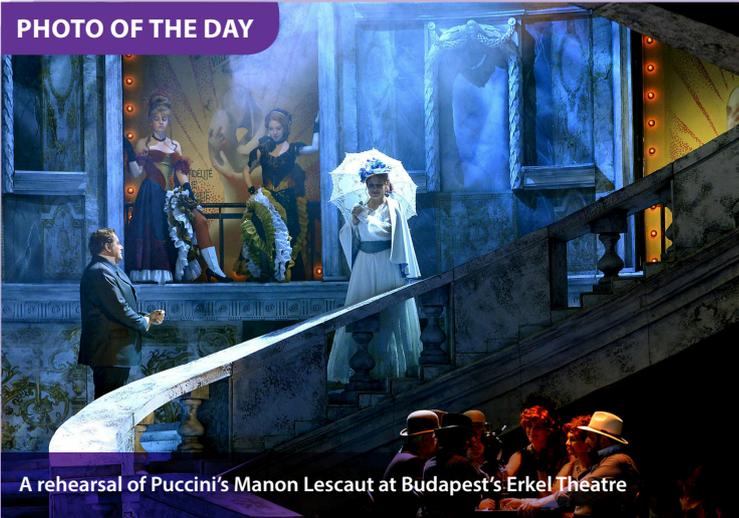


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Lajos Soós

A rehearsal of Puccini's Manon Lescaut at Budapest's Erkel Theatre

UPCOMING EVENTS

National Election Committee meets

LMP holds party congress

S&D Spitzenkandidat Timmermans at Socialist Party's campaign event

Head of PM's Office holds forum

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARIANS SEEK CHANGE IN EUROPE

Hungarians should "send a strong message to Brussels" through the upcoming European parliamentary election that "we want change, we want a Europe which protects its borders at sea and on land", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio.

"We want to see leaders in Brussels who work to stop migration rather than make arrangements for it," the prime minister added. According to Orbán, there is a "liberal mafia of politicians, journalists and analysts, stacked with money and working to make the world believe that nothing can be done against migration". But when the opposite turns out to be true, when "Hungary stops migration on land, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini at sea or when US President Donald Trump decides to build a wall, they start hating these people", Orbán insisted.

The upcoming election will decide "if we accept that or break out of the frame of mind that they are trying to force upon us," Orbán said. "Most Hungarians' hair will stand on end when they hear European politicians say that migration is a good thing but it needs to be better organised."

Answering a question about his withdrawing support from Manfred Weber, the Spitzenkandidat of the European People's Party in the EP election, Orbán said he would decide whom to support after the vote.

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ORBÁN: GROWTH GIVES HUNGARY COMPETITIVE EDGE

Commenting on Hungary's 5.3% GDP growth in the first quarter of 2019 in a radio interview, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said that the aim was to keep Hungarian growth permanently 2% above the European average. That would give the country a competitive edge over its EU competitors, and "our future depends on that," he said.

Regarding his talks with US President Donald Trump on Monday, Orbán noted that Trump had come into politics from the world of business and not of academia. At the meeting, Trump was aware that 1,700 US companies are operating in Hungary, Orbán said, knew the volume of trade between the two countries and the Hungarian economic model. "But most of all, he knew about migration and the Muslim invasion towards Europe that Hungary had stemmed."

Hungary has an interest in a US company starting extracting natural gas on the Black Sea, in Romanian waters, as soon as possible, he said. This is Hungary's only alternative to Russian resources, he said. Hungary also counts on the US in the upgrade of its armed forces, especially in infrastructure defence which warrants the implementation of mid-range missiles, Orbán said. The legal procedure to procure such weapons is underway, he said.

Regarding economic relations with Russia and China, Orbán called the European policies "hypocritical". Using sanctions against Russia, western European countries have "knocked" central European countries from the Russian markets and "elbowed their way in", he said. Western Europe also slams cooperation between central Europe and China but their trade with China "has been growing to an amazing extent," he said.

Regarding prenatal subsidies, the prime minister said the government had consulted Brussels on the new scheme to avoid another legal procedure against Hungary. Brussels has "refused" to green-light the plan, he said, citing a risk of illicit state funding. "Of course, when it comes to issuing migrant cards, there is no such problem," he said.

The root of the problem is that those "wanting to solve European demographic problems through migration" look askance on family policy and vice versa: those promoting family policies as a solution oppose migration, Orbán said.

KÖVÉR: EUROPE LOCKED IN 'CIVILISATIONAL STRUGGLE'

Europe is locked in a "civilisational struggle" between those seeking to preserve the continent's Christian and national principles and those who would rather see it become "post-Christian and post-national", Hungary's parliamentary speaker said in Dresden.

Central Europe holds the key to the future of a Europe that seeks to return to its Christian and national roots, László Kövér was quoted as saying by parliament's press office at a conference organised by the Saxony state parliament. Kövér added that the region could set an example for Western Europe.

He said that although the struggle Europe was going through was "nothing new", the "intensity of the ideological aggression displayed by those who want to see the end of Europe's Christian and national era" was a new aspect. The speaker said those on this side of the struggle had deployed "astounding weapons such as, for example, the mass migration wave thrust onto Europe". Kövér said Europe was "the target of ideological carpet bombing". "Those who want to put an end to the era of Christianity, nations and nation states in Europe to further their own power goals are inciting and preaching anti-Christianity in the name of value neutrality, anti-national sentiments in the name of multiculturalism, and anti-state views in the name of globalism," he added.

Kövér said the EU was in need of a turnaround and should return to its Christian and national roots and "right its own internal democratic balance". "In the 20th century, we, central Europeans believed that what had given us strength in periods of crisis was that Europe was our future," Kövér said in his address. "But in the 21st century it looks like we find strength in central Europe ... being the future of Europe."

ORBÁN ADDRESSES PICK GALA

The 150 year old history of salami producer Pick shows that “Hungarian capital has to serve Hungarian interests”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at a gala event held to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the company and the tenth anniversary of the Bonafarm Group, a food industry corporation owned by billionaire entrepreneur Sándor Csányi.

Although Hungarian-owned companies constitute 90% of the country’s food industry and employ 70% of the sector’s workers, only half of the sector’s revenues and profits end up with them, Orbán said. It is a national interest that Hungarian companies should have the lion’s share of the domestic food industry’s revenues and profits by 2030, Orbán said. They should also invest abroad, he added. “They should be robust and strong, use the economic possibilities of the region, Europe and the whole world to enrich Hungary,” Orbán said. Pick, known worldwide for its salamis, was built by men who knew “that success is something they needed to build every day,” Orbán said. This helped the company to get back on its feet after the world war, economic crises and the Communist nationalisation, he said.

Regarding Bonafarm, Orbán said that it gave further momentum to Pick when it acquired it in 2009. Bonafarm has shown impressive

results. “Thirty years after the final hour of the communist regime, we have a modern, innovative corporation owned by Hungarians that has already grown outside the borders. We have been waiting for such a company in the Hungarian food industry for a long time,” Orbán said.

VARGA: ECONOMIC GROWTH ENABLES HEALTH, EDUCATION, FAMILY PROTECTION MEASURES

Hungary’s strong economy enables the government to invest in new health-care, education and family-protection measures, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said, announcing the acquisition of new medical equipment for a complex of local surgeries in Budapest’s third district. Efforts must be made to turn demographic trends positive and it is therefore important to carry out developments from available resources in order to serve future generations, he said. The revamp of surgery hubs in the capital has started under the arrangements of a scheme dubbed Healthy Budapest and a total of 32 complexes are being developed and transformed, costing over 50 billion forints (EUR 154m), he said. Developments launched in recent years are improving patient services, he added.

Hungary’s economy is on a healthy path of growth, Varga said, welcoming the launch of family protection measures followed by the “year of families” in 2018.

He cited support for young people, a prenatal subsidy scheme, the expansion of home purchase subsidies to resale homes and women raising more than three children being exempted from paying personal income tax.

SPECIAL PARLT SESSION LACKS QUORUM

An extraordinary session of parliament convened by the opposition parties to discuss ways to help troubled forex debtors avoid evictions lacked the required quorum as representatives of the ruling parties stayed away, saying it was a „campaign stunt”.

Speaking at a press conference, nationalist Jobbik vice-chairman Dániel Z. Kárpát said that his party’s six-point package under which banks would be accountable for their forex loan portfolios would provide a comprehensive solution to the problem. Jobbik would introduce an evictions moratorium with no delay and would make the government terminate its “pact” with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Z. Kárpát said. He insisted that under that deal the government had agreed not to burden commercial banks with indemnifying troubled debtors. Z. Kárpát added that all governments since 2006 had “contributed to this economic and societal disaster” and noted that his party had come up with proposals aimed at helping young families to their first home as well as launching a rental housing scheme.

At the session, Jobbik's Lajos Kepeli said the government had been unable to solve the issue of FX loan holders for nearly a decade, and seemed to be unwilling to tackle the problem. The opposition has convened an extraordinary session on an issue impacting about 30 to 40% of the country and the government hasn't even made the effort to send a single politician to attend, he said.

Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth said Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was currying favour with world powers such as Russia, the United States and China. He has travelled to Beijing, Moscow and Washington and returned with hundreds of millions forints in credit, he said. The country has the resources necessary to solve its social issues, he said.

Párbeszéd co-leader Tímea Szabó said that in the past three years, over ten thousand evictions have taken place in Hungary and some one million procedures are currently underway. Nearly 40,000 have been evicted "because Orbán lied and did not help

Hungarians", she said. Government efforts to solve the problem have yielded nothing, she said. While some 5% of European Union citizens struggle with housing poverty, that number in Hungary is nearly 17%, she said.

Gergely Arató of the leftist Democratic Coalition said "two realities" existed in Hungary today. The "false reality" was one of a robust economy and surging wages, and contrasted sharply with "true reality" where people can get evicted for being unable to pay their utility costs or loan installations, where health care is crumbling and wages are not enough to make a living, he said.

LMP lawmaker Antal Csárdi said the issue of families at risk was not a partisan issue. By staying away from the session, Fidesz-KDNP has shown what it thinks about people in need, he said.

István Apáti of the radical nationalist Mi Hazánk party, who sits in parliament as an independent, called for an indefinite extension of the evictions moratorium. He said the "legalised

usury" putting "tens or hundreds of thousands of families at risk of losing their homes" was a common crime of the leftist liberal and the Orbán governments. "Leftist liberals have lured people into a trap and the Orbán governments after 2010 mostly left them there," he said.

POLICE CRACK DOWN ON MONEY LAUNDERING RING IN C HUNGARY

Police have exposed a money laundering ring which caused hundreds of millions of forints' damages by legalising the profits of illegal activities, mostly fraud, police said. The authorities clamped down on the ring on Tuesday, in a coordinated operation involving some 200 policemen and the counterterrorism centre (TEK) in the central Hungarian city of Szolnok and surrounding villages. The police seized assets to the tune of 850 million forints (EUR 2.6m) and arrested three men. Altogether 13 have been charged, they said.