

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV / Csaba Krizsán

Dancers in a Baroque Ball in Győr, W Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary session

Socialist presser on NAT

Czech film festival presser

Innovation ministry presser on Hungary-US higher education ties

TOP STORY

FM: HUNGARY OPEN TO GOOD UKRAINE TIES

It is still not up to the Hungarian government whether good Hungarian-Ukrainian relations are restored or not, the Hungarian foreign minister said, in connection with Ukraine's language law which discriminates against minorities.

Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook that Ukraine's education minister, Hanna Novosad, had promised to meet leaders of the Transcarpathian association of Hungarian teachers to agree on a way forward. He added that the minister had agreed to do so in the presence of several witnesses, including Ukraine's foreign minister. "I hope she keeps her word so we can return to good relations," he wrote, adding that this did not depend on Hungary alone.

Szjijártó met Novosad on Friday, who said after the meeting that proposals he had presented were not practicable. According to Novosad, the Hungarian foreign minister had proposed that Ukraine should acknowledge Transcarpathian Hungarians as an indigenous ethnic minority, thus granting them the opportunity to study all subjects at primary and secondary school in their mother tongue. Secondly, Szijjártó proposed that the number of Ukrainian language classes should be increased in minority schools rather than gradually shifting from Hungarian into Ukraine.

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PINTÉR: PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST CORONAVIRUS WORKING

Preventive measures implemented against the coronavirus by Hungary have so far proven effective, Interior Minister Sándor Pintér the minister told parliament's welfare committee on Friday. The measures include preparing an action plan and setting up an "operative board" to coordinate the actions of state authorities. Preventive measures focus in the first place on the country's borders and the Budapest Liszt Ferenc International Airport, Pintér said. Hungary has sufficient supplies of protective gear such as face masks and gloves on stock, he added.

Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler told the committee that both his ministry and the operative board set up to coordinate preventive measures concerning the virus "have been prepared for all possible circumstances from the first moment". Kásler said that as of now the "panic" surrounding the disease was "a considerably bigger problem" than the virus itself, noting that it has not yet been detected in Hungary. The top priority now is to prevent the virus from entering the country, he said. The minister added, at the same time, that if the virus were to be detected, the South Pest Central Hospital and other institutions were prepared to deal with such a situation. The ministry has prepared a protocol to

be implemented in the event that the coronavirus is detected and has sent it out to hospitals, general practitioner practices, local councils and district government offices.

In response to a question, Kásler said the ministry updates its national pandemic preparedness plan on an annual basis, adding that there were enough respiratory machines and other equipment on hand. He said there were 1.2 million face masks available which will be distributed across the country.

State secretary for communications and international representation Tamás Menczer said the foreign ministry knew of two Hungarian citizens in areas in China locked down because of the coronavirus, neither of whom wanted to leave the country. He said there are currently 197 Hungarians in China, adding that the Hungarian embassy was in constant contact with all of them.

As regards the three Hungarians working aboard a cruise ship that was quarantined off the coast of Japan earlier this week, Menczer said all three of them were healthy and in contact with the Hungarian embassy in Tokyo. A total of 61 people on the ship tested positive for the coronavirus, he noted. Besides them, there is one Hungarian citizen being treated in a hospital in the Philippines. A sample taken from that patient is being tested in Manila, Menczer said, adding that the person's symptoms have eased. Another Hungarian citizen had to be examined in Vietnam but doctors

believe that person's symptoms had been caused by a bacterial infection, he added.

Menczer said that normally 12 direct flights operate between Hungary and China, but four of those have been suspended. From next Monday, only Air China will be operating its Beijing-Budapest flight, he said, noting that China has banned its citizens from booking group tours abroad.

TWO PROSECUTED FOR SPREADING FAKE NEWS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS 'DEATHS'

Police have raised charges against two people for disseminating fake news online that people had dropped dead in Budapest's Keleti railway station due to coronavirus. The two suspects, a man and a woman, have been charged with endangering the public, the National Police Headquarters said on its website on Saturday. Numerous Hungarian-language websites have claimed that several people in Hungary have been infected by coronavirus. The cybercrime unit of the National Bureau of Investigation (NNI) has found that dozens of Facebook pages are linked to the same network of websites that share scare stories.

The contents are designed as clickbait linked to advertising, and they have reached hundreds of thousands of users, the investigation has found.

On Friday, NNI detectives raided various locations and seized technology equipment.

OPPOSITION LMP CHANGES NAME

Opposition LMP (Politics Can Be Different) has changed its name to LMP - Hungary's Green Party, co-leader Erzsébet Schmuck told a press conference on Saturday. Schmuck said the party would use the shortened form Zöldek (Greens). She said the new name was aimed at sending the message that "there is a green party fighting for a liveable environment, one which is worth voting for". The party will complete its green manifesto by mid-2020, she added.

Participants in Saturday's congress voted to change the party's rules, Schmuck said, adding that the changes included a new recruitment system to "open up" the party and make its operations more effective. The Greens are ready to cooperate with other opposition parties to replace the government in 2022 "so the country can go forward with green policies", she said, adding that negotiations with the other parties may be launched in the summer.

The party's other co-leader, János Kenderney, said the party's congress has been convened in preparation for the 2022 elections as well as to evaluate the past one or two years. He said that there was "public demand" for a green party, adding that the Greens were "politically and morally obliged to meet it".

GYURCSÁNY: OPPOSITION EITHER WINS TOGETHER OR NOT AT ALL

Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the Democratic Coalition, has called on Hungary's opposition parties to join forces, saying: "Either we'll win together or we won't win at all". In his annual speech on Sunday, the former Socialist prime minister said the opposition parties came from many different backgrounds, with different pasts and political tastes. "They don't have to love each other, but they should love the homeland," he said.

Gyurcsány said the opposition parties should not ignore their constituents. If they did win the 2022 general election, he added, they would be able to form a government only by joining together. "It's far better for a country to have a coalition government forced to compromise than an ignominious, selfish ... single party of the state," he said. A coalition government's duty, he said, went far beyond linking together party lists. "Those who can't stand each other while campaigning are hardly going to stand each other in government," he said, adding that unless there was "an understanding that the opposition is diverse, there will not be an acceptance that the country needs greater diversity and understanding".

Gyurcsány praised the Socialist Party for its efforts to help the disadvantaged. He also welcomed the Jobbik party's efforts to turn itself

into a "decent, nationalist, conservative party" after its "awful past". He said the Momentum Movement's members were "young, dynamic and sometimes cheeky, but have introduced a new generation of hundreds of thousands to politics." Gyurcsány also noted that the Greens, formerly known as LMP, had filed a criminal complaint against him a few years ago. "But this doesn't matter." "There's no middle way between an authoritarian, populist, nationalist, anti-Europeans and democrats," he said. The leftist leader warned that a win by the opposition in 2022 would be followed by a "hideous" period in which they would be "hounded relentlessly".

Meanwhile, referring to fellow DK politician Péter Niedermüller, the mayor of Budapest's 7th district who recently caused outrage with a remark about "white, Christian, heterosexual men and women", Gyurcsány said Niedermüller should have added that "it is not enough to be white, heterosexual and Christian in present-day Hungary," since "you also have to be Fidesz".

The ruling Fidesz party's director of communications, István Hollik, said in response that Gyurcsány had made it clear in his annual speech that he was the real leader of the liberal opposition. Gyurcsány, he added, had "ruined the country" but had done "very well for himself". Hollik added that while hundreds of thousands had sunk into poverty and lost their jobs, Gyurcsány had been earning billions through "the privatisation robbery". "Let's not forget who Ferenc Gyurcsány actually is," he added.



FAR RIGHT COMMEMORATES WW2 EVENT IN BUDAPEST

Some 500 supporters of far-right organisations gathered in central Buda on Saturday to commemorate an attempt by German and Hungarian soldiers to break out of Buda Castle besieged by the Soviet Red Army on February 11, 1945. The commemoration, dubbed the Day of Honour, was organised by Légión Hungária and Hungarian Hammerskins. Some of the participants turned up wearing WW2 German or Hungarian uniforms, and were carrying the flags of far-right organisations, the red-and-white "Árpád" stripes and the national colours. Some foreign participants held up the flag of France's Vichy government and the flag of the German Third Reich. Participants laid wreaths at a makeshift monument of a crucifix topped with a military helmet set up in the Városmajor Park, while the Hungarian and German anthems were played.

During the event, an estimated 500 anti-fascist activists, including members of the international Antifaschistische Aktion, held a counter-demonstration. They beat drums and blew whistles, while others chanted "Nazis go home".

Participants of the two demonstrations were separated by a steel fence and a line of police.

EUROPEAN LEFT POLITICIANS IN BUDAPEST WARN AGAINST RISE OF FAR RIGHT

A Party of the European Left delegation on Saturday called for Europe to unite against the mounting strength of the far right. After meeting representatives of NGOs and political parties, French Communist Party representative Cecile Dumas told a news conference held on the banks of the Danube next to the Budapest Holocaust Memorial that the far right should be prevented from spreading at all costs. Europeans need to be presented with a vision of hope that is not on the side of the far right, she added.

Olga Athaniti of Greece's Syriza said all forms of fascism had appeared in Greece's history. She added that when the rights of a minority are lost, the majority would also be affected soon afterwards. Helmut Scholz of Die Linke said if fascism made an appearance, this was evidence that civil rights were not being upheld. Attila Vajnai of the Hungarian Workers' Party 2006 said parties should set aside their disagreements and work together to prevent fascism from re-emerging in society. "It's important for Hungarian society to unite against an infection that is far more dangerous and more fatal than coronavirus."

NOVÁK: HUNGARY, US IN CLOSE COOPERATION OVER FAMILY SUPPORT

The Hungarian and US governments are cooperating closely on policies in support of families, Katalin Novák, the state secretary of family and youth affairs, said after talks with politicians and researchers in the US. Cooperation between the US and Hungary "in the areas of supporting families and preserving the dignity of human life has been unprecedented," Novák said, noting the two countries' participation in the Partnership for Families international initiative launched last month. The initiative now embraced by several countries would, she added, help international organisations to uphold the importance of the family and "protect human life from conception to the moment of natural death". Novák said her reports of Hungary's maternity support programmes, under which young mothers receive a monthly allowance for up to three years, had been met with "appreciation" in the US. She added that the US administration, too, was taking significant steps at federal level to promote families. The fact that the number of marriages in Hungary is at a 40-year high, and the number of births had increased by 20 percent since 2010, was also welcomed, she said.

The state secretary called it a serious problem that Europe had "neglected demographic issues" in the past few

decades. "No country in Europe can be self-sustaining because young people's readiness to have children is low," she said, adding that it was worrying that "some countries would prefer to solve the problem through immigration rather than providing incentives to young people to have families".

During her visit, Novak met Republican Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, as well as researchers of the American Enterprise Institute.

JUSTICE MINISTER BACKS EUROPEAN INITIATIVE ON PROTECTING NATIONAL REGIONS

Justice Minister Judit Varga has said on Facebook that she has added her signature to a European citizens' initiative on protecting national regions. The initiative dubbed European Citizens' Initiative for the Equality of the Regions and Sustainability of the Regional Cultures was launched by the Szekler National Council. According to its official page, the initiative aims to convince the European Commission to create

a cohesion policy that pays special attention to regions with national, ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics that are different from those of the surrounding regions.

Attila Dabis, the Szekler National Council's foreign affairs officer, told public current affairs channel M1 earlier on Friday that the initiative was having a hard time generating the required number of signatures. He said only 60,000 people have signed it so far with just 90 days left until the deadline to collect one million signatures. Dabis said the initiative would have to attract at least 10,000 signatures per day from now on in order to be successful.

SPA TOWN HÉVÍZ 12TH IN EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE RANKING

The Hungarian spa town of Hévíz, home to Europe's largest thermal lake, has been voted twelfth best place to visit in this year's European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) ranking, the local council said. Hévíz made the list, ahead of places such as Prague and Madrid, based

on a count of more than 600,000 votes submitted between January 15 and February 5. In addition to Hungarians, Hévíz enjoyed the support of many German, British, Norwegian, Austrian, Russian and Asian travellers, showing the town has made a place for itself among global tourism destinations, the council said. Making the EDEN list generally boosts tourism activity at destinations by 15 percent, it added.

SUSPECT IN MURDER OF FRENCHMAN IN BUDAPEST ARRESTED

Police detectives have arrested a 26-year-old American-British dual citizen suspected of murdering a Frenchman in downtown Budapest. The body of the Frenchman was found early on Saturday in Ferenczy István Street in the capital's 5th district. The 25-year-old is thought to have died at the scene from severe injuries. Police arrested the suspect in a nearby apartment in Museum Boulevard at 2pm and questioned him on suspicion of murder.