

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tamás Vasvári

Light show in downtown Veszprém (W), marking the official opening of the Veszprém-Balaton European Capital of Culture 2023 season

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels

Parlt budget committee meets, followed by presser

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY STILL HUNGARIAN

Hungary, just as it was 200 years ago on the day its national anthem was written, remains Hungarian, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Sunday, marking the Day of Hungarian Culture.

Addressing an ecumenical worship service in Szatmárcseke, in north-eastern Hungary, where Ferenc Kölcsey penned the Hungarian national anthem in 1823, Orbán said that thirty years ago he had believed that Hungarians' merit was their unwavering desire for national independence. Hungarian heroes who had died "under the blood-stained flags of freedom" earned the nation its right of survival, he added. He said he still believed this but also believed that it was necessary to "fight our freedom fights not merely for the sake of political independence and economic and political self-determination". "We always fought our biggest battles ... for the right to remain who we are and to live the way we want" and not "how others tell us to", he said. "We have always found the paths for our own life," Orbán said. Even when it couldn't be openly written on the flag, everyone knew that we are who we were and will be who we are."

The prime minister also greeted the city of Veszprém, in western Hungary, a European Capital of Culture in 2023.

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ORBÁN: ‘ADHERENCE TO OURSELVES IS THE KEY TO SURVIVAL’

If there is a virtue that deserves the reward of survival, “it is adherence to ourselves”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told an ecumenical worship service in Szatmárcseke, in north-eastern Hungary, marking the Day of Hungarian Culture. “This is why we once again cannot be entrapped by the sirens telling us to be on the right side of history,” he said. This is the reason why Hungary refuses to get involved in a bloody war and demands a ceasefire, talks and peace, Orbán said. Hungarians have learned that “the right and wrong sides of history will be determined by the major powers that eventually prevail, and they don’t in the least bit care what is good or bad for Hungarians,” he added. “We must stay on the Hungarian side of history even in the most complicated and most difficult situations,” Orbán said.

He said that though Hungary was a landlocked country, it was “an island”. Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian Basin 1,100 years ago and were surrounded by foreign peoples, he said. They founded a state and established a Hungarian way of life “which we have stuck to for more than 1,100 years”, he said. Hungarians speak a language no one else can understand and “navigate their country amid the

European waves” with a way of thinking no one else can follow, Orbán said.

“We decide who can enter the country and who can stay here; who can live with us and who can’t, and we also want to be the ones to determine the connections of our life with our neighbours,” the prime minister said. “We’re not better or worse, just different,” he said. “And this difference comes from Hungarian culture.”

“We are the Hungarians, who are not and will not be inferior to other peoples, and in our own special nature we are at least as good and respectable a people as any other,” the prime minister said. “Everything else concerns only God.” “We will see who will be left standing in another two hundred years, and which peoples will be screened out by the Lord of history,” he said.

ORBÁN: NATIONAL ANTHEM MESSAGE FROM PAST TO PRESENT, FUTURE GENERATIONS

Hungary’s national anthem feels to Hungarians as if it were a message from every Hungarian who had ever lived throughout the country’s history, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Sunday, marking the Day of Hungarian Culture. It feels like a message “not only for us Hungarians living today, but to every Hungarian that will live in future”, Orbán told an ecumenical worship service in Szatmárcseke, in north-

eastern Hungary, where Ferenc Kölcsey penned the Hungarian national anthem in 1823. He said it was “worthy and just” for the Day of Hungarian Culture to be observed on the day of the birth of the national anthem. “No other work over the last 1,000 years lifts the hearts of Hungarians the way the national anthem does,” Orbán said. If Hungarians had to find a work that expresses everything that is Hungarian “and makes Hungarians Hungarian, we would have to choose the national anthem”, he said.

Noting the funeral of Miklós Duray, a recently deceased ethnic Hungarian politician in Slovakia, this past Tuesday, where he last sang the national anthem, Orbán said the singing of the anthem had been meant not as a goodbye, but to “lift him ... into the pantheon of Hungarians”.

Though the national anthem is a prayer that would “demand a posture of penitent humility”, Hungarians sing it standing with their heads held high rather than on their knees with their heads bowed, he said.

The national anthem contains “that mysterious and elusive thing ... which we can call Hungarianness, Hungarian fate and Hungarian genius,” the prime minister said. “It is the form and quality of creation and existence that only we Hungarians are capable of.”

“The national anthem reminds us that we Hungarians -- like all Christian people who understand sin and forgiveness -- have a good reason to repent,” Orbán said. “We Hungarians are not without sin, either. Our faults

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and shortcomings are also numerous. The only question is what to do with this recognition and admission," he added. "Should we take the knee in the middle of the football pitch? Or tear down the statues of our great ancestors?" Orbán said. "Should we disown and erase our thousand-year culture? Or should we let the self-appointed, stateless and liberal censors sift through and rewrite the history of Hungarians?"

"In the most important sentence of Hungarian literary history, Kölcsey says otherwise: 'This nation has suffered for all sins of the past and of the future!'" Orbán said, quoting the anthem. But in a Christian reading this is "not a *carte blanche*" to commit more sins, the prime minister warned. "With a Christian soul, this sentence means that though the number of our sins may be high, God hasn't wiped us from the face of the Earth," Orbán said. "Even if he has punished us, he lets us continue our history. And the only reason being is that our virtues and merits are also numerous."

NOVÁK: CROATIA, HUNGARY COULD MAKE EU STRONGER

Croatia and Hungary, two countries in central Europe, could help the European Union become stronger, President Katalin Novák told an international press conference held with Zoran Milanović, her Croatian counterpart, in Budapest on Friday. Their talks earlier in the day focused

on the war in Ukraine, the fight against illegal migration, European integration of the Western Balkans, efforts to promote infrastructure and energy cooperation, the demographic crisis, and issues around ethnic minorities, she noted. Novák said Hungary welcomed Croatia's accession to the Schengen zone and its recent introduction of the euro, and highlighted the importance of bilateral trade ties and tourism. She said in 2022 over 600,000 Hungarian tourists had visited Croatia, adding that bilateral trade were growing fast, with Croatia being Hungary's third largest foreign trading partner and Hungary being Croatia's fourth. Novák noted that it was Milanović's first official visit to Hungary, adding that "the Croatian president's courageous stance could help a lot to clear the vision of European leaders".

At their talks, Novák and Milanović condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and voiced support for Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, and for endeavours to achieve peace. Novák thanked her guest for Croatia's support for Hungarians living in the country. Concerning energy cooperation, she said Hungary was relying on Croatia's key role in diversifying energy supplies to Hungary.

Answering a question on another subject, Novák said curbing the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine's Transcarpathia region was unacceptable "even without the current war". Ukraine's law on ethnic

minorities in its current form is "not acceptable" for Hungary because "it poses difficulties for Transcarpathia Hungarians". Novák said she had sent a letter to the Ukrainian president on the subject of the Ukrainian law on minorities.

Milanović said bilateral ties were good and the two countries were in agreement concerning most issues. He noted Hungary and Croatia's being neighbours for over a thousand years and said "they have never had really serious conflicts". Concerning the EU, Milanović said each country should have the right to "settle their own issues in their own manner". He said he supported "the rule of law rather than the rule of power". The EU should accept the existing differences between its members, he added. Croatia does not support the concept of a united states of Europe, Milanović said. He said Croatia had not joined the EU "to become a small screw in a large machinery", adding that his country wanted to preserve its openness.

Referring to an earlier remark in which Milanović had suggested that Brussels was "terrorising" Hungary, he said it was "the acutest of problems" when "financial assistance is awarded without clear criteria, using the might is right principle". Hungary's ruling Fidesz "has its own policy and no matter how right-wing it is, it is European", he said. "Punishing a political community or accusing a nation is unacceptable," he said. Milanović welcomed his country's

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joining the Schengen zone and that border controls were lifted at its border with Hungary, adding that those controls would be introduced at Croatia's southern border.

On another subject, Milanović said that the European sanctions against Russia were "not working and causing a huge problem". The question, he said, was "how much damage are we doing to ourselves?" Concerning the war in Ukraine, Milanović said that "Washington and Moscow should talk".

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH CROATIAN PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Zoran Milanović, the Croatian president, in Budapest on Friday, Orbán's press chief said. Orbán met his guest at the House of Music and they were shown around in the multi-award winning facility by András Batta, its director, said Bertalan Havasi. After the visit, the two politicians discussed bilateral relations and topical international affairs at a working dinner, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY ECONOMY BENEFITS FROM COOPERATION WITH MEXICO

Hungary's economy has benefitted a lot from cooperation with Mexico, its leading partner in Latin America, and Hungarian companies have "profited

much" from Mexico's industrial development, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on an official visit to Mexico City on Friday. Bilateral trade has levelled out over one billion dollars a year, with a "significant" Hungarian surplus, the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying in a statement. Demand for the products and services of Hungarian companies is growing, in digital construction planning, the pharmaceutical industry, the production of health-care equipment and the printing industry, the minister said. "The increase in demand for Hungarian products in these branches of industry gives rise to Hungarian investments," he said. Szijjártó noted that Mexico plans to go GMO-free in some farming sectors and said that could translate as "big opportunities" for Hungary's "world-class" food safety companies. The minister said Hungary was advocating for an update of the "outdated" cooperation agreement between the European Union and Mexico signed more than 20 years ago.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Church of Nativity in Tepoztlan, which has been restored with a Hungarian government contribution after a devastating earthquake in 2017, Szijjártó said the 10,000 kilometre distance between Hungary and Mexico was "not big enough for the Hungarian government not to learn about the disaster and its gravity". "It was therefore clear that we would want to, and will help," the

minister said, adding "that we strongly believe in the universal nature of Christianity which is why we, Christians, bear responsibility for each other, no matter where we live in the world". He said the government was proud that two churches had been restored with its contribution in the second largest Catholic country in the world. Parts of the 16th-century Church of Nativity, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has been renovated with a 300-million forint (EUR 750,000) support from the Hungarian government. The ceremony was also addressed by Culture Minister Alejandra Frausto.

NOVÁK: FAMILY THE 'CRADLE OF CULTURE'

Family is the "cradle of culture", including Hungarian and European culture, which is rooted in family, President Katalin Novák said at the official opening of the Veszprém-Balaton European Capital of Culture 2023 season in Veszprém, in western Hungary, on Saturday. "We Hungarians ... know that we must not only preserve, protect and pass on what was left to us by our ancestors, but also add to it," Novák said. She said this was the reason why Hungary over the past decade had built 200 churches and renovated the State Opera House, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Vigadó cultural centres and castles across the country. It is the same reason why Hungary is creating something new with the House of Music, the Museum of Ethnography and the Csokonai

Fórum of Debrecen, the president added. "This is why we are restoring the Castle District on the Buda side and creating community spaces even in the smallest localities," she said. All that is needed is for someone to hand over and someone to inherit the rich heritage, Novák said. "Family is also the cradle of culture; of Hungarian culture and European culture," she said. "European culture, too, is rooted in family."

"We are living in troubled times," Novák said. Life and progress are being hindered by pandemics, natural and economic disasters and war, she said. "But life forges a path: babies can also be born in shelters, the fierce struggle for a better life continues even with rising prices and artists don't stop creating," Novák said. "Culture breeds life and hope. It can ease pain, dispel fear and helps with reconciliation," she said. "It reminds us that we shouldn't just survive but also live."

Novák said the celebration of Hungarian culture was a celebration of shared European culture. She noted that this was why the Croatian president had been invited to join the opening of the European Capital of Culture season. Novák said Zoran Milanović was a "guest at home", noting the strong ties between Croatian and Hungarian culture. "We're celebrating together with the conviction that Europe needs us at least as much as we need a strong Europe of nations, one that is much stronger than it is today," Novák said. She also stressed the importance

of other European nations such as those of the Balkans "with whom we suffered together over centuries". Hungary is fighting for those countries to be a part of a shared Europe "not just in spirit and culturally, but also legally and economically". "Unification is not assimilation; we're taking, preserving and expanding the heritage of our ancestors, making Europe richer," Novák said. There is a place in Europe for Serbians, Montenegrins, Kosovans, North Macedonians, Albanians and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their cultures alongside Germans, French, Italians, Scandinavians, central Europeans, Croatians and Hungarians, Novák said. Each nation is a unique voice, "but the harmony will only be perfect together".

Veszprém as a European Capital of Culture represents the unique and the common, not just in its history, but also in its present, Novák said, noting that Veszprém's queens "brought Europe to Hungary and took the world of Hungarians to other countries of Europe".

The Croatian president told the opening that there was much more that united the nations of Europe than divided them. He said the aim of the European Capital of Culture title was to highlight the cultural richness of European Union member states and to deepen Europeans' feeling of belonging to the same cultural space, promoting thereby each other's mutual understanding. The project also seeks to highlight that

the European cultural space is a result of the joint contributions of various states and cities, Milanović said. This is especially true for central Europe, he said, noting the region's complex history and the "deep mark this leaves on culture".

MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS CULTURAL, REGIONAL ASPECTS OF EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE PROGRAMME

Tibor Navracsics, the regional development minister, highlighted the cultural and regional aspects of the Veszprém-Balaton European Capital of Culture 2023 season in Veszprém, in western Hungary, on Saturday. Navracsics told a press conference that the programme aimed to demonstrate the "economic strength of culture" and that the creative industry, culture and the utilisation of cultural heritage could serve as the basis for an economic model. "And this not only generates profit for a region, but can also promote economic growth," the minister added.

Gyula Porga, Veszprém's mayor, said the city's European Capital of Culture (EKF) programme had been put together with the cooperation of 116 local councils. He noted the infrastructure developments that went into the programme, highlighting the importance of sustainability in their implementation. Porga said Veszprém aimed to be one of Europe's 20 most liveable cities by 2030.

Alíz Markovits, managing director of Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Zrt, the company responsible for the programme, said the European Capital of Culture 2023 season will offer some 3,000 events over the course of the year. In response to a question, she said the EKF programme had a total budget of 74 billion forints (EUR 187.6m), 72 billion of which was covered by the government. A total of 1.5 billion forints comes from the Melina Mercouri Prize awarded to the project by the European Union, with the remainder being covered by local councils, she added.

FIDESZ MEP: ‘BRUSSELS’ WORLD REMAINS CORRUPT, POLITICALLY MANIPULATED’

The world of Brussels has not changed a bit with the election of Marc Angel as a new Vice-President of the European Parliament, but has remained as “corrupt and politically manipulated” as it was before, an MEP of Hungary’s ruling Fidesz said on Sunday. “Angel, a new EP vice president, fits fully in the well-known, trendy world that dominates the policy line in Brussels,” Balázs Hidvéghi told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio’s morning programme. “This can be partly seen in his LGBTQ activism as well as his involvement in sham attacks the [EP’s] Socialists mounted against governments and countries guided by Christian Democratic principles and national sovereignty,” he said.

Angel “has been elected to fill a post that became vacant after its previous holder, the Socialists’ Eva Kaili, was put behind bars”, Hidvéghi said.

A post of vice president should have gone to a representative of Identity and Democracy (ID), a right-wing conservative group launched in the EP in 2019, to reflect proportions in the EP, he said, adding however that ID politicians “get excluded practically from all ways of operation” including “the possibility to fill posts”. Hidvéghi noted that the Fidesz group had supported Annalisa Tardino, the Italian ID candidate for the post, but “this centre left, left-wing alliance held the line again, unfortunately with the support of the European People’s Party”. “Nothing is changing, this is the same corrupt and politically manipulated world of Brussels we already know so well,” he said.

In connection with Kaili, the Hungarian MEP referred to an EP programme led by the politician which promoted an anti-child pornography and anti-child abuse software with the inclusion of a US-based company. “This would mean that the personal data of tens of millions of Europeans might be obtained and handled by an American firm,” he said. Hidvéghi called the case “a textbook example of corruption” involving a large foreign company paying a huge amount of money to selected politicians willing to allow them access to influence politics. He called the proposal on eradicating graft and foreign interference in the EP a “good for nothing” bill, arguing

that in the current corruption case of Brussels “it is the institutional system that is corrupt, that can be bought and can be manipulated”. “And this all affects the European Parliament, the European Commission and other players,” he said.

BAKONDI: INTL COOPERATION NEEDED TO ELIMINATE HUMAN SMUGGLING RINGS

Human smuggling rings can only be eliminated through the cooperation of international law enforcement agencies, the prime minister’s chief domestic security advisor said on Saturday, adding that Hungary would support such a partnership. The European Union’s southern borders are now better guarded thanks to cooperation among EU countries like Austria, Croatia and Hungary as well as non-EU states like Serbia and Montenegro, György Bakondi told public current affairs channel M1. Hungary’s law enforcement agencies are doing everything possible to repel human smuggling rings, Bakondi said, adding, at the same time, that they could only be eliminated through EU cooperation. Hungary would support EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson spearheading such cooperation with specific steps, he said. Bakondi said human smuggling rings are estimated to have collected over three billion euros last year. European operative bodies, including that of Hungary,

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have detailed information about the human smuggling rings active on the Balkan migration route, he said. There are five large smuggling rings active near the Hungarian border which even compete against each other, Bakondi said, noting that their rivalries had recently led to armed confrontations among them.

PÁRBESZÉD TO SUBMIT DRAFT RESOLUTION ON REDUCING AIR POLLUTION

The opposition Párbeszéd is submitting to parliament a draft resolution on reducing air pollution, the party's group leader said on Sunday. About 13,000 people die each year in Hungary as a direct result of air pollution and another 100,000 fall ill, Tímea Szabó told an online press conference. She cited a 2021 ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union declaring that Hungary was in breach of EU air quality rules by failing to comply with the daily limit for particulates in the air and failing to address these shortcomings. Szabó said soaring energy prices had resulted in even more people using materials for heating that worsen the air quality.

To address the issue, Párbeszéd is submitting to parliament a draft resolution demanding that the government review and expand the air quality monitoring network as well as the supply of constant real-time data. The party also wants the cabinet to set up a national fund with the aim of reducing the most harmful emissions,

Szabó said. Párbeszéd also expects the government to set a stricter limit for particulates in the air, review the regulations for smog alerts, ban the burning of green waste and launch a nationwide awareness campaign, she added.

CLOSE TO 12,400 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,249 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 7,143 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 193 people, ORFK said on Sunday. Budapest received 42 people, 23 children among them, by train.

FITCH CHANGES OUTLOOK ON HUNGARY BBB RATING TO NEGATIVE

Fitch Ratings affirmed Hungary's investment grade BBB sovereign rating but changed the outlook to negative from stable at a scheduled review on Friday. Fitch said higher global interest rates, volatile energy prices and weakening demand in Hungary's key export markets is exposing vulnerabilities stemming from a policy mix that is "influenced by political considerations".

Commenting on the review, the finance ministry said Fitch had changed the outlook to negative

from stable due to the tougher international environment. In a statement, the ministry cited the agency as highlighting Hungary's significant reduction of its public debt and budget deficit. Fitch also sees the economy avoiding a recession for the year as a whole, the ministry said. Fitch's changing of Hungary's outlook shows that the political disputes generated by the European Commission and the uncertainties caused by the war and the "sanctions-fuelled energy crisis" are also reflected in the reviews of rating agencies, the ministry said. It noted that Hungary has investment grade status from all three major credit rating agencies.

MERCEDES-BENZ KECSKEMÉT TO PAY EMPLOYEES EUR 2,200 PROFIT-SHARING BONUS

Employees of Mercedes-Benz Manufacturing Hungary Kft will receive a lump sum bonus payment of gross 870,000 forints (EUR 2,200) in April, the company said on Saturday. The profit-sharing bonus payment will be given to thank employees for their share in the company's achievements in 2022 amid logistics challenges, semiconductor shortages, regional coronavirus-related restrictions and geopolitical uncertainty and their high level of flexibility, it said in a statement. Mercedes-Benz employs more than 4,500 people at its plant in Kecskemét, in central Hungary.