

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Márton Mönus

Fireworks over the River Danube closing out the August 20 celebrations

UPCOMING EVENTS

Govt official on scheme enabling students to visit ethnic Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries

Budapest mayoral candidate Gergely Karácsony presents opposition muni council candidates

First Lady Anita Herczegh visits children camping in W Hungary

Conference of Reformed Intellectuals starts in Balatonszárszó

TOP STORY

PUBLIC DEBT AT 68.7% OF GDP AT END-Q2

Hungary's public debt stood at 68.7% of GDP at the end of June, down from 70.0% of GDP at the end of March, the National Bank of Hungary said concerning preliminary data of Hungary's financial accounts.

Public debt, including Eximbank data, was down from 74% at the end of Q2 in 2018. Hungary's constitution requires the year-end debt-to-GDP ratio to fall each year until it reaches 50%. Excluding Eximbank data, the public debt ratio would have reached 67.0% of GDP at the end of Q2, down from 68.2% at the end of Q1 and down from 72% a year earlier.

The NBH in 2018 started publishing separate public debt ratios, with and without the balance sheet of Magyar Eximbank, in line with a decision by Eurostat. Eurostat has for years maintained that Magyar Eximbank should be reclassified inside the general government sector, raising public debt.

In nominal value public debt was equivalent to 29,519 billion forints (EUR 90.2bn) at the end of Q2. It rose from 29,358 billion forints at the end of Q1 and from 28,821 billion forints from a year earlier.

In the second quarter net borrowing increased the nominal figure by 160 billion forints, as transactions raised the stock by 113 billion forints and revaluations by 47 billion forints.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY 2020 GAS SUPPLY SECURED

Hungary's gas supplies are already secured for 2020 even if a new Russian-Ukrainian agreement falls through, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after meeting Aleksandar Antić, Serbia's minister for energy and mining. Hungarian gas storage facilities will be filled by the autumn, the minister said. According to an agreement signed with Antić, Serbia's gas supply will be ensured via Hungary in 2020, he said.

Concerning the pipeline to supply gas through Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, Szijjártó said it would not operate with full capacity before 2021 due to legal proceedings under way in Bulgaria, but added that after that year it could serve Hungary with as much as 10 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year. Antić said that good partnership with Hungary was a priority for his country, and voiced his appreciation for Hungary's support in terms of securing gas supplies for Serbia. He added that Serbia was making all efforts to become a European Union member in the foreseeable future.

ORBÁN MEETS FORMER CANADIAN PM

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in his office to discuss current political events, the prime minister's

press chief told MTI. The talks also touched on possibilities of developing Hungarian-Canadian cultural ties, Bertalan Havasi said. Harper served as prime minister between 2006 and 2015 under the auspices of the Conservative Party of Canada. He currently heads the International Democrat Union comprising 80 parties from 60 countries. Antal Rogán, Orbán's cabinet chief, and Katalin Novák, the state secretary for youth and family affairs, also attended the meeting.

GULYÁS: HUNGARY GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO REBUILD ALLIANCES

The past 30 years provided the Hungarian nation with an opportunity to rebuild its alliances on a basis of mutual respect and shared values and "to ensure a place for central Europe on the maps of Europe and of the world", Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, said in Cluj (Kolozsvár).

Speaking ahead of a gala evening marking Hungary's August 20 national holiday, Gulyás said cooperation within central Europe now has "an obvious influence on European decision making". He went on to say that "many do not like that; they are interested in maintaining century-old conflicts", and added that "there will be no winners" of provocative actions against Romania's Hungarian minority, but "Hungarians and Romanians could both become losers". Concerning Saint Stephen's Day, Gulyás said

that it is a holiday of "hopes coming true" for Hungarians. King Stephen's work helped Hungarians through a thousand years to the 21st century, helping the nation survive attacks and occupations by foreign powers, as well as "our own mistakes and sins". Gulyás said that culture was a crucial instrument for Hungarian communities to survive. "Culture brings people together, it builds communities and creates high standards, it drives eyes in the same direction and opens up ears and hearts to hear the most important issues," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY AMONG OLDEST COUNTRIES IN EUROPE

Hungary is over a thousand years old, and deserves respect as one of the oldest states in Europe, the foreign minister said in northern Hungary's Eger, at the town's celebration of the August 20 national holiday. "It is good to remind ourselves of that and also to remind those seeking to lecture us," Péter Szijjártó said at the event. In more than a thousand years, it has become clear that Hungary and Europe can only survive if they preserve their identity, security, freedom and Christian culture, he added.

SOCIALISTS WARN OF CONTINUED SEWAGE SLUDGE IMPORTS

Sewage sludge imports continue to arrive in Hungary despite a promise

by Gergely Gulyás, head of the Prime Minister's Office, to stop them over a month ago, head of parliament's welfare committee Lajos Korózs, of the opposition Socialists, said. Korózs told a press conference in front of the Prime Minister's Office that he had filmed the arrival of Croatian and Slovenian lorries transporting sewage sludge to a disposal facility in Székesfehérvár earlier in the day.

Korózs said he would file a lawsuit in the case because the Pest County government office had failed to supply information of public interest in connection with sewage sludge imports within the legally stipulated deadline. Korózs said he had asked the office to specify whom it had granted a permit to transport sewage sludge from Croatia, Slovenia and Italy to Hungary. Who transported it, who received it and who would recycle it, he asked. A total of 91,000 tonnes of sludge arrived from Croatia over two years and 31,000 tonnes a year from Slovenia, he added.

OFFICIAL PRAISES GOVT SCHEMES SUPPORTING ETHNIC HUNGARIANS

The government's Kőrösi Csoma Sándor and Petőfi Sándor programmes are exemplary and unique in global comparison, the state secretary for ethnic Hungarian communities abroad said. The Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Programme helping diaspora Hungarians and the Petőfi Sándor programme supporting ethnic

Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin are flagship projects of Hungary's policy for Hungarian communities abroad, Árpád János Potápi said at the opening event of a week-long preparatory course for scholarship-holders. The Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Programme was launched in 2013 with 47 scholarship-holders and expanded with the Petőfi Sándor Programme two years later, he said. Currently 225 people receive scholarships under the arrangements of the two schemes, he added. Both schemes are aimed at helping ethnic communities retain their national identity and strengthen cohesion through Hungarian language teaching and cultural activities. Over the past few years, a total of around 1,000 young people were granted six-to-nine-month scholarships to help Hungarian communities all over the world.

HARRACH MARKS NATIONAL HOLIDAY IN SZEGED

"Hungary's endeavours have not changed for the past 1,000 years: to build a European, Hungarian, and Christian state, which sensitively protects its independence," Péter Harrach, group leader of the co-ruling Christian Democrats, said, marking the August 20 national holiday. Speaking at a celebration held in Szeged, in southern Hungary, Harrach referred to Stephen I, the founder of Hungary's statehood, as a king "embodying the royal ideal of the age, whose character

was made up of firm decision and fairness". Saint Stephen's work, "a truly European, Christian state", is still an example to be followed, Harrach said, adding that Hungary's independence "of the lords of both East and West" should be protected even now, just as during the past millennium.

At another commemoration in the city centre, Szeged Mayor László Botka of the Socialist Party said that King Stephen defined Hungary's place in Europe by taking a stand by the West. He had realised that taking over Western culture and customs would ensure Hungary's continued existence, he said. Next to Saint Stephen's Day, Szeged this year also marks the 300th anniversary of the city regaining its rank as a free city and the 140th anniversary of its reconstruction after the greatest flood of its history, Botka said.

JEWISH ORG LEADER THANKS PM FOR SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN MACCABI GAMES

András Heisler, president of Hungary's Jewish federation Mazsihisz, has sent a letter to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán thanking him for the government's backing of Hungary's organisation of the 15th European Maccabi Games, the PM's press chief said. "We have accomplished what we could never have done without the support of the Hungarian government. We organised the 15th European Maccabi Games," Bertalan Havasi quoted Heisler as

writing. "We've just finished hosting Europe's biggest mass sporting event and all of us -- from the prime minister to our athletes to our volunteers -- can be proud of this."

Heisler highlighted the security surrounding the event, the "21st-century comfort" provided by the Ludovika campus of the National University of Public Service, the funding allocated towards the event and praised "the patience of Budapest's residents". He said the event had demonstrated that sports could provide a community experience which "can help with building the future of Hungary's Jewish community that has been crippled multiple times over the course of history". He added that Mazsihisz was ready to work with the government in establishing a Jewish sports centre.

Heisler noted that the 15th European Maccabi Games featured 2,300 Jewish athletes competing in more than 20 branches of sport. Hungary won a total of 49 gold medals, making this the country's

most successful Maccabi Games, he said. Heisler himself was on the Maccabi VAC Hungary men's senior swimming team which won the gold medal in the 1,500m freestyle event.

HUNGARY SENDS POLICE UNITS TO SERBIA, NORTH MACEDONIA

Hungary has sent new police contingents to help local forces patrol the borders in North Macedonia and Serbia, the national police said. The police officers will be tasked with investigating and preventing illegal entry into Serbia and North Macedonia and help with arresting people smugglers and illegal migrants, the statement said. Some of the Hungarian officers will be posted along roads in the inner parts of the two countries. The units will be equipped with off-road vehicles, night vision devices and thermal cameras. The Hungarian police force is committed to stopping illegal migrants from entering Hungary or the European Union, the statement added.

ARTS AND CRAFTS FAIR IN BUDA CASTLE ATTRACTS 65,000

Some 65,000 people participated in programmes of this year's Arts and Crafts Fair traditionally held in Budapest's Castle District around the August 20 national holiday, organisers told MTI. Japan was guest of honour at the 33rd fair, represented by 20 craftsmen presenting kimonos, lacquerware or stone seals, as well as offering such programmes as tea ceremonies or samurai fights. Shoemaking was this year's central theme with special focus on southern Hungary's famous "Szeged slippers" but also presenting traditional footwear from other countries including Turkey and Spain. Some 800 craftsmen from the Carpathian Basin set up model workshops at the fair showing their skills to visitors. The programmes were accompanied by folk music.