



European
Federation of
Journalists

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President
ARNE KÖNIG

General Secretary
AIDAN WHITE

Co-Directors
RENATE SCHROEDER & MARC GRUBER

José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission
1049 Brussels, Belgium

January 6 2011

Dear President,

Hungary's "New Media "

We write to you on behalf of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the regional group of the International Federation of Journalists representing more than 260.000 journalists in more than 30 European countries, including all European Union Member States, to express our great concern at Hungary's new media law, which became effective on 1st of January 2010, the date when Hungary assumed the Presidency of the European Union.

We appreciate that this media law is on the Commission's agenda of its first major mission in Hungary on January 7th.

As you know, the EFJ has warned that this law could expose journalists and media to extensive fines should they refuse to disclose their sources or for publishing content that is judged inappropriate or not "balanced" by the new media council of the Hungarian Media Regulatory Office. This means in other words that media is being edited by political representatives.

We are also concerned that this law breaches the most fundamental of free expression rights and will have an impact on wider rights of freedom of expression including musical, artistic and cultural expression.

We are grateful that you emphasised in a recent press conference that "the freedom of media is for us a sacred principle. It's a fundamental principle".

With that in mind, we ask you to consider the potential impact of this law. In particular, we are concerned about protection of journalists' sources of information. We fear that the law will create a blanket of self-censorship across the country's media, and thus weaken the democratic process in Hungary.

The EFJ believes it is untenable that a country which has enacted a law undermining fundamental rights including media freedom should now assume the moral and political leadership of the European Union.

Therefore, Mr. President, we urge your staff to carefully analyse the media law and its implementation, not only with regard to technical criteria as covered in the Audiovisual Services Directive, but also with regard to the principles enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. We are convinced that it will be necessary to launch an infringement procedure against Hungary under Article 6 of the EU treaty, if the Hungarian government does not radically change the law as in place now.

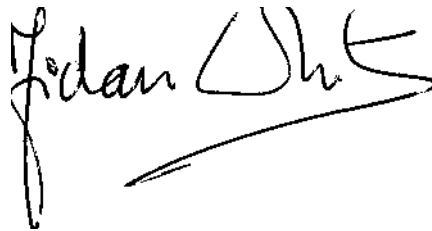
We believe that not only the principle of journalism as a public good is at stake in this matter, but also the credibility of the European Union as a political institution defending human rights. The legally-binding Charter of Fundamental Rights is part of European primary legislation, which as Commissioner Viviane Reding says "is the EU's own ambitious bill of fundamental rights" and that also covers media pluralism and media freedom (Article 11).

We urge you to take all appropriate steps to encourage the Hungarian authorities to amend this law and to make clear its commitment to the values of the European Union and to guarantee to the citizens of Hungary their rights to free expression as guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Yours Sincerely,



Arne König,
EFJ President



Aidan WHITE
EFJ General Secretary

cc.

Neelie Kroes, Commissioner for Digital Agenda

Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Fundamental Rights

EC Media Task-Force