

Bajnai's office confirms former PM moving to New York for two months

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Hungarian former prime minister Gordon Bajnai, the predecessor of Viktor Orban, has accepted an invitation to lecture in EU economic policymaking at New York's Columbia University for a period of two months, Bajnai's office said on Wednesday, confirming press reports that the ex-PM would take up the lectureship.

Tabloid Blikk said earlier that Bajnai would take up his new post in the autumn and move to New York.

Bajnai's spokesman denied the report that Bajnai intended to move from Hungary, saying his appointment was for September and October only.

Blikk said Bajnai has in the meantime taken time to observe a course given by former foreign minister Peter Balazs at Budapest's Central European University.

Blikk noted that Bajnai has stepped into the shadows of Hungarian political life.

Recently, however, Bajnai has set the ball rolling to establish a political think-tank called Home and Progress.

He stepped in as head of the government when Ferenc Gyurcsany, the Socialist prime minister, resigned in the spring of 2009 after his popularity nosedived.

Bajnai, who was not a member of the Socialist party, made it clear from the outset that he intended to head a largely technocratic government and, alongside his appointee as finance minister, Peter Oszko, put the country's near-crippled finances in order under a programme agreed with the IMF and EU as part of a 20 billion euro bailout following the October 2008 economic crisis.

Bajnai's new think-tank will include several familiar faces from his largely technocratic government.

Earlier Magyar Nemzet cited unnamed sources close to Bajnai as saying that the present leadership of the Socialist party and green party Politics Can Be Different are not up to the job of building a credible alternative to ruling party Fidesz, while Gyurcsany - who admitted to "lying day and night" about the public finances - lacks credibility, the paper said.

Bajnai has deliberately stayed out of political and social conflicts, the paper added.

At the same time, people close to Bajnai have been surprised that the Fidesz government has opened up so many battle fronts both at home and abroad, according to Magyar Nemzet.

Attila Juhasz, an analyst with think-tank Political Capital, told Blikk, "if we were to assume that Bajnai could return to Hungarian politics as a possible challenger to Viktor Orban, then such a visit abroad could be double-edged."

"On the one hand, he would very clearly stay out of the skirmishes of day-to-day politics while at the same time failing to secure background support, which he will certainly need if he chooses to come forward as an alternative to Fidesz," Juhasz added.

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