrupt governments", she said. "EU funds don't belong in the pockets of multinational companies or government circles," Demeter said, adding that her party would use them to help local small and medium-sized companies. She said LMP wanted young people to be able to start their own businesses at home, receive funding for innovation and compete in the Hungarian and foreign markets with their own products. Demeter also talked about the need to manage Hungary's "wage crisis" by introducing a common European minimum wage. László Lóránt Keresztes, LMP's other co-leader, told the same press conference that contrary to the government's claims, emigration was not on the decline. Citing statistical data, he said one-sixth of all Hungarian children were born abroad, adding that the number of those leaving the country was still higher than the number of those returning.

## **EBRD RAISES HUNGARY GDP GROWTH FORECAST**

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has raised its forecast for Hungarian economic growth this year to 3.7% from 3.3% in its previous estimate released in November. The EBRD economic

outlook for Hungary is below the government's target of 4% growth contained in its updated Convergence Programme, and it sees a slowdown to 2.9% in 2020.

## **HUNGARY INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 8% IN MARCH**

Industrial output in Hungary grew by an annual 8% in March, according to both unadjusted and working day-adjusted data, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data.

In a month on month comparison, industrial output was up 1%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data. The pace of growth accelerated in vehicle manufacturing, but slowed slightly in the computer, electronics and optical products segment in March, KSH said. In the food, drink and tobacco products segment, output growth was close to the headline figure, it added. In the first three months of the year, industrial output was up 6.2% from a year earlier.

Analyst Orsolya Nyeste of Erste Bank said the first-quarter data suggest that the industrial sector must have made a strong contribution to GDP growth in spite of the slowdown on key export markets. She said she expects to see a slow improvement on main export markets from the second quarter and industrial performance should be supported by external factors as well in the remaining part of the year. Gergely Suppan of Takarékbank said the installation of new manufacturing

capacities and the launch of production of new models could give further momentum to industrial output this year. Suppan forecast industrial output growth of about 6% for the full year 2019 compared with 3.6% last year.

### **HUNGARY ACCREDITATION CTTEE JOINS EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REGISTER**

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). According to its website, the EQAR is a register of agencies “that have demonstrated their substantial compliance with a common set of principles for quality assurance in Europe”. Outlining the advantages of the MAB’s EQAR membership, human resources ministry state secretary József Bódis said that joining the EQAR was “a major step forward”.

Hungarian higher education has had a presence on the global higher education market for decades, Bódis told a press conference. There are some 30,000 international students pursuing studies at Hungarian universities, he said, adding that at the same time “an international environment demands a different kind of quality assurance.” MAB head Valéria Csépe said the Hungarian committee’s admission to the EQAR was a “big success but also a serious challenge” that came with many responsibilities. The MAB aims to ensure student mobility via a transparent system based on trust, she said.

### **OPPOSITION BUDAPEST MAYORAL CANDIDATE ADDRESSES CONCERNS IN DISTRICT**

Leaders of Budapest have done very little on matters of concern to local residents, Gergely Karácsony, mayor of the 14th district and a candidate supported by the

opposition Democratic Coalition and Momentum parties, said. The renovation of prefab housing has stalled in the past nine years, he said. Instead of spending European Union money earmarked for the scheme, the Fidesz government has used the fund to renovate its own properties, Karácsony said, noting a related infringement procedure launched by Brussels against Hungary over a breach of energy efficiency rules.

Karácsony addressed the issue of a site where he said municipal companies had illegally deposited hazardous waste with legal impunity. Substances that pose health risks to local residents have already entered ground waters, he insisted.

Addressing the issue of a recent rat infestation in Budapest, Karácsony said he suspected the municipality had contracted an incompetent pest-control company “for political reasons”. He called for the original firm which had done its job effectively to have its contract renewed.