

On 6 April, a caricature appeared in De Morgen showing the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán having an imaginary talk with Nazi Heinrich Himmler about the alleged “absolute power” of the Prime Minister and his plans “inspired by the Nazis’ textbook”. I was shocked. While I hold freedom of expression dear and crucial, it is certainly not without its boundaries, including good taste and basic civility. Living in Belgium, I have accustomed to emotions running high discussing certain subjects when it comes to my country, but this manifest Hungary-bashing/Orbán-hatred is a disgraceful portrayal of a democratically elected leader of an EU Member State, an ally of both Belgium and Flanders. Of course, I am fully aware of the attacks following the adoption of the *Act on the containment of the coronavirus*. Critics talk about authoritative tendencies and say: the Hungarian government now has “unlimited power”. I feel obliged to provide you with the facts.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic requires exceptional measures to protect people’s health, guarantee legal certainty and to manage the economic consequences. The law in question was approved by our National Assembly with a large majority and a strong democratic mandate. It only confers **limited powers** to the Government related merely to the declared coronavirus state of danger and in accordance with the principles of necessity and proportionality.

Some of the harshest criticism of the Hungarian legislation revolves around three issues based all on inaccurate representation of the facts, which are as follows: **1. Time limit/scope**: unlike in other countries, **our Parliament continues to sit and could end the emergency period any time**. Governmental measures are also **reviewable by our Constitutional Court**. **2. Elections**: only by-elections are postponed for public health reasons, while the general elections are enshrined in our Constitution/Fundamental Law and are unchanged (next general elections are due in 2022, municipal elections in 2024). NB. other EU countries have already postponed broader elections. **3. Freedom of expression**: the rules are very limited and concern only **intentional misinformation** during the period of the state of danger, to be adjudicated by a court of law (many Criminal Codes elsewhere sanction the same activity). **No form of freedom of expression are subject to this law of course, including criticism of the government, no matter how strong these critical views are.**

Hungary advocates a peer review of the fundamental values of the European Union that **extends to all Member States based on objective criteria and equal treatment**. This may also cover the use of emergency measures when the worst days of the ongoing multiple crises are behind us. The values of the European Union are common to all of us. In such difficult times, the EU needs more consideration, unity and solidarity, not division.

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