

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, German Chancellor Angela Merkel after marking the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conference on Körösi Csoma, Petöfi programs

Szijjártó meets Serbian energy minister

TOP STORY

ÁDER: HUNGARIANS PROUD OF 1989 ACHIEVEMENTS

“After thirty years, we are rightly proud of our achievements in 1989”, President János Áder said in his address at Hungary’s August 20 national holiday, at the oath taking ceremony of some 140 military officers.

Since 1989, many dreams such as democracy, a multi-party system, freedom of speech and accession to NATO and the European Union, have come true, while others are yet to be fulfilled, Áder said. With the fall of communism in 1989, the hope returned that Hungary would become a country where “we shape our own laws and expel foreign, barbaric ideas”, he said. Referring to Hungary’s founder King Stephen I, to whom the August 20 holiday is dedicated, Áder said that the Hungarian coat of arms features a crown “reminding us that our history started with a brave king”. The officers today vow to protect their homeland even, if necessary, by laying down their lives for it, Áder said.

In 1989 and the thirty years since, the aim was to create the environment for a “better era” when, instead of sacrificing their lives, people have to live and work for freedom, Áder said. “We are grateful to our first king, his successors and all Hungarians who created freedom and security in this land,” the president said.

ORBÁN CALLS FOR STRONGER HUNGARIAN-GERMAN ECONOMIC TIES

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán highlighted the necessity for stronger business relations between Hungary and Germany, after talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Sopron, in western Hungary. "There are no developments in sight that could disturb Hungarian-German ties but there are some factors pressing for strengthening economic cooperation," Orbán said. He added that the economy was in the focus of his talks and noted that Germany is Hungary's top investor and trading partner.

Bilateral trade with Germany "breaks a record each year" and German investors have brought the most modern technology to Hungary, Orbán said at a joint press conference with Merkel. He noted that 6,000 German businesses are present in Hungary, employing some 300,000 Hungarians, while there are 17 major development projects by German companies in the pipeline.

Orbán and Merkel discussed the European Union's enlargement, and Orbán voiced Hungary's interest in the Western Balkan countries joining the bloc as soon as possible. Hungary urges the enlargement process in which Serbia has a key role, he said, adding that speeding up accession talks with Serbia will also serve Europe's interests. The talks touched upon cooperative efforts targeting

development in Africa because "aid should be delivered where the problem is rooted, to help Africa retain its people" through jointly financed programmes, Orbán said.

Orbán said that Hungary "dismantled the walls 30 years ago so that East Germans could become free and live in security; now we protect our southern border so that Germans can continue living in freedom and security". Border control is an "obligation" for Hungary, Orbán said, adding "it would be good if Brussels could cover some of the costs".

ORBÁN: EUROPE 'HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Monday said that even at times when the continent was divided, "we knew there was always only one Europe," at an ecumenical service commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic, a pivotal event in the fall of communism in 1989.

"We believed in it [the reunification of Europe], and it was reunited. It was reunited because of our faith," Orbán said at the service held in western Hungary's Sopron and attended by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and other dignitaries. Orbán said that "if we continue believing in it", the unity of East and West will be preserved and Europe remains a prosperous home to Europeans.

Orbán called Merkel's visit a great honour. He said Hungarians have great respect for the chancellor who

has led the largest and strongest country in Europe for 14 years. She has also laboured to ensure cooperation among European nations and the reunification of Europe, he said. Since Europe comprises of free and independent nations, European unity "is never completed": it has to be recreated time and time again, he said. In Hungary, "we tip our hats before hardworking and successful ladies", he said, wishing Merkel further success, the respect of her nation and of Europe.

Held on August 19, 1989, on the Austrian-Hungarian border near Sopron, the Pan-European Picnic was a demonstration of peaceful coexistence between Austria and Hungary. The 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 that contributed to the opening of the borders and the reunification of Germany.

MERKEL: TRADE TIES WITH HUNGARY 'IMPORTANT'

German Chancellor Angela Merkel highlighted the importance of trade cooperation with Hungary in western Hungary's Sopron on Monday, after talks with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The chancellor told a press conference that the turnover of bilateral trade was balanced and said it was a sign of "extremely close" relations. She said that the achievements of German companies in Hungary greatly contributed to the success

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of the German economy. Referring to the European Union's cohesion and structural funds, Merkel said that "looking at the growth rate of Hungary it is obvious that Hungary has used those funds well to benefit its people". Germany is happy to have contributed to that welfare through creating jobs, she added. Germany seeks to further develop scientific, research and innovation cooperation with Hungary, Merkel said, adding that ministerial talks would follow to that end.

The EU needs to strengthen ties with the US and China to prevent protectionist tendencies, the chancellor said. Merkel said that Germany seeks to build "tight relations based on trust" with all EU members and suggested that she would also promote the interests of Hungary and central Europe in the community's next budgeting cycle.

MERKEL THANKS HUNGARY FOR ITS ROLE IN GERMAN UNIFICATION

German Chancellor Angela Merkel thanked Hungary for the role it had played in the reunification of Germany, at an ecumenical service held in western Hungary's Sopron, marking the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic. "We Germans are grateful for Hungary's contribution to abolishing division in Europe and to German reunification. We thank Hungary for that," Merkel said.

She noted that thirty years ago, the Pan-European Picnic was organised as

a demonstration for European peace and included plans to symbolically open the Hungarian-Austrian border for a few hours. East Germans, "vacationing at Hungarian camping sites," caught wind of the event and hundreds left all their belongings behind to try and reach freedom, she said.

Regarding the "enormous" challenges facing Europe, Merkel said Europeans should not lose sight of their shared values. "We have to be aware that any nation's prosperity is conditional on Europe's. Europe is only as strong as it is united. Europe is strong only inasmuch as it can make compromises in contested issues," she said. The European peace project "is not self-sustaining," Merkel said. The masses seeking asylum and needing protection in Europe from crisis regions of the world show how important it is to fight against the root causes of persecution and flight, she said.

Hungary, Germany and the other EU states are today partners in shaping the future of a united Europe, she said. "We have to proceed on the road to freedom, democracy and unity, and might be strengthened by remembering the Pan-European Picnic," Merkel said.

US GOVERNMENT SENDS GREETINGS TO HUNGARY ON AUGUST 20

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed his government's greetings to Hungary marking the August 20

national holiday. "On the occasion of Saint Stephen's Day, I would like to extend my best wishes to the government and people of Hungary on behalf of the government of the United States," Pompeo said in a statement on Monday, the eve of the holiday. In his statement, Pompeo highlighted the "long history of partnership and collaboration" between the two nations and added that they were also connected by "security, economic, and people-to-people ties that continue to grow". Pompeo made reference to his February visit to Budapest, and said that "I had the opportunity to see the beauty of your capital, enjoy the hospitality of your people, and appreciate the rich history of your nation". "Our governments are working together at the highest levels and we continue to deepen our cooperation to the benefit of the transatlantic alliance," he added.

TRILATERAL CONFERENCE MARKS PAN-EUROPEAN PICNIC ANNIVERSARY

Hungarian, Austrian and German politicians underlined the importance of understanding and tolerance in building a unified and successful Europe, at a conference ahead of the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic, in Sopron, in western Hungary, on Sunday. Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, told the roundtable discussion that the European Union was getting

bogged down in “pointless internal disputes”, and accused the “West” of being intolerant of “those who think differently”.

He said the reason why western and eastern Europe disagreed on certain issues such as migration was because of the differences in how the two regions progressed over the course of history. Additionally, he said, there were also “countless” cultural and value-related differences between them, which they needed to be tolerant of. Asked about accusations that Hungary has failed to show solidarity when it came to migration, Gulyás said that those who make such accusations “conflate solidarity with folly”. Solidarity comes in many different forms, he said, adding that he did not think that any western European country pursued a more “morally correct” migration policy than Hungary. A policy that does not encourage the protection of Europe’s external borders, but instead sends the message that hundreds of thousands should set off from there, “is morally no more defensible, in fact, it is more indefensible” than Hungary’s policy of border protection and taking help where it is needed, Gulyás said.

FITCH AFFIRMS HUNGARY ‘BBB’ RATING; OUTLOOK ‘STABLE’

Fitch Ratings affirmed Hungary’s ‘BBB’ sovereign rating, two notches over the investment grade threshold, with a ‘stable’ outlook. “Hungary’s ‘BBB’

rating balances strong structural indicators and stronger and more stable macroeconomic performance than peers against high general government debt and risks from policy unpredictability and pro-cyclical policies,” it said.

Fitch noted a deceleration in GDP growth in the second quarter but said economic growth is “still robust, with little evidence of macroeconomic imbalances”. The credit rating agency expects growth to slow to 4.4% in 2019, 3.5% in 2020 and 2.5% in 2021.

Fitch’s decision was in line with expectations, analysts told MTI. Takarékbank chief analyst Gergely Suppan said Fitch had upgraded Hungary to ‘BBB’ - two notches over the investment grade threshold - at its previous review of the country in February, thus it wasn’t expected to modify the rating at the next available opportunity. He added that the big credit rating agencies are “still behind” when it comes to assessing Hungary’s creditworthiness. He explained that they have failed to take into account the marked improvement in Hungary’s macroeconomic indicators, such as the fall in external debt, the stronger banking sector balance sheet, repeated current-account surpluses, the decline in the general government deficit relative to GDP and positive changes to the structure of public debt. These indicators are all better than their pre-crisis levels which would justify giving Hungary back its rating before the crisis, Suppan said.

Equilor Investment senior analyst Zoltán Varga also said Fitch’s affirmation of Hungary’s sovereign rating came as no surprise. Chances for an upgrade at a review by Moody’s Investors Service scheduled for October 25 are good as Moody’s rates Hungary ‘Baa3’, one notch under both Fitch and Standard and Poor’s, he added.

SAINT STEPHEN ORDER GOES TO NEUROBIOLOGIST

President János Áder decorated neurobiologist Botond Roska with the Hungarian Saint Stephen Order on Tuesday, Hungary’s national holiday. “Each year on the holiday of the founder of our state we celebrate those Hungarians whose outstanding talent and achievements serve the well-being and prosperity of many others,” Áder said in his address at the ceremony. Áder referred to this year’s recipient of the prestigious award as a “doctor who does not treat patients but enables others to heal through his research”.

HUNGARIAN DOCTORS GIVE UPDATE ON SEPARATED SIAMESE TWINS

Bangladeshi Siamese twins conjoined at the head who were successfully separated by a team of Hungarian doctors early in August have years of rehabilitation ahead of them, the

physicians who headed the series of medical procedures, dubbed "Operation Freedom", said at an update of the girls' condition in Budapest over the weekend. "The series of operations has not ended. Secondary skull construction and other rehabilitation could take years," chief coordinator Gergely Pataki said at the press conference. Rabeya "is smiling, talking, eating, and her mother can hold her", while Rokaiya is still in a medically induced coma after suffering a viral infection, he said. The girls' neurological status and their outlook can be assessed after a couple of months, he added. The doctors plan to travel back to Bangladesh to continue operating on Rabeya and Rokaiya in 3-6 months. Operation Freedom was organised by the Foundation for Defenceless People.

FIFTIETH FLOWER FESTIVAL HELD IN HUNGARY

The traditional flower festival in the eastern Hungarian city of Debrecen got under way for the fiftieth time on Tuesday with a carnival march including 18 floats with flower

compositions and ten domestic and 17 foreign art groups, organisers told MTI. The flower compositions included representations of the Hungarian crown, Debrecen's coat of arms and the Legend of Saint King Ladislaus. Debrecen's twin cities, German Paderborn, Japanese Toyama and Romania's Oradea (Nagyvárad) also set up floats. Art groups from Belgium, Colombia, Croatia, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey and Ukraine participated alongside ten Hungarian groups, organisers said. The day closes with concerts and fireworks.

HUNGARIAN DOCUMENTARY TAKES TOP PRIZE AT LOCARNO CRITICS' WEEK

The Hungarian director Réka Szabó's documentary "The Euphoria of Being" has won the grand prize of the Critics' Week of the Locarno Film Festival, the Hungarian National Film Fund told MTI. The film, which follows rehearsals for Szabó's dance production Sea Lavender, first performed in 2015, was picked from seven documentaries shown at Critics' Week. "The Euphoria

of Being" is in the programme of the Sarajevo Film Festival, and it will open in Hungary, distributed by ELF Pictures, on September 12.

Szabó earned her diploma in mathematics and IT from Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University and took a teaching job at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. In the meantime, she worked as a dancer with a number of Hungarian and foreign choreographers. In 2002, she established Tünet Együttes, which has become a seminal troupe on Hungary's dance scene.

FARMER EXPO DRAWS 30,000 VISITORS

Farmer Expo, the biggest farm and food fair in eastern Hungary, drew 30,000 to the agriculture campus of the University of Debrecen over four days, expo director László Vaszkó told MTI. About 300 exhibitors showed on an area of 17,000 square metres at the fair. Between 550 and 600 professionals participated at conferences held during the first two days of the fair, Vaszkó said. Fair participants were more optimistic about the future than in earlier years, he added.

