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European Parliament
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Mrs Ursula von der Leyen,
President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Dear President von der Leyen,

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 you, as President of the European Commission 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.*
- *Contribute to accelerating 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, contribute to accelerating the work in Council on the 2018 Commission proposal aiming at the protection of the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards 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.*
- *Investigate and release a statement on allegations filed at DG Competition alleging that the Hungary media market is seriously distorted by illegal state aid to public & pro-government media.*
- *Use all tools at the Commission's disposal to prevent a serious breach of common values, such as expedited infringement procedures and applications for interim measures before the Court of Justice.*

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 European Commission to contribute to accelerating 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 and the Commission to take responsibility and defend all Europeans to make sure they live in a free, democratic and prosperous society.

*Yours faithfully,
Dacian Cioloș
President of Renew Europe*

