

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Tram decorated in Christmas lights at Budapest's Kossuth Square

MTVA/Marton Mónus

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Oct industrial output

EU health ministers meet

President János Áder receives historical church leaders

Coronavirus updates

Hungarian Interchurch Aid begins distributing Christmas grocery packages

TOP STORY

ORBÁN TO ETHNIC KIN: VOTE IN ELECTION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is sending letters to ethnic Hungarians abroad in the coming weeks asking them to cast their ballots in Hungary's general election next spring.

Noting that the Hungarian parliament had passed a law on introducing dual citizenship, and over 1.1 million Hungarians abroad had taken the opportunity to become citizens with voting rights, Csaba Dömötör, the parliamentary state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, said on Facebook: "Hungarians abroad are now entitled to participate in making decisions on our future, and express their views during the general election." The prime minister will now ask them to take part in common decision making and participate in the vote, he added.

Referring to a referendum held under Fidesz's governing predecessor in which the granting of citizenship to ethnic Hungarians abroad was rejected, Dömötör noted that December 5, 2004, the date of that plebiscite, had marked a "trauma that is hard to forget" in the country's relationship with Hungarian communities abroad.

Under a recent amendment to the electoral law, Hungarian citizens living abroad will have the right to vote even if they are not resident in Hungary.

ORBÁN: MERKEL ‘ERA OF AMBIGUITY OVER’

According to the prime minister, “the era of ambiguity, stealth politics and drifting has ended with Merkel.” In one of his so-called Samizdat letters, Viktor Orbán added: “We now prepare for battle with our eyes wide open.” In the letter published on the prime minister’s website, Orbán noted that German Chancellor Angela Merkel retires on Dec. 8. “A piece of the life of Central Europeans will go with her,” the letter published in German and English said. He wrote that Merkel “understood us” and that “we understood her”. After a spell in opposition, first Merkel became Chancellor “and then we returned to power five years later”. “We managed the financial crisis in 2010, we were partners in the fight to keep the European Union together, and together we watched helplessly and without recourse the European tragedy of the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The loyal and disciplined Germans, the rebellious and reckless Hungarians, stood together for a common goal: a Europe in which all nations can feel at home,” he wrote.

Then in 2015 came “the migration invasion” which he called a “rupture, a fracture”. The migration crisis uncovered “the deep philosophical, political and emotional differences”

between Hungary and Germany regarding the nation, freedom and Germany’s role, Orbán argued. For Hungarians and other Central Europeans, he wrote, it revealed that “the homeland is essential”. It transpired that Germans “were on a different path” from “European civilization”, and moving towards “some kind of post-Christian and post-national status”. Hungarians, he said, understood that the Germans did not consider this a problem or “a disease of civilization to be remedied, but a natural, even desirable, and even morally superior outcome.”

“The fabric of European unity was unravelling, and there was no stopping it. Migration, gender, a federalized European Union, the dehumanization of Europe. Restoring European cooperation will require superhuman efforts in the post-secular era,” he wrote. Orbán asks in the letter: did Merkel open the door to trouble or cave into left-wing pressure? “Today we do not yet know the answer to this question.”

Orbán referred to what he called the new left-wing German government’s “pro-immigration, gender-friendly, federalist programme” aimed at a pro-German Europe, and lamented that the 16 years of Merkel’s tenure “did not give us the answer”. “One thing is for sure: the era of ambiguity, stealth politics and drifting has ended with Merkel. We now prepare for battle with our eyes wide open,” his letter concludes.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CRITICS OF HUNGARY-RUSSIA GAS DEAL IDLE ON ENERGY DIVERSIFICATION

Those slamming Hungary for cooperating with Russia on energy issues have themselves failed to act to diversify energy resources in the region, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary’s minister of foreign affairs and trade, told the Budapest LNG Summit. Hungary has a “responsible” energy policy, and often warned in recent years that European energy supplies were jeopardised, he said. The European Union’s policy has failed to prepare for and prevent an impending energy crisis, he said. “They should have focused on pragmatic decisions rather than a dogmatic approach.” Despite “a few steps forward”, the EU’s energy policy has failed to radically change the situation in its most vulnerable region, Szijjártó said. EU energy policy is overly politicised, even though “statements will not heat homes,” he said. Meanwhile, the western European gas reservoirs were not filled to the necessary degree, and the EU neglected to provide a transitional period in the transition to green economy, he said. “Nuclear energy is discriminated against,” he said.

Hungary, on the other hand, has always supported plans aiming to strengthen energy security, such as the construction of an LNG terminal in Croatia and interconnectors in

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neighbouring countries, Szijjártó said. Although “it was common knowledge that Hungary’s contract with Russia would expire this year,” critics of the deal failed to ensure the investment, funding and infrastructure upgrades necessary for diversification, he added. Thus, “Hungary had to enter a new contract with Gazprom, which, whether we like it or not, is a significant player in the region,” he said. The contract ensures reliable and affordable energy security in Hungary, Szijjártó said.

Regarding further diversification, Szijjártó said Azerbaijan’s gas resources may contribute to a solution to the problem. While the Croatian LNG terminal is “historically important and contributed to keeping utility prices low in Hungary”, its capacity will not make a substantial difference in diversification, he said. Energy diversification is an important issue, but Hungary’s government will continue to work on ensuring supply security in the country, the minister added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY ECONOMY AMONG ‘WINNERS OF NEW WORLD ECONOMY’

Hungary’s economy rebounded to pre-pandemic levels by mid-2021, while the global economy is only expected to do the same by the end of 2022, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said at his annual parliamentary hearing.

The Hungarian economy has “broken one record after another” in the past two years, he said. While 114 million people have lost their jobs worldwide due to the pandemic, and global investment volume plummeted by 42%, more Hungarians have jobs than ever before, he said. The country’s Q2 GDP growth was a record 17.8%, he said. Those achievements were thanks to the government’s consistent policy of cutting taxes, Szijjártó added. State funding now goes towards preventing unemployment rather than financing it, he said. The government also used “temporarily lax” EU legislation to tie investment funding to companies that retain their employees, he said.

This year has seen agreements concluded on a record 57 investments worth a total of 4 billion euros, he said. The government supported them with some 200 billion forints (EUR 547.8m) in grants, creating 9,000 jobs, he said. Exports also soared this year, with the data of the first nine months showing 16% growth, bringing the export volume to 112 billion euros, he said.

The investment support programme launched to offset the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic has seen 373 billion forints in grants supporting the investments of 1,380 companies, worth a total of 900 billion forints, Szijjártó said. The measure has helped preserve some 290,000 jobs, making Hungary a successful competitor when it comes to the reshuffling of global economic capacities, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: POLICY TOWARDS ETHNIC KIN ‘SOUL’ OF FOREIGN POLICY

The policy for Hungarian communities beyond the borders is “the soul” of Hungarian foreign policy, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said at an annual parliamentary hearing. He said the government sought to build cooperation with neighbouring countries with a view to improving the situation of ethnic Hungarian communities in those countries. Joint investments carried out in cooperation with neighbouring countries “based on mutual respect” would help to improve the diplomatic atmosphere, thereby helping the Hungarian community, Szijjártó said before parliament’s national cohesion committee. Hungary, he added, had further improved relations with six of its seven neighbours and achieved “common success stories”. “Ukraine is the only exception.”

Regarding cooperation with Romania, the foreign minister noted the agreement signed on reopening and operating two motorways linking the two countries. A third motorway will be built by 2024, Szijjártó said, adding that on the Hungarian side, a rail infrastructure project would be completed in the same year, ensuring an up-to-date link between Budapest, Bucharest and Constanta at the Black Sea.

As regards Serbia, Szijjártó noted the inauguration of the interconnector linking the two countries' gas networks. He further noted the start of the construction of the Budapest-Belgrade and Szeged-Subotica (Szabadka) rail lines.

Concerning Slovakia, he noted the inauguration of interconnectors of high-voltage power grids and the start of the construction of a bridge between Hungary's Ipolydamásd and Helemba on the other side of the border.

Szijjártó said that the pandemic "has not taken a heavy toll" on overall trade with neighbouring countries, and this volume had gone up by 20% in the first nine months of the year. He noted that Hungary has donated ventilators, Covid-19 tests, and medical equipment worth 2 billion forints (EUR 5.5m) to various neighbouring countries.

NOVÁK: WARSAW MEETING ATTENDED BY LEADERS WANTING TO PRESERVE SOVEREIGNTY

Several political leaders who want to preserve sovereignty met in Warsaw on Saturday and decided to tighten cooperation, the minister in charge of families said on Monday. Katalin Novák attended a meeting of leaders of a number of European conservative and right-wing parties in the Polish capital. "A debate about the future of Europe is very timely," she told public radio. "We must collectively state in which

direction we Europeans want to go," she said.

Novák said that many people were in agreement that several irreversible trends had got under way in Europe, and issues such as demographics, migration and the mass influx of migrants must be discussed. The pressure of migration has been continually rising since 2015 and the leaders of several European countries, including the newly formed government in Germany, decided to make their respective countries immigrant countries, she added. "If that's what the Germans want, they should do it, but without forcing their will on other countries, including Hungary," the minister, a member of ruling Fidesz, said. "The most important question is how Europe wants to be renewed," she said.

EU ENLARGEMENT 'KEY TO FUTURE OF EUROPE'

The key to the future of Europe is the enlargement of the European Union and it must be understood that the Western Balkans are "a member of the European family" in terms of their geography, history and economy, Justice Minister Judit Varga told the international forum "Dialogue on the Future of Europe: Is enlargement a key to the future?" Brussels should stop practices that result in the alienation of member states, she insisted. "The time has come for welcoming new countries in our community and build a stronger EU based on stronger nations," she

told the conference organised by the foreign ministry and the Ferenc Mádl Institute of Comparative Law. Varga called for accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia to be started without delay and for consultations with Serbia and Montenegro to be launched before the end of the year.

Olivér Várhelyi, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, said enlargement was the "EU's strategic response to its own development", adding that good relations with its neighbours were key to the EU's future. The "European perspective" is an engine of consolidation in the region and contributes to more resilient countries and economic and social welfare, he said. "The EU can only become stronger if it fully integrates the Western Balkans... It was key that the new European Commission has declared enlargement a priority to break the impasse," he said.

The EU has also developed an economic development plan which will pump 30 billion euros of funding into the region. The flagship projects will be in energy industry, transport, green energy resources and broadband networks, the commissioner said. The EU has also provided 3.3 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines to the Western Balkans, he added.

Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said the EU would only have a chance of regaining its strength if most powers needed for the management of the economic, migration and health crises



are given back to member states. The EU's future lies more in its member states than in Brussels, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as saying. He added that the EU's responses to the financial crisis of 2008, the 2015 migration crisis and the coronavirus pandemic had been "too ideological in nature" and had left little room for democratic debate. During this period, the EU's competitors managed to retain or even strengthen their share of global economic output, the minister said. Further, the EU's level of competitiveness is also hurt by "communitistic proposals" such as the call to discriminate against nuclear energy, the bloc's mobility package "which puts central European road haulage companies at a disadvantage" and attempts to harmonise tax, Szijjártó said. Stifling competition among member states also hurts the EU's external competitiveness, he said, stressing that Hungary would carry on with its tax cuts and investment promotion measures.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said the EU's migration policy had been "a total failure", which he said was well illustrated by the fact that the continent was under migration pressure from three different directions. "Whether this was actually their goal -- to have us be under as much pressure as possible and have as many migrants coming to Europe as possible -- is another question," he said.

As regards the pandemic, Szijjártó said it had demonstrated that "when there was a need for real leadership

decisions, the institutions failed", and the effective response measures had all come from the national governments.

Szijjártó also urged speeding up the EU's enlargement in the Western Balkans, saying it was critical for strengthening the bloc after Brexit.

**PLANET 2021 - ÁDER:
CLIMATE CHANGE NOT
PARTISAN ISSUE**

Climate change and water crises are not partisan issues, and plastic pollution is threatening people regardless of their political convictions, President János Áder said in his Blue Planet (Kék bolygó) podcast on Monday.

In the podcast where he answered questions regarding the Planet Budapest 2021 sustainability expo, which ended on Sunday, Áder said the expo had presented solutions offered by 183 exhibitors in the agriculture, food safety, water management, waste management, energy effectivity, transport and smart cities sectors. The expo showcased solutions developed in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, and especially targeted young people with interactive programmes, he said.

Áder warned that overconsumption in households, the industry and services sectors threatened with the current quality of life becoming impossible in 50 years. Regarding the return of the investment in the expo, Áder noted that the three Budapest Water Summits organised previously

had received a total of 1.5 billion forints (EUR 4.1m) in state funding and brought a "threefold return on the investment according to conservative estimates" by improving the position of Hungarian companies on the market, creating new jobs and promoting climate friendly solutions. Áder said he "hoped" that within a few years, the monies invested in the expo would flow back into state coffers from the exhibitors who showcased their solutions and found new business opportunities at the fair.

**CORONAVIRUS - 489
DEATHS, 22,699 NEW
INFECTIONS OVER
WEEKEND**

Altogether 489 patients died of a Covid-related illness over the weekend, while 22,699 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 6,159,926 people have received a first jab, while 5,867,068 have been fully vaccinated. Altogether 2,765,500 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 189,753, while hospitals are treating 7,440 Covid-19 patients, 586 of whom need respiratory assistance.

Since the first outbreak, 1,157,568 infections have been registered, while the number of fatalities has risen to 35,611. Fully 932,204 people have made a recovery. There are 48,217 people in official quarantine, while the number of tests taken stands at 8,666,739.



**DEUTSCH: HUNGARY
VICTIM OF MEDIA
MANIPULATION**

Hungary is yet again on the end of media manipulation by liberal media spreading fake news, Tamás Deutsch, the head of Fidesz’s European Parliament delegation, said in a letter to the body. Referring to Music Television (MTV)’s interview with Viktória Radványi, a member of the LGBTQ community and a winner of the “Generational Change” category of the European Music Awards streamed on MTV’s YouTube channel, Deutsch wrote that whereas she referred to violence on the streets of Budapest, “in the film, MTV’s short film shows footage taken not in Hungary but in Georgia”. He said MTV quietly removed the images falsely depicting Hungary only after Hungarian website kontra.hu drew attention to the discrepancy. The Fidesz MEP insisted that the case highlighted a “common and extremely harmful” practice by liberal and progressive media outlets that sought to manipulate and insult

certain countries or politicians on the international stage. Deutsch said that in such cases politically motivated false statements were presented as facts before being justified “with new lies and distortions”. He said MTV had not taken responsibility or apologised after the manipulation was exposed. Deutsch added that this sort of manipulation amounted to “an attack on freedom and democracy”.

**V4 CULTURAL OFFICIALS
DISCUSS INNOVATIVE
PROGRAMMES DURING
PANDEMIC**

Ministry officials in charge of culture from the four Visegrad Group countries have discussed at a two-day conference innovative programmes and cultural projects organised during the coronavirus pandemic, Péter Fekete, the state secretary of the human resources ministry, said. The conference entitled Impact and Influence Cultural Innovation in the Visegrad Countries during the Covid-19 Pandemic was organised online on December 1-2 by Hungary

as part of its current V4 presidency’s programme.

“Hungary as V4 president has the job to assemble and share good practices that have been developed [in the cultural sphere] in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia since the outbreak of the pandemic,” Fekete told public television. The member countries came up with many creative ideas and presented exciting new programmes, Fekete said, noting performances streamed by theatres online with their own TV crews and online classes presenting so far unseen art objects in 3D scans by several museums. He said an important result of the conference was to identify creative projects that had been launched “out of necessity” after the outbreak of the pandemic but which could also be used in the future, noting the Térzene free concert series in public spaces in cities, towns and villages. The Visegrad Group will send a summary of their most successful cultural programmes and projects to 40 cultural ministers in Europe, Fekete said.

