

Weekly Media Review of Hungarian Communities Abroad

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Potápi: so far 710,000 Hungarians living abroad have applied for citizenship in the simplified naturalization procedure

Speaking on Wednesday at the National Assembly's Committee on National Cohesion, State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Árpád János Potápi said that so far a total of 710,000 Hungarians living in neighboring countries have submitted applications for citizenship under the simplified naturalization procedure and 670,000 people have taken the citizenship oath. The state secretary added that 66 percent of Hungarians receiving new citizenship are from Transylvania, 17 percent from Vojvodina and 14 percent from Transcarpathia. Regarding the Bethlen Gábor Fund, Mr. Potápi pointed out that its goal is to incorporate the resources of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad and operate a single payment scheme on the basis of transparency, efficiency and oversight. It is the responsibility of the Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Ltd. to manage the fund's assets, as the amount to be allocated for the purposes of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad will exceed HUF 17.62 billion (EUR 58 million) in 2015. At the meeting held at Magyarország Háza, the State Secretary mentioned that since its relaunch, the Hungarian Standing Conference has been held five times and it unanimously approved the closing declaration. He added that the Hungarian Diaspora Council, which has held its fourth meeting, is working in close cooperation with the Hungarian Standing Conference, stressing that while in 2011 it had only 49 members, last year this number had reached 78. The state secretary also briefly presented the programs of the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities abroad: the Kőrösi Csoma Program and the Mikes Program; the program entitled "2015 – The year of Hungarian vocational education abroad", which is currently running; and the Petőfi Program, which will be launched soon.



The SZNT will not organize the Day of Szekler Freedom this year

The head of the Szekler National Council (SZNT) Balázs Izsák has announced that this year the SZNT will not organize the Day of Szekler Freedom, which had earlier been scheduled to take place on 10 March in Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureș, because "It does not want to be a partner of authorities in revealing the deprivation of rights." The head of the party stressed that the residents of Marosvásárhely and Szeklerland have the right to make pilgrimages to the Monument to Szekler Martyrs and remember them by laying flowers or lighting candles. Earlier, the mayor of the town Dorin Florea prohibited the march, which had been scheduled to take place between the Monument of Szekler Martyrs and the town's main square on 10 March, and also prohibited the protest demonstration planned to be held in front of the Prefect's office. Mr. Izsák added that, although the SZNT has applied to the courts for legal remedy, the ban is still in force, and the party will not sign a protocol which allows only the commemoration, but prohibits the march.



Leading Hungarian politicians in Transylvania have different opinions on the Romanian President's remark concerning Hungarians

The leaders of Transylvania's Hungarian parties and political organizations have different opinions on the remark made last week in Berlin by Romanian president Klaus Iohannis, in which the President said that "There is no Hungarian issue in Romania." The head of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) Hunor Kelemen has refused to comment on the remark, but has said that since he has been in office, he has had several meetings with the President and informed him about the problems concerning the Hungarian community in Transylvania. The head of the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania (EMNP) Zsolt Szilágyi has said that "It is remarkable that Romania has a president of German ancestry, but this must not conceal the fact that due to the national policy of the country, the traditional national communities of Romania have started to disappear." The head of the EMNP added that he believes that Mr. Iohannis also wants a Romania in which "traditional national minorities like Saxons, Hungarians, Szeklers and Swabians do not feel threatened." The president of the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP) Zsolt Biró has said that the question President Iohannis was asked in Berlin itself shows that the "Hungarian issue in Romania is not solved." He added, however, that it is promising that the President considers it natural that Hungary should pay attention to its compatriots living abroad. The head of the Szekler National Council (SNZT) Balázs Izsák highlighted that the journalist asking this question at the press conference in Berlin wanted to know "whether it does not cause a problem that Hungary pays too much attention to Hungarians living in Transylvania." He added that the Romanian president handled this question properly, since he said that there is no conflict between Hungary and Romania concerning this issue. Mr. Izsák added that "this was a good approach." The President of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania (EMNT) expressed his disappointment over the Romanian president's remark in Berlin. He added that it is the task of the Hungarian community to decide whether there is a "Hungarians issue" in Romania.



1,010 have lost their Slovak citizenship in less than five years

A statistical survey of Slovakia's Ministry of Interior shows that due to the Slovak Act on Citizenship which entered into force more than four years ago, 1,010 people have lost their Slovak citizenship. The majority of them (360 people) have lost their Slovak citizenship as a result of acquiring the citizenship of the Czech Republic, while 59 of them were deprived of it as a result of becoming citizens of Hungary. A ministerial decree which came into force in February 2015 provides an opportunity for the restoration of citizenship in certain individual cases. So far 9 former citizens have applied for this procedure. Three applications were sent to the ministry from Prague, one from Budapest, and five from various towns in Slovakia.



The current Slovak Act on Citizenship states that any person who acquires the citizenship of another country is deprived of their Slovak citizenship. This law was adopted under the previous government of Robert Fico in June 2010 as a reaction to the simplified naturalization procedure adopted in Hungary the same year.



Serbia is on the right track towards EU integration

On Tuesday the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament accepted the progress report on Serbia prepared by David McAllister (Group of the European People's Party, Germany). MEP representing Vojvodina Andor Deli expressed his satisfaction that amendments by the Fidesz EP delegation have led to the inclusion in the draft report of several issues on minority rights. Mr. Deli added that the document acknowledges and praises the efforts made by the Serbian government towards EU integration, which gives a further impetus for the country to continue on this track.

The Hungarian Government allocates half a billion forints for the renovation of the synagogue in Szabadka

The chairman of the Jewish community of Szabadka/Subotica Róbert Szabados announced on Friday that the Hungarian government will allocate half a billion forints (EUR 1.6 million) for the renovation of the interior of the synagogue in Szabadka; this sum is five times higher than the one promised earlier by Hungary. Mr. Szabados recalled that during his visit in March 2014, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán promised that the Hungarian government would allocate a sum of up to HUF 100 million for renovation of the building. Mr. Szabados said that due to the bad condition of the synagogue, the Government decided to allocate a larger sum of money, adding that he had recently been informed about this decision by State Secretary for Priority Social Affairs at the Prime Minister's Office Csaba Latorcai. The head of the Jewish community added that after the renovation the building will continue to operate as a religious building, but will also operate as a venue for exhibitions and as a tourist destination.

Since 1990 the synagogue in Szabadka has been listed as one of Serbia's priority monuments, and last year it was listed among Europe's seven most endangered monuments and sites at the annual assembly of Europa Nostra (pan-European association for the protection of cultural heritage) held in Vienna.



Viktor Baloga: There is no "Hungarian problem" in Transcarpathia

Speaking to the Ukrainian online newspaper Fakty.ictv.ua on Saturday, Viktor Baloga – a member of the Ukrainian parliament who is also considered the most influential politician in Transcarpathia – said that "The situation in Transcarpathia is stable, and there is neither a Hungarian, Romanian, Polish or Slovakian problem in the county."



The newspaper questioned Mr. Baloga (who is also former governor of Transcarpathia and Ukraine's former Minister for Civil Protection) about an announcement made in Budapest on Friday, according to which more than 94,000 Transcarpathian Hungarians have acquired Hungarian citizenship so far. Responding to the question, Mr. Baloga said that Transcarpathian Hungarians are not the only ones who have dual citizenship in Ukraine. He added that "I am not revealing any secrets when I say that among members of the Ukrainian parliament this rate is not one or two percent, but much higher." He also recalled that several governors in Ukraine have openly admitted that they have three citizenships. Mr. Baloga added that the problem of dual citizenship could easily be settled in Ukraine if the EU ensured a visa waiver for the country. He said that the legalization of dual citizenship in Ukraine would be another solution, since the number of Ukrainian citizens with dual citizenship is high.

László Brenzovics in Brussels

On 24 February 2015, at the invitation of MEP Andrea Bocskor (Group of the European People's Party, Fidesz-KDNP alliance), the head of the Cultural Association of Hungarians in Transcarpathia (KMKSZ) and member of the Ukrainian parliament László Brenzovics made a visit to Brussels, together with the President of Transcarpathia's County Council Volodymyr Chubirko. During their stay in the city, they held talks with Ukraine's Ambassador to the European Union, with whom they discussed current political events in Ukraine and Transcarpathia, as well as opportunities for the region's development and its recognition within the European Union. Mr. Brenzovics and Mr. Chubirko also met the Fidesz-KDNP alliance MEPs and the presidents of the Committee of the Regions, and took part in the session of the delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC).

