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PRIME MINISTERS OFFICE
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COMMUNITIES ABROAD

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Zoltán Balog: we have to fight for freedom of faith

On Friday, speaking at the Unitarian Church in Transylvania's Torda (Turda) on the 449th anniversary of the declaration of freedom of religion and conscience, Minister of Human Capacities Zoltán Balog said that "today also we must fight for freedom of faith and we must do so in Europe as well". The minister stressed that today Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. He added that more than half of the tens of thousands of people who are killed every year because of their faith are Christians. In 1568 the Transylvanian Diet in Torda declared freedom of religion and conscience – the first in the world to do so. Mr. Balog said that Hungarians living in different parts of the world must celebrate together "what Transylvania gave the Hungarian nation, what Torda gave Hungarian Christianity, and what Hungarians gave the world." He added that the religious freedom declared in Torda warns us that we must repeatedly fight for the freedom of our faith and the justice of faith.

Burnt-down school in Kommandó will be rebuilt with support from the Hungarian government

On Monday the Horn Dávid Primary School in Szeklerland's Kommandó/Comandău burnt down. Sándor Tamás, Leader of Kovászna/Kovasna County Council, said that the school will be rebuilt. He added that the municipality will apply for government assistance, and if they do not receive it they will use their own resources. In connection with the incident, the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad of the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement, declaring that the state secretariat will allocate HUF 5 million (EUR 16,000) of emergency aid to the school and will also donate a large collection of books to the school's library. After the accident, Deputy State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Péter Szilágyi spoke on the phone with the director of the school Béni Béla Opra. He informed Mr. Opra that the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad can supply part of the school's 9,000-book collection from the stock of the Mikes Kelemen Program.

The Roman Catholic High School of Marosvásárhely is on the verge of closure

The Roman Catholic Theological High School of Marosváránhely/Targu Mures is on the verge of closure: without a director the school cannot submit its new enrollment plan, and the municipality has not voted about the town's school network. Since the school does not have any person with signatory power, it cannot submit its enrollment plan for the 2017/2018 academic year. Although the former director of the school, Zsolt Tamási – whose official tenure was extended by 60 days – managed to pass the competitive examination for the director's position, the chief superintendent of Maros/Mures county Nadia Rață is unwilling to appoint him. Ms. Rață said that the reason for her decision is that the school is not included in Marosvásárhely's school network.



As has been reported, at the beginning of November the DNA launched proceedings against Zsolt Tamási – who in 2014 was the director of the Roman Catholic High School of Marosvásárhely – and Ștefan Someșan, the chief superintendent of the county. According to the prosecutor’s office, Mr. Tamási and Mr. Someșan acted unlawfully in establishing the high school.



Slovakia’s compliance with national minorities’ language rights is limited

A report on the 2015–2016 period prepared by the government office and the office of government commissioner for minority rights found that in Slovakia over the past two years national minorities’ language rights were violated on several occasions, while in certain fields they were not sufficiently exploited. One of the findings of the report, which was approved by the Slovak government on Monday, is that there have been some steps forward in language use in public administration departments, but several deficiencies were also observed. According to the document, in the period examined the language rights of national minorities were violated in 1,712 cases. In some towns the members of national minorities were not given an opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue orally or in writing; no resolutions, birth, marriage or death certificates were released in national minority languages (although this was requested by the members of national minorities) and no bilingual place name signs were installed.



2016 country report on Serbia discussed by the EP’s committee: the protection of national minorities and the support of economy in the focus

The draft of the 2016 country report on Serbia was on the agenda of the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs on Monday. In connection with the report, MEP Andor Deli (Fidesz, representing Vojvodina) said that country reports serve as a tool for the EP to point to questions and problems in which political or legal steps should be taken, and therefore it serves as constructive criticism for candidate countries in their EU integration process. Mr. Deli said that “from the aspect of minorities, we can be satisfied with the draft, since it dedicates a separate paragraph to minority rights and their protection, and includes the most important issues affecting national minorities.” He added that “There is good cooperation between Budapest and Belgrade on issues concerning the Hungarian community in Vojvodina, and the Hungarian government supports Serbia in its EU integration process.” The next step in the elaboration of the draft will be the submission of amendments and their discussion in February, while the final text will be adopted at the plenary session in March.





Exhibition marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation opens in Beregszász

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation will be celebrated in the framework of several events throughout the Carpathian Basin and Europe. As part of this event series, an exhibition entitled Mosaic of Protestant Schools' History was opened in Beregszász/Berehove. The event was attended by several religious and secular dignitaries, including government commissioner at the Prime Minister's Office István Grezsa. Addressing the event, Mr. Grezsa stressed the significance of the Reformation in the preservation of our Hungarian nation and mother tongue during the hardships of the past 500 years. He said that "the fact that I am here today and can speak in Hungarian, as a Hungarian, is also due to Protestant preachers."



State Secretary Árpád János Potápi on official visit to Australia

Over the past ten days State Secretary for Hungarian Communities Abroad Árpád János Potápi has been on an official visit to Australia, as part of which he met representatives of Hungarian communities in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and several other towns and cities. Speaking to the Hungarian news agency MTI by phone from Sydney, the state secretary said that Hungarians in Australia feel "the Hungarian government pays increasing attention to the diaspora." Mr. Potápi said that he had attended the 16th conference of the Australian Hungarian community, which was concluded by an ecumenical service and a gala performance. After the conference, Mr. Potápi took part in a meeting of the Association of Hungarians in Australia, during which he had an opportunity to discuss the most important current issues in the local Hungarian community. Speaking after his visit to Melbourne, the state secretary said that Hungary must continue its diaspora policy and more emphasis should be laid on the involvement of young Hungarians in the activity of Hungarian organizations abroad. In Melbourne Mr. Potápi made a visit to the Hungarian Center, which is the largest Hungarian center in the world and which operates a Hungarian Sunday school as well. He also visited the Bocskai Center in Melbourne, where 40 children receive Hungarian-language education.