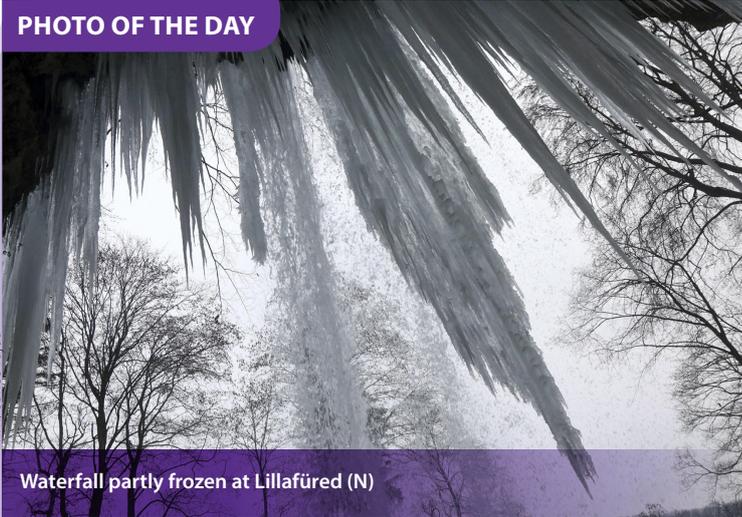


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/János Vajda

Waterfall partly frozen at Lillafüred (N)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Coronavirus updates**

**WWI centenary closing event**

**Model tram-train launched**

## TOP STORY

# MEMORIAL DAY OF ETHNIC GERMANS DEPORTED FROM HUNGARY MARKED

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Imre Ritter, an ethnic German lawmaker, laid a wreath before a plaque at Budaörs railway station, near Budapest, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Hungary.

On January 19, 2013, parliament declared this day an official state day of remembrance of the deportation and expulsion of ethnic Germans, which began on January 19, 1946. The first train left from Budaörs.

The anniversary was marked by the national self-government of Germans in Hungary in an online event. Chairwoman Ibolya Hock Englender said on Facebook that the commemorative event which is normally held annually in Bonyhád, a city in southern Hungary with a large ethnic German population, has been moved online as a result of the coronavirus epidemic. She said the first cattle cars deporting ethnic Germans from Hungary left on January 19, 1946, transporting “humiliated, dispossessed people robbed of their homes to the unknown”. Further trains of ethnic Germans followed, even when tens of thousands had already been taken to the Soviet Union for forced labour starting from 1944, she added. Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, said on Facebook that the deportation of Swabians had caused Hungary an “irreparable loss”.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ URGES PERMANENT OSCE PRESENCE IN TRANSCARPATHIA**

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has urged that the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe special Ukraine mission should set up a permanent presence in Transcarpathia, where ethnic Hungarians are often become physically threatened and “supporting indigenous minorities is not a priority for the European Commission”.

After talks with Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE’s new high commissioner for minorities, Szijjártó said that “Brussels has slammed the door” on ethnic minorities. “The European Commission has made it clear that supporting illegal migrants is much more important than promoting the cause of indigenous ethnic minorities in Europe,” Szijjártó said, in wake of the commission’s announcement that there would be no legal consequences of the Minority SafePack civil initiative.

“This is a disgrace; an unacceptable decision by the EC, therefore for us, Hungarians, it is important to call the attention of other international organisations and ask for help in cases when the rights of ethnic Hungarian communities are violated,” Szijjártó said.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR ‘MUTUAL RESPECT’ WITH NETHERLANDS**

Cooperation between the Netherlands and Hungary “would be much better were it based on mutual respect” and “if the Dutch were not so obsessed with Hungary’s domestic affairs”, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told MTI after talks with Stef Blok, his Dutch counterpart, in the Hague.

From an economic point of view, bilateral relations are “harmonic”, with the Netherlands being Hungary’s seventh largest trade partner and tenth largest investor, Szijjártó said, noting that seven Dutch companies had received grants from the Hungarian government during the pandemic to complete projects worth a combined 3.5 billion forints (EUR 9.7m) and save over 1,500 jobs.

“At the same time we are subject to continual political attacks by the Netherlands, which we regret,” Szijjártó said. “We never meant to interfere with Dutch internal politics. We could now rejoice that the Dutch government was forced to resign... but it is none of our business,” he added.

“I do hope that our excellent economic and trade ties will in time positively impact political relations, too,” Szijjártó said.

## **JUSTICE MINISTER ADDRESSES ‘PROBLEMATIC’ TECH PRACTICES WITH COMPETITION AUTHORITY HEAD**

Judit Varga, the justice minister, met Csaba Rigó, the head of Hungary’s competition authority, to discuss “problematic commercial practices” of international tech companies.

“Experiences from the previous period have shown on several occasions that the behaviour of such giant companies are not simply violating the freedom of expression but the full prevail of consumers’ rights and fair competition too,” Varga said on Facebook.

She said that with the involvement of the competition authority transparent and safe market operations should be ensured and “digital damage” prevented through all available means.

The minister called for equal conditions of competition to be maintained, consumers’ rights to be protected and unethical market behaviour to be sanctioned in the online space, “just like in real life”.

## **NEW FIDESZ MEP TO ‘ADVANCE DIALOGUE BETWEEN FIDESZ, EPP’**

Erő Schaller-Baross, the ruling party’s recently appointed MEP, said he would work to advance dialogue

between Fidesz and its party family, the European People's Party (EPP), in the European Parliament. Fidesz's EPP membership was suspended in March 2019. Schaller-Baross said in an interview with the daily Magyar Nemzet that Fidesz retained the strongest voter support within the party family and that in 2019 its election results had been the best from among all the EPP parties. "The EPP needs down-to-earth, conservative, Christian democratic voices; it needs Fidesz-KDNP. As an MEP, I will be one of those representing that approach," Schaller-Baross, who was appointed to replace József Szájer, said.

### **OPPOSITION ACCUSES GOVT OF WAGING POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TO 'PUNISH' LOCAL COUNCILS**

Six opposition parties published a joint statement, accusing the government of pursuing a political campaign aimed at "punishing local councils" run by the opposition, especially the administration of Budapest. DK, Jobbik, LMP, Momentum, the Socialists and Párbeszéd accused the Orbán government of curbing the powers of local governments in an "unprincipled and senseless" way, thereby hurting several million Hungarians. The statement said it was the "duty" of local governments to inform citizens that at least 100 billion forints (EUR 280m) was being taken away from them in an "arbitrary and politically motivated" way. It added

that the Orbán government was the only central administration in Europe that was "robbing local councils of their last remaining income" instead of supporting them at the time of the coronavirus epidemic and the current crisis. The opposition parties insisted that the government was ploughing hundreds of billions of forints of public money into private foundations and "funding their own power and economic interests". The parties said "after a change of government in 2022, the democratic opposition alliance will restore local government, the autonomy of towns and villages, and will ensure financing goes to local governments free of political considerations".

### **FIDESZ: CHAIN BRIDGE REVAMP TO COST HUF 5 BN MORE THAN PREVIOUS LEADERSHIP'S PLAN**

Construction company A-Híd's renovation of Budapest's landmark Chain Bridge will cost 5 billion forints more than it would have done under Budapest's previous leadership, the Fidesz-delegated member in the city's transport centre BKK said on Tuesday. "Miraculously, Deputy Mayor Kata Tüttő's favourite company, A-Híd, will renovate the Chain Bridge," Fidesz's Budapest group said on Facebook, quoting Zsolt Wintermantel, who also noted he voted against the revamp on the basis of the unjustifiable extra cost. Wintermantel said A-Híd would be paid 25% more for the same work,

arguing that there was "no excuse, including inflation or Covid" to justify paying 5 billion forints more than what previous Mayor István Tarlós would have paid.

BKK said on Monday that A-Híd had won the tender to renovate Chain Bridge with an offer of a net 18.8 billion forints. The renovation of the bridge will cost a total of 26.75 billion forints, the company added. In addition to the net fee, the gross fee includes the mandatory 10% reserve limit, the technical inspector's fee and other costs required by the regulations as well as the VAT. BKK said the contract is expected to be signed at the end of January at the earliest. Accordingly, the renovation work is expected to begin at the end of February and completed by autumn 2023, they added.

### **SOCIALISTS SAY OPPOSITION SHOULD ESTABLISH NEW DRAMA, FILM UNIVERSITY IF IT ASSUMES POWER**

By placing universities up and down the country under private foundations, the government aims to cement its power by stuffing the governing bodies with its own people, an opposition Socialist official said. István Hiller, the party's deputy leader, told an online press conference that the opposition, if it were to win the next general election in 2022, should establish a new drama and film university run by the state, given that the Fidesz government has put the

current institution in private hands. The government, he noted, plans to transfer universities with a total of 70,000 students in Debrecen, Szeged and Pécs to foundations. Further, assets of hundreds of billions of forints would be transferred from state ownership to private foundations whose boards are set up by the government, Hiller said, adding that the move would basically terminate state-run higher education outside of Budapest.

Hiller, a former education minister, said there was every reason to expect that student numbers would be slashed after the transformation because this had been the government's intention for a decade.

To claim that the transfer of universities to foundations improved their quality was unsubstantiated, he added. Also, he said the tuition fee for English-language education in Corvinus University would cost 760,000 forints per semester after September instead of the current 390,000 forints.

Commenting on institutional autonomy, he said the freedom of higher education depended mainly on whether the politicians that ran the country would opt to keep this centuries-long tradition.

He also cited the example of recent changes at the drama and film university SZFE, which he said demonstrated everything that the Socialists opposed in higher education. He added that he had proposed to other opposition

parties that after a change of government, a new, modern and state-owned university should be set up that serves the interests of Hungarian drama and film arts and guarantees its freedom and financing independent of politics. He promised that the credits collected by SZFE students would be accepted at the new institution.

SZFE's previous senate and leadership announced their resignation on Aug. 31 last year, saying the foundation that took over the university on Sept. 1 under a government decree had deprived them of "all essential powers".

**111 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, 573 MORE INFECTIONS**

Fully 111 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 573 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 353,276, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said. The death toll has risen to 11,520, while 231,915 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections stands at 109,841, while there are 4,445 hospitalised Covid patients, 309 on a ventilator. Altogether 18,523 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,968,743. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (65,993) and Pest County (43,966) so far, followed by the counties of Hajdú-Bihar (20,056),

Győr-Moson-Sopron (19,988) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (19,744). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (7,550).

**HUNGARIAN RESEARCH FINDS CLEAR CORRELATION BETWEEN LOCKDOWN, FALLING DEATH RATE**

Hungarian scientists analysing publicly available iPhone data to gauge the effects of lockdowns have found a clear correlation between their severity and speed and the decline in the death rate. Hungarian researchers of the Eötvös Lóránd University, the Eötvös Research Network's Ecological Research Centre (ELKH ÖK) and Australian researchers examined publicly available mobility data during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden. The study published in the Jan. 18 edition of Nature Magazine's online Scientific Reports found the Covid death rate was linked to how swiftly lockdowns were ordered and the extent to which people observed them. Generally, mobility fell sharply when lockdowns were introduced before levelling off, though there were differences between the lockdown practices of various countries, the study's co-author István Scheuring said in a statement. The severity of the lockdown, which correlates

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closely with the mobility data, was a key indicator of the number of deaths during the first wave, Scheuring said. He said the differences were clearest between draconian lockdowns in countries such as Spain and Italy and countries that took a lighter approach such as Sweden. "The success of lockdowns depended on three factors: the speed with which the epidemic spread before lockdown, the speed with which restrictions were implemented and their severity. All that is easy to monitor through phone mobility data, a source of information when we want to research the effectiveness of similar measures in the future," he said. The more people's mobility fell in lockdown, the faster the death rate started to fall too, he said. Similarly, the more people complied with the restrictions, the sooner the pandemic peaked, he said.

### **NOVÁK: HUNGARIAN 'ONE OF MOST PRO-FAMILY NATIONS'**

"Hungarians are one of the most pro-family nations", Katalin Novak, minister without portfolio in charge of family affairs, told an online conference on Tuesday. Novák added, however, that "the majority of Europeans also consider the family as an important asset".

Referring to a survey by Hungary's Kopp Mária Institute and the Századvég Foundation, Novák said that respondents in each European country

said they preferred family support measures rather than mass migration in terms of resolving demographic issues.

The Hungarian government takes those demands into consideration and is working to ensure that "people find having a family and raising children a good thing", she insisted. The government's policies have for the past decade focused on the family, she said, and argued that the government had provided constitutional protection to the family and passed legislation to support pro-family measures. The government has also changed taxation to help families and provides assistance to home-buyers, she added.

### **SLOVAK MILITARY PLANE CRASH REMEMBERED ON 15TH ANNIVERSARY**

The victims of a Slovak military plane crash in the Zemplén Hills near Hejce, in northern Hungary, were remembered on the 15th anniversary of the disaster, on Tuesday.

The AN 24 aircraft of the Slovak Air Force with 43 soldiers on board was returning home from a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo on January 19, 2006, when it crashed. The only surviving soldier, Martin Farkas, was present at this year's commemoration.

At the site, Hungarian Defence Minister Tibor Benkő, Hungarian army chief Ferenc Korom and Daniel Zneko, his Slovak counterpart, paid tribute to the victims.

### **SUPPLY CHAIN PRESSURE AFFECTS AUDI, DAIMLER PLANTS IN HUNGARY - PAPER**

A global parts shortage is affecting the Hungarian plants of German car makers Audi and Daimler, business daily Világ gazdaság said. Mercedes-Benz Manufacturing Hungary told the paper that Daimler's plant in Kecskemét, central Hungary, would shut down on January 20-30 as the production programme is adjusted to the current supplier situation. Audi Hungária communications director Mónika Czechmeister said the Audi plant in Győr, northwest Hungary, would operate with just a single shift this week and next week because of a parts shortage. She added that temporary shift reductions could affect all of the group's plants, but Audi parent Volkswagen is working hard to resolve the issue as soon as possible. Production at Japanese car maker Suzuki's plant in Hungary has not been affected by the global parts shortage for the time being, Magyar Suzuki told the paper. Világ gazdaság said some chip makers switched over to making parts for entertainment electronics in the spring as automotive industry orders fell because of pandemic shutdowns. This caused a shortage of car electronics after vehicle makers ramped up production.

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## **POOR AIR QUALITY PLAGUES NE HUNGARIAN CITIES**

Air quality has deteriorated in Hungary, mainly in north-eastern Hungarian cities, due to a high concentration of airborne particulates, the National Public Health Centre (NNK) said. The authority declared air quality to be “dangerous” in Putnok, in north-eastern Hungary.

Air quality has deteriorated to unhealthy levels in Ajka, Kazincbarcika, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Sajószentpéter and Salgótarján. Concentrations of particulates are also considered to be too high in other cities and towns nationwide, including in Debrecen, Szolnok, Székesfehérvár, Várpalota and Pécs,

the authority said. Vulnerable groups such as children, people suffering from a chronic illness and the elderly are the particular targets of the warning.

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## **GOVT OFFICE CENSURES LGBTQ NGO FOR MISLEADING CUSTOMERS OF FAIRYTALE BOOK**

A central government agency has censured minority rights NGO Labrisz for failing to alert customers to the nature of a book containing fairytales retold to reflect the lives of sexual and ethnic minorities. The central government office of Budapest argued that the NGO had engaged in “unfair market practices” by failing to alert readers to “alternative gender roles” in the book that sparked

controversy when it was published in the autumn.

Leaders of the Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party shredded a copy, insisting the book was “an attack on the soul and healthy development of young children”.

The central government office of Budapest conducted a review of the matter in response to a “report in the public interest”, and concluded that the Labrisz had published the book “with a title and cover suggestive of a book of fairytales without signalling that the stories contained non-traditional gender roles.” Customers bought the book on the basis of “misleading information”, the government office said. The office has instructed Labrisz to “always provide full information on merchandise pertaining to its activities.”