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Transparency International EU deplores EU Commission decision to unfreeze EU funds to Hungary

Pia Engelbrecht-Bogdanov · Wednesday, December 13th, 2023

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Transparency International EU (TI EU) staunchly opposes the release of some 10 billion euros in EU funds to a government that has comprehensively failed to demonstrate it takes meaningful reform to its democratic infrastructure seriously.

In December 2022, we welcomed the European Commission's recommendation to the Council of the European Union to implement measures to protect the Union budget against the consequences of breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary.

However, continuous monitoring by Hungarian civil society has shown that, while Hungary has adopted a modicum of measures in response to these EU requirements since December 2022, these amount to nothing more than window dressing, failing to fully address the remedial measures required under the three separate ongoing procedures.

The Commission's decision to unfreeze funds conditional on rule of law reforms now risks creating a dangerous misconception that the rule of law in Hungary is on a positive and serious reform trajectory. It further sets a worrying precedent for other rule of law processes within the European Union, in doing so undermining the effectiveness of all other rule of law scrutiny tools.

Vitor Teixeira, Senior Policy Officer for Rule of Law and Civic Space, said “The European Commission cannot claim to uphold democracy in the EU if it is not serious about sanctioning those that breach its values. Today’s decision sends the opposite signal: that destruction to democratic society can go unpunished if mere cosmetic reforms are undertaken. The Commission must not let itself get backed into a corner over its fundamental values.”

It is now critical for the safeguarding of the rule of law in the EU that the Commission does not do further damage, remains vigilant, and refuses to release any additional funding to Hungary before proper reforms have been implemented. The European Union is predicated upon the upholding of the rule of law in its Member States. It is the Commission’s duty to ensure this prevails.

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