

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Márton Mónus

Mountaineers Ferenc Lengyel and Csaba Varga in Romania's Făgăraș Mountains

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dedication of Zsolt Marton, newly appointed Vác diocesan bishop

Presser on demo against public education law

TOP STORY

HUNGARY 'STRIVES FOR GOOD TIES'

Hungary's general foreign policy aim is to nurture good ties with the world's leading powers, and the results of this year show that it has managed to fulfil this goal, the head of the Prime Minister's Office has said.

Gergely Gulyás told a news conference that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had met US President Donald Trump earlier this year in Washington, DC, and he referred to German Chancellor Angela Merkel's recent visit to Hungary. Gulyás said that hopefully Orbán would also have talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin later this year. Hungary, he added, is on good terms with China. Concerning Merkel's visit to Sopron on Monday, Gulyás welcomed her comments on Visegrád cooperation and its value to Europe as a whole, as well as her positive assessment of Hungary's use of European Union funding. Germany aims to have the new EU budget adopted before the country takes over the EU's rotating presidency in the second half of 2020, he added.

Gulyás defended the government's decision to nominate former justice minister László Trócsányi as Hungary's EU commissioner. In the EU parliamentary election, Trócsányi topped the Fidesz list that won 53% of the vote, he noted, adding that it was not unusual for Hungarian ruling party nominees to be attacked in the European Parliament.

GULYÁS IN WIDE-RANGING PRESS CONFERENCE

Answering a question concerning upholding the rule of law in central European countries, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, Gergely Gulyás said these countries had no problem with this principle but they opposed double standards in defining the rule of law.

Regarding a hiring stop in public administration, Gulyás said the government had stopped filling posts in central administration that had been vacant for at least half a year. The measure does not apply to local administrative bodies, he added.

On the topic of banning single-use plastics, Gulyás said the government is willing to support selective waste management. It will also comply with any mandatory EU regulations that might be introduced, he said.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said the innovation and technology ministry (ITM) headed by László Palkovics will take over the management of higher education. The change will be effective from Sept. 1 at the latest, he said, adding that the government had decided that the measure was necessary to ensure the most effective management of research and innovation.

He said the new model adopted by the government in the running of Budapest's Corvinus University may provide a basis for operating other institutions, though there were limits to its applicability.

Gulyás announced that Hungarian pensioners will receive vouchers worth 9,000 forints (EUR 27) by Sept. 30. The Hungarian economy, he said, was performing better than expected, and the older generation should have their share of the benefits. The vouchers can be used by March 31 for paying gas and electricity bills, Gulyás said, adding that the separate pension bonus and pension supplement will also be available this year.

Further, public employees who have been employed in the sector for at least three months between January 1 and July 31, 2019 and who are still employed as of August 1 will receive a one-off net payment of 54,000 forints.

Gulyás also announced that Csaba Káel, the director of Budapest's Palace of Arts (Müpa), is to be Hungary's new government commissioner for film from Sept. 1. Káel will carry on at the helm of Müpa concurrently with his new duties, Gulyás said, noting that he will succeed the late Andy Vajna in the post. He also said that Káel would take into consideration criticisms and address the lack of some genres such as historical dramas.

On the topic of the local election campaign, Gulyás said lots of fake news was circulating and that this was especially true "on the side of the opposition". He said the October elections were really about local communities trying to find the most suitable leaders. Often, he added, voters' local choices diverge from their general party preferences.

Further, the minister noted that Hungary will be hosting the European Men's Handball Championship in 2022 and that a large hall designed to hold 20,000 people will be built to accommodate the event. A public procurement process is under way and bids will be submitted in the next few weeks. The principal contract is worth 100 billion forints (EUR 306m), he said.

TÓTH: SOCIALISTS READY FOR CAMPAIGN

The Socialist Party is ready for the local election campaign starting on Saturday and has a recipe to defeat "Fidesz's little kings", the opposition party's leader, Bertalan Tóth, told a news conference. Tóth said that in Budapest and in county seats, as well as in localities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, the opposition parties had forged alliances. The ruling Fidesz's party's biggest headache, he added, was that opposition parties were no longer fighting each other but cooperating everywhere to replace "local Fidesz kings".

The Socialists aim to set up local authorities that closely work with locals and provide good social services, schools and health care while maintaining transparency and fighting pollution, he said. In Budapest, the party wants public utility providers to coordinate reconstruction works. It also wants to set up a unified parking system and renew public housing schemes, he said. The Socialists will put a ceiling on rents, Tóth added. Of

the 23 county seats in Hungary, the Socialist Party is fielding candidates in nine seats and around 600 candidates nationwide, he said. In other localities, the party is getting behind candidates of the leftist Democratic Coalition, the Momentum Movement and nationalist Jobbik, he said.

KÖVÉR, SZÁJER ADDRESS CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCH INTELLECTUALS

Christian democracy maintains a balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and communities, House Speaker László Kövér said at a roundtable discussion at a conference of Reformed Church intellectuals in Balatonszárszó, western Hungary. At the discussion with Fidesz MEP László Trócsányi and István Bogárdi Szabó, the head of the Hungarian Reformed Church's synod, Kövér said that balance was the key to the "worldwide success" of European civilisation. "The mortal danger comes from disturbing it," he added. Liberal democracy has "made individual freedoms totalitarian," leading to chaos, Kövér warned.

The House speaker called the separation of state and church a "communist invention", saying that historic churches had been best at cooperating between the two world wars when they signalled a "clear reference point" for everyone, regardless of party affiliation.

József Szájer, MEP of the ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance, told the conference that "a European identity could only be built on national identities" and insisted that "those building on other than a national identity will build on sand". He went on to say that "some forces" seek to define the European identity against national identities. "The nation, for us, is not a category hindering development and to be discarded but one of the greatest guarantees for our survival," Szájer said. He argued that without an inner cohesion the Hungarian nation "would not have survived for over a thousand years, it would have disappeared long ago".

GULYÁS: DIASPORA HUNGARIANS ASSETS TO MOTHERLAND

Hungary's government considers ethnic Hungarians living abroad assets to the nation, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said in Sátoraljaújhely, in north-eastern Hungary. Strengthening the national identity of Hungarians born abroad could ultimately serve to benefit the nation, Gergely Gulyás said in a talk at a camp for Hungarian university students from around the world organised by the Rákóczi Association.

Gulyás noted that more than one million ethnic Hungarians have been granted citizenship over the last nine years, and encouraged Hungarians living abroad who want to strengthen their ties to the motherland to apply

for naturalisation. The PM's Office chief said the Hungarian economy was getting stronger, pointing out that more and more people were joining the middle class. The government's family policy is designed to support this trend, he said, adding that the measures allowed Hungarians to have children without having to worry about risking poverty.

CHIEF PROSECUTOR LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION IN MICROSOFT CASE

Hungary's chief public prosecutor's office said it had ordered an investigation in the so-called Microsoft case on suspicion of fraud causing especially high damage and of other criminal wrongdoings.

The United States Department of Justice announced in late July that in a non-prosecution agreement Microsoft Hungary had agreed to pay a criminal penalty of 8,751,795 US dollars to resolve a bribery case that involved inflated margins for state orders that were pocketed by middlemen.

In an announcement published on its website on Friday the prosecutor's office said it had received information relevant to the case from the US Justice Department. The Hungarian office said it had asked the US Justice Department to send it all relevant information, including those that could eventually serve as a basis for criminal procedure.

In the meantime the office also carried out an initial analysis of the documents published by the justice

department and the US Securities Commission related to the case.

The prosecutor's office added that it had also received two criminal complaints related to the matter.

LMP LAWMAKER QUESTIONED ON CHARGES OF ABUSING OFFICE

The central bureau of investigation of the public prosecutor's office has questioned Márta Demeter, a lawmaker of green opposition LMP, in relation to charges she abused her office. The prosecutor's office said in a statement that in September 2018 Demeter accessed information relating to the Hungarian armed forces before posting it on social media, falsely claiming that a close relative of the prime minister had used military aircraft for a private journey. The prosecutor's office said that Demeter had published

classified data. Demeter's immunity was suspended on July 12 pending the enquiry.

JAN-JULY BUDGET DEFICIT 35.3% / FY TARGET, MINISTRY CONFIRMS

Hungary's cash flow budget deficit, excluding local councils, was 352.7 billion forints (EUR 1.1bn) in the red at the end of July, or 35.3% of the 998.4 billion full-year target, the finance ministry said, confirming preliminary data. The full-year deficit target of 1.8% of GDP, calculated according to European Union accounting rules, "remains achievable", the ministry said. In July alone, the budget, excluding local councils, posted a 37.2 billion forint surplus. Last year, the July deficit was 70.4 billion and the shortfall in the first seven months was 1,491 billion.

HUNGARIAN DOCUMENTARY WINS SARAJEVO FILM FEST'S HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

The Hungarian director Réka Szabó's documentary "The Euphoria of Being" won the human rights award at the Sarajevo Film Festival on Thursday night. The film, which follows rehearsals for Szabó's dance production Sea Lavender, was picked from 16 documentaries. It recently won the grand prize at the Locarno Film Festival. Szabó earned a degree 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.