

Weekly Media Review of Hungarian Communities Abroad

49/2016



PRIME MINISTERS OFFICE
STATE SECRETARIAT FOR HUNGARIAN
COMMUNITIES ABROAD

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The Hungarian Standing Conference holds 15th plenary session

On Thursday, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán opened the 15th plenary session of the Hungarian Standing Conference (Máért), which was held in Budapest. Addressing the event, the Prime Minister said that Hungary is now “part of a winning team”, because, while earlier it was a stigmatized country banished to the periphery, Hungarian policy has now “become the policy of winners”. Mr. Orbán thanked the leaders of Hungarians communities abroad for standing up for the policies of the kin-state’s government “with courage and a pure heart”, despite “the headwind”. In his speech the Prime Minister said that the greatest success of the past six years has been the unification of the nation, which has been accomplished together with Hungarian communities beyond the borders. He said that, 100 years after the Trianon Treaty, the constituent parts of the Hungarian nation have found one another, and Hungarian-Hungarian cooperation has become part of daily life. Mr. Orbán highlighted that 860,000 people have submitted their applications for the simplified naturalization procedure, more than 810,000 of them have already taken their citizenship oaths, and 100,000 citizenship requests have been submitted from diaspora communities. In his speech the Prime Minister also touched on the upcoming election in Romania, which he said will be decisive as, in his view, in a number of places in Romania measures which are supposed to be used to fight corruption are being used against leaders of the Hungarian community. He asked Hungarians living in Transylvania to vote, to cooperate with their leaders, and to give absolute priority to attaining representation in Bucharest. Finally he expressed support for the idea of thematic years in Hungarian communities beyond the borders, saying that 2017 will be the year of Hungarian family businesses beyond the borders. Speaking at a press conference after the plenary session, Deputy Prime Minister for Hungarian communities abroad Zsolt Semjén said that Hungary allocates unprecedented sums for economic development programs in neighboring countries, as well as for other fields affecting Hungarian communities abroad. The Deputy Prime Minister said that while in 2009 Hungary allocated HUF 9 billion (EUR 28 million) for assistance programs for Hungarian communities abroad, in 2016 this sum became HUF 30 billion (EUR 95 million). He added that in addition to this, the Hungarian government launched two large-scale economic development programs: one of them in Vojvodina (HUF 50 billion – EUR 169 million); the other one in Transcarpathia (HUF 32 billion – EUR 101 million). He added that about half of these funds consist of non-refundable grants, while the other half is made up of preferential loans. Mr. Semjén said that similar large-scale programs would be launched in Croatia and Slovenia as well.

At the end of the plenary session, the members – the heads of Hungarian organizations abroad and Hungarian parliamentary parties – adopted a joint closing declaration, in which they evaluated the “2016 – the year of young Hungarian entrepreneurs abroad” program as successful and agreed that 2017 should be the year of Hungarian family businesses abroad. The parties also expressed their pleasure that the number of Hungarians applying for Hungarian citizenship under the



simplified naturalization procedure is growing, and expressed their joint support for the autonomy aspirations of Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin – especially endeavors for Szeklerland’s autonomy. The parties also stressed that they stand up firmly for the rights and freedoms which Hungarian communities abroad are entitled to.

The Hungarian Diaspora Council holds 6th plenary session

On Wednesday, the Hungarian Diaspora Council held its 6th plenary session in Budapest. Addressing the event, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said that “over the next five years we can reckon on Hungary continuing to grow in strength.” Speaking to members of the Council, which is an umbrella body for the organizations of Hungarian communities dispersed around the world, the Prime Minister pointed out that a weak kin-state is unable to pursue a good diaspora policy. This can only be pursued by a kin-state which continuously gains in strength and earns growing prestige.

Speaking at the session, Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Hungarian Communities Abroad Zsolt Semjén spoke about the Hungarian government’s programs aimed at strengthening the diaspora – including the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program, the Mikes Kelemen Program and the Julianius Program – which have proved to be very successful. The Deputy Prime Minister also introduced a document entitled “Hungarian diaspora policy – strategic directions”, which was adopted at the end of the session. The document presents Hungary’s diaspora policy between 2010 and 2016, and – introducing other countries’ policies and international practices – outlines possible directions for further development. Among these directions, the document mentions the establishment of a Hungarian Emigration and Diaspora Center in Hungary, the development of mother-tongue education in the diaspora, as well as the strengthening of economic relations and diaspora diplomacy. Speaking at the session, State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Árpád János Potápi said that the Hungarian Diaspora Council was convened for the sixth time since 2011. In 2011 it was attended by 49 organizations, while today it has 76 members. The state secretary also expressed the hope that the number of member organizations will grow in the future.



House Speaker László Kövér believes in the improvement of Hungarian-Romanian relations

Speaking at a joint press conference with the head of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) Hunor Kelemen in Kolozsvár/Cluj Napoca, the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly László Kövér said that relations between Romania and Hungary might improve after the Romanian parliamentary election on 11 December. Mr. Kövér added that in this process he is counting on those Hungarians who will win seats in the Romanian parliament in the election. He added



that his personal participation in the election campaign expresses the fact that the Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) support the "Hungarian union in Romania", which is realized through the joint list of the RMDSZ and the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP). The House Speaker said that the forthcoming election will be decisive for the Hungarian community in Transylvania. He stressed that "a large faction in the Romanian parliament is essential in order for the Hungarian community to enforce, defend and expand their rights."

The Csíksomlyó Pentecost Pilgrimage will not be part of UNESCO world heritage

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) wrote that, according to a decision by UNESCO's assembly made in Ethiopia, the Csíksomlyó Pentecost Pilgrimage will not become part of UNESCO world heritage. Four years ago the president of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) Hunor Kelemen, former Romanian Minister of Culture and Heritage, initiated adding the Csíksomlyó Pentecost Pilgrimage – the largest religious and cultural festival of Szeklers – to the UNESCO world heritage list. After UNESCO's Thursday decision, Hunor Kelemen said that "the decision is both depressing and shocking." He added that the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage is one of those religious and cultural events which are crucial for all the Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin.

After the decision, Romania's Ministry of Culture announced that UNESCO's relevant intergovernmental commission will discuss the issue of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage again during its next session. According to the ministry, the dossier on the inclusion of the pilgrimage in the world heritage list was not complete, therefore it will be renegotiated.



A new youth strategy is discussed at the session of the Hungarian Youth Conference

On 25-27 November 2016, the Hungarian Youth Conference held its 31st session in Balatonmárfürdő. The conference was addressed by deputy state secretary for youth policy and creating opportunities at the Ministry of Human Capacities Dr. Boglárka Illés, deputy state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad at the Prime Minister's Office Dr. Péter Szilágyi and the mayor of Balatonmárfürdő György Galács. The event was attended by 33 member organizations from the Carpathian Basin. The main topic of the conference was the re-creation of the Government's youth strategy which bears the name National strategy for the youth 2017-2026. One of the objectives laid down in the document is the development of relations between young people in Hungary and abroad, and the preservation of cultural traditions for the future generations. The proposals which were made during the conference will also be included in the strategy.



The first results of the Minority Action Plan are presented in Belgrade

The results of the first phase of the Minority Action Plan which was adopted by the Serbian Government in March were presented in Belgrade. Speaking at the conference, the head of the Serbian Office of Human Rights and Minority Issues Suzana Paunović said that the report is based on practical results and presents the realization of the planned actions. It was prepared by 67 competent bodies, including 13 national councils. Ms. Paunović stressed that according to the report, 80 percent of actions planned for the first and second quarters have been realized. She added that it shows that “the action plan is working not only in theory, but in practice as well.”



The KMPSZ celebrates its 25th anniversary

On Saturday, the Association of Hungarian Teachers in Transcarpathia (KMPSZ) held its 24th general assembly and celebrated the 25th anniversary of its establishment in Beregszász/Berehove. Addressing the event, the head of the KMPSZ Ildikó Orosz recalled the most memorable moments and milestones of the association which was founded in 1991. She stressed that due to the Hungarian Government’s financial support given in recent years, several Hungarian-language educational institutions in Transcarpathia have been renovated or developed, and the financial situation of church high schools have also been stabilized. Ms. Orosz stressed that the financial assistances Hungary provides for Transcarpathian Hungarian children in the field of education, catering and summer camping, as well as extra pays for Hungarian teachers contributed greatly to the preservation of Hungarian school network in the region. State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Árpád János Potápi greeted the conference in a letter which was read out at the event.

