

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Orbán with British author-philosopher Sir Roger Scruton after presenting him with the Order of Merit of Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Final day of NATO summit

Pintér addresses anti-corruption event of Audit Office, Interior Ministry, NBH

Conference on farming sector's competitiveness

TOP STORY

VÁRHELYI: W BALKANS NEED CREDIBLE EU OUTLOOK

Given that the Western Balkan region is an integral part of Europe, the European Union must offer its countries a credible outlook for joining the bloc, the European commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy said.

Addressing a session of the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee, Olivér Várhelyi urged accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia to be opened as soon as possible. He said the two countries had done everything required of them, adding that the EU had a duty to start the accession talks. At the same time, he urged dialogue with member states that still had reservations about the bloc's enlargement. Várhelyi said the importance of integrating the Western Balkan region must not be questioned. The new European Commission will assign even greater importance to the issue of enlargement and will work to enhance the policy's credibility, he added.

He said it was regrettable that EU leaders had failed to reach an agreement at the October summit on starting the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. Várhelyi vowed to support the commission's efforts to start the talks with both countries.

VÁRHELYI: EC TO OUTLINE PLANS TO SPEED UP ACCESSION TALKS

Next month the European Commission will unveil its plans for speeding up the accession talks, the European commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy, Olivér Várhelyi, said, adding that the commission wants the General Affairs Council to be in a position to greenlight the talks by March. The commissioner said it was important that the EU send a positive message to the Western Balkan countries before next May's EU-Western Balkan summit in Zagreb. Várhelyi said the EU should help speed up the implementation of reforms in the region's candidate countries.

The European Commission places great emphasis on the observance of the rule of law, economic growth, democratic institutions and the reform of public institutions, he said. Meeting these criteria and a strong political commitment are crucial to a future EU membership, Várhelyi added.

He also said it was important for all of the region's candidate countries to join the European Green Deal, the Digital Agenda for Europe as well as the bloc's shipping and energy network, arguing that doing so would enhance growth and create jobs. It would also allow the candidate countries to enjoy the benefits of those policies without having to wait to become full-fledged EU members, he added. But the EU must also do its part so that it is ready

to take on the new members once they meet all the criteria, Várhelyi said.

He said accession talks that were already under way needed to continue, with the accession criteria remaining unchanged. He warned, however, that if the EU failed to keep its word and speed up the integration process, it would lose its credibility.

ORBÁN LAUDS SIR ROGER SCRUTON FOR 'RECOGNISING DANGERS OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION'

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Tuesday presented author and philosopher Sir Roger Scruton with the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary, Middle Cross, saying he had "recognised the dangers of illegal migration and protected Hungary from unjust criticism".

Sir Roger is a member of the Royal Society of Literature and guest professor at The University of Buckingham and Oxford University. President of the Republic János Áder bestowed the award which was handed over by Orbán.

In his laudation at the ceremony held at the Hungarian embassy in London, Orbán said: "Our dear professor taught us that conservatism is not an ideology but rather the polar opposite of one." Orbán said Sir Roger was a man of action who did not just oppose communist ideology but also acted as a strong ally of anti-communist forces in central and eastern Europe during the communist era. On the other

hand, he didn't support open societies blindly but warned of its errors and dangers, he said, adding that Scruton was "a friend of freedom-loving Hungarians", saying the philosopher had recognised that freedom was based on nation states and Christian civilisation.

Sir Roger said Hungary had preserved its precious identity in times when pressure to accept global uniformity and eliminate national differences could be felt everywhere.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO ASSIST ALBANIA'S POST- EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Hungary will help in assessing the damage caused by last week's deadly earthquake in Albania, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in London.

Speaking to Hungarian media on the sidelines of a NATO anniversary summit, Szijjártó said both the Albanian government and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Tiranë-Durrës have reached out to Hungary in the wake of last Tuesday's disaster. Szijjártó said he held talks with his Albanian counterpart and Hungary has also been in contact with the Tirana archdiocese.

Because the Balkan country does not have the engineering capacities required to determine which of the buildings damaged in the earthquake can be rebuilt, the Albanian government has asked Hungary to send a team of experts to help out

with the inspections, Szijjártó said. Hungary on Tuesday morning sent a team of six structural specialists and engineers to Albania to assess the damage, he added. Altogether there are 70 specialists, among them 50 foreigners, conducting post-earthquake inspections in the country.

The Roman Catholic church has informed the Hungarian government that five churches belonging to the Tirana archdiocese were damaged in the earthquake, Szijjártó said. The government will contribute 85 million forints (EUR 255,000) to their reconstruction, he added. Last Tuesday's earthquake killed a total of 51 people and left thousands homeless.

PINTÉR: HUNGARY CONTINUES TO PROMOTE BORDER PROTECTION

Hungary continues to insist on preventing rather than managing illegal migration, as well as protecting the external borders of the bloc, Interior Minister Sándor Pintér said at a meeting of the European Council's Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) in Brussels. The interior ministry said in a statement the JHA discussed on Monday the decree expanding the competencies of Frontex, the EU's border protection agency, which is to come into force on Dec. 4. The ministry said Hungary, from the very beginning, had promoted Frontex support for member states and third countries in their fight against illegal migration. But a stronger

work, diligence and excellence in performance," Péter Szijjártó told MTI. Hungary's economic performance is world-class, Szijjártó said, producing over 100 billion euros of exported goods and services annually which is the 34th highest in the world. The Hungarian economy continues to grow well above the European Union average, he said.

Frontex, it added, must not infringe on the sovereignty of member states or jeopardize their own border protection efforts. Regarding internal security within the EU, the Hungarian delegation agreed that law enforcement organisations need to upgrade their methods and equipment to keep abreast of technological developments. The EU's law enforcement, including the Budapest-based European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), will play an active role in advancing such technological developments, the ministry added. The ministers reviewed the EU's interoperability package designed to provide swift access to information systems on the part of law enforcement, migration and border protection forces. Hungary was one of the first member states to launch related developments and legislation, it said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: DEBRECEN BMW PLANT TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN ECONOMY

An economic protection action plan will need to be introduced early next year in order to maintain growth because Brussels has made mistakes not only in its migration policy but also in economic policy and euro zone countries will as a result see stagnation next year, Szijjarto said. An increasing amount of valuable investment is arriving in Hungary which is beneficial also because it boosts demand for the products and services of Hungary's small and medium-sized businesses. SMEs play a significant role in the supply chain of large international companies setting up business in Hungary, he added. As a result of the increasing number of investments with high value added, salaries have been growing fast and the average salary at newly created jobs grew from monthly 304,000 forints (EUR 910) to 450,000 forints in the past eighteen months, he said. German carmaker BMW said it will start construction of a 1 billion euro plant in Debrecen in the spring. The local council of Debrecen is finishing up groundwork at the site of the plant, BMW said.

The building of a BMW plant in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, will further strengthen the Hungarian economy, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said, commenting on the German carmaker's announcement to start a construction project in the spring of 2020. "The development project will come to Hungary thanks to Hungarians' high-quality

work, diligence and excellence in performance," Péter Szijjártó told MTI. Hungary's economic performance is world-class, Szijjártó said, producing over 100 billion euros of exported goods and services annually which is the 34th highest in the world. The Hungarian economy continues to grow well above the European Union average, he said.

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BUDAPEST MAYOR SIGNS LETTER OF INTENT ON HELPING DISABLED PEOPLE

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony signed a letter of intent on cooperation with civil organisations aimed at improving care and accessibility in the city for people living with disabilities, marking the International Day of Disabled Persons.

"Budapest must become a city of solidarity. It will do its utmost to make sure that disabled persons and people who provide care for their elderly relatives do not feel left alone with their problems," the mayor said prior to signing the document together with the head of the Step by Step! Association. "Budapest must become a city with a heart. It will be a city that takes steps to ensure everyone has access to public transport and all the public institutions," Karácsony said. He added that the municipality would always consult the civil organisations before taking decisions affecting disabled people.

Anett Csordás, the leader of the association of families caring for disabled children, said the initiative has already been joined by 14 civil organisations. The letter of intent has already been signed by 16 districts and talks with another five are ongoing, she added. The cooperation includes improving basic social care, housing conditions and accessibility of public buildings, and launching an

information platform in all 23 districts. The UN General Assembly designated Dec. 3 as International Day of Disabled Persons in 1992.

OECD GAUGE OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE SHOWS IMPROVEMENT IN HUNGARY

Hungarian students showed improved competence in reading, maths and science in a triennial assessment of academic performance of 15-year-olds by the OECD, state secretary for public education Zoltán Maruzsa said.

Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 test show Hungary scored 476 points in reading, improving from 470 points in the 2015 assessment. Hungary's score in maths rose to 481 points from 477, and the country's score in science also climbed to 481 points from 477. The results were close to the average of the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 487 for reading, 489 for maths and 489 in science.

Compared to neighbouring countries, Hungarians scored lower than Austrian and Slovenian students, Maruzsa noted. Serbia, Romania and Ukraine had worse results while Croatia and Slovakia had scored better than Hungary in some fields and trailed it in others, Maruzsa said. The PISA test also highlighted the decade-long phenomenon of widely varying results in Hungarian education, Maruzsa said.

However, the ratio of low performers was at 25.3% in reading, 24.1% in science and at 25.6% in maths, all improvements from the 2015 results, he said. The rate of low performers in all subjects stood at 15.5%, over the OECD average of 13.4%.

Maruzsa noted the shrinking role of the family background in student performance as a positive development. The rate of absenteeism also fell, and 68% of students said they were happy with their lives, he said.

Government-backed development of public education is at the root of the improving performance, Maruzsa said, citing the state funding of schools and support of teachers and families raising children as examples. Next year, state funding for education will be 645 billion forints (EUR 1.9bn) more than in 2010, with 335 billion forints more allocated for teachers' wages than in 2010 and the state will continue to provide schoolbooks for free to all students and free school meals for many, he said.

FIDESZ ACCUSES BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY OF ORDERING FREEZE ON HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION

Ruling Fidesz slammed the opposition-controlled metropolitan assembly for rejecting a proposal for a superhospital in southern Buda, saying it amounted to ordering a freeze on hospital construction. Fidesz MP Imre Pesti told a press conference that the left-liberal city councillors were "playing

with other people's lives", adding that "they couldn't care less about the health of Budapest residents."

"Preventing the construction of the hospital is tantamount to a crime," Pesti insisted. Last Wednesday, the assembly rejected an amendment proposal submitted by the Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance on the construction of the southern Buda hospital. Instead it first approved a proposal submitted by the opposition that would have diverted funding earmarked for that hospital to Budapest's St. Imre and St. János Hospitals. Socialist Party councillor Csaba Horváth later submitted a proposal that was approved for funding the two hospitals without any mention of diverting the funding for the superhospital.

Pesti said the leftist opposition had regularly criticised the government in recent years for "neglecting" health care and had promised to undertake major developments when they returned to power. Meanwhile, he said, the government had been spending an annual 450-550 billion forints (EUR 1.3-1.6bn) on upgrading hospitals around the country. It also aims to spend 700 billion forints on upgrading the health infrastructure of Budapest and its agglomeration, he added.

OPPOSITION SLAMS NOMINATION OF MEDIA AUTHORITY MEMBERS AS 'BIASED'

The opposition parties slammed the nomination of what they said were

exclusively government-backed members to the Hungarian media authority NMHH. Nationalist Jobbik's Kolomán Brenner called it "a mockery of democracy" that the committee set up to nominate new members to NMHH on Monday had tapped only "pro-Fidesz" appointees. Brenner called for at least two opposition members to be elected to the authority.

Socialist Zita Gurmai said that in a law amendment passed in June this year, the government had expanded the authority's powers to assess frequency bids for radio and TV channels, adding that NMHH now had the authority to "cancel the operation of any broadcaster without explanation". With Monday's nominations, the government has cemented a pro-government authority for a further nine years, she added. The leftist Democratic Coalition's Zsolt Gréczy said the ruling Fidesz party had "mounted an occupation of supposedly independent institutions" in order to cement their power. "Freedom of the press is dead in Hungary," he said, insisting that journalists had been barred from asking Fidesz lawmakers questions in Parliament and the lawmakers' office building. Fidesz group spokesman János Halász, who also heads the committee for nominating NMHH members, had tapped Fidesz MEP Ágnes Hankiss, communications director László Meszleny, László Budai and Károly Szadai for the authority.

SOCIALISTS: FIDESZ 'SIDING WITH MULTINATIONALS' ON EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

The Socialist party said that by rejecting an opposition bill on regulating relations in the workplace between management and employees, the government was "siding with oligarchs and multinationals". Deputy party leader Imre Komjáthi told a press conference in Budapest that the proposal would have mandated companies and businesses that are strategic partners of the government to comply with laws protecting the rights of employees.

Lajos Korózs, the head of parliament's welfare committee, said the ruling party politicians had "betrayed workers three times" by passing the labour code amendment raising the cap on overtime in an amendment dubbed "the slave law", by refusing to scrap the "slave law" in parliament, and by rejecting the opposition's current bill. Komjáthi said the Socialist party will continue to support trade unions and use all tools "within or outside parliament" to protect employee rights.

The ruling Fidesz party said in response that the Socialists had "told lies" about the Labour Code for the past year as part of a political campaign. Fidesz said in a statement that the previous government under the Socialists had been responsible for the loss of one million jobs and high

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wage taxes, as well as “humiliatingly low wages”. The opposition also refused to back tax cuts that benefited Hungarian workers in recent years, it added. “It’s clear that the amendment to the Labour Code has not had any negative effects,” Fidesz said, adding that overtime was voluntary and the law allows anyone who wants to work more and earn more to do so while protecting their rights.

BUSINESS CHAMBERS OF SECOND-BIGGEST V4 CITIES TO COOPERATE

The business chambers of the second-biggest cities of the Visegrad Group - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - signed a cooperation agreement in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. The agreement, signed by the business chambers of Brno, Debrecen, Kraków and Košice, covers the areas of higher education, tourism, joint ventures and the coordination of vocational training.

PARLT RESTRICTS E-CIGARETTE SALES TO STATE-RUN SHOPS

Parliament approved legislation limiting the sale of electronic cigarettes and e-cigarette cartridges to the

state-run network of tobacco shops. The law was passed with 117 votes in favour, 37 against and 15 abstentions. The legislation reduces the excise tax on e-cigarette liquid from 55 forints to 20 forints per millilitre, closer to levels in neighbouring countries to reduce illegal imports. It also introduces a 19,160 forint (EUR 57) per kilogramme excise tax on smokeless tobacco products and “smoking substitutes containing nicotine” next year. The law will reduce the number of tobacco shops in the country by raising the population threshold per shop from 3,000 to 4,000. The proposed legislation was submitted by János Lázár, the prime minister’s commissioner for the defence of non-smokers.

SZENT ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY SHOWCASES ACADEMIC- CORPORATE RESEARCH CENTRE

Szent István University presented a Higher Education and Industry Cooperation Centre (FIEK) supported by a 1.5 billion forint (EUR 4.5m) grant from the National R&D&I Fund in Gödöllő, on the outskirts of Budapest. The FIEK will focus on IT advancements in the farm sector, the university’s deputy rector, István Szabó, noted. The

centre is one of eight the government is establishing with European Union and state funds to optimise links between universities and businesses, accelerating the transfer of academic research to practical applications. FIEK centres located around the country focus on materials technology (Miskolc), the pharmaceutical industry (Budapest), crop production and livestock farming (Kaposvár).

OLD 10,000-FORINT BILLS TO BE WITHDRAWN AT END-DEC

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) issued a reminder that old 10,000 forint (EUR 30) bills will be withdrawn from circulation at the end of this year. The NBH upgraded the security features on the 10,000 forint bill late in 2014 and set the date for the withdrawal of the old bills in a decree issued in February of this year. After the old bills are withdrawn from circulation on December 31, 2019, they may still be exchanged, free of charge, at banks and post offices for a period of three years, and for a period of 20 years at the NBH.

The NBH noted on its website that the upgraded 10,000 forint bills already account for 95% of all 10,000 forint banknotes currently in circulation.