

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Sean Scully at his retrospective exhibition in Budapest

MTI/Balázs Mohai

UPCOMING EVENTS

Hungary, Slovenia prime ministers meet in Kidričevo

Coronavirus updates

State secy opens Digital Education Conference

Art Market Budapest 2020 presser

TOP STORY

MINISTER ACCUSES EC OF YIELDING TO INFLUENCE

Justice Minister Judit Varga has called it “outrageous” that the European Commission was allowing itself to be “directly and indirectly influenced” by the Hungarian opposition and George Soros’s Open Society Foundations.

The EC’s rule of law report has again been proven to be “nothing more than a tool to exert political pressure”, she told MTI during a break in a meeting of EU affairs ministers in Luxembourg.

Varga said the fact that Germany, which holds the EU’s rotating presidency, had brought the rule of law report before the General Affairs Council “also gave cause for concern from a legal point of view”. She noted that lacking consensus, the member states last year disapproved a proposal to bring the report before the council. Varga said it was also disappointing that the German presidency had rejected her proposal to make the debate on the report public.

She said the report must not serve as a basis for any form of dialogue on the rule of law within the EU.

As regards a forthcoming debate on climate protection week, Varga said that before the EU sets any more ambitious goals in this area, it should assess the extent to which member states had fulfilled their prior commitments. Hungary proposes that before the EU sets any new targets, all member states should meet the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions overall by 40% by 2030, she said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: WHO SATISFIED WITH HUNGARY'S HANDLING OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

It is clear that the World Health Organisation (WHO) appreciates the measures the Hungarian government has taken so far to combat the coronavirus pandemic and is satisfied with the way the country handled the first wave, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in Geneva.

At the same time, it is also clear that the second wave of the pandemic will be different, posing far greater challenges than the first one did, Szijjártó said. What made the first wave difficult was that the world had been completely unprepared for a global pandemic, he said, adding, however, that the world's health-care systems have now had time to prepare for the next wave. The WHO has expressed satisfaction with Hungary's purchase of the necessary protective equipment, Szijjártó added. He said the WHO was also clearly aware of the disagreement being voiced by Hungary's opposition parties regarding the procurement of protective gear. The organisation believes it is better for a country to over-stock on protective equipment than for people to die due to their shortage, he said.

"The Hungarian health-care system is prepared [to deal with the pandemic]

and the WHO recognises this," Szijjártó said. Concerning his talks with WHO leaders, the minister said both sides agreed that Hungary should only impose another lockdown "as a last resort". The WHO's guidelines and the opinions expressed by the Hungarian people in the latest National Consultation survey both make it clear that the country must function, he added. Protecting public health and ensuring that Hungary functions are two completely compatible goals, he said. The WHO agrees that if vulnerable groups are protected and large crowds are prevented, while the public is encouraged to act responsibly, the country can continue to function, he added.

The Hungarian government is following the organisation's guidelines, Szijjártó said, arguing that the country's rules on wearing face masks, testing practices, quarantine regulations and measures aimed at protecting the elderly "are all consistent with the WHO's protocols". "The WHO clearly recognises Hungary's efforts and agrees that it is possible to keep the country functioning while protecting people," Szijjártó said. "Hungary did a good job handling the first wave of the pandemic and the health-care sector's level of preparedness gives us a good chance to be just as successful in tackling the second wave."

Szijjártó also held talks with Daren Tang, director-general of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Commenting on his talks, the minister said the WIPO also had

a positive view of Hungary. The country is ranked around 30th in the global innovation rankings, he said, adding that this was a good position, considering that Hungary ranks 92nd in terms of its population.

TWENTY-EIGHT FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 1,025 IN HUNGARY

Twenty-eight Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 1,025 to 39,862, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. The number of fatalities stands at 996, and 11,753 people have made a recovery. There are 27,113 active infections and 1,519 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 160 on ventilators. Altogether 21,990 people are in official home quarantine and 841,220 tests have been carried out.

The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. It asked elderly people to pay increased attention to protecting themselves and observe general 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. Regulations include a ban

on visiting hospitals and elderly care homes which have to take every possible measure to prevent infections, the site said. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (13,035), followed by Pest County (5,081) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (2,385), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (2,079), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,886), Hajdú-Bihar (1,853) and Csongrád-Csanád (1,719). Tolna County has the fewest infections (384).

NEW RAPID PCR TEST DEVELOPED IN HUNGARY

A new rapid PCR test developed in Hungary can yield results in only two hours, significantly reducing waiting times when diagnosing people with coronavirus infection, a deputy rector of the Semmelweis University said. Speaking on public Kossuth Rádió, Attila Szabó said the test speeds up the procedure by showing the presence of the virus without having to extract its RNA from the sample first, a step earlier tests could not circumvent. The rapid tests are reliable and "it is up to the manufacturer" now to scale up production, Szabó said.

FIRST HUNGARIAN PATIENTS RECEIVE DOMESTICALLY PRODUCED REMDESIVIR

The first few Hungarian patients have received doses of the domestically manufactured Covid-19 drug Remdesivir at the clinic of Debrecen

University, the university's press office said. The drug was given to Covid patients with chronic underlying illnesses first on Monday, the press office told MTI in a statement. The domestic manufacture of Remdesivir is under way by pharmaceutical company Richter. Richter has already produced enough clinical trial doses in the initial phase to treat some 250 patients, the innovation and technology ministry said last Friday.

By the end of the month, the drug will be available in enough doses to treat more than 800 patients, a state secretary at the ministry said in a statement. The government contributed 400 million forints (EUR 1.1m) to Richter's production of the drug, József Bódis said. Mass manufacture in Hungary of the antiviral drug favipiravir is also under way, Bódis said.

HUNGARIAN, SLOVENIAN PMS TO LAY CORNERSTONE FOR POWER LINE

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Slovenian counterpart Janez Janša will hold a working meeting in Kidričevo, in eastern Slovenia, on Wednesday, Orbán's press chief said, confirming Slovenian press reports. Bertalan Havasi said that the prime ministers would attend a cornerstone laying ceremony for the Cirkovce-Pince power line.

Slovenian press reports said that the 2x400 kV power line would be part of

the Slovenia-Hungary-Croatia grid, a priority for the Slovenian government in developing the country's energy infrastructure.

Havasi said the Hungarian part of the grid reaching the border was completed in 1999 and the construction of the Slovenian side has special importance also to Hungary.

JUSTICE MINISTER WANTS MEETINGS OF EU AFFAIRS OFFICIALS TO BE MADE PUBLIC

Hungary put forward a proposal to make meetings of EU affairs officials open to all European Union citizens, Justice Minister Judit Varga said after a meeting of EU affairs ministers in Luxembourg. The motion, however, was only backed by Poland, Varga said on Facebook, adding that according to the procedural rules of the General Affairs Council, the proposal would have needed the support of 20 member states to pass. "Why is it that the western European champions of the rule of law and democracy are afraid to go public?" Varga asked. "Why are they afraid to express their views on the European Commission's infamous rule of law report in front of their own citizens?"

The minister said she would have liked to publicly ask the rest of the council why the EC had ignored the material provided by the Hungarian government when it compiled its rule of law report. "It would have been nice if European Commission

Vice President Věra Jourová had been given the chance to address her comments attacking Hungary and the Hungarian people in public and clarify whether it is true that she holds informal consultations with [Hungarian opposition] Momentum MEP Anna Donáth."

Varga said the Hungarian people would also have liked to know why it was that things that were considered "threats to the rule of law" in Hungary's case were considered "completely fine" when it came to other countries.

CORONAVIRUS - FIDESZ: HUNGARY RESPONSE MEASURES CONSISTENT WITH EUROPEAN LAW

The emergency measures implemented by Hungary to combat the novel coronavirus pandemic are consistent with European law, Fidesz MP Barna Pál Zsigmond said after a meeting of the standing committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg. Speaking to MTI by phone, Zsigmond said that although most of the participants in Tuesday's conference agreed that the measures introduced by Hungary were in line with European law, "there are still some who see Hungary as having violated those laws".

The politician said there was "no place for political attacks" on this issue, arguing that it was strictly a legal matter. The various measures introduced by Hungary in response to the pandemic must be examined

one at a time, he said, noting that the Council of Europe did not have a uniform legal framework that applied to all of its member states. A country's legal system, however, has to be examined in its entirety, taking into consideration the powers of government, parliament and the constitutional court, he added. "We can't just look at certain elements of a law in isolation and use it to misinterpret a member state's legal system," Zsigmond said. He said a productive legal debate was needed to determine whether the declaration of a state of emergency in a given member state was a threat to human rights. It should also be considered, he added, that there were a variety of solutions that could be consistent with European law.

SZIJJÁRTÓ OPENS CONSULATE IN GENEVA

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó opened Hungary's new consulate in Geneva, Switzerland. At the event, Szijjártó called it "more than symbolic" that the consulate was opening amid the coronavirus pandemic. Szijjártó noted the government's manifold duties in safeguarding people's health and life as well as keeping the economy going. According to the government's National Consultation survey, Hungarians "have made a clear decision" to that end, he said. "Hungary must function, and a functioning diplomacy and foreign diplomacy are instrumental in that," Szijjártó

said. He praised Geneva as "a capital of the world, a bastion of diplomacy in the twentieth and this century." The United Nations and several international organisations have their headquarters there, he noted, adding that Hungary took part in the work of such organisations.

NETANYAHU: HUNGARIANS, ISRAELIS MORE UNITED THAN EVER

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a letter, thanked Prime Minister Viktor Orbán for his New Year's wishes to the Jewish community, saying that the partnership between Israel and Hungary had brought the two governments and nations closer together than ever before. Netanyahu said he was certain that Israel and Hungary's improving relations would yield "tangible advantages" for the two countries' future generations. The Israeli premier expressed appreciation for Hungary's consistent support for Israel at European and international forums and wished Hungarians good health, prosperity and peace for the coming year.

SÜLI: NEW PAKS BLOCKS WILL LEAD TO CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS CUT OF 17 MILLION TONNES PER YEAR

New blocks being constructed for Hungary's sole nuclear power station in Paks will result in 17 million tonnes

less carbon dioxide emissions each year, a government official said.

Hungary's CO2 emissions amount to 12 million tonnes each year, János Süli, the minister without portfolio responsible for overseeing the Paks investment, told parliament's committee on sustainable development, adding that Hungary's forested areas absorb about 6 million tonnes of CO2 a year. He noted nuclear power guaranteed electricity supply regardless of the weather. Wind turbines, he added, contributed 94 megawatts and solar power plants only 9 megawatts to the peak of 7,105 megawatts of energy consumption last December.

Opposition Párbeszéd said the use of nuclear energy should be discontinued in Hungary. Party group deputy leader Olivio Kocsis-Cake told an online press conference that nuclear energy was unsafe and the expansion of Paks was so expensive that it would never bring a return. Párbeszéd considers the credit scheme offered by Russia "bad" and the Russian technology planned to be used in Paks "inappropriate", he added.

IMF SEES HUNGARY ECONOMY CONTRACTING 6.1% THIS YEAR, REBOUNDED EXPANDING 3.9% IN 2021

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects Hungary's economy will contract by 6.1% this year, but rebounding and expanding by 3.9% in 2021, in its latest World Economic

Outlook. The forecast was lowered from a 3.1% contraction, but raised to a 4.2% expansion in the previous WEO released in mid-April, shortly after the country went into pandemic lockdown. Hungary's finance ministry earlier projected a 5-6% decline in GDP for this year.

The IMF sees Hungary's unemployment rate reaching 6.1% this year, but going down to 4.7% in 2021. The IMF expects Hungary's current-account deficit to widen to 1.6% of GDP this year.

HUNGARY ECONOMIC OUTPUT FORECAST TO SHRINK BY 4.7% IN 2020 - TAKARÉKBANK

Hungary's economic output is forecast to shrink by 4.7% this year, according to Takarékbank analyst Gergely Suppan. Earlier, Takarékbank forecast a 3.2% contraction. At the same time, output next year is likely to grow by 7.2%, Suppan said. Although much uncertainty surrounds the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, it appears that the Hungarian economy was most severely buffeted by the virus in the second quarter, he added. It is expected that all sectors of the economy will contribute to growth, Suppan said, adding that the severity of restrictive measures seen in the spring was unlikely to be repeated. By the second half of next year economic output will have likely rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, he added. Inflation is expected to average 3.5%

this year before easing in the early months of 2021, possibly averaging 3.7% in 2021, Suppan said.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT FALLS 2.1% IN AUG - 2ND READING

Hungarian industrial output in August declined by an annual 2.1%, the Central Statistical Office said. Based working day-adjusted data, output fell by an annual 0.2%. Month on month, output grew by 6.8% in August, according to seasonally and working day-adjusted data. Vehicle production rose by an annual 6.2%, while computer products edged up by 1.8%. Food industry output was 0.3% higher than in August last year. Export sales fell by 2.9% in August while domestic sales were 4.4% lower compared with the same month of the previous year. In the first eight months, industrial output shrank by 11%. Sales abroad were 11.6% lower, while domestic sales fell by 7.4%.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 CRISIS ON STATE-OWNED COMPANIES OVER HUF 100 BN

The coronavirus crisis will have a direct cost impact of 15 billion forints (EUR 42m), but an indirect impact on profit-and-loss statements of state-owned companies of over 108 billion forints this year, Andrea Mager, Hungary's minister in charge of state assets, told a parliamentary committee on Tuesday.

Mager said state-owned companies that had to maintain levels of service even amidst sharp drops in demand were hit the hardest by the crisis.

EMPLOYERS' ASSOC REJECTS MUNI COUNCIL'S NEW TAX PROPOSAL TO REBOOT ECONOMY

National employer federation MGYOSZ rejected a proposal by the Budapest municipal council to increase the business tax in an effort to help reboot the economy. Budapest is mulling the introduction of a 0.5% "recovery" tax on larger businesses until Budapest emerges from the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic.

MGYOSZ said in a statement that the economic slowdown caused by the coronavirus epidemic has had a major impact on most businesses, reducing turnovers and making it difficult for them to retain employees. Most companies, it added, had to use up all of their reserves just to survive. "This planned tax increase is not acceptable in any form," the association said. A new tax on business revenue, like the one proposed by the municipal council, could even bankrupt many companies, they added. Differentiating the tax by sector would not solve the problem either, the statement said, arguing that the economic crisis has had a similar impact on every player within a given sector.

The MGYOSZ has asked the municipal council to come up with a

different solution that takes economic players into consideration.

The city's mayor, Gergely Karácsony, said in a presentation to the Metropolitan Interest Coordination Council last week that Budapest's ability to function was in the national economic interest, and new ways to share the public burden in a crisis needed to be considered on a temporary basis. Businesses from sectors that are less affected by the epidemic should pay the tax, he added.

The mayor said Budapest was set to lose three times the amount of tax revenue than the central budget. Fully 70% of the capital's revenue comes from the business tax, which has fallen to 139 billion forints this year from 165 billion in 2019. The capital's operating budget of 300 billion forints has a 69 billion forint "hole" this year, Karácsony said, adding that tight revenues were expected to loosen by 2022-2023.

RESUMPTION OF POULTRY EXPORTS TO THAILAND AND JAPAN FROM ALL PARTS OF HUNGARY POSSIBLE

Thailand and Japan are allowing imports of poultry produce from all parts of Hungary from October 7 and October 8, respectively, Hungary's food safety authority (NÉBIH) said. The authorities of the two countries are lifting the restrictions thanks to the eradication of bird flu, NÉBIH said on its website, adding the measure applied to live poultry, meat and meat

products, as well as eggs and egg products. Many major export markets, including Thailand and Japan, only impose restrictions on areas directly affected by the disease. On Sept. 8, Hungary was declared free of the disease. The last affected areas were Bács-Kiskun and Békés counties.

DRAMA, FILM THEATRE LEADERSHIP TO CONSIDER UNIVERSITY 'STUDENT REPUBLIC' TERMINATED

The new leadership of Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) issued a statement, saying that they henceforth considered the "student republic", an alternative educational model established by striking teachers and students within the university walls, to be "terminated with immediate effect".

Chancellor Gábor Szarka and acting deputy rectors, Emil Novák and János Zalán, said they would "withdraw all financial and material support" from the students and teachers who have barricaded themselves into two university buildings. The statement noted that the teachers and students who occupied the university in protest against the appointment of a new leadership which they saw as an infringement on the university's independence, rejected a crisis management package offered by the new leadership last week.

"The student republic educational model announced by the former deputy rector, László Upor ... has by

now dismantled the internal workings of the university and made all dialogue impossible," the statement said. "Unless the student republic ceases operation immediately, the leadership will consider it a private enterprise operating outside the university ..." it said.

The leadership will send individual letters to all employees, teachers and students of the university, asking them to state their standpoint on the situation and indicate their intentions regarding cooperation with the new leadership. University institutions will gradually revert to "pre-republic operations", ensured by the chancellor and the university's operator, the statement said.

The statement noted that the previous leadership resigned of its own accord after the government set up a foundation to assume oversight of the university. By resigning, the former leadership itself put the

institution's autonomy at risk, it said. "Considering the principle of university autonomy as enshrined in the Constitution, we will remedy those violations of autonomy in the shortest possible time, and hold Senate elections by January 30, 2021, at the latest," the statement said.

SCULLY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OPENS IN BUDAPEST

An exhibition presenting 110 pieces from every major period of renowned contemporary abstract artist Sean Scully will open in the Hungarian National Gallery on Wednesday. The exhibition entitled Passenger - A Retrospective is a milestone in the museum's history as it presents an overview of Scully's life work under one roof for the first time in central Europe, László Baán, the museum's director, told reporters.

Speaking at the scene, Scully said that his wife has Hungarian roots which is why the Budapest exhibition for him is of great importance. He said he was born to a very poor family in Ireland and this has essentially defined his approach as a humanist to art and abstraction. "My project has been to rescue geometric abstraction from minimalists," Scully said.

One of the most outstanding pieces at the exhibition is a new painting entitled Black Square, Dávid Fehér, the Hungarian curator, said. It is coming fresh from Scully's studio to be on public display for the first time, he added.

Beside the paintings, the exhibition also features Scully's works on paper, a sculpture and photographic work, as well as the artist's own writings, notes and sketches, which are presented on the walls and in glass cases.

The exhibition will run until May 2021.