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One Nation Under Orbán

Prime Minister talks up his government's achievements at ethnic pow-wow in Romania

ROBERT HODGSON

The strength of the Hungarian nation depends on a strong mother country, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Wednesday in his traditional keynote lecture at the annual Hungarian Summer University in the Transylvanian town of Baile Tisnad (Tisnăd) (Tisnăd), a pow-wow for the ethnic Magyar youth now in its 24th year.

Back in the mother country, however, opposition MPs characterised Orbán's speech as propaganda in the run-up to a general election in which at least a few hundred thousand ethnic Hungarians living abroad will have the right to vote for the first time.

As ever, the Treaty of Trianon cast a shadow over the event. The post-war peace settlement signed at Versailles in 1920 required Hungary to cede two-thirds of its territory, creating minority communities in neighbouring countries, the largest of which is in Romania.

Orbán, as quoted by state news agency MTI, told his audience that "the current state of affairs" means national cohesion "cannot be promoted on a territorial basis but through bonds of citizenship".

Representation without taxation

Orbán was doubtless referring to the government policy of issuing Hungarian passports to anyone who can demonstrate ethnic Hungarian ancestry. At the last count 420,000 have taken the oath of allegiance and received their documents, and the government hopes to increase the number to half a million by the end of the year. Under electoral reform legislation, these extra-territorial citizens - or those of them over 18 - will be entitled to cast a national list vote in the next general election, due in April.

Otherwise, Orbán's rhetoric abroad was similar to that of his government at home in recent months: Hungary has been a "vulnerable and exploited" country since the switch from communist dictatorship to free elections in 1990, but now it is regaining its political and financial autonomy. As evidence of the country's increasing economic might, Orbán said he had instructed his economy minister to pay off the last EUR 2.2 billion of Hungary's 2008 IMF-EU bailout ahead of schedule in August.

"Hungarians have generated that money during the past three years," Orbán said.

— Continued on page 4 as 'Opposing'



BUTLASCÓ/REUTERS

Philosopher king: The nation cannot be strong without a strong mother country, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a lecture at a summer university in Romania, according to state news agency MTI. He said a crucial component of the government's economic strategy was a policy seeking to help ethnic kin retain their Hungarian identity, prosper in their homelands and have access to Hungarian education. During the past two decades Hungary remained a "vulnerable and exploited" country despite its political freedom, Orbán said, adding that funds had been "pumped" out of the country through several channels, citing the examples of foreign bank profits, the "artificially high" central bank's base rate and forex loans.

Early repayment of IMF loan holds doubtful value

Minister of National Economy Mihály Varga has written to the International Monetary Fund to say that Hungary will fully repay early the EUR 2.2 billion it owes from a 2008 loan before 12 August.

"The favourable market environment and investor confidence in Hungary have resulted in the most auspicious government bond yields and the best five-year CDS premium [an indicator that reflects investor sentiment] in years," the letter says.

— Continued on page 4 as 'New'

WWII-level poverty, Socialists claim

Social security in parts of rural Hungary has sunk to a level not seen since the Second World War, opposition Hungarian Socialist Party MEP Zita Gurmai said on Sunday after taking part in the first stage of a cycling tour in Békés County that aimed to draw attention to the issue.

"The economic policy that the self-proclaimed conservative Fidesz is following has turned Hungary from a country of three million beggars to one of four-and-a-half million, of whom one-and-a-half million live in dire poverty and 5-600,000 are starving," Gurmai said. "These are the facts: poverty is now so great that the government cannot even take the statistics."

The five-day tour was organised by women members of the MSZP, who covered 270 kilometres in eastern Hungary.

SZIGET FESTIVAL Music for the muddy masses

With large backpacks and hand-written hitchhiking signs to Budapest, prospective Sziget party-goers are once again gaining visibility in town, just as the countdown before the start of the annual music festival reaches its final stages. The party starts on Monday with two warm-up days, before reaching 'full-blown' proportion between Wednesday and Sunday.

— Continued on page13 as 'Minus 1'

Happy holidays

The Budapest Times is taking its annual three-week summer break. We have included more entertainment suggestions in this issue so you can better amuse yourselves while we are away. Our offices re-open on Monday 26 August, with the paper on the streets again on Friday 30 August.

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RATES	UK	EU	RUSSIA	USA
343.79	344.18	299.54	296.45	343.17
1 Aug.	25 July	1 Aug.	25 July	1 Aug.

STATS	230 YEARS	103 Mn	210	10.57	6 000
of peace in the last 3,500 years throughout the civilized world.	euros worth of gems were stolen from a Cannes hotel on Sunday.	since 1862: Volusia County, FL leads the world in shark attacks.	seconds: the new 100 metre record for disabled, set by Alan Oliveira.	kilometres wide: the largest ant colony ever found.	

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Hotel guests prove 5-star robbers

Guests steal stuff from hotels! Such, at least, was the conclusion of the booking website *szallas.hu* after it polled 482 Hungarian hoteliers and guest house proprietors about the phenomenon of pilfering by guests.

Nine out of ten respondents said they had experienced the problem of visitors who check out with more in their suitcases than they had when they checked in. Towels, it appears, are the most commonly stolen items of hospitality infrastructure, but the range of inventory that the unprincipled tourist apparently considers ripe for requisition goes beyond the bathroom.

They'll take anything

Much of the theft is petty, even pathetic, such as a ten-roll bag of toilet paper. Even used bog brushes go west on a regular basis. More seriously, bedlinen, kitchenware and small household appliances are all fair game, it seems. Remote-controls often go missing, and hoteliers report numerous cases of flat-screen TVs being disappeared. One guest, citing a broken suitcase, even had the brass neck to ask the owner for a cardboard box in which he subsequently smuggled out the television set.

Overall, one in three guesthouse owners claimed to have lost HUF 5,000 (EUR 17) worth of their inventory to thieves last year, with six per cent putting the figure at HUF 20,000 (EUR 67) or more. The landlord of one B&B told the website of a guest who made off with the entire contents of an apartment kitchen. Another spoke of the loss of a collection of medals, yet others the filching of old books. The biscuit, however, goes to the holidaymaker who made off with half a ton of firewood.