

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Burned out vehicles on the M1 motorway near Herceghalom, where five trucks and 37 cars crashed

UPCOMING EVENTS

LMP presser on party's child protection draft decree

EBRD Transition Report conference

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

PROGRESS MADE TO UNBLOCK COHESION FUNDS

By committing to judicial reforms Hungary has taken a "huge step" towards unblocking cohesion, the justice minister said in Brussels.

Talks between Hungary and the European Commission on the package of judicial reforms are focused on a narrow set of political issues and are now "in the home stretch", Judit Varga told MTI after a meeting of European Union interior and justice ministers. The Hungarian government has been conducting "constructive and intensive" negotiations with the EC since last July with a view to ensuring that Hungarians are given access to the EU monies they are entitled to, the minister said, noting that the package of judicial reforms agreed on between Hungary and the EU last December will soon be submitted to parliament, with the government having consulted all stakeholders. Varga said she had discussed the judicial reforms with European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders on Friday, adding they had agreed that the package would soon be finalised.

VARGA: CHILDREN'S UPBRINGING PARENTS' RIGHT

Concerning the infringement procedure launched over Hungary's child protection law, Judit Varga, the justice minister, said Hungary's recent counter-appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union argued that according to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights it is the exclusive right of parents to decide on their children's upbringing. The minister told MTI that the EC's infringement procedure was "ideologically driven" and "a product of opposition lobbying". The Hungarian government will use every legal tool at its disposal to protect the will expressed by the Hungarian people in last year's referendum on child protection, she said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HAS TALKS WITH UK COUNTERPART

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó had talks with James Cleverly, his British counterpart, from Stockholm by phone. The talks focused on the Ukraine war and Finland and Sweden's NATO integration, Szijjártó said on Facebook after the talks. He said the war "impacts Hungary immediately and seriously", adding that the number of Hungarian soldiers dying in the front lines was increasing. The two ministers agreed that an early solution must be found to answer global inflation, energy

and food supply difficulties. Szijjártó welcomed the recent Windsor Agreement between the European Union and the UK, and assured his British counterpart of Hungary's support in building "the deepest and broadest possible cooperation" between the bloc and Britain. Szijjártó said the Hungarian government supported the ratification of Finland and Sweden's NATO integration, but added that it was a "rightful expectation" that those countries "should not spread lies and false information and give due respect to Hungary".

NÉMETH ON UKRAINE: HUNGARY, POLAND GOALS SAME, APPROACH DIFFERENT

Concerning the war in Ukraine Hungary and Poland see eye to eye in terms of the goals, with "differences of opinion in terms of the methods only", Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said in Wrocław, where he handed over a bust of Hungary's King Matthias (1443-1490) to a local museum on the occasion of Hungarian-Polish Friendship Day. Following his talks in Poland, Németh said the two countries were in agreement on "the two most crucial issues", namely that Ukraine "must remain an independent country which is capable of preserving its territorial integrity", and that both countries condemn Russia's aggression. The Hungarian government is looking for ways to support Ukraine, Németh

said, noting the areas of energy, reverse oil and gas supplies, as well as food exports. He also mentioned defence cooperation with Ukraine within which Ukrainian health professionals are trained in Hungary for the military. Concerning Russia, Németh said both Hungary and Poland "consider it a crucial goal that Russia should not pose a threat to our countries, NATO, and the EU". Concerning the differences, Németh said Hungary and Poland did not share views on issues such as weapons deliveries to Ukraine or sanctions against Russia. He added, however, that the two countries' approaches were "not in conflict, but they are not identical".

ORBÁN TO MEET MACRON ON MONDAY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will meet French President Emmanuel Macron for talks at a working dinner in Paris on Monday, Orbán's press chief said in a statement. According to French press reports, the meeting will be held in preparation for an EU summit held late in March. The agenda of the talks includes the war in Ukraine, European competitiveness, energy issues, and the continent's defence industry.

GULYÁS: GOVT 'BEARS RESPONSIBILITY' FOR EVERY HUNGARIAN

The Hungarian government professes the principle of the "unified Hungarian nation" and "bears responsibility for

each and every Hungarian”, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office said, addressing a conference marking the Day of Szekler Freedom. Gulyás noted Hungary’s law on preferential dual citizenship for ethnic Hungarians, as one of the first pieces of legislation the Fidesz-Christian Democrat parties proposed in 2010. “Thanks to that law, there are 1.1 million ‘new’ Hungarian citizens living all over the world,” he said, adding that dual citizenship had created a bond between the state of Hungary and Hungarians “whether they live in the mother country or beyond”. He also noted that some 20-25% of all Hungarians lived in communities outside Hungary. Concerning differences between those communities, he said Transcarpathian Hungarians were in the most difficult situation, adding that the greatest support should go to those people who stayed in their homeland despite the war in their country.

Gulyás highlighted Hungary’s ties with Serbia, and said “relations have fundamentally changed, turning an adversarial relationship burdened by mutual, historical grievances into friendship”. He added that the incumbent Serbian government’s approach to the Hungarian minority was “better than at any time since the Trianon Peace Treaty” of 1920. He said the Hungarian minority’s situation in Romania was “difficult”, adding that Romania’s “resistance against Hungarian

national symbols has not ceased to exist”. Concerning Slovakian Hungarians, Gulyás said he hoped that a recently established election alliance could again ensure ethnic Hungarians’ presence in the Slovak parliament. Hungary will provide every assistance to all Hungarian communities beyond the borders, he added.

Concerning the war in Ukraine, he said Hungary should “stay on the grounds of common sense and remember who the attacker is and who the attacked is, and do everything to prevent a regional conflict from spreading to Europe.” It is crucial that “the war is kept outside the borders and NATO does not get involved”, he said. The Hungarian government demands that international law be observed and respects the right of each country “both to self-defence and territorial integrity”, he said. It is in the interest of Hungary and the whole of Europe for there to be “a ceasefire and peace as soon as possible,” he added. Once there is peace, “we may return to the mid-2010s, when it seemed that economic growth and development had no external constraints,” he said.

Answering a question, Gulyás said “the issue of introducing the euro could be on the agenda in 5 or 6 years if we are doing very well”. He said such a move would require meeting 90% of the average economic level of the bloc, adding that “currently we are at 75-76%”.

KOCSIS: HUNGARIAN LEFT SERVES PRO-WAR FORCES

While the interest of Hungarians lies in working for the swiftest possible peace in Ukraine, Hungarian left wingers represent Western pro-war forces, Máté Kocsis, the head of the Fidesz parliamentary group, said in an interview to public radio. Referring to the Fidesz-sponsored “pro-peace” bill recently submitted to lawmakers, Kocsis said the declarations contained in the bill were based on the opinion of ordinary Hungarians “expressed time and again”. The bill declares that Hungary wants to avoid drifting into the war and refuses to deliver arms or allow weapons to be transported across Hungarian territory, and the country resists political pressure to comply with any request that would drag it into the war.

Kocsis said it was clear from the parliamentary debate that the left wing was not fully in favour of the pro-peace declaration and were tabling a number of amendments accordingly. He added that it was likely the left wing would attack the governing side’s pro-peace position in the coming days and weeks. He insisted the Hungarian left wing was the “Hungarian voice of Brussels”. During the election campaign, he added, the left “did not represent the Hungarian position” and it was now apparent that they “receive dollars in exchange”. Kocsis said Hungary would be kept under pressure as long as it maintained its stance on “the

gender issue, the war-peace debate, or migration". One way to resist such political pressure was to pass the pro-peace resolution, he said, adding that it was doubtful the Hungarian left wing could be counted on to do so. Notwithstanding differences of opinion between the government and Brussels, however, Hungary remains committed to NATO and the European Union, Kocsis said.

POLL - FIDESZ BENEFITS FROM IMPROVED SENTIMENT - NÉZŐPONT, MEDIÁN

Fidesz and its Christian Democratic ally have benefitted from improved sentiment in the country, notwithstanding the war in Ukraine and sanctions, according to surveys by the Nézőpont Institute and the pollster Medián. Nézőpont said on Saturday that the majority of voters continue to support the ruling parties. Whereas both Nézőpont and Medián found in December that two-thirds of Hungarians thought that the country was headed in the wrong direction, at the end of February and beginning of March, the proportion of pessimists dropped to 57 and 58%, the pollsters found respectively.

Nézőpont found that the proportion of optimistic Hungarians increased from 26% to 32%, while Medián registered 27% to 37%. Nézőpont found that 52% of decided voters supported the Fidesz-led coalition, while Medián's polling

registered 51%. The Democratic Coalition, the largest opposition party, had the support of 12%, according to Nézőpont, while Medián registered 14%. Nézőpont said 9% of respondents favoured the radical opposition Mi Hazánk, while Medián found the liberal Momentum with the same proportion. The Two-Tailed Dog Party would garner a sufficient number of voters to enter parliament, according to both pollsters, while the conservative Jobbik party was borderline. The other opposition parties would not get enough votes to cross the threshold for representation, according to both surveys.

DEPUTY PM COMMEMORATES ETHNIC HUNGARIAN POLITICIAN ESTERHÁZY

János Esterházy, a leader of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian community between the two world wars, represented the cause of survival of the Hungarian nation and the notion that every nation has the right to exist, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said on Sunday. Addressing the commemoration and the presentation of the Esterházy Award granted by the Rákóczi Alliance in Parliament, Semjén said Esterházy had been a politician who represented "the common fate of the Slovak and the Hungarian nation". He symbolised and proved that Christianity and the Hungarian nation "were a reality

pointing towards one another", Semjén said. Semjén praised Esterházy for his courage to speak his credo: "We know only one cross: that of the Golgotha." "Let his credo and martyrdom" light the path of the Hungarian nation and central Europe, he added.

The Esterházy Award was presented to Antal Majnek, a Roman Catholic bishop of Mukachevo (Munkács) in recognition of his work in serving Hungarians and all other people in Transcarpathia. In his laudation, János Árpád Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad, said Majnek had an "imprescriptible role" in rebuilding the Hungarian Roman Catholic church in Transcarpathia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and he praised the awardee for his charitable and social work.

Count Esterházy (1901-1957), the sole Hungarian deputy in the Slovak Parliament before 1945, was an advocate of the ethnic Hungarian community who stood up to any violation of minority rights and discrimination. After the second world war, the Czechoslovak authorities handed him over to the Soviet Union and he was sent to the Gulag on trumped-up charges. He was sentenced to death in 1947 for collaborating with the fascists but was pardoned by the president and handed a life sentence, which was commuted to twenty-five years in prison during a general amnesty. He died in a prison in Mirov in March 1957.

JOBBIK TO CONTEST EP ELECTION ALONE

Opposition Jobbik will contest the 2024 European parliamentary elections on its own and favours fielding local patriots in the local elections without opposition party logos. Jobbik will contest the EP elections as a modern centre-right pro-European party, Márton Gyöngyösi, the party's leader, told a press event.

As regards the local elections, he said a recent mayoral by-election in Jászberény, in eastern Hungary, showed that the vote should be contested without the presence of party logos. He said it was better if the opposition parties "step back and let people who are considered credible locally" decide amongst themselves who should go up against ruling Fidesz's candidate. However, Jobbik does not rule out the possibility of holding primaries in places where there may be disagreements, Gyöngyösi said, adding that "this would have to happen locally".

POLICE: MAN, 44, DIES IN M1 MOTORWAY PILE-UP

A 44-year-old man died in Saturday's pile-up on the M1 motorway near Herceghalom, the Budapest Police

Headquarters (BRFK) said on their website. Altogether 41 vehicles were involved in the mass collision around 25km west of Budapest. Besides the deceased man, 39 people were injured, two with life-threatening injuries, while twelve are in a serious condition, the statement on the website said on Sunday. Another 25 sustained minor injuries. Ten children were among the injured, it added. The body of the deceased was found under the wreckage of a burnt-out car in the morning, according to the statement. Police are examining the circumstances of the mass collision as part of a criminal investigation, it said. Ambulances transported the injured to hospitals in Győr, in western Hungary, Budapest, Tatabánya and Székesfehérvár, Pál Győrfi, spokesperson of the National Emergency Services, said on Saturday.

Rescuers arrived at the scene with four helicopters and 16 ambulances.

The accident may have been caused by a localised dust storm which suddenly reduced visibility, according to a post on the social media page of the company that operates Hungary's motorways. Traffic resumed in the direction of Budapest at after midnight on Sunday and at 5.15am in the direction of Győr.

ECON DEVELOPMENT MINISTER DISCUSSES BILATERAL TIES WITH GEORGIA COUNTERPART

Márton Nagy, the minister of economic development, held talks with Levan Davitashvili, Georgia's economy minister, on Friday, and they reviewed bilateral economic ties with a focus on industry, the ministry said in a statement. Hungary's trade with Georgia has developed over the past years to record levels, with bilateral trade in goods totalling now 90 million euros. The sides were in agreement on the need to further develop economic and trade ties, with a focus on expanding direct cooperation between businesses.

UKRAINE CRISIS - ALMOST 10,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,076 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 4,860 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 96 people, ORFK said on Sunday. Budapest received 34 people, 12 children among them, who arrived by train.