

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Hungary, Slovak PMs Viktor Orbán, Eduard Heger, with Esztergom, Sturovo mayors - 20th anniversary of Mária Valéria Bridge inauguration

MTI/PM's Press Office/Vivien Cher-Benkó

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU health ministers meet in Slovenia's Brdo

Egyptian president meets President János Áder in Budapest

Coronavirus updates

World Hunting Expo in Budapest

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: CEE SURVIVAL HINGES ON COOPERATION

The survival of central Europe's peoples is dependent on their friendship and alliance with each other, Viktor Orbán told a ceremony in Esztergom.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of Mária Valéria Bridge connecting Hungary and Slovakia, in northern Hungary, the prime minister said that as two countries which had both "learned serious lessons about the aggression of the invaders of the previous century", it was easy for Hungary and Slovakia to see "that we're not enemies but companions in misfortune". "Smart neighbours don't go to war with each other and aren't hostile towards each other." Two nations that respect each other's culture would always benefit from cooperation, he added. "It's possible to be a proud European and Slovak and a proud European and Hungarian." It is possible to achieve economic growth that everyone benefits from, to create jobs for everyone "without giving up our way of life, who we are, our past and our values", Orbán said, adding that neither country could be successful without the other. He said the bridge's anniversary needed to be about more than remarking how the bridge connects two countries and its peoples. "New winds are blowing today and we now see the world differently."

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ORBÁN: 'WE HAVE TO FIGHT FOR OUR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS'

Back when the bridge was inaugurated, central Europeans were rightfully optimistic, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at the ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of Mária Valéria Bridge connecting Hungary and Slovakia. "We believed the years of real struggles and the hard part were behind us," he added. "But that mood has evaporated and we had to realise that we cannot have our future be dependent on the goodwill of outside players," Orbán said. "We have to fight for our own achievements each and every day." "Twenty years ago even Brussels was on our side and supported us even with the construction of this bridge," the prime minister said. "But today, more and more it sees central Europeans as unequal partners and second-class member states." Orbán said Brussels wanted to force central Europeans to live with people it did not want to live together with and to enact policies that would limit their economic opportunities. "They also want to force a way of life onto us that goes against everything we value and want to preserve," he said. "It's hard to fight this threat."

Meanwhile, the prime minister said the Visegrad Group (V4) comprising Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland had continuously prospered over the past

decade. The V4 have established an effective and stable alliance and have tackled civilisational crises together, Orbán said. Twenty years after the reconstruction of the Mária Valéria Bridge, central European cooperation is stronger than ever, he added. "The Mária Valéria Bridge has remained a symbol that says we are the future of Europe and we mustn't allow the bridges connecting us to be torn down ever again," Orbán said.

Slovakia's Prime Minister Eduard Heger at the ceremony called Mária Valéria Bridge "a success story and the story of two good neighbours". The bridge had contributed to the development of bilateral ties and cooperation, he said, adding that a number of joint infrastructure projects including energy links had been implemented as a result, boosting the region's energy security. The two countries are also tied by other shared interests, he said, noting "common positions" on issues such as nuclear energy and migration.

Mária Valéria Bridge, blown up at the end of the second world war, was rebuilt in 2001. It was inaugurated on Oct. 11 by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Slovakia's Mikulas Dzurinda.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: STEMMING MIGRATION REQUIRES EXTERNAL ALLIES

Stemming the waves of illegal migration requires external allies such as Egypt, an "extremely

important partner", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with his Visegrad counterparts and the foreign minister of Egypt in Budapest on Monday. According to a foreign ministry statement, Szijjártó said Europe had been under constant pressure from migration since 2015. The minister insisted that the Visegrad Group countries had cooperated and thwarted plans to introduce migrant quotas in Europe, adding that "had we not succeeded, thousands or even tens of thousands of illegal migrants would now be living in our countries". Close cooperation is still needed, he said, adding that "one mistake is being made after another" on the international stage and "irresponsible remarks are threatening even greater migration waves." Referring to a potential 4 million refugees leaving Afghanistan, Szijjártó said: "We now hear proposals that those migrants will have to be redistributed." He added that Europe was now facing migration pressure from the East, too, at Poland's borders.

Concerning Egypt, Szijjártó said the country had proven that migration by sea could be stopped by shutting maritime borders and eliminating human smuggling rings. "It would be to good purpose if the EU changed its attitude towards Egypt accordingly. It would be good to turn down the volume of statements condemning Egypt, and it would be also good if the European development funds for Egypt in fact arrived," Szijjártó said, adding: "We will continue to rely

on Egypt in the future". V4 countries will assess whether Egypt is being hindered by European sanctions in obtaining technologies that would make its border controls more effective, Szijjártó said.

The talks, attended by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Jakub Kulhanek of the Czech Republic, Mariusz Blaszczak of Poland, and Slovak foreign affairs state secretary Martin Klus, were held in preparation for a V4-Egypt summit on Tuesday.

Blaszczak underlined the importance of protecting the external borders of the EU in Poland. Illegal migration and terrorism pose serious threats, he said, adding that responsible governments must do everything to protect their citizens. Shoukry also underlined the importance of efforts against illegal migration. Egypt currently accommodates between 5.5-6 million immigrants and needs assistance from the international community, he said. Egypt is making great efforts to fight extremist ideologies, he added.

There are no open issues between Hungary and Egypt and the two countries "benefit a lot from good bilateral ties especially in terms of the economy", Szijjártó said after meeting his Egyptian counterpart. He said that stability in north Africa was crucial for "security and calm in Europe", adding that the Hungarian government would make efforts "to ensure that Egypt's achievements in that field are recognised". Concerning economic cooperation with Egypt, Szijjártó noted that Hungary's

transport industry is "delivering on its largest foreign order ever", with a Hungarian-Russian consortium producing 1,300 railway carriages worth a total 370 billion forints (EUR 1bn) for the Egyptian national railway company. Hungarian companies are contributing to the renovation of cranes at the ports of Alexandria and Suez as well as to drinking water projects in the Sinai Peninsula, while Hungary has been contracted to deliver 7,000 cattle to Egypt before the end of the year, Szijjártó said. Since the beginning of the year, the turnover of bilateral trade has increased by 21%, driven by a 44% increase in Hungarian exports, the minister said.

Concerning the coronavirus pandemic, Szijjártó said that Hungary is donating 250,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Egypt "because Egypt is a favourite destination of Hungarian tourists". He added that talks were under way on mutually honouring coronavirus vaccination certificates. The Hungarian and Egyptian governments are in talks on gas supplies to increase Hungary's energy security, Szijjártó said. The new South Stream gas pipe line now offers an opportunity for Hungary to receive gas from the eastern Mediterranean and from Egypt's LNG terminals, he added. Parties at the talks also signed several letters of understanding in the areas of trade, international development projects, education, culture, and space research.

JUSTICE MINISTER: PENAL REFORM CRUCIAL FOR STRONG HUNGARY

Changes to the penal code is key to "ensure that the country is operative and contributes to building a strong Hungary", the justice minister said in her opening address to a conference on the subject on Monday. Judit Varga said that the government in the past 11 years advocated a "consistent penal policy with strict but proportional laws to restore public order and increase citizens' sense of security". The minister said that the crimes most affecting public order had been reduced by 70%, and the number of cases reported had fallen from 450,000 to 160,000 between 2010 and 2021. "Hungary has become one of the safest countries in the world, which further strengthens public trust in the judiciary and the state," Varga said.

Interior Minister Sándor Pintér called the government's penal policy a "success story both in terms of legislation and law enforcement". "The goal is that the story should go on," he added. He also said that feedback from residents concerning public security was also crucial, adding that the information gathered should be processed by "credible analysts".

ÁDER DISCUSSES FOOD WASTE IN PODCAST

One-third of food produced in the developed world never reaches the

consumers, President János Áder said in his Blue Planet (Kék bolygó) podcast together with the developer of Munch, an app designed to reduce food waste. Albert Wettstein said Munch contains a list of some 300 restaurants, coffee shops, bakeries and other partners offering to sell leftover, good quality food at half-price. While easing the burden on the environment, the app developed by university students also offers a good deal to consumers and restaurants, he said. The app is available in Hungary and Romania's Transylvania region, he said. So far, it has saved some 60,000 portions of food from being wasted, he added. While several businessmen have invested 30 million forints (EUR 83,000) in the app, the developers are on the search for further seasoned players seeing environmental protection as a business opportunity rather than charity work, Wettstein said. They are also working on a strategic partnership with the Food Bank, and with the Maltese Charity to provide food packages to those in need, he said.

FEKETE-GYŐR LOSES CONFIDENCE VOTE IN MOMENTUM

Leader of the opposition Momentum Movement András Fekete-Győr lost a vote of confidence at a meeting of party delegates on Sunday. Fekete-Győr initiated the vote himself after finishing last at the opposition's primary election in late September.

HUNGARY RECORDS 2,046 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 28 DEATHS OVER WEEKEND

Sixteen patients died of a Covid-related illness over the weekend, while 2,046 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 5,909,819 people have received a first jab, while 5,679,589 have been fully vaccinated. Fully 898,000 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 10,143, while hospitals are treating 715 Covid patients, 109 of whom need respiratory assistance. Since the first outbreak, 829,456 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,303. Fully 789,010 people have made a recovery. There are 5,339 people in official quarantine, while 7,071,702 tests have been officially carried out.

BOSNIAN HUMAN SMUGGLERS SENTENCED IN W HUNGARY

Two Bosnian nationals have been sentenced in a fast-track procedure for attempting to smuggle illegal migrants to Austria, the Veszprém county chief prosecutor's office said on Monday. The men, both aged 21, were transporting 17 Afghans and one Pakistani and one Iranian citizen in a van when they were stopped by police on the road between Székesfehérvár and Várpalota in the evening of

October 5, the statement said. The migrants had left a refugee camp in Sombor (Zombor) in Vojvodina, crossed the Hungarian border illegally and aimed to travel to Austria. Within three days, the two smugglers were sentenced to two and a half years in prison and expelled from Hungary for five years by the Veszprém regional court in a non-binding decision. The prosecutor's office acknowledged the decision, the defendants have three days to submit an appeal.

INNOVATION MIN: FUTURE- ORIENTED SECTORS 'JOINT ECONOMIC BREAKTHROUGH POINTS' FOR HUNGARY, CROATIA

The hydrogen economy and self-driving cars carry huge potential benefits for cooperation between Hungary and Croatia in RDI, László Palkovics, the innovation and technology minister, said in Zagreb. Palkovics said countries in the region had expressed interest in Hungary's "world class" ZalaZone test track for self-driving vehicles, and Croatia is keen to join Hungary's partnership with Austria and Slovenia at ZalaZone, which, he added, already enjoys close cooperation with the University of Zagreb.

Motorway sections connecting the Adriatic and Baltic regions are under way on both sides of the Hungarian-Croatian border in tandem with the Hungarian section of the M6 motorway, which is scheduled to be

completed with the Croatian section in early 2024, he noted. Palkovics said both governments aim to increase spending on RDI to 3% of their GDP by 2030. The minister welcomed the operation of the new LNG terminal on Krk Island which provides access to LNG for the entire region. He also said Hungary's adoption in May of its national hydrogen strategy would invigorate the sector's development. Hungarian companies are ready to help build Croatia's hydrogen infrastructure network and incorporate associated services. Hungary is ready to share with Croatia its experiences in dual vocational training, the ministry said.

During his one-day visit to the Croatian capital, Palkovics had talks with Croatia's ministers of science

and education, economy and sustainable development, transport and infrastructure, and construction, the ministry said in a statement.

APPEALS COURT SENTENCES IS MEMBER TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT

Budapest's municipal appeals court on Monday sentenced Syrian national Hassan F. to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity committed as a member of the Islamic State terrorist organisation. In its binding ruling, the appeals court upheld the life sentence imposed by the municipal court of Budapest in December last year, but added that the defendant had committed the crimes as part of a criminal

organisation, and removed the possibility of parole. According to the charges, the man was complicit in at least two killings in Syria in 2015, at least one of which involved a beheading. He was the commander of an armed unit which controlled an area and kept its residents under terror through executions and torture. When the unit was given a command to occupy a town in Syria, the defendant drew up a "death list" of people rejecting IS and then publicly beheaded the community's imam. The execution, which the community was forced to watch, was filmed.

The defendant was arrested at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport in 2018, and was later sentenced for people smuggling and other crimes.