

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV Zoltán Balogh

The renovated Bulgarian Orthodox Sts Cyril and Methodius Church in Budapest on Hungary-Bulgaria Friendship Day

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monetary council holds rate-setting meeting

Plenary session of parliament

Foreign affairs and trade minister announces tile maker Zalakerámia's investment

Coronavirus updates

Foreign affairs and trade minister presents govt subsidy agreement

TOP STORY

ÁDER: COOPERATION AGAINST WATER POLLUTION KEY

Hungarian President János Áder, in a videoconference of the leaders of central and eastern European countries, called for greater cooperation among the region's countries to prevent water pollution.

Addressing a virtual summit of the Three Seas Initiative organised by Estonia, the president said the region should devote at least as much attention to preserving the quality of its waters as it does to the development of its man-made infrastructure. The 13 countries making up the Three Seas Initiative are linked by several rivers, Áder noted, underlining the problems caused by cross-border pollution. Whether it be industrial, agricultural or solid waste pollutants that are damaging the region's waters, there can be no quality water supply without clean water, Áder said. The president noted the new patches of plastic waste originating from Ukraine and Romania that were found floating on the river Tisza last week. The goal should not be pollution but rather cooperation to prevent pollution, Áder said. The Three Seas Initiative, a strategic partnership of 13 central and eastern European countries, aims to promote joint infrastructure development in the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea regions.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: BULGARIAN MINORITY 'VALUED AND IMPORTANT'

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó praised the Bulgarian ethnic minority as "important and valued members of Hungarian society", after a meeting with his Bulgarian counterpart Ekaterina Zakharieva. Marking the day of Hungarian-Bulgarian friendship, Szijjártó told a joint press conference that Zakharieva was "an ally and a friend". Hungary's Bulgarian minority has parliamentary representation, and their government funding has grown four-fold over the past decade, he said. Hungary and Bulgaria are linked in many ways, Szijjártó said, noting that Hungarian OTP Bank was the "strongest player on the Bulgarian banking market" and Hungarian discount airline Wizz Air was planning new bases there. Hungary is supporting bilateral commercial cooperation with a 180 million euro credit line, he added.

Regarding cooperation in energy issues, Szijjártó said the TurkStream pipeline, delivering natural gas from Russia via Turkey and Bulgaria, is expected to start operation in 2021. In order to diversify the country's energy resources, Hungary will cooperate with Bulgaria to buy liquefied natural gas from Greece, he said.

Szijjártó said that both countries were committed to the enlargement of the European Union in the Western

Balkans, and saw protection of the bloc's external borders as key to a successful migration policy. He said that Hungary and Bulgaria also had similar views on the debate on the rule of law, adding that Hungary saw the procedure as a "hypocritical blackmailing mechanism". Szijjártó insisted that rule of law procedures had nothing to do with facts but were "the revenge of mainstream liberal politics" against member states prioritising national interests. Hungary is "entitled" to EU funding, Szijjártó said. "That funding is no humanitarian aid but the proceeds of joint European economic performance," he said.

Zakharieva thanked Hungary for the "aid and kindness" the government has extended to Bulgarians to preserve their language and culture, and noted that Bulgarians have been resident in Hungary since the 19th century. Regarding energy diversification, Zakharieva said gas would be cheaper if it were available from multiple sources. On the topic of the migration pact, Zakharieva said "it should not be rushed into". Bulgaria is assigning national experts to review, interpret and comment on the document, she said. Nation states cannot accept regulations putting all responsibilities on their shoulders, Zakharieva said. The ministers signed a declaration of intent on development cooperation, and a document marking the centenary of diplomatic ties between Bulgaria and Hungary.

PARLIAMENT APPROVES NEW TOP COURT PRESIDENT

Lawmakers approved the appointment of Zolt András Varga as the new president of the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court. Varga was elected with 135 votes in favour and 26 against in a secret ballot. Varga, who took his oath of office after the vote, will assume his post on January 2, 2021.

Speaking to MTI after the vote, Varga said he viewed his nomination and election to head the supreme court as an expression of trust in him by Hungary. He vowed to do his best to live up to the trust placed in him as a member of the community of the Kúria's judges. Varga said he would spend the next two and a half months getting to know the opinions of the court's judges on the future of the institution while sharing his own views.

Under Hungary's constitution, the president of the Kúria is elected for a nine-year term by a two-thirds majority of lawmakers. President János Áder nominated Varga to succeed Péter Darák as the head of the top court on Oct. 5. Varga graduated from the Faculty of Law at Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University in 1995 before going on to obtain a PhD degree there. He was habilitated at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University. Varga has worked as a university professor since 2012. He worked at several prosecutor's offices in Budapest before joining the Parliamentary Commissioner's

Office. He later became a member of the Venice Commission and served as a constitutional judge from 2014. Between 2017 and 2019 he was vice-chair of the Venice Commission's subcommittee for international law, and later the subcommittee for constitutional law. Varga is also a member of the public body of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

**OPPOSITION PARTIES
REJECT PRESIDENTIAL
NOMINEE FOR TOP COURT
HEAD**

Speaking ahead of parliament's vote on the new head of the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, the leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) said it would boycott the vote, while green LMP had said it would reject the appointment of Zsolt András Varga, nominated by President János Áder earlier this month. DK lawmaker László Sebián-Petrovszki said Varga had "never been a judge and not passed a single sentence". Sebián-Petrovszki also noted that Varga had been the chief public prosecutor's deputy for nearly ten years and in this capacity he had "assisted in scandalous cases" during the Fidesz governments. The deputy said that "Fidesz's attempt to make a prosecutor chief judge" was unprecedented in Europe, and insisted that it would be a "profanation" of the principle of the separation of government branches. DK will appeal against the procedure to the European Commission and other forums, Sebián-Petrovszki said. In a statement, LMP

group leader Lóránt László Keresztes also cited Varga's lack of experience. He noted that the National Judiciary Council had also rejected to endorse the nomination. Koloman Brenner, Deputy House Speaker for the conservative opposition Jobbik party, called the nomination a "disgrace", adding that Varga had been "the right hand" of Chief Public Prosecutor Péter Polt and had so far worked in a "dictatorial system based on following orders". Speaking at a press conference in front of Parliament, Brenner called the nomination "another level of undermining the judiciary, thereby dismantling Hungarian democracy".

The mandate of Péter Darák, the incumbent head of the Kúria, will expire on January 1, 2021.

**FINANCE MINISTER
ATTENDS AMCHAM
BUSINESS FORUM**

The United States is the biggest non-European investor in Hungary and also its biggest non-European export partner, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said after attending a business forum of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hungary. About 1,700 US companies employ around 106,000 people in the country and 14 of the Hungarian government's strategic partners are US-owned, the minister said. Bilateral trade grew by 2.3% to 5.8 billion dollars in 2019, he added. Early this month, the US-Hungary Business Council was informed about ongoing talks on investment projects that US companies

are planning to implement in Hungary, Varga noted. Figures from the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) show the total value of US investments came to 11.6 billion euros. Varga said the government agreed on 101 large investments with foreign and Hungarian companies in 2019, with a combined value of 1,705 billion forints (EUR 4.7bn), or 4% of the country's GDP last year. The government supported these investments with grants worth 156 billion forints. Hungary continues to have an excellent investment ratio, at 27.6% in the second quarter of 2020, Varga said.

**NOVÁK: GOVT TO MAKE
HOME PURCHASE SUBSIDY
TAX-EXEMPT**

Both new and second-hand properties purchased through the government's home buying subsidy scheme CSOK will be fully exempted from the asset acquisition tax from January on, Katalin Novák said. Novák, the minister without portfolio in charge of family affairs, said that a family buying a property for 50 million forints could save 2 million forints (EUR 5,470) through the exemption, adding that their savings would add up to 15.5 million forints considering the government's recent move to scrap the VAT on such purchases. Novák noted that single parents were eligible for the scheme, too, adding that they would thus benefit from the new scheme. She also said that the scheme did not have a cap, and the government would provide as much funding as needed.

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THIRTY-ONE FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 1,478 IN HUNGARY

Fully 31 Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 1,478 to 47,768, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. The number of fatalities stands at 1,173, and 14,312 people have made a recovery. There are 32,283 active infections and 1,896 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 179 on ventilators. Altogether 24,929 people are in official home quarantine and 904,036 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 restaurants, pubs 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 (14,622), followed by Pest County (6,103) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron

(2,961), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (2,711), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (2,340) and Hajdú-Bihar (2,312). Tolna County has the fewest infections (492).

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: HUNGARY INFECTION RATE EUROPEAN AVERAGE

According to the World Health Organisation, Hungary's coronavirus infection rates are close to the European Union average, Hungary's chief medical officer said. Among European Union member states, Hungary is tenth regarding the number of infections in one million people, and 14th regarding the number of deaths, Cecilia Müller said. She added that the number of infections is growing worldwide, including Hungary.

HUNGARIANS ALLOWED TO TRAVEL TO AUSTRIA WITH NO RESTRICTIONS

Hungarians can now cross into Austria without any coronavirus-related restrictions as Austria has "changed Hungary's safety risk assessment to positive", a spokesman for the central body coordinating efforts against the epidemic said. Róbert Kiss noted that Austria treated European citizens and nationals of third countries equally, with regard to the epidemic, based on its own risk assessment. People from countries considered high-risk by the Austrian authorities are only allowed to enter if they present a negative PCR test, he said. Austria's restrictions do not affect earlier rules of international transit, Kiss added.

OFFICIAL MARKS HUNGARY-BULGARIA FRIENDSHIP DAY

The ethnic Bulgarian community is small but its survival is important to Hungary, the state secretary for church and minority relations said at an event marking Hungary-Bulgaria friendship day. Miklós Soltész opened the revamped Bulgarian orthodox church named after Saints Cyril and Methodius in Budapest and inaugurated a statue of Metropolitan Boris of Nevrokop, a martyr of communism. Soltész said the friendship between the two countries was rooted in their similar histories. Both countries suffered from Muslim attacks for centuries in the past, as well as from Communist dictatorships in the 20th century. State Secretary Tamás Menczer told the event that the friendship between the two countries meant that they could rely on each other, adding that they had similar positions on such major European issues as the importance of religion and culture.

CHERVON GROUP TO SET UP HUF 17.5 BN CAR PARTS PLANT IN HUNGARY

Chinese-owned Chervon Group will set up a 17.5 billion-forint car parts plant in Miskolc, in north-east Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. The government is

supporting the investment, which will create 138 jobs, with a 5.3 billion-forint grant, Szijjártó said. The plant will turn out 2 million parts a year, for combustion engine and electric vehicles. Szijjártó said that the Chinese investment indicated that Hungary continued to be an attractive investment destination, adding that projects launched in recent weeks would contribute to "helping Hungary to a winning position in a new chapter of the global economy". Szijjártó said that currently some 700 companies were involved in the car making sector which had a history of 120 years in Hungary. A "stronghold of European car making", Hungary produced 550,000 cars and over 2 million engines last year, 90% of which have been exported, the minister said. Szijjártó also said that in view of the coronavirus epidemic any investment was "worth gold" because they helped save jobs and helped the national economy to new technologies.

SANOFI OPENS GLOBAL COMPETENCE CENTRE IN BUDAPEST

French pharmaceutical company Sanofi has inaugurated its global competence centre in Budapest. The ceremony was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó. The centre will employ 350 people, providing financial, accounting, HR and payroll services in seven languages, he said. Sanofi now has five sites in Hungary and employs more than 2,000 people in the country, he added. Szijjártó said that thanks to low taxes, a good investment environment and political stability, Hungary was at the forefront of the global competition for investments. Currently 120 business service centres operate in Hungary, employing over 55,000 people, mostly multilingual degree-holders, he said. A total of 14 companies set up service centres in the country in the past 12 months and talks are currently under way with eight large companies about setting up their service centres, he added.

EUR 4.3 M WORTH OF COUNTERFEIT CLOTHING SEIZED FROM TURKISH LORRY ON M43

Officials of Hungary's National Tax and Customs Authority (NAV) have seized fake branded clothing with a market value of more than 1.5 billion forints (EUR 4.3m) from a lorry with Turkish licence plates on the M43 motorway in southern Hungary, NAV has said. Upon inspecting the truck, excise officers found more than ten thousand items of branded clothes and accessories, said a spokesperson. The driver could not prove the origin of the shipment and based on a preliminary expert opinion, all the clothes and accessories were fake.

The excise officers seized the shipment and submitted a report to NAV finance inspectors for violation of trademark laws.