

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

NCOs inaugurated on Heroes' Square, Budapest

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Press conference of V4 foreign ministers

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TOP STORY

V4 HOUSE SPEAKERS DISCUSS EUROPE'S FUTURE

The countries of the Visegrad Group are working towards forming a common position on the future of Europe, House Speaker László Kövér said after a meeting with V4 counterparts from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland on Friday.

The V4 countries aim to develop a position which people can identify with in Brussels and in every EU member state and which concerns not only interests but also values. They would like to participate in the debates about the future of Europe as equal partners and want the opinions of national parliaments to be taken seriously, Kövér said. He called the past 10 years of Visegrad cooperation a success story based on "the best intentions by all participants, seeking links rather than divisions". He noted that the region's countries shared not only a history in the past but interests in the present, adding that their infrastructure cooperation projects, such as building south-north transport and energy networks, were "filling hundred-year gaps". The participants focused on efforts to protect central Europe's heritage and issues around a central European identity, and showed a "surprising and refreshing harmony", he said.

The meeting was attended by Boris Kollár of Slovakia, Radek Vondráček and Miloš Vystrčil of the Czech Republic, as well as Elżbieta Witek and Tomasz Grodzki of Poland.

NÉMETH PRAISES V4 COOPERATION

In the forthcoming year, the actions of the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group will be governed by the conviction that the member states -- the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia -- have a vested interest in each other's success, stability and prosperity, Zsolt Németh, head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, told MTI on Saturday. Earlier in the day, Németh, along with Martin Klus, state secretary at the Slovak Foreign Ministry, and József Berényi, Slovakia's former state secretary of foreign affairs, held a forum on relations between the V4 presidency, central Europe and the European Union at a student camp of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian community in Gombasök (Gombaszög).

The contributors agreed on the need to strengthen central Europe, especially through infrastructure development projects, economic cooperation and trade, Németh said. They termed the voluntary nature of Visegrad cooperation as an asset, enabling the member countries to cooperate just in the fields of shared interests, he said. It is another common feature that the Visegrad countries highly value freedom and reject external pressure, Németh said, referring to recent "moves by the European Union which can be seen as a kind of external pressure". The single issue of disagreement was

dual citizenship as the Hungarian government insists on granting Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, he said. The incumbent Slovak state secretary, Németh said, was open to further consultations, stressed the need to amend the relevant law, and expressed hope that "the issue would be settled in a reassuring way" once the Hungarian community would once again be represented in the Slovak parliament.

US, HUNGARY SIGN IMPLEMENTATION DEALS UNDER DEFENCE COOPERATION AGREEMENT

Representatives of the US and Hungary signed the implementation agreements under the two countries' Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) of 2019 concerning the air bases of Kecskemét and Pápa on Friday. Tibor Babos, ministerial commissioner in charge of implementing tasks within the US-Hungary DCA, said at an event in Kecskemét that the agreement originally signed in Washington, DC, was a bilateral inter-state defence pact offering a framework for strengthening cooperation and carrying out military developments at the three bases. He said that Kecskemét and Pápa would see infrastructure and technology developments for the air force, while developments for the field army would take place in Tata and Várpalota. Babos said that the details of the actual

development projects would be negotiated in the near future. The DCA was signed on April 4, 2019, by US deputy secretary of state John Sullivan and Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister.

FIDESZ MEP ACCUSES BRUSSELS OF ABUSING ITS POWERS

Brussels is abusing its powers, constantly making threats and engaging in political blackmail, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said on Sunday, when asked about the possibility of the EU withholding funding from Hungary. "Brussels can't do this," Hidvéghi told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio, arguing that EU funds were not handouts, but money Hungary was entitled to. "Brussels doesn't have the right to withhold the funds. This is all part of the political threats and blackmail," he said. The MEP said the European Commission was particularly interested in the views of Hungarians and was even keeping up with the government's ongoing National Consultation public survey. He urged the public to fill out the survey, saying that it "greatly helps our work in Brussels".

Asked about the EC's lawsuit against Hungary for what the commission sees as Hungary's unlawfully restricting the access of migrants to refugee procedures, Hidvéghi said it was because of the growing migration pressure that migrants were only allowed to submit asylum requests at

foreign missions. Hungary, he said, has been pursuing a firm policy when it comes to migration. "We're determined to stand up for the interests of Hungarians, determined to protect our homeland," he said.

Asked about "Brussels's LGBTQ expansion", Hidvéghi said this was a "diversion" on the part of the EC. Referring to the launch of an infringement procedure against Hungary over its child protection law by the EC this week, Hidvéghi said the commission's problem with the law was that "we're not willing to let LGBTQ activists into kindergartens and schools." "We refuse to allow children to be exposed to sexual propaganda against the will of their parents," Hidvéghi said. "This cannot happen in Hungary."

ÁDER, KÖVÉR OFFER CONDOLENCES, HUNGARIAN HELP TO FLOOD-RAVAGED GERMANY

President János Áder and House Speaker László Kövér have expressed their condolences to the families of the victims of the floods in Germany and to those injured.

In a message to the German head of state, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Áder said he was deeply distressed to learn of the floods which have wreaked massive damage in the provinces of Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia, and he offered Hungary's help to Germany. He wrote that Hungary "stands by the people" of Germany and

is ready to help in clean-up efforts. The president said that hopefully work could soon start on rebuilding the affected areas so that inhabitants can return to their peaceful lives.

Kövér sent telegrams of condolences to Wolfgang Schäuble, the president of Germany's Bundestag, Reiner Haseloff, the speaker of the Bundesrat and prime minister of Saxony-Anhalt land, André Kuper, president of the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hendrik Hering, president of the state parliament of Rhineland-Palatinate, Patrick Dewael, president of Belgium's lower house of parliament, and Sabine Laruelle, the president of the upper chamber. More than 100 people have died in the flooding caused by days of heavy rainfall in Germany. In Belgium, the death toll has risen to 23, while at least 20 people are missing.

DEFENCE MINISTER INAUGURATES ARMY NCOS

Hungary's soldiers have proven that they have an understanding of more than just weapons, Defence Minister Tibor Benkő said at the inauguration ceremony of non-commissioned officers of the armed forces on Saturday. Benkő told the 373 officers taking their oath of office on Budapest's Heroes' Square that besides having the skill to handle weapons, they also needed to be ready to handle disasters like the coronavirus pandemic. "The soldiers have proven that the Hungarian Armed Forces can be counted on to handle any kind of

problem anywhere and at any time," Benkő said. The minister thanked the parents of the new NCOs for "raising their children to dedicate their lives to the service of the country" and to make the sacrifices and take on the trials that come with it. He encouraged the officers to do everything they can to be the best they can be and to set an example to the entire country. "It's clear that the security environment in the region and the world is extremely fragile," Benkő said, adding that this was why the government considered it crucial to have a competent, committed, well-trained and well-equipped military.

Zsolt Sándor, deputy commander of the armed forces, said at the ceremony that being a non-commissioned officer was not a job but a calling. He said NCOs were the bridge between the army's commissioned officers and its rank-and-file. They play a key role in leading subunits and handling complex equipment, he added. Sándor praised the role the new graduates had played in Hungary's response to the pandemic over the past year, adding that they had "many similar challenges" ahead of them.

FINANCE MINISTER: SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE, NATIONAL COHESION PRIORITY

Due to its economic achievements over the past ten years, Hungary has sufficient resources for supporting families, religious life and economic

development, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said at the consecration of a new Reformed church in Pănet (Mezőpanit), in central Romania, this weekend.

The Hungarian government has contributed over 350 million forints (EUR 1m) to the costs of construction, the Finance Ministry said in a statement. The minister confirmed the government's commitment to national cohesion, the prosperity of Hungary's residents and their ethnic kin abroad, and preserving the Christian roots, culture and values of Europe. For this reason, the government has promoted the economic prosperity of ethnic Hungarians abroad for several years, the minister said, citing Hungarian support for the Transylvanian economic development programme launched in 2017. Varga noted that the government had part-financed the renovation of 3,000 churches and the construction of nearly 150 churches in Hungary and the neighbouring countries since 2010.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY FIRST IN EUROPE TO GIVE GREEN LIGHT TO BOOSTER JABS

Hungary is the first country in Europe to give the go-ahead to inoculating its population with a third, booster jab against the coronavirus free of charge, on a voluntary basis, a state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office told public media on Sunday. István

György, who is also the head of the central team in charge of the national vaccination programme, said that from the epidemiological point of view Hungary is one of the safest countries in Europe, producing the second highest rate of inoculation in terms of both the first and the second jab. Over 55% of Hungary's adults have been fully vaccinated, and merely 18% of the elderly have not got a jab at all, he said.

The decision to offer a booster jab to the population was motivated by a recent surge in infections abroad, György said. The third jab is recommended to be administered at least four months after the second shot. Elderly people and those mostly exposed to the danger of infection are especially advised to take the opportunity, the state secretary said. The third, booster vaccine will be available at the general practitioners and the vaccination centre, he said. The government has launched a door-to-door campaign to persuade the over-60 population to get inoculated, György said.

MEDICAL CHAMBER WELCOMES MANDATORY COVID VACCINATION FOR HEALTH WORKERS

The Hungarian Medical Chamber (MOK) has welcomed a Friday announcement by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán that coronavirus

vaccination would be made mandatory for health-care staff. "At present this measure could ensure protection to both patients and staff," MOK said on its website. The chamber said it did not have official statistics showing the vaccination rate of health professionals, but added that it was higher than the Hungarian average. The board of nurse association MESZK expressed its support for the introduction of mandatory Covid vaccination. The organisation said on its website that taking the vaccine will ensure that in case of a new wave of the pandemic, health workers will not get infected and they will not pass on the infection. "Let's show an example and let's all take the vaccine," it added.

HUNGARY LENDS 200,000 MORE COVID-19 VACCINES TO CZECH REPUBLIC

Hungary has lent an additional batch of 200,000 Pfizer Covid-19 vaccines to the Czech Republic. The shipment was delivered to Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš by Hungarian Ambassador Miklós Boros. Babiš expressed thanks for Hungary's repeated help at the handover event in Prague's central military hospital. Previously, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó delivered a total of 149,000 Pfizer vaccines that Hungary lent to the Czech Republic in June and July. Under an agreement, the Czech Republic will return all the vaccines to Hungary by the end of this year.

LMP CALLS ON ORBÁN TO EXTEND ANTIGEN TESTING NATIONWIDE

The opposition LMP party has called on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to “follow the example of [Budapest Mayor] Gergely Karácsony” and extend his antigen testing programme for checking the immunity of Budapest residents against the coronavirus to all citizens of Hungary. LMP also demands that the government should take effective measures to increase the vaccination rate rather than launching a poster campaign to popularise the “national sham consultation” public survey that “considers voters dilettantes”, party co-leader Márton Kanász-Nagy told an online press conference. Whereas the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic is imminent, nearly 2.5 million Hungarian adults have still to be inoculated, he said, adding that the measures taken by the government so far in preparation for a new surge of the virus had been inadequate. Kanász-Nagy called it a success of the opposition that the prime minister had announced the availability of a third round of vaccines from August 1. LMP also blames the government for its failure to manage the social crisis generated by the pandemic, he said, adding that the losses of Hungarian entrepreneurs, employees and job-seekers over the past year and a half should be covered from central funds.

KÁSLER MADE HONORARY CITIZEN OF SLOVAKIA'S IPEL'SKÉ PREDMOSTIE

Human Resources Minister Miklos Kásler has been made an honorary citizen of the village of Ipel'ské Predmostie (Ipolyhídvég), in southern Slovakia. In his acceptance speech at the local cultural centre, Kásler said the Euro-Atlantic world was “experiencing an in-between period” in which its people were unwilling or incapable of living like their forefathers. The minister said the region must not allow the influx of masses with different histories, worldviews, ways of life and goals who could not be integrated. He said the cultures of the East were prospering and becoming major economic powers “because they're not in an identity crisis and know who they are and what they're doing...” “What can central Europe do in a situation like this?” Kásler said. “In my view, the future is that every nation living here should consider this region their home.”

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT TO LAUNCH FOREIGN MARKET GROWTH SUPPORT SCHEME

Hungary's government is launching a 10 billion forint (EUR 27.8m) programme aimed at supporting Hungarian companies looking to increase their presence in foreign markets, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said

on Sunday. As part of the scheme recommended by the operative board for coordinating the economic recovery, the government will cover a maximum of half the costs of companies' investments abroad up to 4 billion forints, Szijjártó said on Facebook. Businesses that receive funding will have to undertake to increase their sales revenue in Hungary resulting from their expansion abroad by at least as much as they receive in support through the scheme, Szijjártó said.

While the Hungarian economy in recent years has seen record investments by multinational companies, certain large Hungarian companies that are successful abroad have also got stronger, Szijjártó said. But many of them are now only able to increase their international market share if they establish a presence abroad by, for example, building factories, he said. Their expansion in foreign markets allows them to bring their profits back home, which is a boost to the Hungarian economy, the minister added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: ONLINE INCOME TAX CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHARITIES, CHURCHES UP 10% IN 2021

Some 1.2 million taxpayers in Hungary used the online tax returns system to donate one percent of their income tax to charities or churches this year, up 10% from 2020, a government official

said on Sunday. Under Hungary's tax laws, taxpayers are offered an opportunity to donate one percent of their income tax to NGOs and another percent to churches. Taxpayer donations are an enormous help to churches and civil groups, finance ministry state secretary András Tállai told MTI, adding that the simplicity of the online tax returns system was a likely factor in the jump in the number of people who used the platform to donate this year. In principle, taxpayers eligible to donate part of their income tax to some kind of organisation could contribute a total of over 40 billion forints (EUR 111.3m) this year, he said.

The government's measures aimed at reducing tax bureaucracy have also applied to taxpayer donations, Tállai said. Donating to NGOs, for example, has been made easier with the list of eligible organisations being available on the tax authority's website, the state secretary said. Meanwhile, those who donated to churches last year automatically had 1% of their taxes sent to the same church again this year unless they rescinded their donation or entered in a new beneficiary, he said.

GAME THEORY SPECIALISTS TO MEET IN BUDAPEST

GAMES 2020, the sixth World Congress of the Game Theory Society (GTS), will take place at the Budapest Convention Centre from July 19 to 23, organisers said in a statement. The quadrennial event was scheduled to be held last year to mark the birth centenary of János Harsányi (John Charles Harsanyi), the Hungarian-American Nobel laureate economist, who is best known for his contribution to the study of game theory and its application to economics. The congress, however, had to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

GAMES 2020 will be held in a hybrid set-up with the first two days on-site and the remaining three days via an on-line meeting platform.

Contributors will include Oliver Hart, recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, whose research centres on the roles that ownership structure and contractual arrangements play in the governance

and boundaries of corporations; GTS President Matthew O. Jackson, an eminent specialist in network science and author of *The Human Network*; and mathematician Herve Moulin, known for his research in mathematical economics, in particular in the fields of mechanism design, social choice, game theory and fair division.

SLOVAK HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER ARRESTED IN N HUNGARY

Police have arrested a Slovak man on suspicion of fatally striking a pedestrian with his car in a hit-and-run accident in Nagyoroszi, in northern Hungary, the Nógrád County police headquarters said on Saturday. The 29-year-old Slovak national hit a man with his car on Wednesday before driving off without attempting to help the victim, police said. The pedestrian died at the scene. The driver was interrogated as a suspect in a hit-and-run case on Saturday and taken into custody, police said, adding that they will initiate his pre-trial detention in the coming days.