

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	Daniel Freund MEP, Co-Chair, Anti-Corruption Intergroup
Transparency International Hungary	Petri Sarvamaa MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption
Access Info	Intergroup
Africa Solidarity Centre Ireland	Lara Wolters MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption
Alliance4Europe	Intergroup
AMARC Europe: World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters	Ramona Strugariu MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption
ARTICLE 19	Intergroup
Association of European Journalists	Stelios Kouloglou MEP, Bureau Member, Anti-Corruption
Campaign for Freedom of Information Scotland	Intergroup
Citizens Network Watchdog Poland	Abir Al-Sahlan MEP
Civil Society Europe	Anna Donath MEP
Corporate Europe Observatory	Benoît Biteau MEP
Danes je nov dan / Today is a new day	Brando Benifei MEP
The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation	Caroline Roose MEP
Defend Democracy	Claude Gruffat MEP
Democracy International	Damien Carême MEP
EU DisinfoLab	David Cormand MEP
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom	Dimitrios Papadimoulis MEP
European Federation of Journalists	François Alfonsi MEP
European Humanist Federation	Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield MEP
EuropeanMay	Karen Melchior MEP
European Movement International	Karima Delli MEP
European Youth Forum	Marie Toussaint MEP
<i>Staffan Dahllöf</i> (Freelance reporter)	Michèle Rivasi MEP
<i>Antonis Ventouris</i> (Freelance)	Mounir Satouri MEP
Freemuse	Pascal Durand MEP
Free Press Unlimited	Reinhard Bütikofer MEP
Fundacja Miasto Obywatelskie Lubartów	Rosa D'Amato MEP
Funky Citizens	Sabrina Pignedoli MEP
Global Forum for Media Development	Salima Yenbou MEP
Gong	Sándor Rónai MEP
The Good Lobby	Saskia Bricmont MEP
Human Rights Watch	Tineke Strik MEP
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union	Yannick Jadot MEP
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	

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