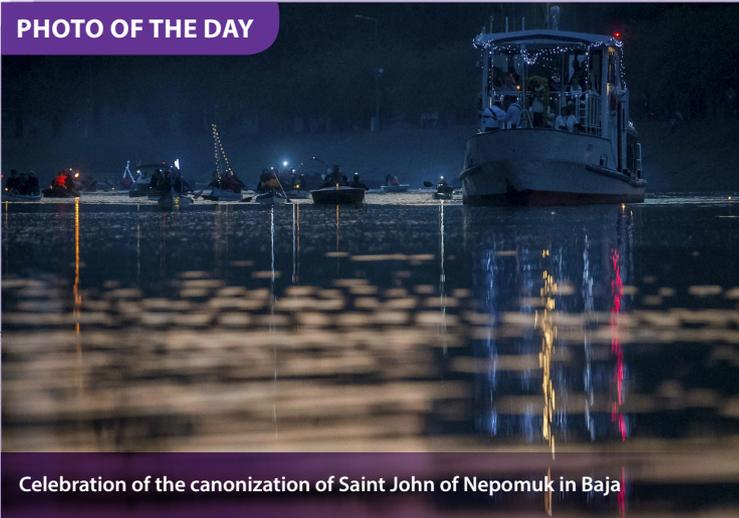


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

Celebration of the canonization of Saint John of Nepomuk in Baja

UPCOMING EVENTS

Szijjártó to visit Turkmenistan

Orbán speaks at self-driving vehicle test track opening

EP election campaign events

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES PROTECTION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN US

Hungary's policy of protecting Christian communities and insistence on preserving Christian values provides a stable basis for its relations with the United States, the foreign minister said after talks in Washington, DC.

Hungary's Eximbank has reached an agreement with the World Bank Group to finance technological and infrastructural investment projects in countries facing hardship and which have thereby become migrant-sending nations, Péter Szijjártó told Hungarian public media. The projects will help ease migration pressure, he said. As regards higher education, Szijjártó said Budapest's National Public Service University has reached a deal with the Roman Catholic Marymount University on the latter launching programmes taught in Hungarian and about Hungary. The collaboration of the two universities will also be about preserving Christian values and protecting Christian communities, he added. He said the two countries' leaders had similar approaches to major global political issues and "the exact same approach" when it comes to the preservation of Christian values and the protection of Christian communities. In acknowledgement of these shared views, he said, the Hungarian government and the US government's aid agency USAID have strengthened their collaboration in the aiding of Middle Eastern Christian communities.

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OVER 20,000 HUNGARIANS REGISTER TO VOTE ABROAD

More than 20,000 Hungarians registered to vote abroad at an embassy or consulate in the May 26 European Parliament elections by the deadline on Friday. The number of absentee voters registered for the EP election is more than double the number of those who voted abroad five years ago.

Voters had until 4pm on May 17 to register to vote at one of Hungary's 132 diplomatic missions. Under Hungary's election rules, citizens with a permanent address in Hungary who are not going to be in the country on May 26 can go to the polls at Hungarian embassies and consulates. They are not eligible to vote by mail. According to official election site www.valasztas.hu, 20,344 Hungarians registered to vote abroad by Friday afternoon. Most absentee voters, 1,729 of them, will be casting their ballots in London. In 2014, 7,572 Hungarians voted at diplomatic missions.

TIMMERMANS CALLS FOR STRONG, LEFT-WING EUROPE

Frans Timmermans, the European Socialists' Spitzenkandidat in the European Parliament elections, called for a strong, left-wing Europe at a Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) campaign rally in

Budapest. Timmermans pledged to tax businesses making a million in profits, set a minimum corporate tax rate and introduce a European Union-wide minimum wage at the rally. He also called for the elimination of the gender wage gap and for stronger union rights. He added that these goals must be achieved in a sustainable manner, and that action must be taken to address the climate crisis. Businesses that cause pollution and are responsible for carbon emissions must be taxed, and the proceeds from these taxes must be used to improve the condition of vulnerable members of society, Timmermans said. He said plans were being drafted to tap the EU's Structural Funds to boost the proportion of energy-saving homes. Timmermans said Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán "and his friends Strache, Salvini and Farage are admirers of Putin, whose goal is obviously the weakening and disintegration of Europe".

Balázs Hidvéghi, the communications director for governing Fidesz, commenting on the arrival of Timmermans in Budapest, said that Hungary's opposition had put their full weight behind the pro-migration Spitzenkandidat in the EP elections. Hidvéghi said Timmermans, whom he called "George Soros's man", had once again come personally to Budapest to strengthen his alliance with the pro-migration Hungarian opposition. He said that Timmermans was preparing to legalise economic migration in Europe if he becomes

the next European Commission president, adding that it would be the punishment for countries that rejected the introduction of mandatory resettlement of migrants.

LMP FOR INDIVIDUAL PENSION ACCOUNTS IN EACH EU MEMBER STATE

Opposition LMP will initiate introducing mandatory individual pension accounts in each EU member state, the party's top candidate in the upcoming European parliamentary elections said after meeting representatives of the Pensioners' Parliament association. Today's pension system is unpredictable and non-transparent and needs to be improved on a European level, Gábor Vágó told a press conference. He noted Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's pledge to set up a system of private pension accounts in 2012, following the transfer of private pension funds to the state system.

Vágó further proposed setting up an EU-level mandatory pension fund operated under a uniform law which he said would be more predictable and protect account holders in the member states.

SOCIALISTS: STOPPING ADVANCE OF RADICAL RIGHT AT STAKE

Stopping the advance of "Salvini, Orbán and their extreme right friends" is what's at stake in the

European Parliament elections for socialists and democrats, the leader of the opposition Socialists said. At a joint campaign event with Párbeszéd, Bertalan Tóth called for a social and green turnaround. Referring to the suspension of ruling Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party, he said the Hungarian government had struck itself from its own team's roster and had lost its ability to effectively represent Hungarian interests. "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been striking alliances with anti-European extremists" which means he will not get a say in the discussion of matters such as the European Union budget, Tóth said.

He called for the introduction of a European minimum wage of the equivalent of 700 euros, a minimum pension of 300 euros, family benefits of 150 euros and student scholarships of 1,000 euros per year. Gergely Karácsony, co-leader of Párbeszéd which has struck an election alliance with the Socialists, said that instead of people's party leaders, Europe needed new leaders who would build a social and sustainable Europe. The European People's Party has failed to restrain "political nobodies" as well as economic lobbies, he added.

SOCIALIST CANDIDATE URGES REMOVAL OF FAR RIGHT

The opposition Socialists' candidate for the European Parliament called for the removal of the "far right

financed from Russian money" and the construction of a democratic, social Europe at a press conference. Tibor Szanyi said Fidesz had "drifted to the far right" and was steering Hungary in the same direction. He said Europe's far-right parties all have a common characteristic: they keep "affectionate Russian ties" the purpose of which is to attack and tear Europe apart. Szanyi called Prime Minister Viktor Orbán an "opportunistic right-winger" who takes the political stand for financial reasons, rather than out of conviction. Commenting on the scandal leading to early elections in Austria, he said the mere mention of the thing that had brought down the government there "is an everyday reality in Hungary". Bence Tordai of Párbeszéd, which has struck an alliance with the Socialists, said Europe has a shared responsibility to determine whether to allow "Putin's Russia" to drive a wedge between member states or to build a strong, cohesive and social continent.

FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL: COE SESSION ACHIEVES LITTLE IN HELSINKI

Little was achieved at a session of the Council of Europe's (CoE) committee of ministers, the Hungarian foreign ministry's state secretary attending the event said on Friday.

The session was convened to mark the 70th anniversary of the CoE and evaluate its work, Levente Magyar said. However, it failed to discuss such

important matters as the upcoming European Parliament elections, the future of Europe and the preservation of its values in depth, he said.

As an organisation much older than the European Union, the CoE's main task has been to keep European countries in unity under the same standard of values, Magyar said. The council has, however, failed to fulfil this task over the past years, Magyar said, insisting that it had done nothing to prevent the violation of minority rights in Ukraine. At the session, Hungary proposed setting a new policy for protecting minority and human rights, an area of key importance for Hungary, he said.

LMP CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST CORPORATE 'CLIMATE CRIMINALS'

Gábor Vágó, who heads the European Parliament election list of opposition LMP, called for action against big corporate "climate criminals" at a party congress. A battle must be waged against the hundred global companies that are responsible for two-thirds of global emissions of greenhouse gases, Vágó told the congress. European leaders and the Hungarian government have failed to serve the people and instead protected the interests of multinationals, he added. Vágó said 20,000 lobbyists were at work in Brussels to promote the interests of multinationals and he promised that LMP would fight for the interests

of 500 million Europeans, including 10 million Hungarian citizens. Europe could switch over to renewable energy and develop community transport but this requires fighting companies in the energy and automotive industries that are only interested in their bottom lines, he said. He described the upcoming EP elections as a “climate election” and called for immediate action against climate change. The current generation is the last one that can make a difference because climate change is still reversible but only if action is not delayed, he added.

Márta Demeter, who is second on LMP’s EP list, said that another issue at stake was stopping mass emigration from Hungary. The Hungarian prime minister has given up on the 600,000 Hungarians who have moved abroad because cheap labour in Hungary represents a competitive advantage in line with his “neo-liberal economic policies”, she added. LMP will work on building a Europe for the people which offers security and stability to Hungarians, too, she said. She argued for strengthening Europe’s external borders, adding that mass migration was the result of climate change and exploitation by big companies.

In a political declaration approved at the congress, LMP is calling on the government to announce a state of emergency due to climate change. The declaration, a copy of which was sent to MTI, shows that climate change could have dramatic

effects within a human’s lifespan. Greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activity play a crucial role in the acceleration of current processes, it added. Recent decades showed that global warming is a complex process that can only be addressed by cooperation between all countries of the world, by putting everybody on a path of sustainable growth, the statement said.

“There is reason for concern because a significant share of world leaders still avoid addressing the problem and let their political decisions be determined by short-term economic interests,” LMP said.

The party added that the Hungarian government, similarly to the German, Czech and Polish governments, were not dedicated to the fight against climate change and this “demonstrates serious irresponsibility”. “What’s at stake in the European Parliament elections on May 26 is whether we will be able to make decisions and enforce them in order to stop climate change and blunt the effects that could not be avoided,” the party said. At a campaign event in Pécs in southern Hungary, the party’s co-leader Lóránt László Keresztes said LMP would not allow a nuclear waste disposal facility to be set up near the city. Such a facility would make it impossible for Pécs to win the green capital of Europe title and the launch of regional developments that are based on sustainability, he added.

JOBBIK CALLS FOR PROBE OF POSSIBLE HUNGARIAN TIES TO STRACHE AFFAIR

Opposition nationalist Jobbik is initiating the establishment of an investigation committee to determine whether there are any Hungarian ties to the Strache affair, party spokesman György Szilágyi said at a press conference.

Jobbik also wants parliament’s national security committee to meet as soon as possible to discuss the matter, Szilágyi said. He noted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had met with former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache earlier in May. Strache resigned after a video emerged of him offering state contracts to a woman claiming to be a rich Russian in exchange for support in the 2017 election campaign. Szilágyi said Strache had brought himself down, “and Viktor Orbán, too”, as “Strache wanted to put Austria’s biggest tabloid in the service of the Freedom Party of Europe, following the example of Hungary, at a corrupt talk with an oligarch”. He said if the matter brought Strache’s downfall, there should be consequences, too, for the “already operating system” in Hungary. Szilágyi raised the questions of whether Russia was involved in the establishment of the Hungarian system, whether the contract for an upgrade of the Paks nuclear power plant or the relocation of the “Russian spy bank” to Hungary may have played a role in the matter. He said a parliamentary committee should also determine whether Heinrich Pecina,

with whom Orbán met, and who bought a number of national newspapers, is “the Russians’ strawperson”.

STATE SECY PARTICIPATES IN PANEL DISCUSSION ON POPULISM IN TALLINN

Hungary’s state secretary for European Union affairs participated in a panel discussion on populism at the Lennart Meri Conference in Tallinn.

Szabolcs Takács was joined on the panel, called “The Siren Calls of Populism: The Roots of Frustration at the Dawn of the EP Elections”, by a number of other international experts and politicians, among them Slovakian Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak. Takács told MTI by phone that populism was a key topic at the conference. He said that, in Hungary’s opinion, an artificial line has been drawn in the European Union pitting forces dubbed “populist” against the supporters of the so-called “progressive” side. “This is an artificial division of which the only purpose is to put political pressure on those who diverge from the mainstream,” he said. “It’s much easier to judge somebody on moral grounds than to debate with them. The elite in Brussels basically brand anybody a populist who identifies with their nation, is anti-immigration and is Christian,” he added. Takács said Hungary believes these issues will be the most important ones in the upcoming European Parliament elections.

The Lennart Meri Conference is a high-level forum held each year to discuss foreign and security policy issues from the perspective of the northern and eastern parts of Europe.

HUNGARY LAUNCHES NEXT PHASE OF TRANSYLVANIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Secretary of state Levente Magyar announced the next phase of the Transylvanian Economic Development Programme, a scheme financed by the state of Hungary, in Dumbrăvioara (Sáromberke), Romania.

Investments of some 300 million euros could be implemented in the framework of the programme in the coming two years, including state subsidies, self-financing and credit, Magyar said at the opening of the AgroMania farm fair. Up to 15,000 euros in grant money will be made available to farmers to purchase livestock, plant crops or acquire machinery, he added.

The programme is coupled with another, launched at the end of last year, that is supporting the construction of several dozen farm sector processing plants in the region. Hunor Kelemen, the head of Romania’s ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party, said the Hungarian economic development programme is creating jobs, boosting farmers’ competitiveness and paving the way to markets.

SZILI: VOTE IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE OF MINORITIES, TOO

The prime ministerial commissioner in charge of minority protection and autonomy stressed the importance of the European Parliament elections

for the future of ethnic minorities in Washington DC, after participating at an annual Hungarian picnic and scouts’ ball. “In the course of my conversations here, I feel that the local Hungarian community is also making preparations for the elections, because it’s important to them how the fate of Europe will be shaped in future,” Katalin Szili told MTI. She said it was “essential” for as many Hungarians living in the United States as possible to get out and vote for a Europe in which its nation states want to preserve their history, culture, traditions and Christian identity. “American Hungarians know from experience how different multilingual Europe is from the monolingual melting pot of America,” Szili said. “We are not for a united states of Europe,” she added.

PUSKÁS STADIUM CONSTRUCTION PASSES SCRUTINY OF UEFA HEAD

Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) chairman Aleksander Ceferin expressed his satisfaction with the construction of Budapest’s Puskás Ferenc Stadium during a visit to the site. The Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ) said its chairman, Sándor Csányi, and state secretary Balázs Fűrjes, had an informal meeting with Ceferin in the stadium. Ceferin said he was waiting with great anticipation for the stadium to open in November. Puskás Stadium, Hungary’s biggest, is scheduled to host four Euro 2020 matches.