

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Szilárd Koszticsák

US President Donald Trump meets Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in the Oval Office of the White House

UPCOMING EVENTS

Czech president begins three-day visit to Hungary

EU defence ministers meet in Brussels

Stats office releases industry, construction figures for March

Speaker Kövér holds forum in Siófok

TOP STORY

ORBÁN MEETS TRUMP AT WHITE HOUSE

Hungary aims to strengthen its strategic alliance with the United States, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at a meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House.

Hungary and the US have similar approaches to a variety of global political issues, Orbán said in the Oval Office, mentioning illegal immigration, the fight against terrorism and the protection of Christian communities. Asked about Hungary's democratic reforms, the prime minister said his government was operating on the basis of the constitution approved in 2011. He noted that his government had won multiple elections, adding that "we are happy to serve our nation."

Trump praised Orbán's efforts to preserve Hungary's security, saying the Hungarian prime minister was "respected all over Europe". He called Hungary a "very good member of NATO". Trump also praised Orbán's handling of illegal migration. "You look at some of the problems that they have in Europe that are tremendous because they have done it a different way than the prime minister," Trump said.

The meeting lasted significantly longer than originally planned, and began with a closed-door meeting that was also attended by Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and US National Security Advisor John Bolton.

ORBÁN: MEETING WITH TRUMP STRENGTHENED HUNGARY-US TIES

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said he and US President Donald Trump strengthened their two countries' strategic ties in a number of areas in their meeting at the White House. Speaking to public media, Orbán noted that he last visited the White House 18 years ago. "I felt the difference ... there's a different kind of leadership now with more ambitious policies," the prime minister said. He said the meeting had been important for Hungary, because the two countries had strengthened their strategic economic, political and security relations. Hungary and the US also strengthened their cooperation on the issue of migration and the aiding of persecuted Christians, the prime minister added.

At the meeting, Trump praised Orbán's efforts to preserve Hungary's security. He called Hungary a "very good member of NATO" and hailed the government's efforts against illegal immigration.

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WASHINGTON TIMES: ORBÁN'S US VISIT TO END 'DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's upcoming talks in the United States "will mark the end of a decade-long period of high-level diplomatic isolation of Hungary", former US Ambassador to Hungary April Foley wrote in an article published in The Washington Times. Orbán's meeting with US President Donald Trump on Monday "is widely applauded by friends of Hungary, like myself, who hold that keeping our allies close should be a prime strategic goal of US foreign policy," Foley said. "During the Obama years" central and eastern European countries "rightfully felt neglected, while the US administration's efforts to reset relations with Russia overwrote long-standing friendships America had cultivated on Europe's edge," Foley said. She went on to say that "US meddling in Hungary's domestic affairs and its criticism without engagement left a deep scar on bilateral relations".

In her article, Foley said that "the Trump administration was right to discontinue the reset with Russia, rethink US policy toward Hungary and the region, and take great power competition seriously. It took the bold leadership of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to break with almost a decade of failed policy." Foley called defence cooperation the backbone of bilateral ties and said that it was "wise

diplomacy for America to focus on expanding that cooperation".

Concerning China's Belt and Road Initiative, Foley said it was "an alarmingly appealing alternative to countries like Hungary" and added that "the Trump administration is right to be more forceful in economic and trade diplomacy toward Hungary".

NÉZŐPONT: HUNGARIANS MORE PRO-AMERICAN THAN C EUROPEAN AVERAGE

Hungarians tend to be even more pro-American than the central European average, a comprehensive survey released by the Nézőpont Institute shows.

Nézőpont's survey of 12 central European countries and regions found that on average, 54% of central Europe's population have a favourable view of the United States, while 40% have a negative opinion of it. Among Hungarians, the US is viewed favourably by 59% and only 22% have an unfavourable view of it. Nézőpont said the pro-American view was "clearly in the majority" among Hungarians, adding that there was no demographic group in which most people had a negative opinion of the US.

According to the survey, Romania tends to be the most committed to the US in central Europe, with 79% of the country's population holding pro-American views. Poland was next with 66% of its respondents holding a

positive opinion of the US, followed by the Czech Republic (62%) and Hungary (59%). Only in Austria, Slovenia and Serbia did the majority of respondents have a negative view of the US.

Nézőpont surveyed a total of 12,000 people between Feb. 1 and 27 across Austria, Bavaria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, eastern Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

GOVT INFORMATION CENTRE: BRUSSELS OBSTRUCTS LAWFUL EXPULSION OF ILLEGAL MIGRANTS

The Hungarian authorities acted in line with relevant European Union and Hungarian laws when it removed illegal migrants from the country, the Government Information Centre said in a statement.

Hungary initiated the legal expulsion of 17 Afghan illegal migrants to Afghanistan on May 8 as part of the Frontex air-disembarkation operation. Sixteen of them were ejected from Hungary because their asylum requests had been rejected by the relevant court while one had been convicted of people smuggling. Eleven of them made written statements to the effect that they would voluntarily leave Hungary for Serbia, and this took place without any official involvement.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee rights NGO, which the statement called a "Soros organisation", turned to the European Court of Human Rights with

a view to stopping the expulsion of a five-member family from taking place. The European court ruled in favour and Hungary complied with the court ruling, the statement added.

The statement said it was "astonishing" that while politicians in Brussels preached the importance of repatriating migrants, they then tried to prevent the lawful expulsion of illegal migrants in order to keep even more migrants in Europe.

KÖVÉR, MONTENEGRIN COUNTERPART DISCUSS EU ENLARGEMENT, EP ELECTIONS

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér discussed European Union enlargement and its prospects after the upcoming European parliamentary elections with Ivan Brajović, his Montenegrin counterpart. At a joint press conference in Parliament, Kövér said hopefully, given a "positive outcome" of the EP ballot, the focus would shift towards the Western Balkans and the region's EU integration would speed up. Montenegro would be first among the EU aspirants to join the bloc, he said, adding that the target date of 2025, however, was "unreasonably remote". To move the process forward, they signed an agreement between the parliaments, house speakers and special committees of the two countries, Kövér said. Hungary is providing exhaustive political and diplomatic support to Montenegro to aid its EU integration,

Kövér said, adding that Montenegro was a key partner of Hungary in the western Balkans, he said. He noted that Hungary is the second biggest investor among EU countries in Montenegro and he outlined further opportunities for involvement in developing its infrastructure. Brajović thanked Hungary for its support for Montenegro's NATO accession two years ago.

TARLÓS: KARÁCSONY APPOINTS HIMSELF JUDGE AND JURY

Budapest mayor István Tarlós has questioned a decision by Gergely Karácsony, mayor of the 14th district of the capital, and the local authority to take it upon themselves to investigate the legality of a controversial parking contract they had previously entered into. Tarlós said in a statement that Zugló 14th district council had promptly terminated the contract with the parking companies involved and had appointed a fact-finding team to review the parking system in the municipality. Commenting on Karácsony's move to broaden the investigation to the rest of the capital's districts, Tarlós said: "This does not add up."

Karácsony, who is also the opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance's candidate to replace Tarlós at the autumn local elections, said in a television interview that he knew the parking contracts had been "the result of a dirty bargain", Tarlós said.

"[Karácsony] also admitted the district parking system was unprofitable but he said the district authority had forced him to sign the contracts nevertheless," he said. "If this is the case, then why on earth would he investigate those who concluded the contract?" Tarlós insisted Zugló wanted its committee to probe the capital itself as well as its districts, saying this was "interesting" as the capital had not entered into a single parking contract: parking contracts were the business of the districts. The Budapest mayor also insisted that Karácsony had later stated that he thought Zugló's parking business was indeed profitable. "If this were so, then why would he have to terminate the contracts with immediate effect?" Tarlós said.

PUZSÉR SUSPENDS MAYORAL CAMPAIGN UNTIL EP BALLOT

Róbert Puzsér, an independent Budapest mayoral candidate backed by opposition Jobbik and LMP, has suspended his campaign for the autumn ballot until the upcoming European parliamentary elections. The focus for politicians and parties until May 26 should be on issues and challenges faced by "the European continent and the entire civilisation" over the next two weeks, Péter Zaránd, his campaign chief, told MTI. Announcing his decision on Facebook, Puzsér said he would remove leaflets circulated in the streets that "question the skills" of mayoral candidates of the

opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd party alliance, as well as stop "attacking" politicians in Budapest. Puzsér said he had sought to persuade the joint Socialist-Párbeszéd candidate to follow suit, but Gergely Karácsony had refused to do so. He said he still believed that his "unilateral gesture could help improve domestic political culture so that it would look beyond party interests and a quest for political positions".

JOBBIK ACCUSES GOVT OF IMPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS TO KEEP WAGES LOW

A lawmaker of opposition Jobbik accused ruling Fidesz of deliberately pursuing a policy of accepting Hungarian emigration while quietly importing migrant workers with a view to keeping wages low. Ádám Mirkóczki told a press conference that whereas Fidesz campaigned under the slogans "Let's stop Brussels!", "Let's stop Soros!" and "Let's stop immigration!", official data show at least 86,000 "migrant workers have been brought into the country".

Mirkóczki noted how a shortage of labour put upward pressure on wages. In order to ease this pressure, the government's solution was "to import workers" from abroad and house them, he said, referring to a government scheme to build worker hostels around the country. The government says building hostels is part of its policy of boosting employee mobility within the

country. Mirkóczki noted that Jobbik has proposed introducing a "European wage union" with the aim of keeping trained young Hungarians in their homeland.

HUNGARIAN GRIPENS INTERCEPT RUSSIAN MILITARY PLANE IN BALTIC AIRSPACE

Gripen fighters of the Hungarian Armed Forces intercepted a Russian AN-26 military plane in Baltic airspace, the defence ministry said. The Gripens received an alert from a NATO air command centre in Germany that an unidentified aircraft had entered the protected airspace, the ministry said. They identified the aircraft and escorted it out of the airspace.

The ministry noted that from May 1, the Hungarian Armed Forces is leading the airspace patrol mission of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in partnership with Spain and Britain under NATO command. Hungary will carry out the mission with four JAS-39 Gripen aircraft and some 100 soldiers for four months, the ministry said.

HUNGARY DISSATISFIED WITH EU FUNDING PROPOSAL, SEEKS ADJUSTMENT

Hungary finds the European Commission's 2021-2027 funding proposal "disappointing" and it objects to reductions in real terms

of 24% to just below 18 billion euros, a government official said. Cuts in common agricultural policy funding would result in 16% less in direct payments and a 27% reduction in rural development support, Tamás Schanda, the state secretary for innovation and technology, noted at a press conference. Hungary also objects to the tightening of conditions which would require the government to increase co-financing while the level of pre-financing would be lowered, he said.

Schanda complained that the commission proposal favoured richer countries with lax fiscal discipline and ballooned the budget even though Brexit justified a smaller financial framework. Financing the burden of migration should not be at the expense of cohesion policy, he said, noting that the Hungarian opposition had backed a three-fold increase in the European Union's migration fund. The state secretary objected to money being funnelled to centralised projects led by Brussels at the expense of regional funding.

Schanda said it was wrong to link subsidies to the observance of the rule of law, adding that the commission had overstepped its powers. It would be using funding decisions to exert political pressure, he insisted. After 2020, more financing should be made available for measures that work well, and the basics of cohesion policy should be maintained in order to reduce inequalities within the EU, he said.

Meanwhile, Schanda said Hungary is well on track to use up its EU budget allocation of 25 billion euros in the current financial cycle by 2020. The government has already paid out 66% of the financial framework to project winners and payments are scheduled to continue according to plan, he said, adding that Hungary has so far called down 33% of EU monies available to the country during the current funding cycle.

ELECTION COMMITTEE FAULTS GOVT OFFICIAL FOR MEDDLING IN CZEGLÉDY CASE

The National Election Committee (NVB) has faulted a justice ministry official for writing to NVB members in connection with an immunity case involving an opposition MEP candidate who has been investigated in connection with suspected corruption. The committee's head said that Pál Völner, the justice ministry state secretary, had meddled unlawfully when he wrote a letter to the committee's members complaining about the NVB's decision not to lift the immunity of Csaba Czeplédy, a Democratic Coalition candidate in the EP elections.

On Saturday, Völner wrote of the ministry's "deep shock" on learning that the NVB had refused to suspend Czeplédy's immunity.

Péter Rádi, the committee's chairman, said the NVB's decision had been hijacked for the purposes of the election campaign. He said whereas

the state secretary had the right to express his opinion as a politician, he had overstepped the bounds of legality by writing a letter of complaint on behalf of a public body.

At the same time, the NVB rejected objections Czeplédy raised against the respective spokesmen of the Christian Democratic party and its senior ally, Fidesz. The Christian Democrat Lőrinc Nacsa called on NVB members who voted not to lift Czeplédy's immunity to renounce their decision or otherwise face being outed publicly. Fidesz's János Halász then publicly named the relevant committee members. In both cases, the committee voted 14:3 in favour of the statement that the spokesmen were exercising their right to freedom of expression. The NVB's decisions are not final and can be appealed to the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, within three days.

MINISTRY OFFICIAL: HUNGARY ACCEPTS UK'S DECISION TO QUIT EU

Hungary regretfully accepts the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, a foreign ministry official told a forum focusing on Brexit organised by the Budapest Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BKIK). Respecting the internal affairs of other countries is one of the cornerstones of Hungary's foreign policy, Tamás Menczer, state secretary for communications and international representation, said, suggesting that not every EU country shared this

mentality. "It is telling of the work of the current European Commission that while Britain is preparing to leave the European Union, the migrants have got in," the state secretary said, underlining the Hungarian government's view that the EU and the UK should strive to reach a fair Brexit deal that protects the rights of Hungarians living and studying in the country.

The state secretary said the current Brexit deal, which is yet to be approved by the British parliament, was in line with Hungary's values as it guarantees reciprocal rights for EU and UK citizens. Hungary, however, is also making preparations for a "no-deal Brexit", he said, noting that the government has set up a working group to prepare for such a scenario. He said the Hungarian government welcomed the UK's commitment to guarantee the rights of EU citizens even in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Menczer noted, however, that in the absence of a free trade deal, UK-EU trade would be regulated by the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which he said would be disadvantageous to

Hungary. Menczer also pointed out that Brexit will mean the departure of the world's fifth and Europe's second largest economy from the EU. The UK economy represents more than 14% of the bloc's GDP, he noted.

As regards Hungary-UK relations, the state secretary said Britain was Hungary's 11th largest trading partner. Bilateral trade turnover last year exceeded 5.7 billion euros, he said. The UK is the sixth largest investor in Hungary, he said, adding that the British companies doing business in the country employ some 55,000 people. The Hungarian government has signed strategic partnership agreements with four British companies, he said.

Iain Lindsay, Britain's ambassador to Hungary, told the forum that in the 2016 referendum, the British people had not rejected European values but had rather expressed their will on how they wanted their democracy to be run. The people of the UK voted to leave the European Union but not Europe, he said, adding that they were still committed to European

partnership. The British government is working to leave the bloc in an orderly fashion, the ambassador said, adding that no EU citizen would have to leave the UK post-Brexit. On the topic of bilateral ties, Lindsay said both political and economic relations were good. Hungary is the UK's third largest export market in central and eastern Europe, he noted.

BUDAPEST'S KELETI STATION CLOSED FOR MAINTENANCE

Keleti, one of Budapest's three major train stations, will be closed for scheduled maintenance works from Monday, May 13, to Sunday, May 26, Hungarian railways company MÁV told MTI. All trains will be redirected to other stations, the company said. The lines impacted include major transport lines such as from Budapest to Győr and Hegyeshalom in western Hungary, to Miskolc and Sátoraljaújhely in the east, to Pécs and to Békéscsaba in the south and to Debrecen, Nyíregyháza and Záhony in the east of the country.