

renew europe.

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Member of the European Parliament
President of Renew Europe Group
European Parliament
WIB 05M003, B-1047

Brussels, 29 July 2020

Minister of State for Europe at the German Federal Government,

Dear Mr Michael Roth,

In the same week that Viktor Orban returned to Budapest claiming triumph from last week's European Summit, Hungary's largest independent media outlet is in turmoil after the editor of index.hu was forced to resign, amid accusations of political interference. This new threat towards the independence of the press and the withering of media pluralism shows once more the growing concerns that Hungary continues to turn its back from the European Union's fundamental values. A free and vibrant press is one of the pillars of liberal democracy.

The European Parliament took its responsibility back in September 2018 by demanding that the Council acts to prevent the Hungarian authorities from breaching the EU's founding values. Back then, there were already concerns regarding freedom of expression but also regarding judicial independence, corruption, rights of minorities, and the situation of migrants and refugees. I firmly regret the total absence of progress in Council regarding the article 7 procedure against Hungary, knowing that, as recent official reports have indicated, the situation has deteriorated since the European Parliament took action.

As President of the Renew Group, I call on the German Presidency to:

- *Investigate the situation surrounding index.hu and take a strong stand to support the independence of the press in Hungary. There is no truth without journalists free to report it.*
- *Accelerate the procedure in Council in order to address concrete recommendations, establish clear deadlines and ensure that EU fundamental values are respected in Hungary. Currently the hearings are neither regular nor structured.*
- *Following the agreement in the European Council on the imperative for Rule of Law conditionality, accelerate the work in Council on the 2018 Commission proposal aiming at the protection of the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies as re-*

gards the rule of law in the Member States. The European Parliament is ready to start trilogues. This is a key element for the swift adoption of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

- *Respond publicly to the events surrounding index.hu and to rumors, circulated by Viktor Orban, that the Chancellor of Germany promised to end Article 7 procedures against the Hungarian Government by the end of this year.*

Unfortunately, Hungary is not the only Member State where there are breaches of rule of law principals. The European Commission requested EU action in December 2017 in view of the perceived threats to the independence of the judiciary in Poland. Recent reports have shown that the situation has also since been deteriorating. The Polish Government has recently promised to “repolonize” the country’s media, a strategy often used by politicians to muzzle the free press. Renew Europe counts on the German presidency to accelerate as well the article 7 procedure in Council towards Poland.

It is time for the European Union to stand firmly by its values. It is time for the Council to take responsibility and defend all Europeans to make sure they live in a free, democratic and prosperous society. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has underlined on several occasions that the rule of law is a priority for the German presidency. Now it is time to translate this into concrete actions.

*Yours sincerely,
Dacian Cioloş
President of Renew Europe*

