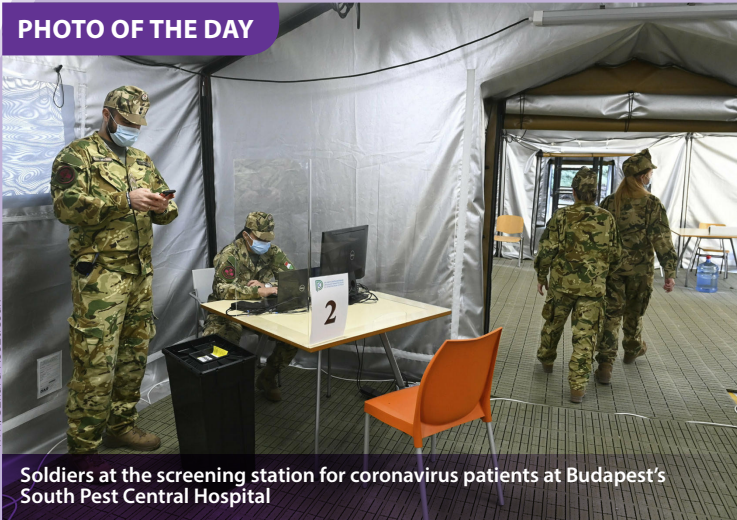


PHOTO OF THE DAY



Soldiers at the screening station for coronavirus patients at Budapest's South Pest Central Hospital

MTI/Szilárd Koszticsák

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

National Bank of Hungary Monetary Council rate-setting meeting

Dept PM inaugurates visitors' centre at Kis-Balaton nature reserve

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY 'BETTER PREPARED' THAN IN SPRING

Hungary is better prepared to confront coronavirus now than when the disease first emerged in the spring, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told lawmakers.

"We have a tough period behind us and a difficult one ahead," the prime minister said in his speech opening the autumn session of parliament. Orbán said the country had built up a bank of experiences from the previous wave and also had the outcome of its National Consultation public survey at hand, indicating that "people clearly want to see Hungary functioning". He said citizens had entrusted government to ensure that "lives are saved and jobs are protected, and everyday life is not paralysed by the virus." He said that today there was no reason to fear that anyone would be left without proper treatment. At the same time, Orbán noted that the government last week decided to keep restrictions on entry in place and make mask-wearing mandatory in enclosed public spaces. Those found in violation of the rules on wearing face masks face a fine of up to 50,000 forints (EUR 138), he noted, adding that he has submitted a bill that would see the fine increased. The blanket visiting ban for hospitals and retirement homes has also been upheld, he noted.

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ORBÁN URGES YOUNG PEOPLE TO STICK TO RULES

A failure by young people to follow the rules could endanger the elderly and the sick, the prime minister warned in his speech to lawmakers. “Now the effectiveness of our defence against the pandemic really depends on us,” he said. The government has capped the price of coronavirus tests at 19,500 forints and decided that clubs and bars must close by 11pm, Orbán noted.

Orbán said Hungarian health care was equipped to face twice the number of coronavirus infections as that modelled in worst-case scenarios. He said “doctors and mathematicians” estimated, at the severe end of the scale, that Hungary may contend with 200,000 coronavirus infections, with 16,000 requiring hospitalisation and 800 patients on ventilators. The government has made preparations to accommodate twice that number, with 66,000 hospital beds available, he said. The health-care system continues to operate under a chain of command so that when certain hospitals reach maximum capacity others are activated, Orbán said.

On the subject of the economy, Orbán said the government was committed to protecting jobs, noting that by August, 4.5 million people were employed compared with 4.458 million in January. Overall, nearly one million were benefitting

from some sort of employment or job support, Orbán said. A total of 15,000 businesses have applied for the government’s investment support scheme, saving over 207,000 jobs, he said. Some 37,000 companies have applied for the wage support scheme with a commitment to creating 49,000 new jobs. The government provided a 40% wage subsidy to the R&D&I sector for a period of three months, the prime minister said, adding that some 1,100 businesses applied for funding and the scheme benefitted 23,000 people. To protect households, the government has extended a loan moratorium on mortgages for families, pensioners, jobseekers and fostered workers to July 1, 2021, Orbán said. This will secure the households of 1.6 million people and the scheme has left families and businesses with an additional 2,000 billion forints, he said. Orbán insisted that Hungary had been the only nation to show such a level of solidarity with its citizens during the coronavirus crisis.

Orbán made note of the government’s investment support scheme, saying that Hungary aimed to develop and grow at a time when other countries were focused on austerity. The government has launched an investment funding scheme aimed at protecting jobs, swiftly expanded to 170 billion forints (EUR 470.6m) from the initial 50 billion, he said. Within the scheme, 904 investors pledged to invest 424

billion forints and protect 154,000 jobs, he said. The government’s scheme for SMEs has drawn 5,500 applications with investments totalling at 193 billion forints, protecting some 130,000 jobs, he said. The government’s economic measures have successfully protected jobs and households in the country against the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, he said. Orbán noted that the government had pledged to create as many jobs as those destroyed by the pandemic.

On the topic of the four-day EU summit held between July 17 and 21, Orbán noted the European Council had agreed on the EU’s multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 financial cycle and a recovery package to offset the damage wreaked by the coronavirus epidemic. Noting the Hungarian delegation acted on requirements laid down by the Hungarian parliament ahead of the summit, Orbán said Hungary would receive some 31 billion euros during that period, or 4-4.5 billion euros each year. That is the sixth largest sum to be distributed to EU member states, Orbán said. Hungary, he added, would be “near to becoming a net contributor” to the EU budget by 2028. To achieve that goal, Hungary would “either need to buy out foreign companies” operating in Hungary “or increase investments abroad”, he said. To achieve a “balance”, Hungarian companies’ profits in foreign countries should



grow to reach 9.6 billion euros, equivalent to the combined profits foreign companies are currently making in Hungary, he said.

Orbán said he had asked for the conclusion of the Article 7 procedure against Hungary to take place by the end of 2020 under the German EU presidency. He said he saw no obstacles to closing the procedure. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she would work to conclude the procedure within that deadline, but made no promises, Orbán said. Hungary has also called on the European Council to scrap funding for politically active organisations “posing as NGOs”, he said. The proposal generated a strong backlash, he added, but the Hungarian government was keeping the issue on the agenda.

Meanwhile, the government has taken big steps to stop EU funding from being tied to “politically and ideologically motivated conditions”, he said. Hungary is committed to the rule of law but will not allow “unfounded political accusations to be gathered under the umbrella of a concept of the rule of law that lacks clear-cut legal definitions”. “What the European Left calls rule of law is a rule of blackmail,” he said, adding that Hungary and Poland had jointly thwarted attempts to bring procedures that would harm Hungary’s financial interests. Orbán noted that the European Council will hold a special session on Thursday and Friday to discuss the Greece-Turkey conflict.

**ORBÁN PLEDGES
CORONAVIRUS
PROTECTION IN MAGYAR
NEMZET ARTICLE**

In an article published by the daily Magyar Nemzet, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán pledged to protect the health and lives of people but he also vowed to keep the country functioning. The elderly must be protected while keeping kindergartens, schools, and workplaces open, he said, calling on everyone to observe safety rules. Orbán said that preventive efforts could go on until the next general election in spring 2022 and that Hungary should acquire “a few million doses of the vaccine” next year. He noted that nurses were being given a 70% pay rise.

Concerning the economy, Orbán said that the government was working “not only to maintain the level reached during the past ten years but ensure that everybody can take a step forward each year”. Hopefully, Hungary would arrive at the 2022 elections, he said, “having successfully fenced off the epidemic, beefed up its health care, with unprecedented economic growth, full employment, a greater home construction boom than ever before, and the reintroduction of 13th month pensions.”

Orbán accused leftist parties of “busily undermining national cooperation”, as well as politicians and experts coordinating preventive

measures against the epidemic. “Our freedom will be at stake in 2022.” He insisted that sovereign states were most jeopardised by “a global network advocating an open society, aimed at eliminating national structures”, he wrote, referring to “George Soros’s network”. The global elite will “apply the same strategy in Hungary in the 2022 election campaign as in this year’s presidential election in Poland,” he said. “Have no doubt: they will do everything for power and money.”

Orbán said the West had lost its appeal in central Europe and “our way of life does not appear to be desirable for westerners”, Orbán said, adding, however, that “Europe must be kept together in the years to come”. In this “stalemate”, European countries must find a way to work together, he said.

Referring to his keynote speech in Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) a few years ago, Orbán insisted that the aims he had set out were starting to bear fruit, and more and more people opposed “political correctness and the liberal doctrine”. The doctrine that “democracy can only be liberal” no longer stands, he said, adding that the conservative and Christian Democratic parties would now have a chance “to free themselves from the life-threatening embrace of the liberals”. It was not true, he added, that the separation of powers, civil and political freedoms, the protection of private property and the rule of law could only be



achieved through the means of liberal democracy.

The prime minister also gave a ringing endorsement of the US president. "I'm keeping my fingers crossed for Donald Trump's victory, because we know well the foreign policy of American Democrat governments is based on moral imperialism. We tasted it ... It did not taste good..."

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS ON EU TO CREATE JOBS FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS

A European Union priority should be to provide employment for European citizens who have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a meeting of EU foreign ministers. The grave economic consequences of the pandemic, he added, were now becoming clear. Szijjártó said he had called on the European Commission to "stop creating legal migration routes" and "insisting on bringing the African work force to Europe". "What we need is jobs for European people," he said. The EU's talks on a migration agreement with Africa "should be about African people staying in their homelands", he said.

Regarding talks on Libya, Szijjártó noted that the Visegrad Group donated 35 million euros in 2018 to support border protection efforts on the Mediterranean. However, the EU "has yet to get around to buying" the ships which the Libyan coast guard

could use to stop migration and people smuggling towards Europe, he said. At Monday's talks, the foreign ministers agreed that three ships will be bought for that purpose, Szijjártó said.

Regarding the situation in Belarus, where demonstrations have been ongoing for six weeks after a contested presidential election, Szijjártó said the foreign ministers had not made a decision regarding sanctions. Also, Szijjártó said he had asked Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union, to help Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, the Catholic Archbishop of Minsk, to return to his homeland.

Earlier, Szijjártó urged the European Union to adopt a "clear and comprehensive" strategy in respect of Belarus. It is important for the EU to prepare a long-term plan, effective from a political, economic and security point of view, Péter Szijjártó said in a video message before the meeting. The EU should elaborate its plans under Poland's guidance, he added. "Hungary is already engaged in providing help to Belarus, in the form of assisting the country's Catholic Church," he said, noting that Kondrusiewicz has been barred from returning to his home country from Poland since August 31. "Kondrusiewicz's presence could help achieve a peaceful solution to the situation in Belarus," Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary will continue to call for allowing the bishop to return to the country.

HUNGARY BACKS US NOMINEE FOR OECD SECRETARY-GENERAL

Hungary supports the nomination of Chris Liddell, US President Donald Trump's deputy chief of staff, for the post of OECD Secretary-General, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is scheduled to elect its next chief later this year, will play a major role in shaping the new world economic order, he said. "We do believe that there is room for patriotic economic policies under the sun, insist that economic policies should remain in the national sphere of competence, and consider it natural that economic policies may reflect national characteristics," Szijjártó said.

THREE DIE, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 876 IN HUNGARY

Three Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 876 to 18,866, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 686, and 4,401 people have made a recovery. There are 13,779 active infections and 463 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 35 on ventilators. Altogether 26,750 people are in official home quarantine

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and 626,021 tests have been carried out. In addition to shops and public transport, wearing a mask will be made mandatory in cinemas, theatres, health and social institutions and public offices, and clubs will have to close by 11pm to curb the spread of the virus.

JUSTICE MINISTER OPENS CONFERENCE ON BUILDING STRONG EU

Justice Minister Judit Varga opened in Parliament a conference dubbed "Dialogue on the future of Europe: How to build a more effective and genuinely strong Union". Europe, Varga said in her opening speech, was now navigating "dangerous waters". The justice minister said nobody could have foreseen the scope of difficulties that the EU has had to face in the past fifteen years, including the global economic crisis, Brexit and the novel coronavirus epidemic. "Hungary's position is that while mutually beneficial areas of cooperation must be identified, it is necessary to respect traditional differences," she said at the conference organised by the Justice Ministry and the Ferenc Mádl Institute of Comparative Law. The principle of subsidiarity, she said, must be respected, adding that coronavirus has shown that member states are better at handling such crises. European institutions must learn from member states, Varga said. "The Hungarian government nurtures a close relationship with citizens", regularly holding National Consultation

surveys on current issues, she added. Varga said Europe must think in the long term, adding that expansion was a fundamental tool for achieving stability.

Earlier, in an interview to public radio, Varga said the rule of law "must not be used as a tool for political blackmail", commenting on planned rule of law reports on European Union member states. Completing such annual reports was proposed by Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission. "The rule of law is a priority in Europe but when it is deployed on the level of political statements, it could easily turn into a rule of blackmail," Varga told Kossuth Rádió. Hungary fully agrees that the rule of law is a priority but if financial sanctions are introduced without specifying what standards must be met, then the rule of law comes to an end, she added.

Hungary expects that the sources of the reports promised by Von der Leyen to be released later this month, she said, adding that experience from recent years showed that "national governments' opinions are not given as much focus as pseudo-evidence constructed from cross-references by various NGOs," she said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY TO SUPPORT ETHNIC MINORITY TEACHERS

Hungary has allocated 4.2 billion forints (EUR 11.6m) to support teachers in Hungary's ethnic minorities, the state

secretary for church and minority relations said. The funding will be available in 2020 and 2021, Miklós Soltész said noting that some 110,000 children and youth currently receive ethnic minority education. Minority councils operate 95 institutions, mostly in education, and several state-run schools provide minority language classes, he said. A scholarship scheme for minority teachers, with a 720 million forint budget this academic year, serves the purpose of keeping teachers in the profession, he said, adding that the increased funding will allow to offer a further 500 scholarships, along with the 370 provided so far. Awardees will be required to work as minority teachers for at least as long as the time they received the scholarships, he said.

DOBREV CALLS FOR JOINT OPPOSITION PARTY LIST

MEP of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) Klára Dobrev has called for cooperation of the opposition parties in the next election scheduled for 2022. Dobrev said that now the job of the parties is not to compete with each other but to show that "after a decade of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's autocratic rule", a responsible, pro-European, pro-republican opposition capable of governing the country is born. She stressed that DK sees itself as a partner and not as a leader of the collaboration. A joint offer must be made to Hungary and a joint programme given to voters, she said. "We need a joint opposition

prime ministerial candidate, a joint party list and a joint opposition candidate in all constituencies," she said.

JOBBIK: ORBÁN 'INCAPABLE' OF ACTING AS A DEMOCRAT

The head of parliament's national security committee, János Stummer of opposition Jobbik, accused Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of being "incapable of exercising power as a democrat", telling journalists that Orbán had developed his social skills while growing up in a dictatorship and, despite his "shuttlecock policies", it was clear that the role of an eastern despot came more naturally to him than that of a western democrat. He cited Orbán's handling of the Belarus crisis, the coronavirus epidemic and the Navalny affair as proof, stating that they showed that "Viktor Orbán has chosen an eastern orientation instead of western democracies". "Orbán may very well respect [German Chancellor] Angela Merkel

but he's enamoured by [Russian President] Vladimir Putin," Stummer said.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECONVENE IN OCT

Balázs Fürjes, the state secretary in charge of development projects in and around Budapest, welcomed the agreement of Gergely Karácsony, the city's mayor, to hold a meeting of the municipal public development council next month. At the meeting scheduled for Oct. 15, the government intends to discuss the situation around Budapest's public transport system as well as planned traffic changes on the city's Grand Boulevard, Fürjes said on Twitter. Speaking to MTI, he said the government and the city council were expected to finalise the agenda later this week. He said the government's proposals concerning the city's traffic aimed to make the lives of Budapest residents easier and the city more climate friendly, as well as to reduce pollution. Meanwhile, the ruling

Fidesz-Christian-Democrat alliance welcomed the mayor's decision to reconvene the body. In a Facebook entry, the parties proposed, among other things, that the city council delay the deadline for Budapest taxi drivers to replace vehicles older than 10 years until next year.

BUDAPEST AIRPORT TO LAY OFF MORE STAFF

Budapest Airport, the operator of Liszt Ferenc International, will carry out further staff cuts in response to travel restrictions in force since September and the slower-than-expected return of travel activity. Budapest Airport plans to lay off 236 employees because it is unable to maintain staff levels adjusted to an annual minimum of 10 million passengers. Previous group lay-offs were announced in April. Budapest Airport projects passenger numbers to drop by 90% in the autumn and winter months compared with the same period of last year, corresponding to the levels 17 years ago, the company said.