

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédy

Grey cattle herd on their way to summer field in Hortobágy

UPCOMING EVENTS

Prime minister on Transylvania visit

Foreign minister, Albanian counterpart meet, give joint presser

Justice minister, Polish deputy PM address conference on C Europe

Nat Election Cttee meets, decides on election observers

TOP STORY

GULYÁS: HUNGARY ON 'RIGHT TRACK'

Hungary has "clearly headed in the right direction" since 2010, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, told a conference organised by think-tank Nézopőnt Institute and the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

Gulyás said that after the EU's next financial cycle, Hungary will "receive as much in community funding as it contributes". Western European companies operating in Hungary, he added, earn profits equal to 7 percent of Hungary's GDP, while EU subsidies account for less than 4 percent of GDP. "Neither side has a moral basis to complain about a mutually beneficial situation," he added.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said the upcoming European parliamentary elections would determine whether "MEPs with a Hungarian mandate do indeed represent Hungarians". "Hungary has had strong representation in the EP through its Fidesz-Christian Democrat MEPs," he said. "But Brussels also has had a strong representation in Hungary through opposition MEPs."

Outlining the results of the government's economic policies, he said economic growth last year of close to 5% was one of the strongest deliveries since the 1989-1990 change in political system and put Hungary among the top performers in Europe. Gulyás highlighted successful employment policies, noting that more than 800,000 people are working today compared with 2010.

ORBÁN CALLS FOR VOTER PARTICIPATION IN EP BALLOT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called on voters to participate in the upcoming European Parliament elections and asked ethnic Hungarians to support the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), in Sibiu (Nagyszeben), in central Romania. Arriving at an informal meeting of EU heads of state and government, Orbán told reporters that “first of all, I want to campaign among ethnic Hungarians, and generally among all Romanian citizens, to turn up for this vote of great importance for Romania, Hungary and all European countries. Secondly, one always comes to Romania to improve Romanian-Hungarian relations. We would like to see closer cooperation between the two countries and the two peoples. Thirdly, I want to ask ethnic Hungarians living here to vote for the RMDSZ list.

Meanwhile, Orbán said on Facebook that voters should tick the boxes of anti-migration leaders on European Parliament ballot papers so that the bloc can protect itself “and the future of our children”. In a video recorded in Sibiu, central Romania, on the sidelines of an informal summit of EU leaders, Orbán said discussions had been focused on Europe’s future, but absent of the opinions of ordinary people, it would be impossible to draw any meaningful conclusions. “We’ll become familiar with their opinions

at the election,” he said. “What we can definitely say today is that Hungary represents the view that migration must be stopped.”

SZIJJÁRTÓ: SIGNIFICANCE OF EP ELECTION HIGHER THAN EVER BEFORE

The significance of the upcoming European parliamentary elections is “greater than ever before” because there is more at stake and the European voters’ decision will have a major impact on their everyday lives, Hungary’s foreign minister said. Addressing a conference at the National University of Public Service, Péter Szijjártó called the timing of the election perfect, arguing that it was high time to close the past five-year period that was marked by a series of “unpleasant experiences and failures” for the EU. “It is time to place the operation of the European Commission on new foundations because its performance over the recent period was poorer than ever before,” he said. The community faces historic challenges with disputes about its future, but those disputes “are emotionally motivated and everybody outside the mainstream is stigmatised as anti-European”, Szijjártó said. He warned, however, that “today’s minority could become a majority tomorrow”.

Hungary rejects the idea of a united states of Europe and “any proposal restricting competition and aimed at centralisation because Hungary

believes in a strong European Union of strong nation states,” the minister said.

Szijjártó said that building a strong EU requires measures to allow competition, arguing that internal competition will increase the EU’s global competitiveness. He added that current proposals such as harmonising taxes across the community would lead to reducing internal competition. He said that “low taxes require fiscal discipline”, adding that such proposals are sponsored by countries that are unable to cut their taxes. “They advocate tax hikes in countries where taxes are low, thus reducing their own lag.” Hungary rejects proposals aimed at distributing some countries’ debt because that would be equal to “distributing the ramifications of an earlier, irresponsible economic policy”.

The EU should “restore security for Europeans” and take measures to eliminate possibilities for illegal entry. “It has now become clear that Europe’s migration policy and Western Europe’s endeavours to integrate (immigrants) have largely failed, which is demonstrated by the emergence of parallel societies and terror attacks in recent years,” Szijjártó said. The EU should work to stop migration rather than manage it, he said, adding that demographic problems and labour shortages should be addressed at a national level. “Supporting families and modernising the education is the right answer, therefore Hungary rejects any pressure or attempts to take away those national competencies; it is each nation’s sovereign right to

decide whom they allow to enter and to live together with," he insisted. The Hungarian government also thinks that the EU must preserve its Christian culture and European identity, and should expect new entrants "to respect local culture, behaviours and laws", Szijjártó said.

On another subject, Szijjártó called for a "fair" debate on the EU's next budget, saying that "the notion of funds granted to central Europe being donations should be dropped at last". "Hungary is entitled to those funds because it met its obligations and opened up its markets where Western European companies have made huge profits", he said, and insisted that "70% of those funds is returned to Western Europe as profit".

The next European Commission "must not act as a political body; it must pay more respect for European people and nations and Europe's institutions must again be capable of understanding people's problems", Szijjártó said.

Szijjártó also said that the EU should be further enlarged and added that Hungary considers integration of the Western Balkans as a top priority.

ÁDER: HUNGARIANS' MISSION TO PRESERVE FAITH, ENRICH THE WORLD

The mission of Hungarians is to preserve their faith and enrich the world, President János Ader told cardinals and representatives of bishops' conferences from seventy

countries who arrived in Budapest to see the planned locations of, and preparations for, the International Eucharistic Congress of 2020. Hungary wants to demonstrate at the congress its dedication to preserving values and respecting others also in the 21st century, Áder said.

Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, called it an "old dream" of Hungarian Catholics that after the Eucharistic Congress of 1938, Budapest should once again host that meeting of the Catholic world.

András Veres, President of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference, said the congress and the preparations offer a great opportunity to the Hungarian Catholic community for renewal.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, BRAZIL AGREE ON NEED FOR ACTION AGAINST MIGRATION

Hungary and Brazil share similar approaches to issues that pose dilemmas in world politics today, such as the need for action against migration and that discrimination against Christians is unacceptable, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after meeting his counterpart Ernesto Araujo. He told a joint press conference that this was the first occasion for a Brazilian foreign minister to hold talks in Hungary. Szijjártó said he had agreed with Araujo to coordinate their respective countries' actions in international forums. "We are proud to

be among the six countries that voted against the UN Migration Compact," Szijjártó said, calling the package "the most dangerous document ever". "We reserve the right to decide who should enter and with whom we'll live together," he added. They highlighted the security impacts of migration. "This must be taken seriously," he said.

Szijjártó and his counterpart agreed that discrimination against Christians, as seen in many parts of the world, was unacceptable. "International public opinion does not see Christianity as the most persecuted religion in the world," he said, adding that this was lamentable. Hungary has so far helped 35,000 Christians in the Middle East stay in the homelands or return there, Szijjártó said. "This should be in the focus of international organisations rather than managing or promoting migration."

Hungary and Brazil both believe in promoting their national interests and rejecting attempts at influence from abroad, he said. This serves a good basis for cooperation, Szijjártó added. Hungary supports Brazil's bids to be a member of the United Nations Security Council and to join OECD, he said.

Szijjártó praised Brazil's international role and announced the Hungarian government's strategy "to build a new foundation for Hungary-Brazil ties". The government has set up a 415 million euro credit line with Hungary's Eximbank to finance bilateral business cooperation with special regard to promoting Hungarian exports of food, IT, water management

and pharmaceutical products and to further strengthen Hungarian companies active in Brazil, he said. They agreed the Hungary-Brazil mixed economic committee will be chaired by the two foreign ministers. Hungary and Brazil will make their cooperation closer in the area of education, too, and give new impetus to bilateral trade, turnover of which was 430 million dollars last year, Szijjártó said.

Szijjártó said hopefully Brazil's president would visit Hungary, having received Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's invitation early in January.

Araujo said Hungary and Brazil were countries working "to make their voices heard" in the world and were brave enough to meet challenges if their ideals made it necessary. Brazil is ready to cooperate with Hungary in multilateral organisations to protect their values and Christian minority groups. He called the persecution of Christians worrying, and added that addressing that problem was a top priority for his country.

SOCIALISTS-PÁRBSZÉD MARK EUROPE DAY

Only the European Union can guarantee peace and security on the continent, politicians of the opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance said, marking Europe Day at a statue of WW2 victims in Budapest. Socialist National Board member Dávid Bihal noted at a press conference that Europe had seen two wars over the past century. He criticised Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán for making friends with politicians who are the "enemies of Europe" eager to disrupt unity on the continent. If one wants to build a successful country in a period of global challenges and climate change, they should work towards a strong and united European Union, Párbeszéd spokesman Richárd Barabás said. When Orbán is "destroying the political unity of Europe", he is also acting against the interests of Hungary and the Hungarians, he added. Europe needs to be reformed and must be united in its social, foreign and energy policies, he said.

OPPOSITION PROPOSES SPECIAL PARLT SESSION TO ADDRESS HOUSING CRISIS

Parties of the opposition and independent MPs have called an extraordinary session of parliament for next Tuesday to address "an ever increasing housing crisis" impacting troubled forex debtors.

In a statement, MPs of Jobbik, the Socialist Party, the Democratic Coalition, Párbeszéd, LMP and independent MP Bernadett Szél said that "the issue cannot suffer any delay because the evictions moratorium ended on April 30 and further thousands of families could find themselves in the street". Last year, some 3,000 families lost their homes, signatories to the statement said.

The opposition demands that the state should help those in trouble.

Although the basic law stipulates that Hungary "shall strive to provide every person with decent housing" and the related law declares the local governments' obligation to prevent homelessness, the state is "doing nothing" to improve the situation, they said.

The opposition parties voiced hope that MPs of the ruling parties would attend the meeting and "elaborate how the government wishes to prevent families with small children, elderly and sick people from being evicted and what long-term solution they have for the decade-long forex crisis"

The ruling Fidesz party said in response that the proposal was "an empty campaign manoeuvre". The special session was initiated by the same opposition politicians who, when in power, introduced and approved the forex loan scheme in the first place, the party said. "The Asset Manager has offered to rescue 36,000 families over the past years," Fidesz said. "So far almost 20,000 have said they will take up the offer."

DK QUESTIONS HOW ANTI- HUNGARIAN UKRAINIAN BISHOP COULD OBTAIN HUNGARIAN CITIZENSHIP

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on the government to probe how "Hungarian-hater" Ukrainian bishop Victor Vasilyevich Begy had been able to obtain Hungarian citizenship. Gergely Arató,

DK deputy parliamentary group leader, at a press conference on Thursday cited a report by the daily Népszava that President János Áder had withdrawn the Hungarian citizenship of the Orthodox Church bishop. The paper added that the bishop had been known for decades to be anti-Hungarian. Arató said the number of "secretly" naturalised Ukrainians also should be uncovered. "How many Ukrainians with nothing to do with Hungarians and who do not speak Hungarian will be voting for Fidesz on May 26 in the European parliamentary elections?" the DK politician said. He added that the list of Hungarian voters beyond the border was being kept under wraps by the authorities. It is unknown who has the right to vote, he said.

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE UPHOLDS CZEGLÉDY'S IMMUNITY, COURT DROPS CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

A court in Szeged, in southern Hungary, has terminated a criminal procedure against Csaba Czeplédy, after the National Elections Committee upheld his immunity as a candidate in the European parliamentary elections for Hungary's opposition Democratic Coalition (DK). On April 26, the court requested that the Elections Committee should suspend Czeplédy's immunity so that the proceedings could continue.

The ruling parties said that "the opposition has openly sided with

a criminal" referring to opposition members of the Elections Committee refusing to lift Czeplédy's immunity. Lőrinc Nacsa, parliamentary spokesman for the co-ruling Christian Democrats, said that the opposition is "covering up for Czeplédy to get away with a crime".

Czeplédy, a municipal politician in Szombathely, in western Hungary, was arrested in July 2017 under charges of major fraud and forgery of public documents. He was put in house arrest in December last year, and was released in February. He was indicted for tax fraud to the tune of six billion forints (EUR 18.9m).

HUNGARY CPI RISES TO 3.9 PC IN APRIL

The rate of consumer price inflation in Hungary accelerated to 3.9% in April from 3.7% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. In a monthly comparison, prices rose by 0.9% after a 0.7% rise in March. Core inflation growth, which excludes volatile food and fuel prices, stayed unchanged at a seasonally adjusted 3.8%, the more than 6-year peak rate it picked up to in March. Twelve-month headline inflation was the highest measured since December 2012 and the month-on-month rise was the steepest since January 2012.

Assessing inflation prospects after a rate-setting meeting on April 30, the National Bank of Hungary Monetary Council said that 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".

TRADE SURPLUS EUR 677 M IN MARCH

Hungary had a 677 million euro trade surplus in March, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data. The surplus was down by 21 million euros from the same month a year earlier. Exports rose by 4.9% annually to 9.674 billion euros. Imports were up 5.6% at 8.996 billion euros. About 82% of exports and 75% of imports were traded with other European Union member states. For January-March, exports were up 5.9% annually at 27.737 billion euros and imports rose by 7.5% to 25.851 billion euros. The trade surplus in the first quarter of the year was 1.886 billion euros, down by 260 million euros from the same period last year.

BUDGET DEFICIT REACHES 3.9% OF FULL-YEAR TARGET AT END-APRIL

Hungary's budget, excluding local councils, ran a 39 billion forint (EUR 120m) deficit at the end of April, the finance ministry said in a preliminary reading of data. The four-month deficit reached 3.9% of the 998.4 billion forint target for the full year. The full-

year accrual-based deficit target of 1.8% of GDP is achievable, and public debt could be reduced to below 70% of GDP, the ministry cited Finance Minister Mihály Varga as saying.

The January-April deficit was in line with the government's expectations, the minister said, noting that the central budget's position is stable and balanced due to the performance of the economy and to rising revenue despite tax cuts.

The budget, excluding local councils ran a 102.9 billion forints

surplus in April alone. The figures compare to an April deficit of 208.4 billion forints and a four-month deficit of 1,081.4 billion forints in 2018. A steady rise of employment coupled with rising wages supports the expansion of retail consumption, Varga said. He noted that revenue from VAT rose by 349.3 billion forints, revenue from personal income tax climbed by 55.5 billion forints and revenue from payroll taxes increased by 160.9 billion forints from the same period a year earlier.

The government continued the pre-financing of EU-funded investments and this continued to impact the balance, Varga said. Pay-outs for such investments reached 489.3 billion forints during the period, while transfers from Brussels came to just 305.9 billion forints. The government also spent significant central budget funds to support developments in the framework of the Modern Cities Programme, as well large corporate investments that expand capacity and create jobs.