

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tamás Kovács

Kayaker Bálint Kopasz, winner of the 5,000 meter race at the 2019 European Games near Minsk, Belarus

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parlt foreign affairs cttee meets

Democratic Union of teachers gives presser

International Danube Day marked in Győr

KSH releases data on Jan-April wages

TOP STORY

COURT BLOCKS GRUEVSKI'S EXTRADITION

A Budapest court rejected a request from North Macedonia for the extradition of former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who has been granted asylum in Hungary.

In its justification, the Budapest Municipal Court said that under Hungarian law, having been granted refugee status, Gruevski could not be extradited to the country he had fled from. The judge presiding over the case warned Gruevski that the international warrant for his arrest issued by Skopje and the extradition request were valid, but could not be executed on Hungary's territory. The judge, Éva Várhegyi, said that the court has the authority only to assess the lawfulness of the extradition request, taking into consideration the Hungarian immigration office's decision to grant asylum to Gruevski. A final decision will be taken by the justice minister, she added. The judge said she had ordered Gruevski to be set at liberty. The decision is legally binding.

Gruevski held office between 2006 and 2016. An arrest warrant was issued on November 12 last year after he failed to start a two-year prison sentence for corruption. He announced on his Facebook page two days later that he was in Budapest and had submitted a request for political asylum.

GULYÁS WARNS AGAINST HASTE IN SELECTING EU LEADERS

Prime Minister's Office chief Gergely Gulyás, at a regular press briefing, underlined the importance of electing new European Union leaders as quickly as possible, adding that getting the right people into the top jobs was more important than rushing appointments. The Hungarian government supports leaders who "are not motivated by personal ambitions for power", but can negotiate with all EU members, promote consensus and "have not attacked any member states and have sought fair ties." Gulyás said the candidates vying for the position of European Commission president failed to meet these criteria, noting the Hungarian government's opposition to the Spitzenkandidat system overall. He said Manfred Weber, the lead candidate of the European People's Party (EPP), had failed to meet the requirement of having respect for all EU governments, arguing that Weber had "insulted" Hungary and voted for the Sargentini report critical of the state of the rule of law in the country. Gulyás said member states should have the right to decide on the appointment of the leaders of all EU institutions, adding that EU leaders will meet to discuss this on Sunday, ahead of the inaugural session of the new European Parliament.

The PM's Office chief said there was no reason why member states could not reach an agreement on the new EU leaders, adding that the appointments could have been finalised earlier had it not been for the Spitzenkandidat system slowing down the process.

He said the Visegrad Group countries have coordinated their positions on the candidates they would support for the top positions. Gulyás noted that Michel Barnier, the European Union's chief Brexit negotiator, was one such candidate, adding that there were other people the V4 found "acceptable". He noted the need for political balance in the bloc's top brass, pointing out that if the European Commission were to be headed by someone from the EPP, the president of the European Council would likely have to come from another political grouping.

Meanwhile, referring to recent remarks by Alex Soros, son of US billionaire George Soros, Gulyás said that the Hungarian opposition and the Soros family "are seeking to involve the EU in their fight against the Hungarian government". Earlier this week, news portal Index cited Alex Soros as saying at the Central European University's graduation ceremony that the CEU had been "banned and driven out of Hungary" but not defeated, as the university would flourish in Vienna and around the world. Gulyás accused Alex Soros of "slandering" Hungary, saying: "It appears he wants to follow in his father's footsteps."

Asked why the government had not released a recent report on Hungary by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), Gulyás said the report would be released within a few weeks, along with a response from the government.

As regards the Budapest Municipal Court's recent rejection of a North Macedonian request to extradite former Macedonian PM Nikola Gruevski, Gulyás said the government respected the court's decision. He said Hungary's asylum law was clear on the rights of refugees, insisting that Gruevski, who has been granted asylum in Hungary, did not have a special status.

Concerning climate change, Gulyás noted Hungary's commitment to keeping to its 2030 carbon emission reduction target, adding, at the same time, that it was not possible to further reduce emissions without the use of nuclear energy.

Asked about the appointment of Judit Varga as justice minister, Gulyás said that in her role as a state secretary in charge of EU affairs, she had done an excellent job representing Hungary's interests in Brussels. He confirmed that with Varga's appointment EU affairs will be reassigned to the justice ministry from the PM's office. Commenting on the opposition's preselection process to choose a Budapest mayoral candidate ahead of the autumn local elections, Gulyás said the process had highlighted how none of the candidates were fit to serve.

HUNGARIAN, AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MARK 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF IRON CURTAIN OPENING

The foreign ministers of Hungary and Austria, Péter Szijjártó and Alexander Schallenberg, marked the 30th anniversary of the symbolic dismantling of the Iron Curtain in Sopron. The commemoration was held at the exact spot where then Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn and his Austrian counterpart, Alois Mock, opened the sealed border by symbolically cutting the barbed wire fence on June 27, 1989. "The Iron Curtain imprisoned Hungarians, but it was only a matter of time before ... the core characteristics of the Hungarian people would surface..." Szijjártó said in his speech. "This is what the desire for freedom is like."

He said central Europe today is home to "robust, developing, proud" countries which are able to cooperate according to national interests and contribute substantially to Europe's economy and security. Support for the Hungarian government is overwhelming, he said, giving it a mandate to stand up for national interests in debates over the European Union's future. Schallenberg said the message of 1989 was "never to forget what we owe to European integration". Today, the continent enjoys stability and wealth it didn't have before,

he said. The unification process is not yet finished because many feel that some are closer to power than others, Schallenberg said. The European Union should work to change that, he said. Before the commemoration, Szijjártó and Schallenberg discussed bilateral cooperation.

EUROPEAN COURT OKAYS HUNGARY ADVERTISEMENT TAX

The European Court of Justice annulled a European Commission decision which had declared the Hungarian advertisement tax incompatible with the European Union's restrictions on state subsidies. According to the Luxembourg court's ruling, the commission had no sufficient evidence that the Hungarian tax would selectively benefit taxpayers. In 2016, the commission said that the Hungarian law would provide an unjustified benefit to companies with low advertising revenues and ones that did not have profits in 2013, and stipulated that the Hungarian government should "restore equal treatment in the advertising market". In its ruling, the court said companies with a higher turnover incurred lower production costs due to economies of scale, and could have a proportionally higher revenue and pay higher taxes. The ruling can be appealed.

DEFENCE MINISTER: HUNGARY TAKES ITS DEFENCE BUDGET OBLIGATIONS SERIOUSLY

Hungary is serious about raising its defence budget and is doing everything it can to ensure that it fulfils NATO targets in this area, Hungary's defence minister said. According to a ministry statement, Tibor Benkő participated in a two-day ministerial meeting of NATO member states in which general agreement was expressed on the need to further strengthen the alliance, including in the area of combatting terrorism. Benkő said that whereas Hungary's security situation could be said to be stable, the country intersected with eastern and southern potential flashpoints. The stability of the Western Balkans is vitally important to Hungary in this respect. Regarding pledges to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP by 2024, Benkő said Hungary was on course to meet the deadline as well as its commitment to spend 20% of its spending on military developments. "A strong Hungary with a strong army serves the security of NATO and the region," he said.

He noted that Hungary is raising the number of troops involved in peacekeeping and various other missions. Also, Hungary and Croatia are setting up a joint division to serve the region's security interests, he added. Benkő also noted the establishment of a centre to coordinate the army's

modernisation, and its cyber academy was inaugurated two weeks ago. Answering a journalist's question, Benkő said that in addition to deterrence, further negotiations with Russia were needed in respect of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and eliminating land-based medium- and short-range missiles.

OPPOSITION DK'S KÁLMÁN STATES FULL SUPPORT FOR KARÁCSONY

Olga Kálmán, the Democratic Coalition's (DK) Budapest mayoral candidate defeated by Gergely Karácsony in the preselection process, said she now fully backed her former rival. Karácsony of the Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance won the preselection process held by several opposition parties to field a candidate against incumbent mayor István Tarlós in the autumn local elections. "There is no question that from now on the opposition's candidate for Budapest mayor is called Gergely Karácsony, and there is no question that I'll help him as best as I can," Kálmán told a press conference. She said that DK would work from now on to ensure that Karácsony won the mayoral election. Karácsony won the preselection with 33,355 votes ahead of Kálmán with 25,093 votes.

At a separate press conference, Karácsony said that the Socialists, Párbeszéd, the leftist Democratic Opposition (DK) and Momentum parties will set up a "political body"

and run a joint campaign staff. During the campaign, they will draw on the resources of all the parties and build on the work of activists, he said. "Money, power and the media are on the side of [ruling] Fidesz," he said, adding that the opposition could only compensate by "filling the streets with activists". Karácsony said that hopefully, the "circle of cooperating parties will soon expand". They need green LMP and nationalist Jobbik too, he said.

ANTHONY RADEV APPOINTED PRESIDENT OF CORVINUS UNIVERSITY

Anthony Radev, a former director of financial company McKinsey&Co. will be appointed president of Budapest's Corvinus University, Zsolt Hernádi, the chairman of Corvinus's Maecenas Foundation who also heads Hungarian oil and gas company MOL, said. Radev worked as a director of the eastern European financial institutions' working group at McKinsey for 22 years, the university said in a statement. He worked in projects in financial institutions, industrial companies and the services sector, the statement added. He has also worked in education and held lectures at several business schools and universities of economy.

The presidential board comprising the university's rector, chancellor, and people invited on a permanent or ad-hoc basis will assist the president in his work, the statement said. According to the new founding charter, the rector,

chancellor, and the new president will head the university, with the latter in charge of the university's operations. The body's senate will continue to govern the university and define its education and research priorities. The rector, Andras Lanczi, remains in charge of the senate, and his mandate has been extended for one year. The chancellor, Lívia Pavlik, remains responsible for the university's long-term finances. Corvinus is developing a strategy to manage its renewal and to build up its relations internationally, the statement said. As well as improving the quality of services provided to students, it plans to develop its alumni organisation and corporate relationships. Accordingly, the president plans to run the university along the lines of the American model, it added.

HUNGARY JOBLESS RATE EDGES DOWN TO 3.4%

Hungary's three-month rolling average jobless rate was 3.4% in March-May, edging down from 3.5% in the previous three-month period and down from 3.7% twelve months earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The rate covers unemployment among 15-74 year-olds. In absolute terms, there were 160,400 unemployed, 2,000 fewer than in the previous period and down 10,300 from a year earlier. Out-of-work Hungarians spent about 13.9 months on average looking for employment during the period, and 36.7% of the

unemployed had been seeking work for one year or longer. The number of employed stood at 4,500,400 among 15-74-year-olds, 43,300 or 1.0 percent more than in the same period a year earlier. The employment rate was 60.7 percent, up 0.8 of a percentage point. The number of employed included 113,600 Hungarians in fostered work programmes and 115,500 working abroad. The number of those employed on the domestic primary labour market rose 2.0% from a year earlier to 4,271,200, while the number of fostered workers dropped 29.7%. The number of those working abroad was up 7.0%. KSH defines "employed" in line with International Labour Organisation standards as anybody who worked one or more hour a week or was temporarily absent from their job during the survey week. The data also include those employed in public work schemes and those working abroad for less than one year.

Commenting on the data, the finance minister said the unemployment rate was at its lowest point since Hungary's democratic transition in 1989-90. Mihály Varga told public news channel M1 that the

number of people in employment has increased by 800,000 since 2010. He said that though the decline of the unemployment rate was slowing, the government hoped unemployment had not yet reached its low point. Varga attributed the falling unemployment rate partly to the government's job protection action plan, which he said had proven effective in recent years. "So the good economic situation backed up by the government's economic policy measures have resulted in Hungary registering the fourth best unemployment figure in the European Union," the minister said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: NO MORE THAN 6 HUNGARY- AUSTRIA ROADS FACE TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS

Austria is mulling restricting traffic on six roads between Austria and Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, calling reports that "a majority" of such roads face closure "scaremongering". Talking to MTI after talks with Hans Peter Doskozil, the head of Austria's Burgenland region,

Szjijártó noted that some thirty roads connect the two countries. Of the six in question, five are dirt roads, he added. A Hungarian-Austrian working group is holding talks to find a solution that respects local interests, he said. The average distance of legal border crossings between Austria and Hungary is 12 kilometres, much shorter than the regional 40km average, he noted. It is still behind the 2.5km average in western Europe, he added.

HUNGARY TO HOST WOMEN'S TENNIS FED CUP FINALS IN 2020-2022

Budapest has been selected to host the finals of the women's tennis Fed Cup in 2020, 2021 and 2022, according to an announcement made at the Queen's Tennis Club in London. Budapest was in competition with Moscow, St Petersburg, Berlin, Munich, Prague, Vienna, and Chicago. The finals next year will be held at the Papp Laszlo Budapest Sports Arena, while in the second and third years at Budapest's new, 20,000-seat sports hall.