

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zoltán Mátyás

Hungarian state railway company MÁV launches green campaign in Budapest's Keleti Station

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Tax and customs office assesses 2020

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: UNITY KEY TO V4'S SUCCESS

If the Visegrad Group wants to remain successful over the next 30 years, sticking together will be the secret to the group's success, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after a meeting with his V4 counterparts in Krakow.

The prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia met European Council President Charles Michel on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group. In response to a question from Hungarian public media, Orbán told a joint press conference with his V4 counterparts that loyalty and solidarity would be the key to the central European group's ability to continue fulfilling its duty in the future. Orbán said he believed Slovakia had a strategic role in the alliance, not just because of its geographical position, but also because it is Hungary's only V4 neighbour. Slovakia is the country that links the northern and southern parts of central Europe, he said. Orbán emphasised the importance of preserving the unity among the four countries.

Though the Visegrad Group may be marking 30 years of cooperation, he said, they were looking back hundreds of years to the first form of cooperation between the leaders of the central European countries. Orbán said it was this historical perspective that made the Visegrad cooperation as serious as it was.

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ORBÁN: COVID VACCINE ISSUE SHOULD BE DEPOLITICISED

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, at a joint press conference with his Visegrad Group counterparts in Krakow, said Hungary’s priority regarding coronavirus vaccines was to procure enough safe and effective jabs as quickly as possible, adding that procuring the vaccines quickly was more important than their cost. He said the issue should be depoliticised, arguing that although there were “geopolitical disagreements and differences in history and taste” these should not be expressed through a debate on vaccines. “There’s only one kind of vaccine: the kind which cures people quickly and effectively and to politicise this issue when people’s lives are at stake is irresponsible,” Orbán said.

Concerning the V4’s history, Orbán noted that he had been a member of the parliament that approved the Visegrad cooperation 30 years ago. “Though there were serious problems to be dealt with at the time,” parliament had the time and strength to have one of its first votes be on strengthening central European cooperation, the prime minister added.

Orbán emphasised that central Europe was the fastest growing region of the European economy. He also said the central European countries were aware that there were countries significantly more powerful than them,

but they also wanted to be competitive against those states. “And this is only possible if we get one step ahead of them,” he said. Therefore, Orbán said, he and his V4 colleagues had also touched on the matter of restarting their economies, adding that it was also important for them to share with each other their experiences with their political and economic measures.

Reopening the economy requires close consultations, as it is not automatic, but requires serious work on the government’s part, Orbán said. He said the V4 were lucky to have two former finance ministers among the four prime ministers, whose experiences he said could be helpful when determining how to best go about rebooting the economy.

Orbán said he was grateful to European Council President Charles Michel for his participation in the V4 summit and his openness to and understanding of their positions. The cooperation among the Benelux states has always inspired the V4, he added.

ORBÁN: CENTRAL EUROPE TO SHAPE EUROPE FUTURE

The Visegrad Group countries have a responsibility to protect Europe from external attacks and internal imperial ambitions in the interest of the continent’s future, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said. In an article in the Wednesday issue of daily Magyar Nemzet, Orbán said central European countries would work to preserve “the independence of our homelands and

nations”. Over the course of its history, central Europe had not just a role to play but also a duty to fulfil, “but this fact had been obscured to us by the Soviet invasion of the region until 1990”, the prime minister wrote in the article marking the 30th anniversary of the V4.

“The fight to rid ourselves of our communists narrowed our perspective and exhausted our strengths,” Orbán said. Central Europeans, he added, had fought hard to make sure that the region’s communist forces were “as far away from governing as possible, left as textbook examples of historic crimes and for our grandchildren to learn what happens when one tries to shape the future without national ideals and adhering to Christian teachings”. “After the defeat of communism and the liberation of our countries ... our hearts told us as early as 1991 that our countries, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had to unite in some way,” he said. “We knew that centuries come and go, but the central European peoples would share a common fate.”

“And indeed, with 30 years gone by, we can say that we are members of NATO and the fastest-growing region of the European Union,” Orbán said. “Strong growth, low unemployment, a rapid digital transformation and robust investments. That’s who we are today.” The prime minister said the debates within the EU on the issues of migration, the demographic situation, the role of families and the conflict between national culture

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and multiculturalism once again called attention to the historical duty of central Europe. "Hungarians view central Europe as the territory between the lands of the Germans and the Russians," Orbán said, adding that the V4 were "undoubtedly the core territory of central Europe". "We Hungarians have always thought that we don't just come into the world. If you are born Hungarian, you also have a mission. This mission is greater than you, with a European horizon and significance," the prime minister said.

"In the territory between the German and Russian worlds where Latin Christianity borders Orthodox Christianity, which has seen the rise of many languages and national cultures, there exists a unique shared cultural quality, an outlook on life, a way of thinking and a unique posture," Orbán said. "This is proven by hundreds of Polish, Slovak, Czech and Hungarian poetry collections, novels and films. Our duty is to preserve this," he added. "Our Europe was created by the peoples that attacked the Roman Empire independent of each other at various points in history," Orbán noted. While preserving their own cultures, these peoples adopted Latin Christianity, he said. "History's hammer forged these alloys ... giving birth not only to nation states but national cultures, too."

"An ideal was born: an ordinance of what Europe should be like," Orbán said, referring to independent EU member states "spiritually united,

with common cultural foundations", but diverse at the same time. Undermining unity would be un-European, he said. "But a bad European would seek to eradicate diversity," he added. Central Europeans, the prime minister said, understood that harmony did not mean uniformity or unanimity but harnessing the tension of opposites. "This is at the root of the Hungarian people and other central European peoples that sought their independence." Orbán said European balance and stability over the centuries rested on preserving the spirit of nations and coming together in order to protect Christian European culture against attacks from outside Europe. "This is what defending Europe is about; and the French President is making a stretch to seek to introduce the idea of a European sovereignty emanating from Brussels," the prime minister said.

He said that when the V4 countries joined the EU, "the old members of the club at first regarded the idea of homeland, Christianity, family and sovereignty as cultural and historical folklore ... as a kind of fleeting phenomenon that, like chickenpox, would soon go away." But once the migration crisis hit, "opening eyes, sharpening differences and shedding light on the deep divides in insights, philosophies [and] principles for organising society... it was then that we Hungarians understood that the speeches and writings on the post-Christian, post-nation era spoke to a real political intent ... [and] while

during communism we longed for a Christian and sovereign way of life in Sovietized Europe, those living in the Americanised half of Europe redefined the essence of Europe and worked consistently to implement their programme," he wrote.

"Their new European mission is to advocate policies aimed at ensuring full openness without borders (or at least only temporarily and treated as bad but unavoidable), gender roles and family models that can be changed as desired, and obligations to preserve the cultural heritage considered more like a task for the archaeologist," he said.

The goal, he added, was not only to introduce this in their own countries but to make it universal in every EU country, "including the reluctant like of us". "In this situation it is clear for us Hungarians what our European mission is," Orbán said. That mission, he said, was to "add to the common European weal an unrelenting anti-communist tradition, and to include the crimes and lessons of international socialism alongside the crimes and lessons of national socialism". Orbán said it was crucial to "demonstrate the beauty and competitiveness of a political and social order built on Christian teaching" as well as "to make our friends -- primarily our French friends -- understand that central Europe has a model of social organisation built on those teachings". He said that peoples living inside Europe should not lose sight of external dangers such



as “the fluctuation of peoples in the Mediterranean driving the tide towards us, the waves of which could even reach Scandinavia.”

“The migrant masses are in fact waves of migration seeking a European life, which our predecessors were always fully committed to fencing off,” Orbán said. “Failing to defend ourselves is in fact giving up, which will result in a total change of civilisation, as seen by people neighbouring the Balkans on the southern and eastern perimeter of Europe,” he said.

“We must remind ourselves that no matter how enlightened the empire is, its builders will corrupt the spirit of Europe and we will get the opposite result,” Orbán said. The prime minister concluded: “Even we Visegrad countries may have differences over these difficult and complicated issues ... historical philosophies certainly have different emphases; sympathies and antipathies for other countries may be different. Sometimes even the assessment of geopolitical relations could be different,” he said. “It is also certain that our nations sense the responsibility for Europe’s future -- to protect it against external attacks as well as against internal endeavours to make it an empire, and to maintain the independence of our homelands and nations”. “Trying yet failing in a mission is heroic but not joyful. Fulfilling a mission while ensuring success, freedom, and welfare for your homeland is no less heroic but it is also joyful,” Orbán said, adding that

central Europe had a good chance of achieving the latter. “In the name of my nation, I thank you for these thirty years of Visegrad cooperation,” the prime minister wrote.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY WINNER AFTER BOOSTING UZBEK TIES

Hungary has gained much by boosting ties with Uzbekistan in parallel with engaging with central Asia, Péter Sziijártó, the foreign affairs and trade minister, said after meeting Sardor Umurzakov, Uzbekistan’s deputy prime minister. Sziijártó said cooperation in nuclear energy has opened up opportunities for Hungarian technology exports worth 300 million US dollars.

Also, a Hungarian seed plant and a vegetable oil plant will be built in Uzbekistan, and the University of Debrecen will set up its own campus there.

Umurzakov said the talks could open up 76 new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries.

Sziijártó earlier told a bilateral business forum that Hungary’s government was providing all financial and institutional conditions necessary to develop economic cooperation with Uzbekistan. Hungary’s Eximbank has established a 100 million US dollar credit line for promoting bilateral trade, running joint ventures and financing joint tenders in third markets, he said.

Umurzakov expressed hope that 2021 would be a year of historic importance in bilateral relations. There is no EU member state with which Uzbekistan has better relations than with Hungary, he said, adding that economic ties should not fall behind the development of political relations.

GOVT OFFICIAL REVEALS SURVEY QUESTIONS ON REOPENING

A government official has revealed the topics of the National Consultation survey on conditions for reopening the economy after the coronavirus epidemic. In the survey launching in the coming days, the government is seeking opinions on whether the country should be reopened gradually or in one fell swoop once the epidemic has subsided, Csaba Dömötör, a state secretary of the Prime Minister’s Office, said on Facebook. Opinion will also be sought on whether people with immunity certificates should enjoy exemption from certain restrictions and whether foreigners should only be allowed into the country if they can show proof of inoculation or an immunity passport. The survey also asks about the curfew currently in force in Hungary between 8pm and 5am, and the opening of restaurants, hotels and sports venues, Dömötör said. Although the latter depends heavily on the epidemiological situation, the government wants to know whether the public supports reopening while observing safety regulations, he said.

**CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER:
EXPERTS STUDYING
SINOPHARM COVID
VACCINE**

Hungary's National Public Health Authority (NNK) is examining China's Sinopharm vaccine, 550,000 doses of which were delivered to the country on Tuesday, the chief medical officer said. Cecília Müller told a press conference of the operative board responsible for handling the coronavirus epidemic that experts have also received the vaccine's documentation and will soon issue guidelines on its use and information for patients. In Hungary, 348,927 people have been inoculated so far and 124,824 have also received their second jab, Müller noted. Vaccine recipients have so far reported only mild side effects from the jabs, she said.

Meanwhile, Müller said "the epidemic is not loosening its grip", with the number of active infections at 77,250 in the past 24 hours. Traces of the virus in waste water, a marker of the spread of the epidemic, has grown in several cities, including Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Szolnok and Zalaegerszeg, she added.

Müller said health experts were also studying the virus's various mutations. Laboratory tests have so far identified 193 cases of the UK variant of the virus in Hungary, she said, adding that mutations originating from South Africa and Brazil have not yet been detected. Though the UK variant does

not appear to produce more severe symptoms than the most common form of the virus, it is able to spread faster, she noted.

In response to a question, the chief medical officer said that if someone contracts the virus between receiving their two shots, the second jab can only be administered after the individual has recovered. She attributed the low number of flu cases registered this year to the public's adherence to mask wearing and social distancing rules.

**DK TO LAUNCH ONLINE
CONSULTATION
ON SITUATION OF
PENSIONERS**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) will start an online consultation on the situation of Hungarian pensioners on Wednesday, a European parliamentarian of the party said. Klára Dobrev, who is also a vice-president of the European Parliament, told an online press conference that this week had seen major progress towards introducing the European minimum pension as the European Commission has launched a consultation on how to guarantee a decent livelihood and living conditions for the elderly. In Hungary the EC's consultation would be conducted by DK, she said, adding that the elderly would be asked about the biggest challenges they face and the areas in which they need the most help. Dobrev said the consultation would mostly take place online but she

would also hold talks with pensioner organisations and the trade unions.

In response, ruling Fidesz noted that DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány while in power as prime minister over ten years ago "forgot to consult with pensioners about depriving them of their 13th-month pension".

**HUNGARY RECORDS 94
CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES,
1,548 NEW INFECTIONS**

Fully 94 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,548 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 391,170, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday. The death toll has risen to 13,931, while 299,989 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections has declined to 77,250, while there are 4,014 hospitalised Covid patients, 321 on a ventilator. Altogether 18,205 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 3,414,023. Fully 348,927 people have been vaccinated so far, with 134,824 having received the second jab. Hospital vaccinations using the Pfizer and Sputnik vaccines will continue this week and GPs are vaccinating people below the age of 60 with underlying illnesses with AstraZeneca vaccine. Teams are also returning to several nursing homes, while second-round jabs of health workers will continue. The government has extended

coronavirus-related restrictions until March 1. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (72,796) and Pest County (49,040) so far, followed by the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (22,054), Hajdú-Bihar (21,950) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (21,764). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (8,689).

HUNGARY SELF-SUFFICIENT IN MANUFACTURING MEDICAL MASKS

Hungary has become self-sufficient in manufacturing medical-grade masks that protect against the coronavirus, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said at the launch of a production line turning out one million masks a day at the plant of Vajda Papír in Dunaföldvár, in central Hungary. The 1.4 billion forint (EUR 3.9m) investment supported by a 1.1 billion government grant has created 16 new jobs and preserved 134, Varga said. The government launched its health industry support scheme when the need to boost protection capacities skyrocketed during the coronavirus epidemic, Varga said. The scheme allocated 50 billion forints to support 46 investments, he said. The goal is to make Hungary self-sufficient in manufacturing protective health-care equipment and to cut its dependence on imports, he said. He said the Hungarian health-care industry had proven

its professional knowledge and development potential over the past few months, "making government support worthwhile". The funding framework has been raised to 68 billion forints, he said, noting that so far the scheme has supported developments in the production of protective gear, medical equipment, raw pharmaceutical materials and disinfectants.

SEMMELWEIS UNIVERSITY'S CARDIOLOGY FACULTY AMONG WORLD'S TOP 100

Budapest's Semmelweis University has made great strides on the "US News Best Global University" list featuring 1,500 universities in 80 countries, the innovation and technology ministry said. The medical university's best ranking was in the field of cardiac and cardiovascular systems, advancing from last year's 112th place to 87th place this year, the ministry said. The medical university was ranked in eight fields, with its results between 87th and 345th place. Its progress in cardiology was mainly boosted by the total number of citations and international collaborations, it said. The ministry said additional higher education funding of 1,500 billion forints (EUR 4.2bn) as part of the recovery action plan would give fresh impetus to efforts to catch up with the world elite. Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics reinforced

the government's commitment to ensuring that a number of Hungarian universities secure a stable position among the best in the world by the end of this decade.

BALOG ELECTED AS HEAD OF REFORMED CHURCH SYNOD

Zoltán Balog, Bishop of the Danubian district of the Reformed Church in Hungary, was elected president of the church's new General Synod in Budapest. Two candidates contested for the post. Balog was elected with 64 votes while Bishop Károly Fekete of the Transtibiscan church district mustered 33. Balog served as human resources minister in Hungary's Fidesz-led government from 2012 to 2018.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EIGHT COMPANIES TO GET HUF 13 BN SUPPORT FOR INVESTMENTS ABROAD

Eight companies will receive 13 billion forints (EUR 36m) in state support to carry out investments worth 25 billion forints abroad, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. The government has launched its foreign markets economic growth scheme with the aim to help Hungarian companies set up production, research and service capacities abroad, Szijjártó told an event where the certificates were presented. The government has allocated 70 billion forints for the

scheme, 157 companies have applied for funding and a total of 28 recipients have been announced so far, he added. These companies will receive 42 billion forints for investments worth 80 billion forints, to be carried out mostly in the Western Balkans, he said. In addition to the Western Balkans, investments will also be carried out in Austria and Singapore, Szijjártó added.

FINANCE MINISTER: COUNTERFEIT ELECTRONIC DEVICES WORTH HUF 1.3 BN SEIZED

Customs officers in Zala county, in south-west Hungary, have seized over 13,000 counterfeit electronic devices worth a total of 1.3 billion forints (EUR 3.6m), Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The container transporting the

goods came from the Far East, Varga said in a Facebook post. Customs officers investigated after noticing that the customs documents listed them at prices far below market value, he said. The counterfeit devices will be destroyed as required by Hungarian law, the minister added.

HUNGARY PUBLIC DEBT RISES TO 81% / GDP

Hungary's public debt rose to 81% of GDP at the end of the fourth quarter, according to a first reading of data the National Bank of Hungary (NBH). The debt rose from 74.2% at the end of the third quarter and from 65.5% at the end of 2019. In absolute terms, it was 38,368 billion forints at the end of 2020. Hungary's constitution stipulates that year-end

debt-GDP ratio should decline to 50%. Government spending on pandemic measures and economic stimulus have swollen the debt.

HUNGARIAN FIRMS TO ATTEND BIOFACH ESPECIAL EXHIBITION

Nineteen Hungarian bio producers will display their latest products in Biofach eSpecial, the world's biggest ecology exhibition, Agrármarketing Centrum (AMC) told MTI. The three-day virtual exhibition will focus on innovation, sustainability, the transformation of ecology-based economy and nutrition. The products on display will include mushrooms, farinaceous foodstuffs, tea specialities, dried fruits, oilseeds, extruded snacks, rice, bio vegetables and fruits, AMC said.