

Weekly Media Review of Hungarian Communities Abroad

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MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND JUSTICE



Dignitaries and government leaders highlight national cohesion in Arad

Speakers in Arad last Thursday highlighted the importance of national cohesion and national identity at events commemorating the martyrs of Hungary's failed 1848/49 War of Independence. Dignitaries laid wreaths of remembrance at the site where 13 generals of the independent Hungarian army were executed on October 6, 1849. At the closing event of day, held in front of the 1848/49 monument in the city of Arad, Hungarian State Secretary for Social Inclusion Miklós Soltész spoke about the importance of ethnic identity, and encouraged participants to declare it in Romania's upcoming census. 'It is important to help each other, as well as to declare what we have inherited from our forebears: what those generals were killed for,' said Mr. Soltész in his address. Similar commemorations were held in several cities in Slovakia, Ukraine and Serbia, as well as at various locations across Hungary. In Budapest the national flag in front of Parliament was raised, then lowered to half-mast in a ceremony attended by President Pál Schmitt, the Speaker of Parliament László Kövér, the Minister for Internal Affairs Sándor Pintér, the Minister for Foreign Affairs János Martonyi, State Secretary for Defense István Simicskó and members of the diplomatic corps. Count Lajos Batthyány – Hungary's prime minister at the time – faced the firing squad in Pest (before it became Budapest) on the same day that the thirteen Arad martyrs were executed; all had been leaders in the freedom fight against Habsburg rule. The War of Independence started with the revolution in Pest on 15 March 1848. The Hungarian government declared 6 October a national day of mourning in 2001.

Countries must keep contact with their citizens living in diaspora communities

Countries must keep in contact with their citizens, regardless of how far they live from the mother country, Minister for Foreign Affairs János Martonyi said last Friday at the conference 'The parliamentary representation of citizens living beyond the country's borders – The out-of-country voting procedure: examples and challenges'. He said it is a new phenomenon that more and more people live outside their home countries, and that migration and mobility are global trends, but countries do not want to lose contact with their citizens living outside the borders. Mr. Martonyi noted that giving voting rights to citizens living abroad was within the scope of national legislation, but it required understanding and dialogue between countries. Voting rights for foreigners do not infringe on the sovereignty of the country where they live, he said. The parliamentary group of the governing Fidesz party plans to submit a proposal for a single-round election, with Hungarian citizens outside Hungary casting single votes on a national party list. They will be required to register to vote, and will get the option to cast their votes by post. MEP of the Fidesz party János Áder said at the conference that the voting rights of citizens living abroad are regulated in 24 countries within the European Union, but the methods are diverse. He also said that the parliamentary representation of national minorities in Hungary will also be tackled by this new law. However he noted



that most countries do not combine the voting rights of their citizens living abroad and minorities living inside the country.

Hungarian Standing Conference to meet in November

At the congress of the Alliance of Christian Intellectuals (KESZ) in Parliament on Saturday, the Deputy State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad said that the next meeting of the Hungarian Standing Conference (MÁÉRT) will be called in November. MÁÉRT met last year after a gap of six years. MÁÉRT's last meeting – attended by representatives of the Hungarian government, parliamentary parties, Hungarian parties in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, and Serbia, as well as other organisations – was held in Budapest in November 2010. Zsuzsanna Répás said that the National Register – which is meant to take account of all Hungarians outside the country's borders – was ready to be launched, and a Diaspora Council would be set up soon to liaise with Hungarian organisations of diaspora communities. Ms. Répás added that the National Register would help Hungarians keep in contact with members of the Diaspora. Policy tasks affecting Hungarian communities abroad involve legal protection, law extension, identity policy and institutional development, she said. To this end, foundations should be laid which allow all members of the Hungarian community to feel a part of the Hungarian nation. This is what the law on national cohesion declares, Ms. Répás said, adding that the situation of Hungarians abroad has improved since the era before the political transition of 1989 / 90, but neither Hungarians inside nor beyond the borders ought to be satisfied. The goal is to help Hungarians beyond the borders strengthen their national identity, create Hungarian institutions and promote Hungarian-language education, Ms. Répás said.



Daniel Funeriu calls for adherence to the Education Act

The Education Act has long been the subject of heated debate among Hungarian lecturers, students and the Senate of the Medical and Pharmacological University of Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureş. The latter, the majority of which is Romanian, recently adopted a new university charter that does not comply with the Education Act, and is clearly prejudicial to the creation of a Hungarian-language department. The new Education Act in Romania ensures the creation of faculties and colleges at multicultural universities according to the language of education. At the end of last week the Romanian Ministry of Education handed over a transcript to the Senate, highlighting the question of Hungarian-language education. This letter followed comments from the Minister of Education Daniel Funeriu, who had earlier brought the Senate's attention to the obligation of establishing Hungarian institutions in accordance with the multicultural character of the University. The University Rector argued that there were not enough Hungarian lecturers to bring a Hungarian-language department into being. Last week hundreds of demonstrators gathered front of the central building of the University,



where they laid flowers to express their strong dissatisfaction with the University's discriminatory policy. The start of the new school year began with separate ceremonies of the Romanian and Hungarian departments. The Senate had its latest meeting on Monday, in which the transcript was not debated.



President defends dual citizenship for Hungarians in Slovakia

Hungarian President Pál Schmitt defended dual citizenship for Hungarians living in Slovakia at talks with his Slovakian counterpart Ivan Gašparovič in Budapest on Saturday. Mr. Schmitt told Mr. Gašparovič that Hungary had no intention of withdrawing legislation giving Hungarian citizenship and the right to vote to Hungarians resident abroad. These Hungarian laws are both in line with European practices, the President said. Mr. Schmitt acknowledged Slovakia's softening of its stand on the matter, but said that the country must stop revoking the Slovakian citizenship of residents who take up Hungarian citizenship. President Schmitt praised the close cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary, citing as evidence of this partnership reconstructed bridges connecting the two countries over the Danube and the River Ipoly. Mr. Gašparovič was in Budapest for a two-day summit of the presidents of the Visegrád Four: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.

Önkormányzati Szemle ('Local Government Review'): A new professional journal

Under the editorship of *Pro Civis Polgári Társulás*, a new journal, entitled *Önkormányzati Szemle* ('Local Government Review') has appeared on the Hungarian-language media market in Slovakia. The 64-page-long journal has been established to provide professional and linguistic help for Hungarian local authorities in Slovakia. The first issue ran to 3,000 copies, and was distributed to the local council of every town and village where Hungarians form at least 20 per cent of the population. The journal, which the publisher intends to deliver quarterly to the agents of local authorities and public administration, attempts to support and facilitate the use and development of the administrative language in regions where Hungarians live, by publishing in Hungarian the text of legislation and its explanation, as well as various official documents. In addition, it is trying to provide specific professional advice for mayors and members of local authorities. In the first issue of *Önkormányzati Szemle*, MEP Edit Bauer and Hungary's Deputy State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Zsuzsanna Répás express their appreciation for the foundation of the journal.





Serbian President Boris Tadić signs the Restitution Act into law

The leadership of the Alliance of Hungarians in Vajdaság/Vojvodina (VMSZ) expressed its regret over the President Boris Tadić signing the Act on property restitution and compensation. The law took effect on 6 October. 'We are convinced that the Act, by ignoring the principle of individual responsibility, violates the Constitution at several points, and is irreconcilable with the fundamental values of the European Union,' the Alliance said in its statement. The leadership of VMSZ instructed the parliamentary members of the party to apply to the Constitutional Court for re-examination of the constitutionality of the law, confirmation of its adoption of a collective responsibility principle, and for consideration of its repeal. According to the Hungarian State Secretary for EU Affairs Enikő Győri, the Serbian restitution law is not solely a matter between Serbia and Hungary, but a European issue, and passing this law calls into question Serbia's commitment to EU membership. She added that Hungary would inform the European Commission of its position, stressing that the Hungarian government is in complete opposition to the Act. Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén underlined that it is not Hungary's aim to prevent Serbia's EU accession: Hungary only wishes to see the law amended. In response, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Bozidar Djelic said that Serbia was against assigning collective guilt, but did not want anyone to forget who had fought fascism in World War II. Mr. Djelic also said that the Serbian authorities would aim to convince the Hungarian community that the law did not impose collective guilt, but pointed out that due to its current composition, Parliament lacked the will to amend the law.



Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister encourages Hungarians living in Germany to take up citizenship

Attending a national pilgrimage of Hungarians in Bavaria on Saturday, Hungary's Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén encouraged Hungarians living in Germany to take up Hungarian citizenship. Mr. Semjén extended the Hungarian government's greetings to the more than one thousand Hungarians taking part in the pilgrimage to Scheyern Abbey. The Benedictine monastery, established in 1119, was the site of the engagement and wedding of King Stephen of Hungary and Giselle of Bavaria. The Deputy Prime Minister said that it was important that Hungarian families should also be able to experience their Hungarian identity in legal terms, and he said that Hungary's parliament would soon adopt legislation allowing Hungarian citizens abroad to vote on a national party list in general elections. Mr. Semjén said that he openly opposed Serbia's recent restitution law, which Hungary sees as discriminatory against Hungarian communities; this is because it prevents Hungarians living in Serbia from access to restitution under the same terms as Serbs, thus enforcing the concept of collective guilt. 'Serbia cannot become a member of the European Union while its legal system contains measures collectively stripping Hungarian or German communities of their rights,' he said.

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