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Zsolt Semjén: 2015 was perhaps the most successful year of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad

Speaking on the program of the Kossuth Radio entitled Without Borders, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said that 2015 was perhaps the most successful year of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad. In his evaluation of the year the Deputy Prime Minister said that all the related programs launched by the Hungarian Government during the past five years “are operating smoothly”. Mr. Semjén mentioned the Kőrösi Csoma Program as an example, under which one hundred young interns were sent to Hungarian communities living in diaspora to help them maintain and strengthen their Hungarian identity. Mr. Semjén stressed that it was extremely important that this initiative was expanded with a similar program entitled Petőfi Sándor Program which focuses on Hungarian communities living in the Carpathian Basin. The Deputy Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of thematic years which “direct attention – and financial resources – to specific areas.” He added that the first “fine-tuning” in this field was the enhancement of vocational education, as it is important that Hungarian communities should be able to stay in their native lands not only in a cultural, but also in a financial sense. Mr. Semjén highlighted that the government had launched an unprecedented initiative in Vojvodina: HUF 50 billion (EUR 160 million) has been provided for the purposes of economic development, partly in the form of non-repayable grants, and partly in the form of preferential loans. He added that the next significant economic development program will be realized in Transcarpathia since it is the region with the most difficult economic situation.

Árpád János Potápi: We support Hungarians living abroad instead of immigrants

In an interview to the Hungarian daily Magyar Idők, State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Árpád János Potápi said that “we should pay more attention to young people and entrants, and encourage them to stay in their homeland and try to live there, have children and enroll them in Hungarian schools.” The state secretary added that the policy concerning migrants is mistaken since people who have “nothing to do with Europe” and have no relations with it receive more rights and opportunities than those whose ancestors “have been living here for a thousand years.” Mr. Potápi said that 2015 was an extremely successful year of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad. The state secretary mentioned two significant events which took place in 2015. One of them was the historic success Hungarian parties in Transcarpathia reached in local elections, due to their unity and cooperation. According to Mr. Potápi, the second one is the unprecedented economic development program of HUF 50 billion the Hungarian Government launched in Vojvodina. The state secretary also spoke about the fourteenth annual meeting of the Hungarian Standing Conference (Máért) which took place at the beginning of December, calling it extremely fruitful. Regarding the next year, Mr. Potápi said that programs aimed to



support vocational education will continue, while the main attention will be paid to young Hungarian entrepreneurs living in the Carpathian Basin.

Transylvanian Hungarians' distrust of Romania deepened in 2015

According to the year assessment of the Hungarian news agency MTI, Transylvanian Hungarians' distrust of Romania deepened in 2015. During the year, Hungarians in Romania had to focus on the enforcement and defense of their existing rights. The members of the Hungarian community often asserted that Transylvanian Hungarians always tried to enforce their rights in a peaceful way, by means of parliamentary methods, therefore, it caused great concern and indignation among them when the draft strategy on the protection of public order and public safety (2015-2020) released by the Romanian Ministry of Interior to public debate called Hungarians' demands for ethnic autonomy a source of danger. Due to the protest of Hungarian parties and Romanian civil organizations, this exposure was not included in the final version of the strategy. Another incident causing indignation among Hungarians was that the Romanian National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) initiated proceedings against the mayor of Gyergyószentmiklós/Gheorgheni János Mezei at the end of January, as well as against the mayor of Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc Róbert Ráduly and deputy mayor Domkos Szőke in April, on charges of abuse of office. The main cause of revulsion was that the Hungarian leaders of Szeklerland were charged because of such frivolous cases which definitely take place at every mayoral office. The issue of the planned Hungarian department at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Marosvásárhely/Targu Mureș was not solved in 2015, neither was settled the debate over the use of community symbols. Although the Parliament adopted a law on the use of local flags in May, the law does not ensure a legal basis for the use of the Szekler flag. Concerning political life, Hungarian political parties were preparing for local and parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in summer 2016 and autumn 2016 respectively.

The MKP holds its first Hungarian New Year Gala Concert

On 2 January, the Party of the Hungarian Community (MKP) organized its first Hungarian New Year Gala Concert in Slovakia at the Cultural Center of Dunaszerdahely/ Dunajská Streda with the aim to create a tradition. Speaking at the event, the president of the MKP József Berényi said that the next year will provide an opportunity for the Hungarian community in Slovakia to increase its power compared to the previous years. Mr. Berényi declared that "Peace has not been restored in Ukraine, and the conflict taking place there also has an impact on us. There is unrest in Western Europe as well, although it has always been the island of peace; after the terror attacks in Paris a state of emergency had to be introduced in Brussels, and we



are not accustomed to events like these. It is our responsibility to wish peace for Europe and the world.” The president of the MKP added that this time, Central Europe managed to “escape” from the conflicts and the flow of refugees, and it is partly due to the fact that Hungary closed its borders in time. Mr. Berényi added that it is not a solution to “invite people of different cultures to Europe”, the solution is to settle conflicts locally, at the place where they emerge, so that no one has to leave his homeland.

The Hungarian National Council adopts its budget for the next year

The Hungarian National Council (MNT) has amended its budget since it received further sums of aid by the end of the year. The president of the MNT Jenő Hajnal said that there are overlaps between the 2015 and 2016 budgets, since the majority of support provided by the kin-state will be used in the first months of the next year. Mr. Hajnal stressed that without Hungary’s support, the MNT would not be able to realize any serious project. The Hungarian National Council’s total amount of sources for the next year is 774 million dinar (1.9 billion HUF).

Year Assessment: Hungarians in Transcarpathia had a difficult but successful year

In spite of the situation in Eastern Ukraine and the grave economic crisis in the country, the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia had a relatively successful year which is – mainly – due to the intensive support of the kin-state. The 150,000-strong Transcarpathian Hungarian community has survived its hardest period after the Second World War, which ended with the deportation of Transcarpathia’s entire male population and the death of thousands of people. It is due to the effective support and solidarity of the kin-state that the situation of Hungarians in Transcarpathia has not become critical. The Hungarian Government’s financial support (extra pay) allocated for Hungarian kindergarten and school teachers, priests, catechists, Hungarian-speaking doctors and people working in the field of health care was extremely important in terms of the Hungarian community’s permanence. In the field of political life, the most spectacular event of the past two decades – from both a Hungarian and Ukrainian perspective – was the huge success of Hungarian parties in Ukraine’s local elections held on 25 October 2015. Due to the cooperation agreement of the two largest Hungarian organizations in the region, the Cultural Association of Hungarians in Transcarpathia (KMKSZ) and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Ukraine (UMDSZ) concluded in September 2015, the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia reached remarkable results in the local elections both at a district and county level.