

International Press Headlines About Hungary's President Schmitt Resigning

Monday, 02 April 2012

"President Pál Schmitt announced his departure at the end of an unscheduled speech in the Hungarian Parliament today. The Associated Press, one of the first to break the story in English, reported Schmitt saying he is stepping down because his "personal issue" is dividing Hungary.

His 1992 doctorate was recently revoked after a University investigation concluded that most of his thesis was copied. Another international news agency quoted him telling parliament today, "Under the constitution, the president must represent the unity of the Hungarian nation. I have unfortunately become a symbol of division; I feel it is my duty to leave my position".

That agency mentioned that recently in Germany the defence minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg was forced to resign over allegations he too plagiarised his doctoral thesis. CNN quoted Guttenberg saying then that he was "taking the step that I would expect others to take". Schmitt said last Wednesday that "never for a moment" had he thought about resigning because of this scandal.

CNN continued to highlight Prime Minister Viktor Orban saying all along that it was up to the president to decide what to do. "Nobody except him can decide," the PM said in a widely reported interview last Friday.

The BBC said, "Fidesz support for Mr Schmitt wavered from the very start of the plagiarism allegations. "A single comment from Mr Orban's spokesman Peter Szijarto, that the allegations were "ridiculous", was not followed up by the party as a whole."

"When a committee of the Budapest Semmelweis University issued its 1,157-page report last week, Fidesz simply declared the matter "closed", while the Christian Democrats (KDNP), their junior partner in government, issued a much more strident attack on the president's critics", reported BBC's Nick Thorpe in Budapest.

Bloomberg News made the point that Schmitt "is the first president to resign since Hungary's transition to democracy in 1990. Schmitt, who was one of Orban's deputies in the ruling Fidesz party, vowed to be the "motor" of government policy as president, raising concern over the lack of checks and balances on a premier who won an unprecedented two-thirds parliamentary majority in 2010 elections."

A recent video by EuroNews mentioned that the Hungarian opposition planned to initiate the impeachment of Schmitt in parliament - a move that would have forced the government to defend the president and be dragged into the scandal too.

The BBJ highlighted the fact that right-wing newspapers in Hungary including the daily Magyar Nemzet and weekly Heti Válasz published editorial articles in which they called upon Schmitt to go. They alluded to the negative impact on the credibility of the leadership of Hungary, as well as on country's international interests if Schmitt stayed in office. Now 69, he was elected President in 2010 for a five-year term.

The Associated Press concluded its early coverage saying, "Soon after Schmitt spoke, Hungary's governing Fidesz Party said it plans to have Parliament vote later Monday to accept the resignation and to have the legislators choose his successor as soon as possible."

László Kövér will take on the role of acting president of Hungary. Schmitt, who won gold medals for fencing at the 1968 and 1972 Olympic, is now expected to write a new thesis.

(Xpatloop.com)