

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Light-painted Chain Bridge marking Universal Children's Day

MTI/Marton Mónus

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Parliament meets**

**NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussel ends**

**European People's Party congress ends in Zagreb**

**Tourism conference in Budapest**

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY TO INCREASE PRESENCE IN NATO MISSIONS

Hungary will increase its number of troops serving in NATO missions by one-third, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a meeting with his NATO counterparts in Brussels.

Szjártó told reporters that Hungary will increase the number of its troops combatting terror in Afghanistan from 100 to 170. An additional 100 soldiers will be sent to Kosovo, raising the headcount of Hungarian troops there to 500, he said, arguing that security in the Western Balkan region was crucial for Hungary and Europe as a whole. Overall, Hungary will be raising its number of soldiers serving in NATO missions from 499 to 669, he added. Szjártó said Hungary has already fulfilled its commitment to allocate 20% of its defence budget to developments by 2024, noting that 23.48% of this year's defence funds were being spent on military developments. He added that Hungary would raise its defence spending to 2% of GDP by the 2024 deadline at the latest.

On another subject, he said Hungary, Slovenia and Greece had all underlined the links between terrorism and migration at the meeting. Terrorist organisations are forcing masses of people to leave their homes while unregulated migration waves give terrorists the chance to cross borders unchecked, Szjártó argued.

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## WORLD SCIENCE FORUM OPENS IN BUDAPEST

Science is a “shared edifice” on which the researchers of vastly different nations work to understand the same truths, President János Áder said at the opening of the World Science Forum in Budapest. “The various nations are not working in different scientific fields; they are all working on building the same structure,” Áder said, quoting world-renowned Hungarian physicist Loránd Eötvös. “The end result belongs to all those who contributed to its creation,” he added. The president said what had been true during Eötvös’s time was even more so today.

The World Science Forum runs until Nov. 23. Topics on the conference’s agenda include ethical problems faced by researchers, the responsible and ethical use of scientific knowledge, science diplomacy, water science, sustainability and more. The forum will consist of six plenary sessions and some 30 panel sections. It will also feature several fringe and cultural events.

## EC: HUNGARY DOES NOT COMPLY WITH COUNCIL’S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Hungary has not taken action to comply with European Council budget recommendations, the European Commission said in a report released on Wednesday. The

EC therefore proposes that the Council should amend recommendations for measures to be taken in 2020 to correct for a big deviation from the country’s medium-term budget targets. The EC recommends that Hungary take steps to ensure that the nominal growth rate of net primary government expenditure does not exceed 4.7% in 2020, corresponding to an annual structural adjustment of 0.75% of GDP. The EC said the Council should also recommend that Hungary should “use any windfall gains for deficit reduction” and “compensate unexpected revenue shortfalls with high-quality permanent fiscal measures”. Hungary is to report to the Council on actions it has taken by April 15, 2020, according to the proposed recommendation. Both Hungary and Romania have been assessed in the framework of the Stability and Growth Pact. A warning is made in the case of major alignment deviations and to help EU member states to restore their budgetary positions.

## SZIJJÁRTÓ: HONESTY, MUTUAL RESPECT CRUCIAL FOR INTL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Addressing a United Nations event on conflict resolution in New York on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó highlighted the importance of international dialogue based on honesty and mutual respect. “There’s too much political correctness and hypocrisy in the air,” Szijjártó told

the event organised by the UN’s inter-agency working group on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. The most significant global challenges need to be addressed honestly “without backing each other into corners, or berating or stigmatising one another and by thwarting the spread of fake news”, he said.

Szjijártó said countries’ recognition of each other’s right to preserve their identities and historical, cultural and religious traditions was a key precondition of resolving conflicts. Recognising people’s right to live safely and make a living in their homeland as a fundamental human right also helps advance peace, he said. The international community should therefore concentrate its efforts on creating the conditions for people to return to their homelands, he added. Hungary devotes special attention to aiding persecuted Christian communities so that they are not forced to leave their homes and can live peacefully in their homelands, the minister said.

## SZIJJÁRTÓ OPENS CONSULAR OFFICE IN MALTA

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó opened a Hungarian consular office in Malta. At the opening ceremony, Szijjártó spoke highly of bilateral relations, adding that Hungary and Malta had no unresolved issues or disputes, while both countries were committed to increasing bilateral cooperation. The minister said the

new representation mission would be useful for Hungarian nationals of whom there are 3,000 on the island in addition to 27,000 Hungarian holiday-makers, based on 2018 data. Hungary and Malta support each other in international organisations such the United Nations, he said.

Szijjártó said both countries considered Christianity the basis for European culture, and joint cooperation on protecting Christian communities was a possibility. Hungary and Malta also take similar positions concerning a number of challenges facing Europe, such as EU enlargement, Szijjártó said. He added that the two countries were in agreement that the bloc and the UK should strive for close ties in case of Brexit.

Szijjártó called migration “a crucial problem”, and Hungary and Malta are in agreement that security aspects should be considered when taking an approach to migration, with an emphasis on border protection. Potential migrants should be helped to stay and prosper in their own homelands, he added. Hungary-Malta relations are based on mutual respect and this provides a basis for future cooperation, Szijjártó said.

**KOVÁCS: OPPOSITION FAILS TO DERAIL VÁRHELYI'S CANDIDACY FOR EU COMMISSIONER**

MEPs of the Hungarian opposition have failed in their “shameful and

hostile” attack to derail Olivér Várhelyi's candidacy for the post of Hungary's European Union commissioner, the state secretary for the government's international communications wrote on Twitter. Zoltán Kovács said that Várhelyi had “triumphed” in his hearing, and as commissioner in charge of EU enlargement he would strengthen the bloc. Kovács also said he hoped the new European Commission would stop illegal migration and would “consider protection of Christian culture and Europe itself as a top priority”.

The European Parliament's foreign affairs committee approved Várhelyi's nomination on Monday. The approval came after parliamentary group coordinators found satisfactory Várhelyi's responses to additional written questions submitted following a hearing last week.

**KOCSIS: WEDNESDAY'S INCIDENT IN PARLIAMENT JUSTIFIES NEED FOR STRICTER RULES**

Ruling Fidesz group leader Máté Kocsis said that an incident earlier in the day in parliament made it clear that it was indeed necessary to amend relevant laws and house rules. Kocsis said that Péter Jakab of conservative opposition Jobbik had “arbitrarily” sat in Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's seat. He condemned the “deviant and provocative behaviour” as incompatible with the operation of parliament.

Referring to a recent proposal by Fidesz, he said stricter sanctions had been initiated for violators of disciplinary regulations but none of them were new. What's been prohibited in the past will remain so in the future but the fines currently in force have obviously lacked the sufficient preventative effect, he added.

The ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrats alliance proposed stricter disciplinary rules for MPs violating the order of parliamentary sessions last Wednesday. Accordingly, the maximum fine applicable if an MP disturbs the peace of a session would increase by 12-fold, to four times of the monthly salary and preventing the chairman of the session from carrying out his duties could result in a fine equalling six months' salary or optionally 12 months'.

**OPPOSITION SLAMS PROPOSED HOUSE RULE CHANGES AS 'ACT OF REVENGE'**

The opposition parliamentary parties slammed changes to house rules proposed by the ruling parties as “an act of revenge” and a move planned as part of a “vendetta” against them.

Jobbik deputy group leader László György Lukács told a press conference he held jointly with other opposition party representatives that the proposed changes would curb the rights of MPs. He said the proposal showed that Prime Minister Viktor



Orbán had been “frightened by the outcome of the October 13 [local] elections”.

Socialist Party group leader Bertalan Tóth said that by submitting the amendment proposal, Fidesz was actually exacting revenge on the opposition for its attempts to prevent the “slave law” from being passed last year. Gergely Arató, deputy group leader of the Democratic Coalition, said the proposed changes were about taking revenge on opposition voters who had elected opposition MPs and “ousted corrupt, ostentatious and arrogant” Fidesz politicians in a number of electoral districts.

LMP deputy group leader Antal Csárdi said the amendment proposal was meant to enshrine “existing legal violations” into law. He said he had tried to enter state institutions on a number of occasions but had never been allowed in. Párbeszéd group leader Tímea Szabó said the package was a part of Orbán’s “vendetta”. She said the opposition’s message to the prime minister was that they would not be intimidated, even if they were subjected to fines equalling their yearly salaries.

**EJA HEAD THANKS ORBÁN FOR SUPPORTING ISRAEL, JEWS**

European Jewish Association (EJA) head Rabbi Menachem Margolin has thanked Prime Minister Viktor Orbán for the Hungarian government’s position on Jewish settlements

in the West Bank, Hungary’s consistent support for Israel and the comprehensive agreement that the government signed with the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), Orbán’s press chief said.

Margolin said in a letter that there were areas of disputed geographical affiliation in many countries around the world and it was unfair to single out Israel, Bertalan Havasi said. Margolin welcomed the Hungarian government’s position going against the European Union’s criticism of Washington. The US recently made it clear that it did not consider the Jewish settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law. Margolin thanked Orbán for his commitment to the Jewish people and support for its major role in Hungary’s cultural, civic and economic development.

**MINISTER: HUNGARY AGAINST GIVING UP EU MEMBER STATES’ DIALOGUE ON RULE OF LAW**

Hungary disagrees with a proposal put forward by current European Union president Finland under which the bloc would abandon intergovernmental dialogue on the issue of the rule of law, the justice minister said in Brussels. Speaking to Hungarian journalists after a meeting of EU affairs ministers on Tuesday, Judit Varga underlined Hungary’s support for preserving a “tried and tested” mechanism built on intergovernmental dialogue when it comes to examining

the state of the rule of law in a member state.

Hungary favours a process that respects equality among member states, the minister said. Such a mechanism must not be replaced by a procedure that would see member states giving their opinions on one another on the basis of the European Commission’s annual report on the rule of law, Varga added.

She also voiced Hungary’s opposition to plans for the European Council to base its own dialogue on the commission’s rule of law report in the future. Varga said Hungary and Poland had argued at the meeting that member states should form their opinions on any concerns over the state of the rule of law in another EU country solely on the basis of bilateral talks. The proposal put forward by Finland would put an end to the intergovernmental aspect of this process and replace it with a new mechanism, she added. “Hungary cannot accept the establishment of such a mechanism,” Varga said. “Though it’s in the minority, the opinion being ignored by the majority of member states is a legitimate one.” Varga added that the EC had the tools it needed to enforce the observance of EU treaties by member states.

**CHRISTDEMS ‘CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC’ ABOUT NEW EPP LEADERSHIP**

The Christian Democratic Party (KDNP) hopes that the European People’s

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Party's next leadership will focus more on crucial European issues and less on internal disputes, KDNP lawmaker Lőrinc Nacsa said in Zagreb. Speaking to MTI on the first day of the EPP's leadership election congress, Nacsa said his party was "cautiously optimistic" about the centre-right grouping's new leaders. He noted that the EPP leadership contest would merely be a technicality given that former Polish prime minister Donald Tusk is the sole candidate running to replace France's Joseph Daul, who had led the grouping since 2013. Nacsa added that the matter of ruling Fidesz's suspended EPP membership was not on the congress's agenda, noting that Fidesz will not even be present.

### **MINISTRY: GOVT PRIORITISES PROTECTING CHILDREN**

The government puts a premium on protecting children and their physical, mental and spiritual development, the ministry of human resources said on Wednesday, Universal Children's Day. The new Penal Code includes protections for children and strict punishments for crimes against children, the ministry said in a statement. Children are also at the heart of the government's family protection action plan, with 2,228 billion forints (EUR 6.65bn) to be spent next year on families with children, the statement added. The government has introduced measures to ensure the well-being and rights of children and

plans further measures. The number of crèche and kindergarten places is being increased and kindergarten education is compulsory. Next year all primary and secondary school students will receive free textbooks and half a million children will receive free or subsidised school lunches, the statement said.

### **UNICEF CHILD FRIENDLY CITY TITLE GOES TO TATA, JÁSZBOLDOGHÁZA**

UNICEF's Child Friendly City 2019 title has been awarded to Tata, in western Hungary, and Jászboldogháza, in the country's central-east. UNICEF Hungary announced the award at a roundtable marking the 30th anniversary of the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each year, the award goes to a municipality which treats the rights of children as a top priority.

Antónia Mészáros, the managing director of UNICEF Hungary, said that 41 million children in the world were in need of urgent assistance. She said that 400 million children did not have access to clean drinking water and 200 million were seriously undernourished.

At the roundtable, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said that air pollution, traffic safety and housing were issues that most affected children in Hungary's capital, and he pledged improvements in all three areas. Budapest, he added, is a European capital with some of the highest levels of air pollution, and poor air quality

around schools in the inner districts was a big problem. Improving air quality is a top priority, but "this can't be done overnight". The city of Budapest is making preparations to bid for European funds aimed at improving air quality around schools, he said.

Karácsony said many schools could not be safely accessed due to dangerous traffic. The city, he added, is working on a programme to improve traffic safety in the vicinity of schools. Concerning housing, Karácsony noted that real estate prices have increased dramatically, adding that families with children were most affected. The city plans to steadily increase its housing stock and introduce subsidies to promote affordable housing. The municipality of Budapest will cooperate with district governments to introduce uniform rules aimed at reducing utility fees, he added.

### **IT MINISTRY: NEW VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM AIMS TO BOOST COMPETITIVENESS**

Hungary's vocational training system will change fundamentally from the 2020-21 academic year, an innovation and technology ministry official said. "We're creating a more flexible system attuned to the needs of the market while preventing school drop-outs," Tamás Schanda, the ministry's state secretary, told a news conference, commenting on the relevant law parliament adopted the previous day. Children completing eighth grade

(typically 14-year-olds) will have a choice of either attending technical school which includes the option of sitting traditional school-leaving exams at the age of 18 and obtaining a technical diploma following a 5-year course, or a vocational school offering a 3-year course in a chosen trade. Schanda said the changes were accompanied by big increases in wages and scholarships, with vocational teachers receiving an average rise of 30%. He said the new system would be performance-based and would apply to almost 32,000 people. With the new student scholarships available, the number of vocational students is expected to triple over two years, he added.

The Democratic Union of Teachers (PDSZ) said the legislation adopted on Tuesday was an unsuitable basis for reforming the vocational training system. It complained that parliament had adopted the law without prior consultation with stakeholders and it also protested against the change to the legal status of teachers, adding that the new law would put 32,000 teachers into a legal limbo, while in return they had received an unguaranteed pledge of higher wages.

Teacher trade union PSZ said today that it had turned to Hungary's president asking him not to sign

the new law. PSZ also complained that the ministry had not launched broadscale consultations during the law's preparation. Further, the new law could lead to "serious employment and occupational risks" both for employers and employees. In its statement, the union objected to the removal of vocational training from the public education system, adding that vocational teachers were opposed to losing their status as public servants. The union said the president should send the law back to parliament and ask the ministry to draft the law properly.

On Tuesday, parliament passed the vocational training law with 119 votes in favour, 40 against and 15 abstentions, replacing the law adopted in 2011.

**PM'S OFFICE: GOVT MAINTAINS STAND AGAINST BUDAPEST CONGESTION CHARGE**

The government continues to object the introduction of congestion charges in Budapest, initially proposed during former mayor Gábor Demszky's term in office before 2010, the prime minister's office said. If current mayor Gergely Karácsony insists on the introduction

of congestion charges, the issues should first be discussed in the city's Municipal Assembly, then in the Budapest Municipal Development Council and finally by parliament, it added. The prime minister's office reacted to deputy mayor Dávid Dorosz's remarks on commercial channel RTL Klub that the city would restrict the entry of cars into the city centre and the use of diesel-run vehicles within five years.

**SZAKÁCS TO FILL TÓBIÁS'S VACATED PARLIAMENTARY SEAT**

Hungary's National Election Committee (NVB) allotted former Socialist Party lawmaker József Tóbiás's vacated parliamentary mandate to László Szakács.

Last month, Tóbiás announced his decision to return his mandate effective November 1, explaining that he would have to spend more time abroad because his son's respiratory illness forced the family to move away from Hungary. Because Tóbiás won his parliamentary seat from the Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance's national list, the party had the right to name his replacement. Szakács will take his oath as lawmaker once the NVB's decision becomes official.

