

# THE BUDAPEST TIMES

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## Far-right takes Gyöngyöspata

*Jobbik candidate wins race for mayor of village that has become a political football*

The candidate of the far-right party Jobbik became mayor of Gyöngyöspata on Monday with roughly a third of the vote. He has already announced he intends to set up a local gendarmerie to keep order in the

town that has been plagued by politically fuelled ethnic tension in recent months. For a village of under 3,000 souls, Gyöngyöspata has gained a surprisingly high profile both at home and abroad – and for the worst of reasons. Jobbik got the ball rolling in March when it staged a rally calling for action to end “Gypsy terror” (the rhetoric having been ratcheted up a notch since the party scored 17 per cent in last year’s general election with a campaign against “gypsy crime”).

The rally marked the arrival in the village of a thuggish group calling itself the “Civil Guard for a Better Future”, which began patrolling the streets, especially the peripheral Gypsy ghetto. According to Amnesty International, the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center and others, this involved frequent intimidation of the local Roma population.

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## To be franc, it's bad

**More grim news for those in forex mortgage trap amid market turmoil**

The anxiety felt by many of the million-plus Hungarian families paying off Swiss franc mortgages can only have been intensified this week as the Helvetic currency hit a record high against the forint. The cost of a franc to Hungarian wage earners rose above 238 forints on Monday, with analysts and pundits suggesting the “safe haven” currency could continue to strengthen as the EU dithers while the simmering eurozone crisis threatens to boil over.

### Bank tests source of stress

The latest jump in the value of the Swiss franc (the forint remains fairly strong against the euro, although it did slide past the 270 mark this week for the first time since mid-May) was attributed partly to the results of the EU’s “stress tests” on banks, whose results were published on 15 July. The tests were more stringent than those last year, which gave Ireland’s banks a clean bill of health just before the nation’s taxpayers were forced to bail them out, and eight banks failed while another 16 only scraped through. The benchmark BUX index of Budapest Stock Exchange lost 3.67 per cent on Monday. Even OTP Bank, Hungary’s biggest, fell 4.89 per cent, despite passing its stress test easily.

At the height of the craze for foreign-currency mortgages in the years running up to Hungary’s IMF rescue in 2008, the franc traded at as little as HUF 140, meaning many borrowers have seen their monthly repayments rise by half or more.

A survey by Raiffeisen Bank and research firm GfK suggests that only 17.5 per cent of households are able to save money, and few expect their savings to increase in the near future.

– See page 6 for analysis

## Képiró acquitted for lack of evidence

**Prosecution, defence lodge appeals against verdict on 97-year-old war crimes suspect**



The 97-year-old former policeman Sándor Képiró was acquitted of war crimes charges on Monday in what may well be one of the last attempts to bring a Nazi-era suspect to justice. Képiró was wheeled into court with an IV drip in his arm and a blanket on his knees having spent the past week in hospital. “I am innocent, I never killed or stole, I served my country, I came back because for me

there is no life outside Hungary,” he said through a nurse before the verdict was read out.

### Documents ‘unreliable’

Presiding Judge Béla Varga told the court that Képiró was acquitted due to a lack of evidence. In particular, documents relating to two trials from the 1940s were declared inadmissible. Furthermore, some witness testimony was deemed unreliable.

One elderly woman claimed to have seen Képiró beat a child with a rifle. Varga said police involved in the Novi Sad raid carried pistols, not rifles, so her testimony was doubtful.

### Appeals by both sides

Prosecutor Zolt Falvai had called during the trial, which began on 5 May, for a prison sentence despite Képiró’s advanced age. He said on Tuesday that the court’s verdict was

“unfounded” and lodged an appeal. Defence lawyer Zolt Zétényi lodged an appeal on Képiró’s behalf the following day. He argued that Képiró should be declared innocent, not merely acquitted for lack of evidence. The Simon Wiesenthal Center described Képiró’s acquittal as an “outrageous miscarriage of justice that insults the memory of the 1,246 victims of the Novi Sad massacre”.

– Continued on page 5 as ‘Charges’

## Journalist’s wine attack earthy, but noble

**Human rights court overturns criminal conviction for maligning local plonk**

The European Court of Human Rights overturned the criminal conviction for libel of a Hungarian journalist on Tuesday. Péter Uj had been sued by a large wine-trading firm over a 2008 comment piece in the daily *Népszabadság* in which he lamented the poor quality of much domestic plonk. As the court recalled: “The domestic courts found that, although Mr. Uj was entitled to express his opinion about the wine, characterising it as ‘shit’ was unnecessarily insulting and infringing the wine producer’s right to a good reputation.”

### Sober second thought

The Strasbourg-based court ruled, however, that the article’s primary aim was to “raise awareness about the disadvantages of state ownership rather than to denigrate the quality of the wine company’s products”. The court ruled that Uj’s opinion was of public interest and “as a journalist, he had a duty to impart information and ideas, even if somewhat exaggerated or provocative”. Furthermore, the court made a distinction between damaging a person’s

personal reputation and that of a company, which has “no moral dimension”.

### A call to arm tastebuds

The case revolved around an acid philippic published by the left-liberal daily *Népszabadság* on New Year’s Day 2008. “Now, if we’ve managed to get over it, and the semi-sweet tank-champagne and New Year telly shows didn’t cause lasting brain damage...” Uj began. After deriding the low-brow Sylvester offerings on national

television and taking a side-swipe at factory-farmed foods, he got down to business: wine.

Hungary has a reputation for producing great wine that goes back centuries, but it is generally accepted that quality bombed during the four decades to 1989 when the nation was a communist dictatorship and fulfilling production quotas took precedence over quality control.

“The crowning moment of the party comes when the host... sneaks into the pantry and emerges with a bottle of Tokaj

wine, which the stuffed-to-bursting company drinks with the greatest reverence,” Uj wrote. He then described in unflattering terms a pantomime of appreciation and connoisseurship, and his frustration that no one stops and says: “Wait, this is shit!”

### Communist-era hangover

The writer went on to name-check the Tokaj region’s largest wine-trading firm, a state-owned firm derived from a cumbersome communist era *kombinat*.

He lamented the fact that many people’s impressions of Hungary’s most revered wine region are formed by an encounter with cheap (sub-1000-forint) mass-produced wines. “Eighteen years on, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians drink this shit with pride, even reverence,” Uj wrote.

He argued that exports and domestic sales of low-quality produce are undermining the efforts of the many quality winemakers who have emerged since the end of the communist system to rebuild the region’s reputation.

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RATES	UK	EU	CH	US
304.83	304.85	268.23	268.93	229.28
21 July	14 July	21 July	14 July	21 July
231.85	188.56	188.96		
14 July	21 July	14 July		

**STATS**

**28 Days** Average delay on late payments in H1, down from 31.

**4849** Tonnes of wasted Hungarian produce in E.coli scare.

**A-ha!** More than half of male drivers have vision problems.

**178 mn** Harry Potter flick sets Hungarian opening weekend box office record.

**6% DROP** Petrol sales in H1. Diesel up 1.5%. Overall down 2.1%.

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