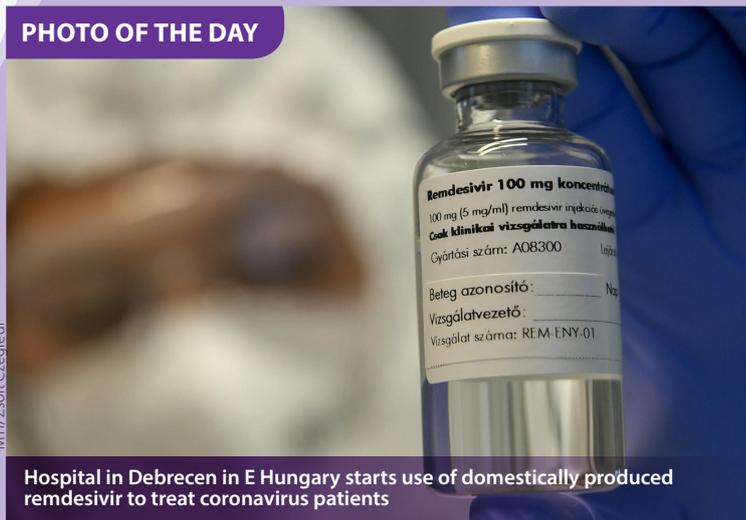


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Hospital in Debrecen in E Hungary starts use of domestically produced remdesivir to treat coronavirus patients

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Closing day of EU summit in Brussels**

**Stats office releases Aug construction figures**

**Coronavirus updates**

**International Swimming League's 2020 season gets under way in Budapest**

## TOP STORY

### FIDESZ MEP QUERIES JOUROVÁ TIES

Tamás Deutsch, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, has sent a letter to European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová, asking her about her ties to Anna Donáth, an MEP of the opposition Momentum movement.

The letter was prompted by a recently published video in which, according to Deutsch, Donáth had said that she was in "constant contact" with Jourová, the Vice-President for Values and Transparency. Deutsch insisted that Jourová and Donáth had regularly discussed matters relating to the rule of law in Hungary. Deutsch noted that after the video "scandal", Jourová told a Czech daily that she had no direct contact with the Hungarian opposition.

In the letter sent in the name of Hungary's group in the European People's Party, Deutsch called Donáth's statements "proof" that Momentum and other Hungarian left-wing parties "consciously mislead and manipulate" European institutions and dignitaries.

Deutsch said the "scandal" raised questions regarding the EC's sources of information in individual member states. He said Jourová's "one-sided and biased" practices were incompatible with EU rules demanding that commissioners work impartially and objectively.

## **FIDESZ MEP URGES STRONGER EC SUPPORT FOR PROTECTION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES**

The European Commission must stand up in support of ethnic communities, Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál said after a European Parliamentary hearing on Minority SafePack, an initiative urging European Union protection for indigenous national minorities in the bloc, on Thursday. Even though indigenous minorities pay taxes and contribute to the economic prosperity of their countries the same as other EU citizens, they are still forced to deal with issues like discrimination in education or the use of their mother tongue, and are often the targets of hate speech, Gál told MTI.

Gál said she believed the EC was still not doing enough to address the issue of national minority rights. "Whereas the commission often argues that these problems fall under national competences, it is not the least bit shy about openly intervening in other matters of national competence," she said.

Gál criticised Věra Jourová, the European commissioner for justice, consumer protection and equal opportunities, for "offering nothing but a hollow video message" on the issue. She called on the EC not to apply double standards in connection with Europe's indigenous national minorities and to draft a minority

protection plan as soon as possible. "It's time the commission took specific measures so that citizens belonging to a national minority have actual equality and protections," the MEP said.

On another subject, Gál said the EU has extended the deadline for collecting signatures in support of a citizens' initiative on protecting national regions until Nov. 7. She expressed hope that the initiative which aims to convince the EC 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 would attract the minimum number of required signatures from at least seven member states.

Hunor Kelemen, head of Romania's ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party, said the protection of minorities had become a full-fledged European value, adding, however that certain communities in the EU "still don't have a right to their own identities". He said this had to change, arguing that rights should not be dependent on "which half of Europe someone was born in".

Anna Donáth of Hungary's opposition Momentum Movement said it was time for the EC to listen to the bloc's citizens and respond to the Minority SafePack initiative by giving minorities a chance to enforce their interests.

The signature drive initiated by RMDSZ and coordinated by FUEN was launched in April 2017. A total of

1,128,385 signatures were certified across the 28 EU member states over the year-long campaign. The EC registered the signatures in January this year.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN COMPANIES TO REHABILITATE LAKE IN PHILIPPINES**

Hungarian companies will undertake a 30-million dollar project aimed at rehabilitating Lake Laguna, the largest lake in the Philippines, including water purification and monitoring water quality, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks in Manila. Hungary will also deliver water purification equipment to all regions of the Philippines contributing to that country's drinking water supplies, the minister said following his talks with Teodoro Locsin, his Philippine counterpart, and Ramon Loopze, the minister of trade and industry.

Szjijártó noted that 400-sqkm Lake Laguna was heavily polluted, and could not be used for tourism or any other purposes. The rehabilitation project, financed from the Hungarian tied-aid programme, is expected to change that situation.

The minister said that the Hungarian government was ready to assist Hungarian companies in other countries, in view of an increasing competition for foreign market positions. He added that Southeast Asia's environmental challenges called for Hungarian technologies

such as those employed in water management. "There is huge demand for Hungarian water management solutions in the Philippines," he said.

Szijjártó said he also promoted Hungarian food products in Manila. "We have a good chance that once the swine and bird flu epidemics are over, Hungarian poultry and pork products can return to the Philippine's dynamically expanding market," he said.

Szijjártó also urged that the European Union should resume free trade talks with the Philippines "lightning fast" and insisted that "the freer it is to export to the Philippines, the better for Hungarian companies". He insisted that Hungary was interested in "making the global economy more open, free and fair".

Hungary and the Philippines are in close cooperation in international organisations aimed at providing protection to persecuted Christian communities worldwide, Szijjártó said. "We now have to make it clear that Christianity has become the most persecuted religion. As a country with a strong Christian culture we consider it as an obligation to fight for those Christian communities," Szijjártó said.

### **TÁLLAI CRITICISES BUDAPEST MAYOR'S 'JUMPSTART' TAX PROPOSAL**

Finance ministry State Secretary András Tállai called a proposal by the mayor of Budapest to levy a "jumpstart" tax on businesses "inept" in an interview

published in Thursday's issue of daily Magyar Nemzet. "The idea is inept and threatens to do extraordinary damage," Tállai told the paper. "Increasing the tax burden or introducing any kind of general tax during a crisis can immediately strip away that small opportunity to remain on one's feet," he added.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said a week earlier that the city is weighing the introduction of a 0.5% "jumpstart" tax on high-turnover businesses until the city recovers from the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. The temporary tax would be paid by businesses whose Local Business Tax base is over 5 billion forints (EUR 13.7m), with the aim of collecting revenue from companies that have not been as hard hit as other branches of the economy, he added.

Tállai acknowledged that levying such a tax is in the scope of the municipal council's power, but said it would run counter to the central government's efforts to provide businesses with tax relief. He recommended the mayor sack his "useless advisors" which could generate savings "in the billions" of forints.

### **CJEU ADVISOR: HUNGARY AD TAX COMPLIES WITH EU RULES**

A top adviser of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) said Hungary's progressive advertising tax does not violate EU rules on state aid. Advocate General Juliane Kokott said

in an opinion that state aid rules do not preclude taxation of turnover of businesses at a progressive rate and proposed the CJEU dismiss an appeal by the European Commission against a ruling by the General Court finding no evidence of selective advantage in the tax regime.

The Hungarian ad tax is paid on net turnover. It is set at zero% for a tax base under 100 million forints (EUR 274,000) and at 5.3% over that threshold.

The EC has argued that the tax grants smaller businesses, which are "taxed at too low a level", an impermissible advantage and thus constitutes state aid.

The advocate general drew the same conclusion for an ad tax in Poland that the EC has also contested. The opinion does not bind the court.

### **ORBÁN: EU SUMMIT TO FOCUS ON PANDEMIC RESPONSE**

The coronavirus pandemic and Europe's response measures are expected to be the focus of the upcoming European Union summit, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in Brussels. EU leaders will discuss how they can best assist each other in their protective measures and mount a coordinated response to the pandemic, the prime minister said in a video message on Facebook. Orbán said that hopefully EU leaders would also "receive some good news" about when a Covid-19 vaccine would be ready, as well as how and when member states would have access to it.

## **FIVE UNIONS FORM ALLIANCE IN PROTEST AGAINST NEW HEALTH-CARE LAW**

Five unions representing Hungary's health-care workers have formed an alliance to advocate their interests against a new law affecting their sector, the unions said in a joint statement. The Alliance for Health said the new legislation affected not only health-care workers but Hungarian society as a whole.

On Oct. 6, lawmakers unanimously approved the government-sponsored law which allows for a major wage hike for doctors and contains provisions criminalising gratuities. The legislation was fast-tracked through parliament days after Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said he had accepted a proposal by the Hungarian Chamber of Doctors (MOK).

The new alliance said that the law "has generated a serious crisis of confidence in the health-care sector", and criticised its drafting without preliminary consultation involving the sectors' representatives. The unions called for talks with the government on drafting a new "more transparent" bill which should be based on broad preliminary public consultations.

The five unions include the Independent Health Trade Union, the Trade Union of Hungarian Doctors, the Trade Union of Hungarian Ambulance Workers and the confederations of Medical Universities' and the Health-care Workers' Trade Unions.

## **HUNGARY OPENS CONSULAR OFFICE IN NOVI SAD**

Hungary opened a consular office in Novi Sad (Újvidék), in northern Serbia, on Thursday. Attorney Arpad Zavarko will oversee the mission as honorary consul. Zavarko, who assumed his post on Oct. 9, will be tasked with working to advance Hungarian-Serbian economic ties. The consular office's jurisdiction extends to the Backa region of northern Vojvodina and the Syrmia region. According to official sources, trade turnover between Hungary and Serbia exceeded 2.6 billion euros in 2019, a 2.9% increase over the previous year.

## **TWENTY-NINE FATALITIES, REGISTERED INFECTIONS UP 950 IN HUNGARY**

Twenty-nine Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 950 to 41,732, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. The number of fatalities stands at 1,052, and 12,628 people have made a recovery. There are 28,052 active infections and 1,555 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 167 on ventilators. Altogether 24,710 people are in official home quarantine and 861,620 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.

The operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response has ordered 9 schools and 188 classes to revert to digital education. Fully 48 kindergartens and 24 schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (13,525), followed by Pest County (5,298) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (2,557), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (2,268), Hajdú-Bihar (1,948) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,943). Tolna County has the fewest infections (390).

## **CORONAVIRUS – ROMANIA LIFTS QUARANTINE REQUIREMENT**

From Thursday on travellers can cross into Romania from Hungary without having to isolate themselves on arrival, according to information from the central body coordinating coronavirus-related measures. Róbert Kiss, a spokesman for the operative body, said that Romania had removed Hungary from the list of high-risk countries.

He also added that traffic at Hungary's border crossings was smooth, with the exception of Csanádpalota, Rösztke, Tompa and Beregsurány, where 2-3 hour waiting times should be expected.

### **FÜRJES: GOVT READY TO TAKE PROJECTS OVER FROM BUDAPEST**

The government is ready to take development projects off the hands of the Budapest council and finance them, but it cannot support "tax hikes and the amassing of municipal debt", Balázs Furjes, Prime Minister's Office state secretary for Budapest developments, told a press conference. Fürjes said the government would send a "constructive proposal" to the capital's development council on Thursday afternoon. "If the city wishes to take up the opportunity, the government will help it avoid debts and tax hikes..." He said that the projects in question should involve those concerning which the city recently applied to the government for funding of 55 billion forints (EUR 150.8m). According to Furjes, the projects would be implemented "solely on basis of jointly prepared plans approved by the city".

### **MAYORS ASK EU FOR DIRECT ACCESS TO COVID RECOVERY FUNDS**

The mayors of more than 50 European localities have petitioned the European Union to commit to

bigger CO2 emissions cuts over the next decade, and to facilitate this aim by providing cities with direct access to Covid-19 recovery funds, a letter released by the Budapest Mayor's Office on Thursday showed. In the letter addressed to the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, the mayors said the bloc should commit to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. Cities that commit to an even deeper cut of 65%, they said, should receive direct funding as part of the EU's Covid-19 recovery strategy. The localities are asking the bloc to help fund the development of public transport networks and green infrastructure, as well as building renovations, with a view to advancing the economic recovery. The EU's recovery plan should also serve to boost emissions cuts, the letter said. Funding should be concentrated in areas where it is most needed in pursuit of a "green and fair" recovery, they added.

### **DK CALLS ON ORBÁN TO SUPPORT EU CLIMATE TARGETS**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán "to support rather than obstruct" European Union climate protection targets. DK MEP Sándor Rónai noted that Orbán

had presented a climate protection action plan earlier this year. "Nothing seems to have happened since." He also said ruling Fidesz's MEPs "failed to support the EU's climate plan" last week. Rónai said climate change would be high on the agenda of an European Council meeting starting on Thursday. "The earliest introduction of measures aimed at halting climate change is in the interest of all Hungarian and European citizens," he added.

### **HUNGARIAN SPAS ASSOCIATION: SPAS IN CRISIS**

Hungary's spas are in the midst of a crisis caused by low attendance resulting from the novel coronavirus epidemic, with drop in revenues of at least 50% experienced so far this year, the head of the Hungarian Spas Association said on Thursday, adding that nearly 5,000 lay-offs are likely by March 2021. Over 76% of Hungarian spas won't survive the crisis by the spring of next year from their own resources, having used all their reserves during the first wave of the epidemic, Attila László said. A fresh survey shows that spas will lay off 26.3% of staff, or 4,700 people, between October 2019 and March 2021, he added.

Three-quarters of the spas have been forced to employ people part-time instead of full-time, he said. The association wants the government to establish a 35 billion forint (EUR 98m)

non-fundable liquidity fund for the sector to partially compensate for lost revenues and to preserve jobs, he added.

### **CLINICAL TESTS OF HUNGARIAN-DEVELOPED MUSCLE RELAXANT COULD START NEXT YEAR**

Clinical tests of a muscle relaxant that could bring relief to patients suffering from spastic limbs after a stroke could start early next year, the Hungarian research team involved in the project told MTI. An article on the muscle relaxant MPH-220, developed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) and a team of researchers at the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, has been published in the latest issue of the journal Cell. MPH-220 effectively reduces muscle spasms common after nervous system injuries such as stroke without side effects, the group said.

About 60 million people suffer from such muscle spasms around the world. Managing the condition is estimated to cost more than 500 billion dollars.

### **PRICES FOR NEW BUILDS IN CAPITAL UP 6.5% IN Q3**

The average price per square metre of a new builds in the capital rose by an annual 6.5% to 1,045,000, real

estate broker Otthon Centrum said. New homes in the 5th district, in downtown Pest, as well as in the leafy 1st, 2nd and 12th districts of Buda, were listed for over 1.5 million per square metre, while new homes in the outlying districts of Pest were priced at 680,000-850,000 per square metre. Otthon Centrum said construction of some 34,000 homes is under way in Budapest, though 38% of those still haven't been put on the market.

### **WORLD'S BEST SWIMMERS IN BUDAPEST FOR ISL**

Over 300 swimmers from nearly 50 countries will participate in the second season of the International Swimming League (ISL) starting in Budapest on Friday. The finals were originally to be held in Tokyo on November 21-22 but the organisers decided to hold the entire season at the Duna Arena in Budapest. Because of the novel coronavirus epidemic, competitions will be held without spectators and all international swimmers travelling to Hungary will have to stay in "bubbles", similarly to the NHL and NBA in the US. In addition to the titleholder team Energy Standard, other teams competing will include Cali Condors, London Roar, NY Breakers, Tokyo Frog Kings, Toronto Titans, Aqua Centurions, LA Currents, DC Tridents, and Iron.

### **HUNDREDS OF GYPSY MUSICIANS GET GOVT SUPPORT**

Fully 456 musicians from 97 Gypsy bands are this year receiving support as part of the government's Music Hungary programme, which is aimed at reviving the traditions of Hungarian restaurant Gypsy music, the House of Traditions organisation said on Thursday. The National Tourism Development Strategy will take into consideration the views of Gypsy musicians, the deputy head of the Hungarian Tourism Agency told a press conference after an event in which student Gypsy musicians received exam certificates.

### **SIXTY HUNGARIAN ACTRESSES RE-ENACT PSYCHO SHOWER SCENE**

Sixty Hungarian actresses have symbolically re-enacted and filmed the shower scene of Psycho in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Alfred Hitchcock's eponymous film. The 3 minute Psycho60 short by director Zoltán Végh Vozo features different actress in every cut. The set was built in Budapest's Örkény Theatre, and the director made sure that every aspect of the set, from the knife to the shower head and curtain, was a faithful reproduction of the original.

The film can be seen on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/s3zU6VPZFUM>.