



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF HUNGARY
TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 2 May 2018
KKM/ /2018/Adm

Subject: Feedback for the Committee to Protect Journalists

Dear Mr Gibson,

With reference to your request dated 26 April 2018, please find below my reactions to your statements.

1. The closure of Magyar Nemzet earlier this month has contributed to a lack of media diversity in the country.

It is always unfortunate if a newspaper with a long history ceases to exist, regardless of its political orientation or commitment. However, it must be emphasized that the newspaper in question was a completely privately owned outlet and it was the free decision of its owner to close business, based on his own personal consideration, be that the decreasing number of copies, economic loss, or anything else. In Hungary there is not only media freedom but also market economy. Media ownership is consequently governed by civil law and not the state.

2. Prime Minister Orban spoke on 15 March of “amends” to come. We would like to receive an update from you as to any official measures, you may be aware of, that are planned relating to the media

The quote in question was part of a speech delivered in the campaign season, and neither its context nor the literal meaning of the words does imply official measures regarding the media. The Prime Minister spoke of political, moral and legal amends. It is clear that from the political point of view, amends has been made with the governing Fidesz-KDNP coalition winning a two-thirds majority in this years’ election a few weeks after the speech. The moral amends can be found in the overwhelming public support behind the Government, due to which almost three million citizens voted for the program of the current Government to continue protecting and preserving the cultural identity of the country and the continent we call home. As for legal amends, anyone who feels that his or her individual rights have been infringed by the unworthy and aggressive attacks of the opposition and its press, has the right to turn to the independent judiciary and seek legal action by charges of libel or otherwise.

3. On 12 April, a pro-government weekly, Figyelo, also published a list naming 200 academics, civil society workers, independent journalists, and other Orban critics as “mercenaries of the speculator” (a reference alluding to George Soros).

The publication of articles and their content is based on the free choice of the editors of the news outlets and the Government does not, and must not have a word in the news editing habits of the privately-owned newspaper in question. Figyelő is independent of the Hungarian

Government, therefore, the Government cannot be held responsible neither legally nor morally for the publication of the list. Nevertheless, it is the right of any member of Hungarian civil society – including journalists – to reveal any influence deemed unwanted or harmful. The Government however has no control over these publications and anyone who has complaints regarding the contents of a media release has the right to turn to the Media Council, an independent body the members of which cannot by any means be instructed within their official capacity.

4. A Hungarian journalist also told CPJ that the public state media is nothing more than a “government propaganda machine”.

This statement is based on subjective, politically distorted opposition opinions and therefore lacks adequate data, statistics and facts that could form the basis of a rational debate. It must be emphasized nevertheless, that overall the opposition media reaches a much wider public in Hungary than public state media. As for online media for example, the proportion of government-critical portals is around 80 percent. The diversity of the Hungarian media scenery was perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that most Hungarian media outlets actively campaigned against the Fidesz-KDNP alliance ahead of the 8th April elections.

5. Hungary’s media is largely controlled by businessmen closely affiliated with Prime Minister Orbán, who benefit economically from state advertising, and this situation has created an unequal playing field - with smaller, independent outlets being forced into a weaker and weaker position.

There have indeed been some recent changes in the Hungarian media scenery; all within the framework of normal market economy and civil law dynamics. It must be underlined once again that issues related to the functioning and structure of the media market fall completely outside the competence of the Government and not only has the Hungarian Government no intention to limit media freedom, but there are no legal options either to do so. Hungary has powerful legal and constitutional safeguards of media freedom: the Fundamental Law stipulates that Hungary recognizes and protects the freedom and diversity of the press and the so called ‘Media Constitution’ of 2010 also strongly protects the editorial and journalistic freedom of expression. All in all it can be safely stated that the ownership and political spectrum of the Hungarian media is more diverse, and the freedom of the press is more prevalent than in most Western European countries.

Yours sincerely,

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*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
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