

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Open letter: the EU must not sit idly by while a Member State's democracy is in jeopardy

Alessandro · Wednesday, April 15th, 2020

The following letter, signed by over 80 MEPs and civil society groups, was sent to the presidents of the European Commission and Council:

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear President Michel,

The coronavirus pandemic represents an urgent global challenge. Governments and EU institutions must act decisively to control its spread, protect citizens, and limit economic damage in the European Union.

However, the crisis must not serve as a smokescreen for anti-democratic activities and the stifling of active civil society, that can exacerbate corruption and undermine Goal 16 of the SDGs: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.'

Exceptional times, of course, demand exceptional measures and it may be legitimate for governments to temporarily use extraordinary powers to manage the situation. Nevertheless, even in a crisis, these measures must be time-limited and proportionate. We cannot allow unscrupulous political actors to use the current climate as a pretext for dismantling democracy and undermining the rule of law.

The recent actions of Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary are a flagrant attack on the cornerstones of the rule of law and the values of the Union. Last week, the government overrode the objections of the opposition and civil society, granting the Prime Minister indefinite powers to rule by decree. This law has also mandated draconian prison sentences for spreading 'misinformation' which could be used to stifle independent journalism.

These measures have a chilling effect on free speech and anticipate the potential to suffocate those remaining elements of the checks and balances system in Hungary which survived the past ten years of almost uninterrupted democratic backsliding resulting from Viktor Orbán's rule.

The European Union must not sit idly by while a Member State's democracy is in jeopardy.

We also remind you that previous actions of the European Union failed to prevent the Hungarian government from going along a path that leads to the disruption of democratic

institutions, marginalising of civil society, and the undermining of the rule of law. Therefore, we call on the European Commission and the Council to more strictly control the spending of EU funds and to enhance current measures that prevent the creation of an illiberal system within our Union.

We therefore urge you to unequivocally condemn the Hungarian government's misuse of the coronavirus crisis to erode democratic values. The European Commission and the Council must also take swift and decisive actions to address these threats to the rule of law being carried out under the guise of emergency powers.

Respectfully,

| | |
|--|--|
| Transparency International EU | |
| Transparency International Hungary | |
| Access Info | Daniel Freund MEP, Co-Chair, Anti-Corruption Intergroup |
| Africa Solidarity Centre Ireland | Petri Sarvamaa MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption Intergroup |
| Alliance4Europe | Lara Wolters MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption Intergroup |
| AMARC Europe: World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters | Ramona Strugariu MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption Intergroup |
| ARTICLE 19 | Stelios Kouloglou MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption Intergroup |
| Association of European Journalists | Abir Al-Sahlani MEP |
| Campaign for Freedom of Information Scotland | Anna Donath MEP |
| Citizens Network Watchdog Poland | Benoît Biteau MEP |
| Civil Society Europe | Brando Benifei MEP |
| Corporate Europe Observatory | Caroline Roose MEP |
| Danes je nov dan / Today is a new day | Claude Gruffat MEP |
| The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation | Damien Carême MEP |
| Defend Democracy | David Cormand MEP |
| Democracy International | Dimitrios Papadimoulis MEP |
| EU DisinfoLab | François Alfonsi MEP |
| European Centre for Press and Media Freedom | Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield MEP |
| European Federation of Journalists | Karen Melchior MEP |
| European Humanist Federation | Karima Delli MEP |
| EuropeanMay | Marie Toussaint MEP |
| European Movement International | Michèle Rivasi MEP |
| European Youth Forum | Mounir Satouri MEP |
| <i>Staffan Dahllöf</i> (Freelance reporter) | Pascal Durand MEP |
| <i>Antonis Ventouris</i> (Freelance) | Reinhard Bütikofer MEP |
| Freemuse | Rosa D'Amato MEP |
| Free Press Unlimited | Sabrina Pignedoli MEP |
| Fundacja Miasto Obywatelskie Lubartów | Salima Yenbou MEP |
| Funky Citizens | Sándor Rónai MEP |
| Global Forum for Media Development | Saskia Bricmont MEP |
| Gong | Tineke Strik MEP |
| The Good Lobby | Yannick Jadot MEP |
| Human Rights Watch | |
| Hungarian Civil Liberties Union | |
| Hungarian Europe Society | |
| Hungarian Helsinki Committee | |
| International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Europe | |
| International Press Institute | |
| JEF Europe (Young European Federalists) | |
| Lawyers for Human Rights | |
| <i>Vigilencia Abazi</i> (of Maastricht University) | |
| Mertek Media Monitor | |
| Netherlands Helsinki Committee | |
| Open Society European Policy Institute | |
| Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa | |
| The Oslo Center | |
| <i>Professor Laurent Pech</i> (of Middlesex University) | |
| Poets, Essayists and Novelists International | |
| Reporters Without Borders | |
| Solidar and Solidar Foundation | |
| Unhack Democracy | |
| Vouliwatch | |
| WeMove Europe | |

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 15th, 2020 at 3:03 pm