

PHOTO OF THE DAY



UPCOMING EVENTS

EC's annual rule-of-law report presented in Brussels

Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, Slovak, Slovenian foreign ministers to meet in Czech Republic

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: V4 TO HELP LITHUANIA HALT MIGRANTS

The Visegrad Group countries, which oppose the mandatory resettlement quotas and Brussels' immigration policy, have agreed to help Lithuania contain the wave of refugees from Belarus, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, said after talks with his V4 counterparts on Monday.

The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia will specify the details in the days to come and coordinate the various forms of aid to Lithuania, including human resources, technical equipment and erecting a fence along the border, Szijjártó told a press conference in front of the town hall of Komárom in northern Hungary. "The Visegrad countries will jointly help their Lithuanian friends defend the external borders of the European Union," he said.

Szijjártó said the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group gave priority to boosting quick economic recovery in the whole region. As tax rises would not help the economy restart, Hungary continues to oppose the introduction of the global minimum tax, he said.

Praising the four countries for the fiscal and financial discipline, Szijjártó said that "those who are unable to conduct disciplined policies should not impose higher taxes stemming from their incorrect fiscal policies on us."

The minister said that Hungary's trade with its three Visegrad partners amounted to 30 billion euros last year.

V4 FOREIGN MINISTERS DISCUSS FUTURE OF EUROPE

Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok told a joint press conference after talks with his V4 counterparts on Monday that the foreign ministers' exchange of ideas about the future of the EU had been extremely useful and important. He said it must be noted in Slovakia and in the Visegrad Group that "we cannot see the danger of the EU moving towards a super-state" and pursuing ambitions to become an empire. At the same time, it must be made clear that the EU is not above criticism, he added. The Visegrad Group should state it more often that there is no alternative to being in the EU and the countries should discuss more often "what and how we want to do in the EU", he said.

Korčok and Czech counterpart Jan Kohout both said that their respective countries supported Lithuania and they praised the planned programme of Hungary's V4 presidency. Kohout said the Hungarian presidency's targets were important not only for central Europe but for the whole of Europe and welcomed its priority target to strengthen neighbourly relations.

Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau said that Poland wanted to see Europe's population getting more involved in the debate about the EU's future. Only politicians have had experiences so far about the workings of EU institutions, yet the majority of their decisions affect ordinary citizens, he added.

Commenting on the migration situation in Lithuania, he noted "the Lukashenka regime's extraordinary pressure" and said that Vilnius had asked for help from each of the V4 countries separately and the group wanted to coordinate their effort to give help, acting as "a strong advocate" for Lithuania "when the Baltic country faces such an unprecedented challenge".

JUSTICE MINISTER: EC RULE-OF-LAW REPORT NOT BE USED FOR IDEOLOGICAL PURPOSES

The European Commission's new rule-of-law report to be issued on Tuesday should not be used for ideological purposes and for blackmailing the member states, Judit Varga, Hungary's justice minister, said on Monday, adding that the states' sovereignty and the treaties of the European Union must be respected.

The minister called the EC's decision to draft such a report "arbitrary", noting that it had not dealt with national minorities and the fight against anti-Semitism this year.

Varga called the methodology applied by the EC "questionable", adding that the scope of background institutions and NGOs that contributed to the report with what the EC considers "authentic information" is also challengeable.

Hungary insists that the European Commission had not been authorised by the EU treaties to compile such reports, the minister told Hungarian reporters.

Varga said it was "regrettable" that the political statements on Hungary's law on child protection had appeared before opinion-shapers had read the very text of the law. The minister said the European Commission had used the rule-of-law tool to blackmail the Hungarian government when it assessed Hungary's plan of accessing EU funds for post-pandemic economic recovery.

Concerning the planned conferences on Europe's future, Varga said that the series should be based on "true popular sovereignty", with the opinions of democratic, natural communities presented to decision makers. Preparing with a seven-point plan of action for the debates, Hungary will take a stand against extending the powers of certain European institutions, and efforts to build a so-called super-state, the minister said.

European integration should be a tool, not a purpose in itself, and decisions should be made by elected leaders rather than outsourced to civil organisations, Varga said. The minister stressed the need for Europe to prepare for "a period of dangerous challenges", including migration and the pandemic. The countries waiting for EU accession should also be invited to the series of conferences, she added.

DK DEMANDS INFORMATION ON REPORTS OF ISRAELI SPY SOFTWARE USED IN HUNGARY

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has asked the government in

writing about press reports suggesting that an Israeli spy software had been used in Hungary to collect information on opposition politicians and journalists.

“We want to know whom the government had wiretapped illegally,” Ágnes Vadai, DK’s deputy leader, said at a press conference on Monday.

Vadai, who is also deputy head of parliament’s defence and law enforcement committee, has proposed that the committee should hear Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Justice Minister Judit Varga, as well as Sándor Pintér, the interior minister.

Vadai said that the software, developed to monitor the activities of criminals and terrorists, was only available to governments upon approval by the Israeli defence ministry. “It follows that the Hungarian government has used state agencies for illegal surveillance,” she said. Ruling Fidesz’s parliamentary group said in a statement that convening a committee hearing was “not justified” because Hungary’s national security agencies “fully abide by the law”.

János Halász, the deputy head of the national security committee, delegated by Fidesz, said that “the reports published in the leftist press are unfounded and aimed solely at stirring up political sentiments”.

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a press conference on a different subject that the Information Office under his control had never used the software in question and had not entered any kind of cooperation in connection with it.

Justice Minister Judit Varga told a press conference on a different subject

that in Hungary, like in all other rule-of-law countries, secret services are separated from the political sphere. All decisions made by them are based on professional rather than political considerations, and all their actions are regulated by strict laws.

Opposition LMP national board secretary Péter Ungár told an online press conference that the spy software issue also demonstrated that the government was trying to hide things and willing to go as far as violating the law in an effort to collect information about political enemies. Ungár said the government was either hiding something or was unaware of what’s happening in Hungary.

He slammed a statement by Fidesz MPs showing that they would not attend a national security committee hearing about the issue.

PINTÉR: NATIONAL SECURITY SERVICE NOT INVOLVED IN ILLEGAL SURVEILLANCE

Since May 29, 2010, Hungary’s National Security Service has not been involved in illegal surveillance, the interior minister said on Monday in response to a question by independent MP Bernadett Szél.

Sándor Pintér said in his written response that this was confirmed by the results of audits carried out. He added that he was ready to answer all further questions by Szél at a meeting of parliament’s national security committee to be held behind closed doors.

Szél submitted the following question to the interior minister: “Who has purchased Israeli spy software and which interior affairs or national security organisations participated in illegal surveillance?”

Pintér said in response that Hungary was a democratic country based on the rule of law and as such, it has acted in keeping with current laws in the case of each individual. Government organisations and independent organisations regularly check the state bodies authorised to use the instruments of covert surveillance, he added.

GOVT PLEDGES FURTHER AID TO DIABETICS

The government will make a new type of insulin pump available for people with type 1 diabetes from next month, under a Monday decision by the body in charge of restarting community life after the coronavirus pandemic. Katalin Novák, minister for family affairs and the head of the operative body, told a press conference that the device automatically pumps insulin into the body if it detects higher glucose levels. Children and university students will receive 98% in funding for the pump, while adults will receive 80%, she said. The body also decided to cut the administrative burden on crèches, facilitating a faster procedure to open new ones.

Regarding the coronavirus epidemic, Novák said incidence numbers were growing primarily due to the spread of the more infectious delta variant in



Hungary. Those not inoculated are in greater danger than in previous waves of the pandemic, she said. The government has launched several campaigns to convince people over 60 to accept the jab, she said. Some 50% of 16-18-year-olds and 13-14% of children between 12 and 15 are already inoculated, she said.

Commenting on a report by Háttér Társaság, an LGBTQ advocacy group, on growing numbers of attacks against members of the community, Novák said she hoped that discrimination based on sexual orientation was not prevalent in Hungary, "just like it wasn't in the past". Hungary maintains a zero tolerance policy against discrimination based on sexual orientation, she added.

The operative body has named Szilárd Demeter, the head of the Petőfi Literary Museum, head the supervisory board of the Foundation for Hungarian Culture. As its first measure, the foundation is allocating 1.8 billion forints to funding periodicals within the Carpathian Basin, Demeter said. He said that the Petőfi Literary Agency would distribute nearly 2 billion forints (EUR 5.6m) in the pop music sector and one billion in book publishing. "We are moving towards exporting Hungarian literature and pop music," he said.

HUNGARY RECORDS TWO CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, 139 NEW INFECTIONS

Two Covid-19 patients died over the weekend, while 139 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 5,569,099

people have received a first jab, while 5,293,132 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 35,602, while hospitals are treating 76 Covid patients, 11 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 1,594 people in official quarantine, while 6,257,264 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 808,864 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,017. Fully 743,245 people have made a recovery.

JOBBIK CRITICISES GOVT LAND PURCHASE SCHEME

The government's plan to set up a private fund of 100 billion forints (EUR 278m) to purchase farmland "stinks" and "raises a number of questions", according to an expert of opposition Jobbik. Zoltán Magyar said in a statement on Monday that his party had been against selling off state-owned land "from the beginning" adding that ruling Fidesz had "sold out one of the remaining bits of national assets at a brutal pace". He insisted that "the largest and most valuable properties have landed with the gentry close to the government". Magyar went on to say that under the current plans "land purchased with taxpayers' money will again end up with the elite" close to ruling Fidesz.

According to Jobbik, in the time before next year's elections, the government is "trying to help itself to the most possible public funds and national assets".

HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITIES CONCLUDE LASER R&D PROJECT

The universities of Szeged, Pécs and Debrecen have concluded a four-year research project to investigate ultrafast physical processes using lasers, supported by 1.4 billion forints (EUR 3.9m) in European Union grant money. The EU-funded basic and applied research project explored the use of various wavelengths, from THz to X-rays, in the areas of light-matter interaction, materials science and biomedical science, the University of Szeged said.

HUNGARY PRESENTS JOINT PROPOSAL ON SUPPORT FOR NATL APICULTURE PROGRAMMES

Hungary presented a joint proposal on supporting the health conditions of bee colonies through national apiculture programmes at a meeting of European Union agriculture and fisheries ministers in Brussels on Monday, the Agriculture Ministry said. Hungary made the proposal on the importance of introducing measures to support apiculture in member states together with Croatia, France, Greece, Italy and Romania. Agriculture Minister István Nagy noted the unquestionable importance of the role of pollination in the farm and food sectors, addressing the decline in bee populations. He

said incentives can keep beekeeping an attractive profession by reducing risks and improving profitability.

**MATOLCSY PLUGS AWAY
AT ARGUMENTS FOR
FISCAL TIGHTENING**

National Bank of Hungary (NBH) governor György Matolcsy reiterated and refined arguments for reining in next year’s budget deficit in an op-ed piece published on the website of daily Magyar Nemzet on Monday.

Matolcsy has said a number of times that the government’s 5.9%-of-GDP budget deficit target for next year is too high, while stressing that the central bank continues to move forward in a strategic alliance with the government, in spite of differences on the matter. In the piece, Matolcsy said the more fiscal resources a state puts toward achieving recovery, the smaller the chance the return to economic growth will be sustainable, and he warned that “tipped balances will force

fiscal austerity with time”. Matolcsy said the faster fiscal balance is achieved, the faster resources outside of the budget become available to support sustainable growth.

He noted that Hungarians have some 44 billion forints (EUR 122m) in financial assets that can be mobilised for the recovery, pointing out that the share of government securities held by domestic retail investors, at close to 25%, is well over the 2% average rate for the region. “The lion’s share of the financial resources necessary to return to a path of balance and convergence is available in Hungary. Those resources will only become available if we first crack inflation and set the fiscal deficit at around 3% (3-3.4%), and keep it under 3% from 2023,” Matolcsy said.

**RENOVATED WING
OF ESTERHÁZY CASTLE
INAUGURATED**

The western wing of the imposing Esterházy Castle in Fertőd, in western

Hungary, renovated from somewhat less than 2 billion forints (EUR 5.7m), was inaugurated on Sunday. The wing accommodates the Esterházy gallery, the Esterházy porcelain cabinet and Modulated Time, a joint exhibition of sculptor Boldi and painter Mózes Incze.

The ceremony was attended by President János Áder, First Lady Anita Herczegh, Justice Minister Judit Varga, Prince Anton Esterházy and his wife, Svetlana Esterházy.

Addressing the event, Attila Barcza (Fidesz), MP of Sopron and its region, noted that Miklós Esterházy, “the Magnificent”, had a lion’s share in the birth of what has been called the “Hungarian Versailles” in the 18th century. The Hungarian government led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán decided to renovate the castle in 2013 so that Hungary’s largest and most splendid Baroque building should regain its one-time grandeur and become not only a symbolic, but a bustling site of Hungarian culture, he said.

