

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Péter Komka

Szilvásvárad trout newly listed in EU Geographical Indications (GI) for agri-food

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

MINISTER CRITICISES EC RULE OF LAW REPORT

The chapter on Hungary in the European Commission's Rule of Law Report is largely based on "ready-baked material" provided by NGOs linked to George Soros's Open Society Foundations, and as such its objectivity and trustworthiness is questionable, Justice Minister Judit Varga said on Facebook.

Fully 13 articles of source material referenced in the report are linked to 11 NGOs that have received financial support from organisations financed by Soros, Varga said. "The list may be familiar: it includes the Helsinki Committee, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TÁSZ), EKKINT and Mérték," Varga said, adding that this was only "for starters".

Also several earlier EC reports are referenced, she said. "If we study their sources, again we often come across those same NGOs," Varga said, adding that the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner, the EU's Venice Commission and GRECO "preferred" to cite the reports of such NGOs. Varga said Hungary had made every effort to ensure that the EC's report on the rule of law met, at the very least, the minimum requirements of objectivity and balance, noting that the government had submitted detailed analyses in aid of the report's preparation over the past year. "The commission has essentially ignored our material," Varga said, adding the justice ministry has posted the documents and "authentic information" on its website.

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FINMIN: DEBT REDUCTION TO CONTINUE AFTER DEFEATING EPIDEMIC

Once the novel coronavirus epidemic is defeated, the government will continue reducing Hungary's public debt with the help of secure and diversified long-term financing, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Facebook. He said that investors also appreciated responsible and predictable debt management, as demonstrated by Bond Awards 2020 by website Global Capital granted to Hungary. The country has won the award for most impressive issuer in central and eastern Europe, and CEO of the Government Debt Management Agency Zoltán Kurali has been voted the most impressive CEE funding official, he added. The recognition is especially noteworthy because it is granted on the basis of votes by banks, investors and issuers, and it shows that the government's efforts are increasingly supported by international capital markets, he said.

FREEDOM COMMITTEE TO MONITOR RULE OF LAW GUARANTEES

The government set up the Digital Freedom Committee this spring, not to censor Facebook, but to monitor guarantees of the rule of law on the internet, the justice minister told a conference. Judit Varga addressed an innovation forum dubbed think.

BDPST, organised for the fifth time by the Antall Jozsef Knowledge Centre.

She noted that the Digital Freedom Committee is monitoring the observance of laws on the internet, such as legislation for the protection of consumers and children. The question is whether "common" rule-of-law guarantees that exist in the offline world already exist against technology giants or whether they must be established, she added. When citizens face problems connected to their online activities, they might not be able to go to an office to address these problems because the companies in question are not necessarily restricted by borders, she said.

PALKOVICS: HUNGARY AIMS TO BE AMONG TOP THIRD EUROPEAN INNOVATORS BY 2030

Hungary aims to be in the top third of major European innovators by 2030 through government R and D support schemes, László Palkovics, the minister of innovation and technology, said in Zalaegerszeg, in south-western Hungary.

Central spending on R+D has doubled since 2010, from 1.14% of GDP to 1.53% by 2018, Palkovics said in the ZalaZONE Reserch and Technology Centre.

In a bid to promote Hungarian know-how at home and abroad, the government has set aside 14 billion forints (EUR 39m) of support for 17 national research laboratories this year, and it will provide them with 90

billion forints over the next few years, he said, adding the support aims to help them integrate effectively with international processes. Two of the laboratories directly support tests at the Zalaegerszeg vehicle track, he said.

Palkovics noted that the Zalaegerszeg track and science park will be the first in the world to provide a testing environment for automated vehicles and even drones, as well as for conventional vehicles. A 60 billion forint plant for the production of the world's most advanced Lynx combat vehicles will also be built in the city, where R and D will also play a role, he said.

HUNGARY OPENS CONSULATE IN NUREMBERG

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó attended the opening of Hungary's consulate in Nuremberg, in Germany's Bavaria region.

In his address, Szijjártó said Hungary had a vested interest in cooperating with Bavaria in the economic, trade, educational and cultural sectors. Bavaria is Hungary's primary trading partner and second in the number of investors present in Hungary among German regions, he added. The "bedrock of cooperation" between Bavaria and Hungary is ties between its citizens, Szijjártó said, citing common educational projects as examples.

He thanked the German province for steadily supporting Budapest's German-language Andrassy Gyula University, and noted that a recent

government decision had opened the gates to German education being offered in Hungary, "from crèches to a master's degree". Hungary and Bavaria maintain 113 partnerships between localities and 58 partnerships between schools, he said.

"We expect that the new consulate will boost economic, cultural and personal ties between Hungary and Bavaria, especially within the Nuremberg region," Szijjártó said.

Nuremberg Mayor Marcus Koenig noted that around 100,000 Hungarians live in Bavaria, 12,000 of whom are resident in and around Nuremberg. They will now have an office to aid them besides the Consulate-General in Munich, he said.

SEVENTEEN FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 1,322 IN HUNGARY

Seventeen Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 1,322 to 28,631, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 798, and 6,349 people have made a recovery. There are 21,484 active infections and 740 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 47 on ventilators. Altogether 22,906 people are in official home quarantine and 740,043 tests have been carried out. The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines

and hygiene regulations. Entry restrictions for travellers from abroad remain in force. In addition to shops and public transport, wearing a mask is now mandatory in cinemas, theatres, health and social institutions and public offices, and clubs have to close by 11pm to curb the spread of the virus. The operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response has ordered five schools to revert to digital education. Fully 121 classes in otherwise operating schools have also been ordered to work from home, and 33 kindergartens and six schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (10,576), followed by Pest County (3,866) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (1,466), Fejér (1,290), Csongrád-Csanád (1,234), Hajdú-Bihar (1,190) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,174). Tolna County has the fewest infections (282).

KOVÁCS 'SERIOUSLY CONCERNED' FOR PRESS FREEDOM IN GERMANY

Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, said on Facebook that he was "seriously concerned for the freedom of the press in Germany", in connection with how a German radio station reported recent comments on Hungary made by German Social Democrat politician and Vice President of the European Parliament Katarina Barley. The matter concerns an admission by German public radio Deutschlandfunk

on its website, in an editor's note, that it had earlier "falsified" a statement by Katarina Barley. Kovács said Barley's recent remark that member states, such as Poland and Hungary, "must be financially starved" had raised uproar. She told Hungarian news portal 24.hu on Friday morning, however, that she had been misquoted and she actually had said that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán should be financially starved, Kovács added. "No excuses whatsoever; they have instead changed the text of the interview," he said.

NBH SEES NO IMMEDIATE SYSTEMIC RISK TO FINANCIAL SYSTEM

Financial stress had increased significantly around March with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, but the level of stress was below that of the financial crisis in 2008 and by now it has subsided back to pre-March levels, officials of the National Bank of Hungary said at an online press briefing accompanying the publishing of the NBH's Macroprudential Report. The coronavirus pandemic has clearly increased risks to financial stability and risks at individual institutions, impacting lending practices as well, but as fears eased in the real economy, this also lowered stress levels in financial markets and it can be said that there are now no significant systemic risks.

NBH officials noted that the situation in 2020 has been more favourable than in 2008 as in the past years significant systemic risks have not appeared, as

opposed to the situation before 2008. Data show retail loan disbursements have slowed both because of demand and supply reasons but state supported lending schemes have helped counterbalance the drop. By July 2020 retail loan disbursement growth has dropped to 34% but without government backed loans growth would have been around a negative 5%. A loan repayment moratorium introduced by the government has impacted around 44% of corporate loans at 60,000 companies and 54% of retail loans at 1.6 million households. In June repayments were halted for more than 50% of loans provided to micro companies and the rate was around 35% for major companies.

HUNGARY POSTS TRADE SURPLUS OF EUR 207 M IN JULY

Hungary's trade surplus was 207 million euros in July, growing from 78 million in the same month a year before, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The surplus was revised down from 262 million in a first reading. Exports fell by an annual 4.3% to 8.624 billion euros and imports were down by 5.8% at 8.417 billion. In June, exports and imports dropped by 3.2% and 5.1%, respectively. Other European Union member states accounted for 77% of Hungary's exports and 71% of its imports. For the period January-July, Hungary's exports fell by an annual 10.5% to 57.425 billion euros and the country's imports were down by 9.7%

at 55.172 billion. The trade surplus contracted to 2.253 billion euros from 3.035 billion in the base period.

POTÁPI: STRONG REPRESENTATION OF INTEREST GUARANTEE FOR SURVIVAL OF ETHNIC HUNGARIANS IN TRANSCARPATHIA

Strong interest representation is a guarantee of the survival of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia, and support from the mother country helps all Ukrainian citizens in the region regardless of ethnicity, the state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad said. Over the past ten years, ethnic nationality rights suffered a gradual decline in Transcarpathia, Árpád János Potápi told an online conference focusing on Ukraine and its western parts during the Covid-19 epidemic and the local elections.

He said no positive developments in minority rights had taken place, and despite various cultural, educational and economic schemes under way, the organisations that carry them out suffered continual harassment, including repeated attempts to make their operations impossible, he added. Potápi said that Ukraine had broken a nearly decade-long practice of tolerance of national minorities and clearly aimed to define itself as a nation state.

European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi said that Ukraine, being a member of the United Nations and

the Council of Europe, must respect international agreements on minority rights. The time has come for the Ukrainian government to consider minorities as partners and involve them in new legislation in the making on minorities, he said. The aim is for the amendment to be supported by local minorities, he added. Várhelyi said he insisted that Ukraine should implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

László Brenzovics, president of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association, said Hungary had provided the strongest support during the epidemic.

BUDAPEST MUNICIPALITY, TOURISM AGENCIES SIGN AGREEMENT ON BOOSTING SECTOR

The Budapest municipality and representatives of the tourism sector have signed a cooperation agreement designed to boost professional and business tourism in the city. Signatories included the Hungarian Tourism Agency, the Hungarian Tourism Alliance Foundation, the Hungarian Convention Bureau and the Budapest Festival and Tourism Centre. Addressing the event, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony noted that the city council had cut leases and fees tourism companies have to pay on city-owned property with a view to aiding the sector hit hard by the fallout of coronavirus pandemic. Hopefully, the cooperation will boost conference tourism in the city, he said.

TEMPUS: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TRIPLES IN TWO DECADES

The number of international students studying in Hungarian higher education institutions has more than tripled in the past two decades, the daily Magyar Nemzet said, citing a report by Tempus Public Foundation, which manages international education and training schemes. The number of international students in Hungarian universities and colleges totalled 38,422 in the 2019/2020 academic year as against 11,783 in 2001, the paper said, citing Tempus figures. The majority of international students were in Budapest and the three university cities of Debrecen, Szeged and Pécs. Their spending in the south-western region of Hungary and Baranya County exceeded one percent of GDP, the paper added.

International students spent a total of 111.2 billion forints (EUR 305m) on consumption and nearly 63 billion forints on tuition fees, Magyar Nemzet said. Additionally, they received guests

who spent an estimated 6.5 billion forints while in Hungary, the paper said. As a result, the total revenue from international students amounted to over 180 billion forints over the academic year, it added.

NEW LEADERSHIP OF THEATRE, FILM UNI STARTS WORK

The new leadership of Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) started work on Friday from an external location, after employees started striking and students barricaded two university buildings, in protest against what they have called an infringement on the university's independence.

SZFE's previous senate and leadership announced their resignation on Aug. 31, saying the foundation that took over the university on Sept. 1 under a government decree had deprived them of "all essential powers". Attila Vidnyánszky, the director of the National Theatre, has been appointed to head the university's supervisory

board, sparking protests from many teachers and students.

Gábor Szarka, the recently appointed chancellor of the university, told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio that he had contact with "those inside" via email. The new leadership is working to resolve the situation peacefully, and trying to collect information, he said, adding that they were not going to resort to violence.

Szarka noted that of the strike committee's eight demands, six fell under the purview of the university's operating body. However, the new leadership has already offered a 15% wage hike, outbidding the committee's original demand of 10%, he said. In view of that gesture, "I find it hard to see what their actual goal is," he said.

Szarka noted that the university's budget would be doubled next year, which could see developments "unprecedented in its history". The new leadership is doing everything in its power to find a solution via peaceful dialogue, but the other party is not receptive, Szarka said. "This situation is starting to hinder the university's operation," he said.