

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Róbert Hegedűs

The National Gallery show of photos of Budapest at the turn of the 20th century

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU defence ministers meet in Brussels

Stats office releases Q3 2023 GDP figures

Events linked to wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY 'VOICE OF EUROPEANS'

"Hungary today is the voice of the people of Europe," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told a conference organised by the Századvég Foundation on Monday.

"Hungary is the only country that speaks the thoughts of Hungarians and western Europeans," he told the conference on sovereignty. "The time has come for change in Europe and for Europeans to take back European institutions." Concerning the history of Századvég, Orbán said the institute was founded 30 years ago, "but the concept had been born much earlier, in the mid-1980s, when Századvég, a periodical, was issued," noting his own participation. "This generation decided not to pretend anymore" and expressed its hatred of communism, he added. "We wanted the communists to fail and the Soviets to pull out of Hungary ... and a periodical seemed to be a good idea, as free life begins with free speech and free speech starts with free writing," he said. "Freedom will bring further freedoms and create free people; that was the philosophy of Századvég." He said his generation had been "the most inexperienced and the most radical" of all other opposition movements. The foundation of Századvég was "a story of the heart and the love for the homeland", he said.

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ORBÁN: SZÁZADVÉG 'INTELLECTUAL WORKSHOP'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said the Századvég Institute was needed as an "intellectual workshop, a civic research centre that supports us". It was clear for everyone in 1993 that "Fidesz exists and will exist", but the return of the communists then posed a serious intellectual challenge. "The real twist in the entire story, which also made our lives intellectually more difficult, was that the door where they entered had been opened by freedom-loving liberals," he added. "Nobody is surprised about that here now because it is natural in western Europe that the liberals are the new communists," but in 1993-94 it caused "a moral shock" that shook the entire Hungarian political system because "decent people at that time found this odd, to say the least". "As a result, we had to get strong and there had to be an intellectual workshop, which is why Századvég was created 30 years ago," he said.

Orbán suggested that back then, they had been on the same side with US financier George Soros, because "he also did not want Hungary to be ruled by communists, and supported anti-communist activities". "It was not yet clear that he wanted to be the one to rule central Europe instead of the communists and Soviets ... we could not be aware of that," Orbán said. "Now he no longer conceals his plans

... he crashed the British pound, he is flooding Europe with migrants, he will openly say that national borders should be abolished and Europe's countries stripped of their sovereignty," he added.

ORBÁN: WORLD NOT INTERESTED IN HUNGARY SOVEREIGNTY

Orbán said the lesson learnt from the 2002 election defeat was that "we believed that if we live in democracy, nothing threatens us anymore". "We thought the nation has sovereignty, it is ours, and everyone will serve that at home and respect it from the outside," he added. "The world around us is not interested in Hungary remaining a sovereign country ... they will be better off if we partially or fully lose our sovereignty," he said, adding that even some Hungarians thought that way. Hungary, he said, could not be sovereign as long as public thinking was dominated by "a liberal hegemony". "This does not mean that we should eliminate what belongs to our adversaries ... what we want is pluralism in Hungary," he said. "In the West, they have not understood this; public thinking there is unable to step out of the liberal framework," he added.

The Hungarian political system stands closer to a democratic way of thinking than the western European does, he said. "Liberals do not care about the people; their thinking focuses on an ideology and not the

community of people," he added. Orbán said Hungary's international influence was "greater than its real weight" because "Europeans can now express their opinion via Hungary rather than their own publicity".

"It is high time the West learnt that you cannot live in lies because it will make you sick and destroy you," he said. Meanwhile, he said "lost sovereignty was in the focus of the last century", while Hungary's sovereignty was regained at the end of the century and "this decade is about retaining that sovereignty". Hungary continues to rely on Századvég's help, "especially the young generation", Orbán said. "We regained sovereignty and now it is up to young people to retain it."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EU SHOULD EVALUATE ITS POLICY 'FAILURE' INSTEAD OF ADOPTING 12TH SANCTIONS PACKAGE

Rather than adopting a 12th sanctions package against Russia, the European Union should evaluate the "failure" of the policy it has pursued and the damage caused by the sanctions it has imposed so far, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels on Monday. Addressing a news conference during a break in a meeting of EU foreign ministers, Szijjártó said Monday's meeting had also been attended by his Ukrainian counterpart via a video call, to seek more support for Ukraine's fight. Hungary's stance is that it is time for the EU to confront the outcome

of its political decisions on Ukraine, Szijjártó said, according to a ministry statement.

The EU, he said, should assess the extent to which its policies had achieved their intended goals, as well as their impacts on the bloc and its foreign relations, the member states, Russia and Ukraine. "If we took a look at what this enormous financial support of more than 80 billion euros has been spent on so far ... we'd see that only a small fraction of the goals of these decisions can be said to have been achieved," Szijjártó said.

"The fact is that the sanctions have, at the very least, shot the European economy in the foot..." he said. "It has also become clear that this war can't be resolved on the battlefield, because there are only casualties and destruction there. And it's also clear that the hopes of a breakthrough success for the Ukrainian counter-offensive have by today become an illusion."

Szijjártó said the EU will this week put forward a proposal on its 12th package of sanctions. "I think it's totally fair to ask how we can have a meaningful debate on a 12th sanctions package when there hasn't been any kind of comprehensive analysis on the first 11 packages," the minister said.

He said Brussels and certain member states were not prepared to confront the damage the sanctions had done to the European economy and how they had failed to fulfil their purpose. The sanctions have failed to achieve their main goals of bringing the Russian

economy to its knees and bringing about peace, he said. "And we also don't see a possibility for a meaningful debate on transferring tens of billions of euros more to Ukraine when the EU and its member states haven't received any kind of briefing or account of how the 80 billion euros approved so far has been spent," he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT TO REPRESENT 'SPECIFICALLY HUNGARIAN INTERESTS' REGARDING ISRAEL

Hungary's government will stand up for "specifically Hungarian considerations" at all forums discussing the situation in Israel, because freeing Hungarian hostages and bringing those in Gaza to safety is of primary importance, the foreign minister said in Brussels on Monday. Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of European Union foreign ministers, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference that the roots of the conflict "should not be forgotten or relativised", despite the varied takes of member states on the situation.

"In a brutal terrorist attack, a terrorist organisation attacked Israel with thousands of missiles, causing thousands of deaths and injuries. What's going on now is an anti-terrorist operation, a fight against terrorism," he said. The success of the operation is in the interest of the entire world, he said.

Seven Hungarian citizens are still stranded in Gaza, and cannot leave for security reasons, he said. "We are in constant contact with them. The place

they are staying in was hit yesterday, several of them were lightly injured and taken to hospital. They have all left the hospital by today, and are organising their journey to the border crossing in Rafah," he said, referring to the only border crossing in the Gaza Strip with Egypt. Szijjártó said he had agreed with his Israeli and Egyptian counterparts that the Hungarian citizens and their two Palestinian relatives may leave the Gaza Strip when they arrive there.

"Regarding the conflict in the Middle East and the fight against terrorism, Hungary will only support solutions that enable all dual citizens and their family members to leave the Gaza Strip if they want to," he said.

Hamas is also holding five Hungarians hostage, he said, and thanked Qatar for its mediation in the negotiations. "We can back resolutions and proposals of any international organisation only if it calls on Hamas to let the hostages go immediately, without conditions," he said. The international community also has a task to prevent an escalation, as a war between states in the Middle East "would have unforeseeable consequences", he said.

Szijjártó also highlighted the importance of support for Egypt, saying that instability there would have a dramatic effect on European security. Cairo has a major role in curbing migration to the continent, he said. "If Egypt lost its stability and wasn't able to act as a barrier, the continent could face migration pressure and



security challenges it does not seem to be prepared for," he said. Hungary is supporting the health care of Gaza refugees in Egypt with 40 million forints (EUR 105,900), he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT CONTINUES TO REJECT EU FUNDING OF WEAPON DELIVERIES TO UKRAINE

The government continues to reject European Union financing for weapon deliveries to Ukraine, and will do so until it is guaranteed that Ukraine "will never again use trumped-up accusations to put another Hungarian company on its list of sponsors of the war", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels on Monday. Szijjártó told a press conference in the break of an EU foreign ministers' meeting that "there has been enormous pressure" on Hungary to agree to another 500 million euro payment from the European Peace Facility for weapon deliveries to Ukraine. "Some called [the Hungarian stance] unfair, others said it was scandalous ... but I asked my EU colleagues not to mislead the public," he said. "This isn't support for Ukraine. This 500 million euros would help member states which decided to deliver weapons there as sovereign countries to recover part of the price of those weapons," he said. "Hungary will not contribute to paying 1,500 million euros until the Ukrainian anti-corruption agency guarantees that Hungarian companies ... will not land on the list of sponsors of the war

based on unfounded and sometimes ridiculous charges," he said.

Regarding Ukraine's EU candidacy, Szijjártó said the country was "very far from fulfilling the requirements and even from any sort of progress". On the issue of minority rights, a priority in the EU, Ukraine has been backsliding, he said. "We have had reports that the Ukrainian education ministry had instructed schools that teachers and students should use the official language, Ukrainian, even during breaks." The government sees no reason to advance Ukraine's candidacy, he said. "Besides, the European Union should take peace to third countries rather than importing war into the bloc," he said. Szijjártó said he expected mounting pressure on the issue. "I think it is particularly cynical on Ukraine's part that they're obviously not even trying to solve the issues important to us ... They are expecting Hungarians to cave under the growing pressure," he said.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER: C EUROPE MUST REMAIN A FOCUS OF EU FUNDING

Central Europe must not take a back seat in the distribution of European Union funding, which must be reformed to benefit disadvantaged regions, the economic development minister told a conference on Monday. The EU now lags behind the US, and lacks an independent foreign policy, Tibor Navracsics told the

Századvég Institute's Sovereignty conference in Budapest. Its leadership is mishandling challenges and misinterpreting its own role because it plays a political role, he said.

Whereas earlier the EU strove for a solution to disagreements, the European Commission is now pushing political expectations as generally applicable even though most Europeans are against such methods of distribution, he said. Unless it changes, that approach might push European integration into a deep crisis, Navracsics said.

Since European funding has been withheld, closing the developmental gap between regions is also lagging, he said. Keeping the deadlines for the reconstruction funding has now become impossible, he added. "Brussels can only blame itself for that, as things took a turn for the worse when they started a political game."

Although the cohesion gap appears to be closing in the EU, central European capitals are driving development in the region, he said. Withholding EU funding harms rural areas the most. Development funding should be channelled there, tailored to the needs of the recipients, he added. Hungary is mulling a revamping of its regional development categories to accommodate those needs, he said.

Meanwhile, the EU should unify its cohesion policy to iron out discrepancies in funding, he said. Western European bidders are now receiving disproportionately more scientific and R&D funding than central

European ones, he said. Navracsics also rejected that “southern European states, which have fallen behind due to the coronavirus pandemic, should be supported in catching up to the detriment of central Europe”.

ECONMIN: HUNGARY ECONOMY HAS FOUNDATIONS IN PLACE FOR FURTHER GROWTH

The Hungarian economy has the foundations in place for continued economic growth, Márton Nagy, the economic development minister, told a conference on Monday. Over the last ten “fortunate years”, Hungary was able to build a healthy economy, which is the basis of its successful economic policy in today’s times of crisis, Nagy told the Századvég Institute’s Sovereignty conference in Budapest. Hungary’s economic strategy is sound and only needs some fine-tuning, he said, warning that the country must not stray from its current path which, he said, was the key to its economic sovereignty. He attributed the strength of the Hungarian economy to the country’s political stability, its family and labour-based society, high investment rate coupled with a stable and diverse inflow of FDI, its strong export and complex export structure, developed road network, self-financing and an innovative financial system.

All of this provides a stable foundation for continued economic growth, Nagy said, adding that

capacities needed to be increased further in light of the challenges faced by the global and the Hungarian economy. He said a demographic turnaround was the key to maintaining growth, explaining that the labour market needed to mobilise its internal reserves or, if necessary, bring in guest workers. The economy’s energy supply needs to be increased 1.5-fold and made greener, the minister said, adding that transport and storage also called for developments. The digital transition should also be speeded up, and public debt needs to be kept on a downward path, he said.

KOCSIS: PROTECTING SOVEREIGNTY ‘CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION’

“Protecting Hungary’s sovereignty is our constitutional obligation, under which we must face any debate,” Máté Kocsis, the group leader of ruling Fidesz, told a conference on Monday. Kocsis called for setting up an institution to protect the country’s sovereignty “to monitor trends indicating foreign interference”. To stop such interference, the election law should be changed “to make it clear that the same rules apply to all civil organisations and their candidates, as to the political parties” he said. Financing and accounting for their spending must be the same whether it comes to civil groups or political parties, he said. Foreign funds in Hungarian politics have

been increasingly present since Hungary joined the European Union and simultaneously with political globalisation, Kocsis said, but “there have been no earlier examples of foreign funds financing [leftist] political campaigns” in the country, he insisted. He called for changing the penal code to criminalise accepting foreign funds as a member or candidate of an organisation participating in an election, and to penalise such activities with up to three years imprisonment. According to Kocsis, “there is a fundamental difference between the concept of democracy in the West and in Hungary ... they say things will often change and we say the will of the people must be promoted at all times.” While “in the West it is not democratic if voters support the same government for the fourth time ... they say steadiness is dictatorship and versatility is democracy.” “They have a fundamental problem with a country in which elections are won on the basis of national values and sovereignty”.

SEMJÉN: SITUATION OF HUNGARY NATL MINORITIES NOT IMPACTED BY POTENTIAL DIFFICULT TIES WITH MOTHERLAND

The situation of national minorities in Hungary cannot be negatively affected by a potentially difficult relationship between Hungary and the given motherland, the deputy prime minister in charge of policies for national

minorities said on Monday. Hungary's Fundamental Law declares that the 13 indigenous national minority groups in the country are part of the Hungarian state and have self-governments, Zsolt Semjén said at his annual hearing before parliament's committee for national minority communities.

The government aims to have the closest possible ties with the motherlands of Hungary's ethnic communities, Semjén said, adding that even when there are disagreements, it could not have any sort of negative consequence for the minority groups. Highlighting the example of the current disputes between Hungary and Ukraine, Semjén said this could not put the Ukrainian community in Hungary at any kind of disadvantage. If relations with the motherland in question are good and fruitful -- as they are in the case of Serbia -- it can also benefit the given ethnic community, he said. Meanwhile, Semjén said government support for ethnic minorities had been increased six-fold, while the number of national minority institutions had risen eight-fold. Whereas in 2010, there were only 12 national minority schools in Hungary, today there are 106 attended by 20,000 students, he said.

The government this year invited bids for a total of 1.3 billion forints (EUR 3.4m) in funding for national minorities, and some 1,000 projects worth a combined 2 billion forints have been carried out in the recent period, he said. As regards key investment projects, he noted the renovation of

the Slovak Evangelical church and centre, support for the construction of the Bulgarian education and cultural centre and the construction of a German primary school in Biatorbágy, on the outskirts of Budapest.

PARLT EU AFFAIRS CTTEE HEAD: 2024 YEAR OF PROTECTING SOVEREIGNTY

The year 2024 will be dedicated to protecting sovereignty, with "great battles to be fought in the spring", the head of parliament's European Affairs committee said on Monday. Judit Varga told a conference organised by the Századvég Institute dubbed Sovereignty that borders must be defined between states as well as between states and international organisations in terms of self-governance and freedom. In certain matters, such as migration, marriage and family, nobody should decide on behalf of Hungarians, she said. "Yet, in Brussels they want to make decisions on Hungarians' behalf in these and some more serious issues, such as war and peace," she added. "Instead of observing the treaties and laws, the EU defines the borders between EU competencies and member states' powers on the basis of political tastes and preferences, in line with an arbitrary choice of values," Varga said.

Hungary must fight for its sovereignty within the borders and outside the borders, she said. "Attacks by the servants of foreign interests

must be fought back," she added citing "pseudo-NGOs and rolling dollars being used to undermine Hungarians' self-governance". Referring to the election results in Poland, she said "Poland has lost the ability to protect its sovereignty".

ORBÁN ATTENDS TALKS IN BERLIN

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Monday travelled to Berlin for a consultation on the European Union's strategic agenda with the leaders of several member states organised by European Council President Charles Michel. According to Michel's invitation, the consultation scheduled for Monday evening will build on the first meeting held in Granada on the priorities of the EU's next institutional cycle earlier this year. The working dinner in Berlin will also be attended by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz as well as the heads of state and government of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 4,795 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 4,483 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 70 people, ORFK said on Monday.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT DOWN 7.3% IN SEPTEMBER

Headline industrial output fell by 7.3% year-on-year in September, following a 5.2% decline in the previous month, a detailed release of data by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Monday shows. Output dropped by 5.8% when adjusted for the number of workdays, KSH said. At the same time, output of the automotive industry, Hungary's biggest manufacturing sector, rose by 1.2% year-on-year in September, slowing after a 4.6% increase in the previous month, KSH added. The segment accounted for 27% of manufacturing output during the month. The detailed data show output of the electrical equipment segment, which made up 12% of manufacturing output, inched up by 2.0%. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment, accounting for 10% of manufacturing, fell by 18.2%. Output of the food, drinks and tobacco segment, which made up 13% of manufacturing sector output, slipped by 9.7%. In a month-on-month comparison, output rose by a seasonally and workday-adjusted 1.2%. For the period January-September, output dropped by 4.9% year-on-year. Industrial sales fell by 11.2% year-on-year in September. Export sales slipped by 7.7% and domestic sales dropped by 16.4%. In absolute terms, industrial sales reached 5,916 billion forints (EUR 15.6bn). Export sales accounted for 62% of the total.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT FALLS 6% IN SEPTEMBER

Output of Hungary's construction sector fell by 6.0% year-on-year in September, after edging down 0.1% in the previous month, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Monday show. Output of the buildings segment dropped by 9.5% but civil engineering output edged up by 0.4%. In absolute terms, construction sector output reached 732 billion forints (EUR 1.9bn) in September. The buildings segment accounted for 60% of the total. In a month-on-month comparison, construction sector output slipped by 1.8%, adjusted for seasonal and workday effects. Order stock was 30.6% lower at the end of September than twelve months earlier. Buildings segment orders were down 13.4% and civil engineering orders dropped by 42.6%. New orders fell by 32.0% during the period. New orders in the buildings segment were down 43.9% and new civil engineering orders decreased by 2.7%. Construction sector output fell by 4.7% in January-September from the base period.

NATIONAL THEATRE DIRECTOR VIDNYÁNSZKY RESIGNS

National Theatre director Attila Vidnyánszky has resigned from his post, the theatre said on Monday. The theatre told daily Magyar Nemzet in a statement that Vidnyánszky resigned

in the wake of an accident that had happened in the theatre on Friday. He has informed János Csák, the minister of culture, about the decision, the statement added. Two actors were taken to hospital and a performance of Romeo and Juliet was interrupted after they fell behind the scenery from an elevated platform.

TAROM PLANE SUFFERS TYRE DAMAGE, LANDS IN BUDAPEST

The tyres of a Romanian Tarom carrier aircraft were damaged on arrival from Bucharest at Budapest's International Liszt Ferenc Airport on Sunday, the airport operator told MTI. A spokesperson for Budapest Airport said the tyres were damaged when the plane left the runway and turned onto a taxi way, adding that nobody was injured. An investigation is under way into the possible causes of the incident.

BIRD FLU DETECTED IN NE, S HUNGARY

The food safety authority Nébih has detected a highly pathogenic strand of bird flu in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Bács-Kiskun counties, in north-east and southern Hungary, respectively, the authority said on Monday. The H5N1 strand was identified in a 6,000-head goose farm in Tiszabábolna, where the authorities have already started to cull the animals. Culling will start on Tuesday at a duck farm in Petőfiszállás keeping 7,100 animals, the statement said.