

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tiborilés

Budapest police "flashmob" in Széll Kálmán Square 2021

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Plenary session of parliament**

**Cbank Monetary Council holds rate-setting meeting**

**EU General Affairs Council meets in Brussels**

**Justice ministry, natl police force organise conference on supporting crime victims**

**Coronavirus updates**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: VACCINE WORKS; HUNGARY WORKS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, addressing lawmakers during the opening of parliament's autumn session, said that Hungary's strategy for beating the coronavirus pandemic would depend on its vaccination campaign.

Orbán said vaccinations were the only effective way to tackle the virus, adding that after Hungary's experiences gained after three waves of the epidemic it had become clear that restrictions and masks were not up to the job of defeating or even slowing down the virus. But if there are enough people who have been vaccinated, a normal life can be maintained, he said. Concerning booster jabs, he said that "having [the possibility] is better than not", adding that people who receive a third jab would be "certainly better protected". So far some 525,000 people have received a booster shot, he said, adding that 17 million doses are available this year. Orbán noted that the majority of Hungarians were vaccinated and protected from the virus and appealed to people who have not got vaccinated to do so. Hungary, he added, was prepared to respond to the fourth wave of the virus, noting that MPs have been asked to prolong the special legal order and the special measures related to Covid until the end of the year.

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**ORBÁN: ECONOMY  
OFF TO ‘FLYING START’**

The economy “has got off to a flying start”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told lawmakers, noting that GDP growth was 17.9% in the second quarter, the “highest figure ever recorded”. Hungary’s economic output has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels, while most European Union countries are “still waiting” to catch up. Orbán added that full-year GDP growth would reach, or could even exceed, the government’s target of 5.5%. Citing official data, he said more than 4.7 million people had jobs in July, adding that the country had not had this many people in employment since the change of regime in 1989. The economy added nearly one million jobs over the last 11 years, the prime minister said, adding that Hungary was “just one step away from full employment”.

Referring to questions the government put to the public in a recent survey, Orbán told lawmakers that responses to the National Consultation survey “are binding on the government”. By Feb. 15, the government will refund a portion of personal income tax to parents raising children, he said. Fully 1.9 million parents will receive partial refunds of their 2021 personal income tax payments, a measure that totals 600 billion forints (EUR 1.7bn), Orbán said. Also, pensioners

will receive a pension premium that is likely to be over 50,000 forints to make up for higher inflation, he said. Talks are under way to increase the minimum wage to 200,000 forints, the prime minister said, adding that the chance of a successful agreement was high. He said the measures built on earlier special support such as the loan moratorium for troubled borrowers and the phased reintroduction of the 13th month pension. Also, people below the age of 25 will be exempted from paying the personal income tax, while in early 2022 military and law enforcement personnel will get a special allowance for six months, Orbán said, adding that, in accordance with the results of the National Consultation, the government also intends to provide constitutional protection for family benefits, low taxes on labour and pensions.

Turning to the recent developments in Afghanistan, Orbán said Hungary had joined the international military operation there at the request of the United States and had withdrawn its troops in parallel. He said it appeared that the US had “misjudged the situation in Afghanistan”. The prime minister praised the efforts of the Hungarian troops, saying that he did not believe the threat related to Afghanistan had passed, as the crisis in the Central Asian country could trigger a new migration wave. Orbán said Hungary was sticking to its policy of strengthening its borders.

He said the Balkan migration route was again filling up with migrants who, he insisted, were being aided by organisations linked to US financier George Soros. Orbán said the number of migrants crossing the border illegally and people smugglers registered by the Hungarian authorities had tripled compared with last year.

“Hungary gets regularly stabbed in the back by Brussels,” Orbán said, adding that the government would stick to its guns and protect the borders in the face of heavy political pressure. He insisted that the bloc’s unity was being “shredded” due to disputes over migration, and only by handing the relevant powers back to member states would that unity be preserved. Commenting the EC infringement procedure launched against Hungary because of the government’s child protection law, Orbán said: “We won’t allow space for any kind of sexual propaganda targeting our children.” Orbán told parliament that Hungarian laws that ban sexual propaganda in schools and kindergartens as well as in advertisements were under attack by Brussels, which has formally called on Hungary to amend its laws on public education, advertising and the media. “Their demands are absurd and run counter to the general belief in Hungary that the sex education of children should be exclusively determined by parents,” the prime minister said, adding that the Hungarian people would have the



final say on the issue in a referendum. "In Hungary it is up to the people to pass decisions on migration and child protection. In turn, Brussels and countries that favour migration and LGBTQ have never done the same: there, the elite rather than the people pass decisions on these issues," Orbán said.

After Orbán's address, opposition leaders responded, with Tímea Szabó of Párbeszéd referring to "record inflation" and "record petrol prices". Péter Jakab, the leader of Jobbik, said more than 2 million Hungarians lived below the poverty line, while the minimum pension and child allowance had not increased in the last 13 years. Bertalan Tóth of the Socialist Party said Orbán had made no mention of the 30,000-plus people who died of Covid-19, while the number of people vaccinated in Hungary was "well below" the EU average. He referred to "growing waiting lists" in hospitals and thousands of doctors and nurses quitting state health care in the middle of the pandemic. LMP's László Lóránt Keresztes said the prime minister had failed to mention "the transfer of an astonishing amount of public property to [ruling] Fidesz public foundations", and austerity at local government level. Ferenc Gyurcsány of the Democratic Coalition said the prime minister was "fighting demons from Brussels", "a lawmaker called Gyurcsány" as well as "hundreds of thousands of those who want to love freely". He said the prime minister had failed to unite the nation and he accused Orbán of having

a "party secretary mentality" since he only represented his own party.

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### **KURZ CALLS FOR 'MORE FAIRNESS' FOR HUNGARY, POLAND IN EU**

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has called for "more fairness" for Hungary and Poland in the debates on the rule of law in the European Union. Kurz told the German Funke-Mediengruppe and French daily Ouest-France that, while upholding the rule of law and the core values of the EU were crucial for the "continued existence" of the bloc, "those rules should apply to all member states."

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### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'LIBERAL MAINSTREAM BUILDING OPINION DICTATORSHIP'**

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Monday slammed "the liberal mainstream" as the cause of a "weakening European Union, the extreme pessimism of the populace of many western European countries" and for building an "opinion dictatorship". Addressing the Conservative Conference organised by the Ladislav Hanus Fellowship in Bratislava, Szijjártó said: "the liberal mainstream is hypocritical because they lecture us on how to operate a democracy and on the importance of the freedom of opinion. Meanwhile, the liberal mainstream is the most discriminative ideology today, branding and excluding dissenters immediately.

So the liberal mainstream is actually building a hegemony and dictatorship of opinion," he said.

The EU's share of the world's GDP has fallen to 18% from 21% over the past 20 years, Szijjártó said. Today, 7 of the 50 largest companies of the world are from the EU, down from 14 ten years ago, he said. Meanwhile, 27% of social spending in the world is being given out in Europe, he said, "putting the system's sustainability into question". The EU has been successful thanks to its strong nation states and conservative politics, Szijjártó said. It could be bolstered again by a conservative turnaround, and if patriotic politics based on democratic Christian values and on the "original European values" replaced its liberal mainstream, he said. A weakening EU "is contrary to the will of central Europeans", Szijjártó said. In an antidemocratic move, the liberals are "trying to thwart the participation of central Europeans, Christians and conservatives" in the debate on the future of the EU, he said. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary was putting conservative family, economy and security policy into practice. The number of taxpayers has grown from 1.7 million to 4.2 million in 11 years since the Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance came to power, he said. The government is also protecting families, and has called to life a programme to support persecuted Christians in their homelands, he said.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY STAUNCHLY REJECTS ANTI-ISRAELI CRITICISM, POLICIES**

Hungary will always take a stand in international organisations against those criticising Israel or pursuing anti-Israeli policies, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, said on Monday after a phone call with his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid. Hungary will always defend Israel's right to defend itself from terrorist organisations and attacks, Szijjártó said on Facebook. The minister noted that he had first met Lapid back in 2013 during the Israeli's term as finance minister. Lapid expressed thanks for Hungary's continuous support for Israel, Szijjártó said, adding that he assured him that Israel could always count on Hungary in the future. Szijjártó said he was looking forward to an opportunity to host his Israeli counterpart in Budapest as soon as possible.

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## **ÁDER EXPLORES HUNGARIAN WATER MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY IN PODCAST**

President János Áder has discussed the activities of Hungarian water management companies at home and abroad with Bálint Horváth, the CEO of Pureco, a Hungarian-owned company installing water purifying systems in African countries. Áder noted that 90% of waste water is dumped

uncleaned into natural waters in Africa, which is an "enormous strain". Water resources are also overused, which is expected to lead to lack of water in a few decades, he said. Horváth noted that Pureco installed a waste water purifying system in Ghana in May. The company's self-developed purifying system allows the waste water handled there to be let back into natural waters without posing infection risks, he said. Experts of the Danube Regional Waterworks are currently training local professionals in operating the system, he said.

Pureco has been present at all Budapest Water Summits, and has used the forum to develop its network in Egypt and other countries, in line with the government's southern opening strategy, Horváth said. Áder noted that Budapest is organising the Planet Budapest 2021 sustainability expo, an extended version of the summits, between November 29 and December 5. The event is expected to draw more than 160 exhibitors from the Visegrad Group countries, he said. The president's Blue Planet (Kék bolygó) podcast will air weekly until then, presenting one of the participants each week, he said.

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## **PARLT CTTEE DECLARES MEETING ON SPY SOFTWARE CONFIDENTIAL**

Parliament's national security committee declared its meeting on the issue of Pegasus, an Israeli spy software, confidential for 50 years,

the chairman of the committee said on Monday. János Stummer of Jobbik said Interior Minister Sándor Pintér and Pál Völner, a state secretary of the justice ministry, attended the meeting, as well as four ruling party members of the committee. Opposition members had proposed setting up an investigative subcommittee, but the majority voted against the motion, Stummer said. The government officials "did not deny that politicians and journalists have been put under surveillance," Stummer said.

Zsolt Molnár, the committee's Socialist member, said "the meeting's only merit was that it had quorum". Lacking unequivocal responses, "the suspicion of obfuscation and secrecy grew", he said. Without an investigative committee, "we can only debate issues of faith," he said. Péter Ungár of LMP said that while national security was an important national interest, "it would be good to know how many times [the spy software was used] in the country's interest and how many times in [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán's".

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## **MESTERHÁZY DISCUSSES PEGASUS ALLEGATIONS WITH SECURITY AGENCY CHIEF**

Attila Mesterházy, the (Socialist) deputy head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, on Monday discussed with the head of the Special Service for National Security (NSZ) allegations regarding the use of the Israeli-made Pegasus spyware in Hungary. Mesterházy told a press conference

after his meeting with Hedvig Szabó that the NSZ chief gave a guarantee that the agency had never spied on anyone without permission. Mesterházy added, however, that because of a confidentiality statement he had signed, he was only able to provide general information about his meeting with Szabó. Mesterházy said he had been told that the NSZ only provided the technical framework for the operations of other organisations such as the prosecutor's office or the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and was therefore not responsible for their analysis either. This, he explained, meant that it was the organisations in question that ordered the surveillance operation, and furthermore, the NSZ was not responsible for making sure that an operation was lawful. Most such operations are approved by a court while some are signed off by the justice minister, he added.

Meanwhile, Mesterházy said the justice minister's office had still not responded to his request for a meeting to discuss the Pegasus affair. The politician said he was convinced that the government had access to and was using the spyware. Mesterházy also called for an investigation into whether Hungary's use of Pegasus could have allowed any hacker groups to get a hold of information that could potentially compromise national security. He said a parliamentary investigative committee should also be set up to look into the affair once the Investigative Prosecution Office of the

Capital concludes its own probe. Earlier this month Mesterházy discussed the use of the Pegasus spyware in Hungary with the director general of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Last month, data protection authority NAIH said it had launched an official investigation into press reports that the spyware licenced by the Israeli NSO Group had been used to hack the mobile phones of specific targets in multiple countries.

### **JUSTICE MINISTER: HUNGARY REGISTERS 160 EVENTS AT CONFERENCES ON EU FUTURE**

Out of the 2,000 events in a series of upcoming conferences on the future of the European Union, Hungary has registered 160, more than any other country except for Germany and Italy, the justice minister said on Facebook in an English-language post. Judit Varga said that "as the statistics show, the Hungarian people are committed to the future of Europe". "We are working hard and remain active in the dialogue and common reflection because we want to live in a Europe that is true to its own intellectual and cultural heritage. Where they do not make a mockery of national commitment and do not relativise the concept of family," Varga wrote. "The current consultation cannot be complete without the opinion of Hungarians. Now is the time to finally send a direct message to Brussels, whether it is about

migration, family or the protection of our common values," she added.

### **HUNGARY REGISTERS 1,072 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 13 DEATHS OVER THE WEEKEND**

Thirteen patients died over the weekend of a Covid-related illness, while 1,072 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 5,859,814 people have received a first jab, while 5,571,043 have been fully vaccinated. Fully 612,000 Hungarians have already received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 7,630, while hospitals are treating 380 Covid patients, 45 of whom need respiratory assistance. Since the first outbreak, 818,231 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,136. Fully 780,465 people have made a recovery. There are 4,031 people in official quarantine, while 6,805,886 tests have been officially carried out.

### **'WORLD-CLASS' FAIR GROUNDS, CONFERENCE CENTRE COMPLETED IN BUDAPEST**

A "world-class" complex of fair grounds and conference facilities has been completed at Budapest's Hungexpo area, Expo Park has announced. The 55 billion forint (EUR 155m) project was completed within two years as planned, the state-owned project manager said. The complex includes

a 25,000sqm conference centre, including an auditorium for over 2,000 people, as well as a 2,500sqm exhibition hall and a 2,300sqm roof terrace. As part of the project, 12,000sqm of parkland has been renewed and a new 1,000sqm park added. The company expects to organise 200 conferences, with 500,000 participants and 2 million visitors a year. The new facilities have already hosted events linked to the recent International Eucharistic Congress and also will be home to the upcoming Planet Budapest sustainability expo and world conference.

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### **GOVT RENEWS AGREEMENT WITH BAPTIST CHURCH**

The government renewed its comprehensive agreement with the Hungarian Baptist Church. The document was signed by Deputy

Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén and János Papp, the head of the church. At the event, Semjén said that the 1998 agreement had withstood the test of time and its renewal was merely necessitated by changes in the legal environment. He also said that similar agreements with the largest churches were being renewed, too. Papp said that some 300 communities and several hundred pastors of his organisation all welcomed the agreement.

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### **MAGYAR SUZUKI RESTARTS PRODUCTION**

Japanese car maker Suzuki is restarting production at its plant in Esztergom, northern Hungary, on Monday, after a two-week shutdown due to supply chain interruptions, Magyar Suzuki told business daily Világgazdaság. Magyar Suzuki said earlier production at the plant would stop between September 6 and 18 because of the

global semiconductor shortage. A spokesperson for the unit said developments would be undertaken at the plant during the downtime.

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### **DANUBIUS OCCUPANCY OVER 80% AT WELLNESS HOTELS**

Occupancy rates at Danubius Hotels' all-inclusive wellness hotels and accommodations around Lake Balaton were over 80% for the whole summer, the company said. Occupancy rates in Budapest were 50-70%, on average, during the summer months, although hotels filled up over the weekend of the August 20 national holiday, Danubius Hotels said. Bookings suggest occupancy rates of 70% at the company's wellness hotels outside of the capital and 50% in Budapest during the autumn months, marketing director Judit Gál said.