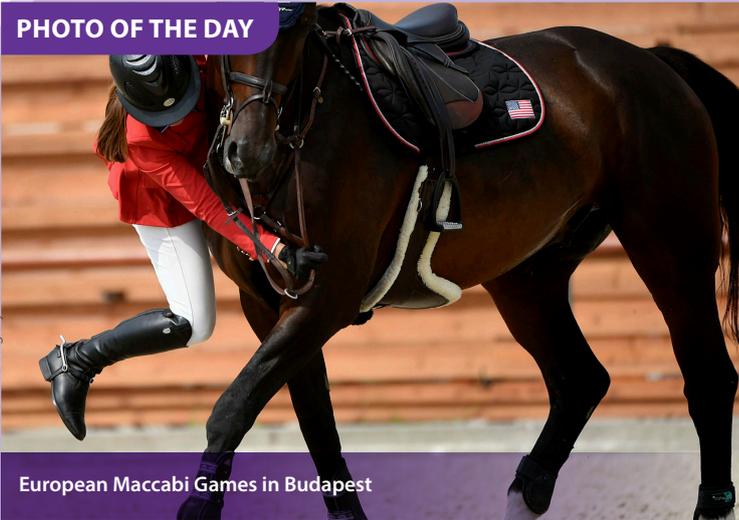


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balázs Czirágy

European Maccabi Games in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán meets EC President-elect Von der Leyen in Brussels

Police's presser on Formula One Hungary event

Stats office publishes 2019 May foreign trade data in 1st reading

TOP STORY

OUTGOING EC 'AIMING TO CEMENT POLICIES'

The reason behind the European Commission's recent decision to sue Hungary over the "Stop Soros" package of laws is that the outgoing body "aims to cement its policies in its remaining months", the PM's office chief has said.

EC President-elect Ursula von der Leyen, however, is capable of easing divisions within the European Union, Gergely Gulyás said at a regular press briefing. The government also believes she could create consensus among member states and define the bloc's shared values, he said, noting that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is scheduled to meet Von der Leyen for private talks on Thursday, and underlining the Hungarian government's continued confidence in the EC president-elect. He said the two leaders could potentially cover any variety of topics. Hungary respects the incoming EC chief's authority to decide on the makeup of the new commission, he added.

Commenting on reports that Von der Leyen may appoint Frans Timmermans EC vice-president responsible for upholding the rule of law, Gulyás said the Hungarian government would respect the EC head's decisions. The goal for Europe to have a leading body that sees the continent's interests as a priority, he said. Measures in the past five years have shown different intentions, however, and "Timmermans definitely belongs to that circle," he said.

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ECJ RULING ON REFUGEES NOT COVERED BY HUNGARIAN LAW

Referring to a decision issued by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) earlier this week under which judges can grant international protection to refugees if an administrative body has overruled their decision without establishing new elements in the given case, Gergely Gulyás, the PM's Office chief, said the ruling had granted the courts powers that were not guaranteed by Hungarian law. He said the ruling meant that the EU was opening up the asylum system to possible abuse. Gulyás cited as an example the case of a Russian national with a criminal background whose asylum application had been rejected by the Hungarian state, while the EU court had ruled that he qualified for asylum. He said the justice minister would have to look into whether the ECJ's ruling required the enactment of new legislation.

Regarding the distribution of top jobs within the EU, Gulyás said that László Trócsányi's nomination for European commissioner was the best decision the cabinet could make. He noted that the former justice minister had topped the Fidesz-Christian Democrat (KDNP) list in the European parliamentary election, adding that the support of voters for that list was the second highest in the EU.

Regarding the Article 7 procedure launched against Hungary last July, Gulyás said the government was ready to answer all questions "but this is a political witch hunt that lacks any foundation".

Regarding an infringement procedure the EC has launched against Hungary regarding the circumstances in Hungary's transit zones for asylum seekers on the Serbian-Hungarian border, Gulyás said the government's response was that "nobody is being starved in the transit zone." All those within the asylum procedure "are provided for impeccably", he said. The transit zone is open towards Serbia, and those housed there are free to leave, he said. The government finds it "offensive", however, that Hungary's defence of the EU's external borders is met with "baseless criticism and opinions disguised as political discourse" instead of financial and political support.

On another subject, the PM's Office chief said the cabinet had held its last meeting before its summer break on Tuesday and will next meet on Aug. 21.

In response to a question about whether Lőrinc Mészáros, a businessman linked to the Hungarian prime minister, was "paying the prime minister back" by renting a golf course from his father, Gulyás said it appeared that "opposition politics is more and more about defamation and libel". The government does not concern itself with business matters, he said, expressing incomprehension as to why the opposition was making

accusations concerning a market-based leasing deal.

Meanwhile, asked if there were any plans to change boating regulations after the May 29 Danube ship collision, Gulyás said discussions on the matter would have to wait until the end of the criminal proceedings in the case.

He said major progress has been made in employment in Hungary, with 850,000 more jobholders today than in 2010. The cabinet reviewed the latest economic indicators on Tuesday, Gergely Gulyás said. Citing data from the Central Statistical Office, he said that the employment rate of 20-64 year-olds has risen to 75.2%, while it is 70% in the 15-64 age group. The highest rate was measured in Budapest, followed by western Hungary. Regional differences only indicate there are reserves to be tapped, he said. Gulyás also announced that the government decided to earmark 32 billion forints (EUR 98m) extra spending for innovation and research as part of the transformation of the academic research network.

On the subject of a Russian aircraft carrying weapons which entered Hungarian airspace, Gulyás said the aircraft was not a military plane and therefore had the right to enter Hungarian airspace after notifying the authorities without waiting for specific permission. Hungary could not have legally refused airspace use, he said.

CAPTAIN OF CRUISE SHIP REMANDED BACK INTO CUSTODY

A Budapest court has ordered the Ukrainian captain of the cruise ship which collided with a sightseeing boat in central Budapest in May to be remanded back into custody, the captain's attorney told reporters on Wednesday. The court has ordered the 64-year-old Ukrainian captain's detention for a duration of 30 days, saying he posed a flight risk or could tamper with evidence, M. Gábor Tóth said. He added that the defence will appeal the decision.

On May 29, the Viking Sigyn cruise ship collided with a sightseeing boat that had 33 South Korean tourists on board and a crew of two Hungarians. Seven tourists were rescued from the water after the collision and the rest died. In early June, the captain of the Viking Sigyn was taken into custody on suspicion of criminal misconduct but later released on a bail of 15 million forints (EUR 45,800). The municipal court ruling granting the captain's release also obliged him to remain in Budapest. On Monday, the captain was taken into custody again on suspicion of abandoning the passengers and crew of the Hableány sightseeing boat after the crash.

ORBÁN, MERKEL TO MARK ANNIVERSARY OF PAN-EUROPEAN PICNIC TOGETHER

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will mark together the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic, one of a series of events leading to the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the fall of communism, the prime minister's press chief told MTI. The Pan-European Picnic was held on August 19, 1989, on the Austrian-Hungarian border, near the town of Sopron, as a demonstration of the peaceful coexistence of Austria and Hungary. The nearby border crossing was opened for three hours, allowing nearly 1,000 East Germans to flee to the West. The picnic was one of the events contributing to the opening of the borders and the reunification of Germany. Bertalan Havasi told MTI that Merkel and Orbán will attend an ecumenical service in the Lutheran Church in Sopron's historical centre on August 19. Both leaders will address the commemoration, Havasi said.

ÁDER OPENS 15TH EUROPEAN MACCABI GAMES

President János Áder on Tuesday evening welcomed contestants participating in the 15th European Maccabi Games, a championship of Jewish athletes. "We Hungarians are always ready to root

for our athletes ... We are proud of the many identities thriving in the Hungarian team, under the Hungarian flag. We are proud of our Jewish compatriots whose achievements boost our shared confidence," Áder said in his speech opening the event. Hungarian Jews have been present in Hungarian sports history from the start, he said: Ferenc Kemény contributed to organising the first modern-day Olympics and another Hungarian Jew, the swimmer Alfréd Hajós, won the country's first gold medal there. The Maccabi Games were conceived in the same spirit, Áder said: to celebrate performance and to create a community through games. Áder wished the participants "noble fights and memorable moments".

Motti Tichauer, chairman of the European Maccabi Confederation, told the event that the first European Maccabi Games were held in Prague in 1929 but during the past 90 years none of countries in the region hosted the games so it has only now returned to its central-eastern European roots.

The opening event featured some seventy performers and the flame was lit by world and Olympic champion chess player Judit Polgár and five-time Olympic champion gymnast Ágnes Keleti. The central venue of the games will be the Ludovika Campus in the Orczy Gardens where daily awards ceremonies will be held, as well as exhibitions, concerts and film screenings. The 15th European Maccabi Games will run through next Wednesday. Some 5,000 participants including 2,311 athletes arrived from 42 countries for the games.

MI HAZÁNK, MIÉP PROTEST TAXPAYER- FUNDED EUROPEAN MACCABI GAMES

The radical nationalist Mi Hazánk and non-parliamentary MIÉP parties called it “unacceptable” that Hungary was financing the organisation of the “discriminatory and racist” European Maccabi Games from taxpayer money. Addressing a press conference in Budapest, Mi Hazánk deputy leader Előd Novák said that while Germany, the host of the previous European Maccabi Games, had spent 1.4 billion forints (EUR 4.3m) on organising the event, Hungary has spent some 30 billion forints on the 2019 Games. Mi Hazánk demands that the government immediately release details of its spending on the event, Novák said, arguing that the Games were a “hotbed for corruption”. MIÉP leader Tibor Nagy told the same press conference that his party will turn to the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations over the “apartheid” he said characterised the Games. He called on all “decent” athletes and fans to boycott the event.

SOCIALISTS TURN TO EC OVER DISPOSAL OF CROATIAN, SLOVENIAN SEWAGE SLUDGE IN HUNGARY

The opposition Socialist Party has turned to the European Commission

over the matter of Croatia and Slovenia exporting their sewage sludge to Hungary, the party’s MEP, István Ujhelyi, told a press conference, noting that he had turned to the European commissioners for health asking whether the European Commissioner had any knowledge of the matter or if it was aware that toxic materials had been moved between member states for years. Ujhelyi said his party also wanted to know whether this was in line with EU law and if the EU had allocated any funding for these dealings. He said the matter was not an internal issue, arguing that it was about a form of trade between member states that “grossly violates” EU law.

Ujhelyi said the government’s decision to prevent the future entry of sewage sludge into Hungary would not be enough to resolve the issue, since the contracts currently in effect still permitted its entry. Ujhelyi called on Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, to address the issue.

Lajos Korózs, the (Socialist) head of parliament’s public health committee, told the same press conference that public data released in connection with the matter showed that the permits for the entry of sewage sludge had been issued by the Pest County government office, the authority in charge of environmental protection tasks. In response to a question, Korózs accused Gulyás of lying when he said Hungary had not issued any permits for the transport of sewage sludge. Citing data from Croatia’s environmental

protection and energy ministry, he said Croatia had disposed of over 90,000 tonnes of sewage sludge in Hungary’s depots over the past two years. Meanwhile data from Slovenia’s environmental authorities suggest that some 30,000 tonnes of Slovenian sewage sludge were dumped in Hungary last year, he added.

HUNGARY PPI EDGE UP 0.1% YR/YR IN JUNE - KSH

Industrial producer prices rose by 0.1% in June from the same month a year earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Prices for domestic sales were up 3.0% while export prices fell by 1.2%. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial producer prices were down 0.6% as domestic prices were down 0.8% and export prices fell by 0.6%.

NUMBER OF NEW HOME BUILDING PERMITS UP, HOME PRICES EXPECTED TO RISE

The number of home building permits issued in Hungary rose by 0.9% to 18,227 in the first half of 2019, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) show. The number of home building permits issued in Budapest edged up by 0.6% to 6,153. The number issued in county seats and cities with over 50,000 residents fell by 3.2% to 3,978. The number in other cities was down 5.7% at 4,838, and the number in smaller communities jumped by

20.4% to 3,258. Meanwhile, a survey by economic research institute GKI forecast a 4 to 5% rise in home prices for the coming twelve months. New home prices are expected to climb 4 to 7 percent, the quarterly survey shows. The prices of centrally located homes in the capital could rise by 10%. GKI drew on responses from more than 1,200 companies and a representative sample of 1,000 people for the survey.

LOT TO LAUNCH FIVE NEW FLIGHTS FROM BUDAPEST

Polish airline company LOT is launching five new flights from Budapest, to Seoul, Belgrade, Prague, Stuttgart and Sofia, CEO Rafał Milczarski said. The first direct flight to Seoul from Budapest will launch on September 22 and will fly on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, Milczarski said. LOT will fly twice every workday to Prague and Stuttgart, and once every day to Sofia and Belgrade, he said. To service the new flights, LOT will operate three new Embraer E-Jet planes from Budapest and hire 60 pilots and 150 stewardesses, he said.

Tamás Menczer, the Hungarian foreign ministry's state secretary

in charge of communications and international representation, said that the announcement mirrors Hungary's growing importance in Europe and the world. South Korean companies invested over 350 billion forints (EUR 1.1bn) in Hungary this year alone, Menczer said. The number of South Korean tourists in Hungary has jumped by 69% since 2015, to 176,000 and 253,000 guest nights in 2018, he noted.

'DIGITAL CULTURE' COULD BE NEW SUBJECT IN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS FROM 2020 - PAPER

Digital culture is planned to be introduced as a new subject in Hungary's public education system from 2020, following British and North American examples, daily Magyar Nemzet said citing an education expert involved in the preparation of the national syllabus. Gábor Major, head of the company makerspace.hu involved in the development of creative educational materials, said that digital methods would get a significant role also in vocational training. Some sixty workshops will be set up with the help of European Union funding all

over Hungary where students will get a chance to learn laser cutting, robotics, 3D design and printing, electronic programming and the preparation of digital sewing patterns, he added.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE PRIZE AWARDED TO HELLER

Germany's prestigious German Friedrich Nietzsche Prize has been awarded to late Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller. A decision to honour Heller in recognition of her work was taken in early June, six weeks before she died, the Naumburg-based Friedrich Nietzsche Foundation said on Wednesday, adding that Heller was among the most influential modern-day philosophers. Heller died on July 19 aged 90 while swimming in Lake Balaton. She authored 40 books on ethics, philosophy and political theory.

The prize was first awarded by the state of Saxony-Anhalt in 1996 for a German-language essayistic or philosophical work, along with 15,000 euros in cash. It has been received so far by German writer Martin Walser and Swiss literary scientist Wolfram Groddeck.