

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Bodlárka Bodnár

Blooming lavender in Tihany, at Lake Balaton

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU health ministers meet in Luxembourg

Jobbik presser on education

TOP STORY

HUNGARY, SERBIA AGREE ON GAS PIPELINE

Hungary and Serbia signed an intergovernmental agreement to cooperate on the construction and operation of a gas interconnector.

After signing the pact in Budapest with Serbian energy minister Aleksandar Aleksandar Antić, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said the security of gas supplies was a strategic and national security matter. Bids for the reservation of capacities in the pipeline will be invited in September, he said, adding that its maximum capacity will be 10 billion cubic metres. The size of Hungary's investment will depend on the capacity reservations made by the various gas companies, he said. The bidding process will last until the end of September, followed by the signing of gas trade contracts. Construction is scheduled to start next summer and the project is estimated to be completed by the end of 2021, the minister added. Szijjártó noted that Russia and Ukraine have yet to sign a new gas transit deal for 2020.

Meanwhile, he said, Hungary's allies were also taking too long to make the decisions that would allow the country to import gas from new sources. He said Hungary's most realistic option of a new gas supply route was the Turkish gas transport corridor passing through Bulgaria and Serbia.

ORBÁN: EUROPEAN GROUPING FIDESZ BELONGS TO 'SECONDARY'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview to public radio, said that it was a secondary consideration which European grouping Fidesz belonged to in the future. Orbán said political groupings were in the process of being formed. "It's not possible to stay put in one place because then we'd be exposed to changes in European politics," he said, adding that the ruling party would abide by the Hungarian interest in determining its position on the European political stage. Fidesz, he said, would have no place in a political family that became pro-immigration and disregarded its Christian roots. He added that Fidesz would not want to belong to a formation that failed to respect nations or became "hostage to the bureaucrats of Brussels". Orbán said an attempt would be made to maintain the European People's Party as the party of Helmut Kohl. This grouping would respect nations, place primacy on Christianity and give proper weight to the interests of central Europeans. Further, it would put a premium on creating a potent European economy. Such an EPP would be "good and useful for Hungary", he added. Regarding the EPP committee examining the question of the Fidesz party's place in the grouping, the prime minister said Fidesz and the EPP body were engaged in discussions as equal partners. It would soon emerge

whether each side's goals were compatible, he added.

Referring to Thursday's Visegrad Group talks, Orbán said the V4 states would enforce their own interests when it came to deciding on EU leadership positions. Germany's trade with the V4 is much larger than with France, so "we're talking about a decisive group of countries" and "the engine of European growth is currently central Europe". The prime minister said a central European leader would have to embody this self-assurance, strength and optimistic outlook at European level, too. He added that any leader from outside central Europe would have to respect central Europe "and not look down on us". He said it was too early to talk about specific individuals, but anyone who took part in "attacking any member state" would not receive his support. "A broad list must be submitted," he said, adding that an agreement may be reached within a week or two. Orbán said that regarding the future of the EU, the positions of Visegrad Group countries did not differ on any substantive matters, adding that he only endorsed documents or people whose aim was to stop migration.

The independence of economic policymaking by member states must be respected, he said. No single economic policy should be forced on divergent countries, he said, adding that Brussels bureaucrats should not be allowed to shape Hungary's budget or tax system. "Only Hungarians can say what's good for Hungary," Orbán

said. The government can work with its partners as long as Hungary's interests are served, he added.

In connection with next year's budget, Orbán said "the feeling that things are going in the right direction in the country" had a solid basis, referring to "a growing number of jobs, higher wages and an economic performance that inspires hope". "What we have achieved so far must be protected," he said, adding that risks to the economy must be reduced. He said the economies of Hungary's most important trading partners in western Europe were slowing down, and the government had reacted by designing an economic protection action plan that offered both tax cuts and measures to support growth.

Meanwhile, on the topic of the Danube collision, Orbán said the country had been shaken by the fact that "those who died were our guests". An agreement with South Korea will be made on a fitting memorial to commemorate the victims, he added.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH BULGARIAN PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed Europe's "unsatisfactory handling" of the migration crisis, Hungarian-Bulgarian ties and energy affairs with Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, the prime minister's press chief said. Orbán and Radev were in agreement that Europe had failed to make any meaningful progress in its handling

of the migration crisis in recent years, while the threat of migration still persisted, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. The two leaders agreed that the European Union did not have a crisis plan in place for a potential sudden increase in migration pressure on the continent and that this made Bulgaria's situation "extremely difficult". Orbán assured Radev that the Hungarian government continued to view Bulgaria as an ally on the issue of migration and was ready to help Sofia in any way it could. The two leaders hailed their countries' friendship and "shared historical fate" which they said formed the political, spiritual and cultural basis of the further development of their ties. Radev praised Hungary's economic achievements and said its family subsidy system was held in high regard in Bulgaria.

Orbán and Radev also discussed economic cooperation between China and the CEE region as well as energy matters. They underlined the importance of ensuring that Europe has a diverse supply of affordable energy.

ÁDER DISCUSSES EU, ECONOMIC ISSUES WITH BULGARIAN COUNTERPART

President János Áder met Bulgarian counterpart Rumen Radev and their talks focused on economic relations and European Union issues, the sides said at a joint press conference after the meeting.

Commenting on the four freedoms principle of the EU, Áder said that if the free movement of goods, capital, services and people is taken seriously, then Bulgarian and Hungarian companies should not be squeezed out of certain EU markets, as has been the case with respect to their freight forwarders. Meanwhile, Áder said the EU had not been trustworthy or reliable in recent years regarding integration of the Western Balkans. He underlined the importance of preserving "institutional balance" within the EU, calling on the bloc to "end the creeping expansion of its powers". On the issue of migration, Áder said Hungary and Bulgaria were on the same page in terms of both principles and practical matters. Commenting on bilateral economic ties, Áder said Hungary was the eighth largest investor in Bulgaria, but had made the second highest amount of investments in the country after the Netherlands last year.

Radev said both countries must insist on getting EU support for energy infrastructure developments. If such developments are neglected, divisions within the EU will further widen, he added. He said Bulgaria and Hungary were partners and allies in the EU, stressing that they shared the same views on the future of the bloc. Radev emphasised the importance of preserving the EU's basic principles, unity and solidarity, saying that the weakness stemming from divisions within the bloc should be made into strengths. As regards economic

ties, he said annual trade turnover between the two countries was more than 1.6 billion euros and the value of Hungarian investments in the country was close to 2 billion euros.

He thanked Hungary for supporting its Bulgarian minority in the preservation of their customs and culture. The president also expressed his gratitude for Hungary's assistance in Bulgaria's border protection efforts.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: FIGHTING TERRORISM NEVER UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The fight against terrorism is never unfinished business and Hungary is committed to the fight, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, said after meeting his Sri Lankan counterpart. At a joint press conference, Szijjártó said the terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka at Easter were yet another reminder of the importance of this fight, adding that the attacks had concentrated on Christian communities celebrating Easter. Christians, he said, were among the world's most persecuted religious communities. Szijjártó said it must not be accepted that anti-Christianity "is seen as the last acceptable form of discrimination" but this problem was rarely addressed due to "political correctness and hypocrisy". He expressed condolences and solidarity to the government and people of Sri Lanka as well as appreciation for the measures taken by the Sri Lankan government to target the

perpetrators of terrorist attacks. The rebuilding of the damaged Catholic churches has begun, he added. Szijjártó noted that Hungary donated 20 million forints (EUR 62,000) of emergency aid after the attacks.

Meanwhile, the minister also referred to economic ties based on a 47.5 billion forint loan scheme for Hungarian companies building motorway bridges, developing the water network, renewing rail crossings and modernising Sri Lanka's court system. Also, Hungary's Eximbank has extended a credit line of 90 million euros to boost cooperation between Hungarian and Sri Lankan companies, he added. Hungary also calls on the European Union to enhance its support for Sri Lanka, Szijjártó said.

Tilak Marapana said Sri Lanka was committed to building ties with European countries and Hungary was one of its key partners. He noted that coincided with the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

PERSONAL DATA LINKED TO OPPOSITION'S EUROPEAN PROSECUTOR OFFICE CAMPAIGN COMPROMISED

The personal data of 680,000 Hungarians linked to a signature drive demanding that Hungary join the European prosecutor's office was handled outside the European Union, the daily Magyar Nemzet said, citing the head of Hungary's data protection authority. Attila Péterfalvy told the paper that people who lent their signature to the initiative by independent lawmaker Ákos Hadházy had to provide their name, email address, telephone number and postal address. It is "problematic" that these data were handled abroad, he said. The data is being processed by US and Canadian companies, according to the information provided on data management during the signature drive, he added. Also, the role that parties played in gathering the

signatures was "problematic", he said, noting that the opposition Socialists and Momentum had supported the signature drive. Some 680,000 signatures were collected instead of the one million targeted, the paper noted. It is not known what the parties did with the data they collected, the paper added.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT JUMPS 40.1% IN APRIL

Output of Hungary's construction sector grew by an annual 40.1% in April, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) show. Output of the buildings segment was up 34.3%, lifted by construction of industrial buildings, offices and homes, KSH said. Civil engineering output increased by 47.9%, supported by road and railway projects, it added. In a month-on-month comparison, construction output fell by 3.8%, adjusted for seasonal and working-day effects.