

Resolution of the AEJ Hungarian Section on World Press Freedom Day: EU must act to end political control over media in parts of Europe

On World Press Freedom Day, May 3, the Hungarian Section of the AEJ recalls that just thirty years ago, an epoch-making regime change took place not only in Central Europe but also in southern Africa. On this very date in 1991, African journalists adopted the Windhoek Declaration in the Namibian capital, in which they united to appeal for the establishment of a free, independent and diverse press.

Now, just one year away from general election in Hungary a “deep state” has taken hold, which seeks a servile-minded army of writers who faithfully follow instructions instead of independent, autonomously-minded journalists. It is our moral duty to remind people on World Press Freedom Day about the media policy of the Fidesz autocracy, which is gradually crippling independence through the cynical exercise of state power aimed at suppressing all forms of protest.

The timeliness of the Namibian statement has only been heightened by the passing of time, almost everywhere in the world. Hungarian journalists and newspaper readers, students and viewers are primarily interested in the Hungarian media situation, the serious crisis of which is shown by nothing more than the fact that the Hungarian media world has become a diplomatic topic again in recent weeks. U.S. Secretary of State Donald Blinken, who is well acquainted with the Central European region, put it accurately and without rhetorical exaggeration, saying "We have real concern that is shared by international press freedom advocates and many Hungarians over the decline of the pluralism and diversity and independent voices". With this statement, the head of the State Department indicated that the Biden government, in accordance with the American Constitution, considers unrestricted freedom of the press to be one of the most important elements of democratic values. Neither foreign critics nor we claim that the Hungarian media situation is characterized by brutal retaliation against the Belarusian, Russian or Turkish press. However, it is also true that in the last more than ten years the governments of Orbán have increased their influence in the Hungarian media under systemic economic and political pressure, number of media; recently the government-critical Klubrádió was pushed to the Internet, before which the iconic Index was shattered, previously the independence of the patinatic conservative Magyar Nemzet was broken, after the left-wing

Népszabadság editorial office was closed for economic reasons - and unfortunately the line can continue.

The flooding of the public media has recently stirred new international waves: Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg quickly and firmly said that Hungarian Television mocked and put on trial a staff member of the Vienna-based weekly Profil, just because the reporter in connection with the Orbán-Mazowieczki-Salvini meeting asked Fidesz MEPs three questions. Advocating the diversity of the press and in the spirit of professional solidarity, the AEJ Hungarian Section condemns the harsh attacks on Franziska Tschinderle by some pro-government and pro-Orbán Hungarian bodies.

On World Press Freedom Day, we endorse the view of Othmar Karas, Vice-President of the European Parliament, that the European Union is 'too weak' to counterbalance the 'lies and propaganda' of the media close to the government, so we need 'stronger tools' to protect European values. Hungarian media consumers are not comforted by the fact that the politician pointed out that in addition to Hungary, several other EU member states - such as Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland and Malta - also have problems with keeping the operation of the press free from political manipulation. While we agree with his assessment, we have no illusions: the Orbán cabinet's oppressive press policy is a close and inseparable part of Fidesz's more than a decade-long policy of three overwhelming victories and characterized by incessant centralization and constant estrangement from the Western value system.

The Board of AEJ-Hungary