

Vice President Věra Jourová
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 21 April 2020

DEMOCRACY IN THE NEXT BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Dear Vice President Jourová,
Dear Commissioner Reynders,

The current global pandemic will alter the course of European history indefinitely. The European Commission's decisions and actions today will set the course for the decades to come. So far, the European Commission has made important steps towards solidarity and coordination between EU Member States. As part of the Commission's response, the European Commission is redrafting a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to empower the Commission with the financial tools and means to mitigate the harms to global health, economic recession and the larger political fallout. This draft is set to be published on 28 April 2020.

We urge you to ensure democracy and human rights are placed higher on the agenda in the framework of the new MFF proposal. Many different regimes have engaged in soft coups, taking advantage of the pandemic to quell dissent and concentrate power in ways they are unlikely to give up afterwards. For example in Hungary on 30 March, parliament passed legislation handing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sweeping new emergency powers to indefinitely rule by decree. The new law also criminalises the spreading of “false” or “distorted” information which undermines the authorities' fight against COVID-19 with fines and up to five years in prison. The crisis has also given rise to the increasing tension between security and freedom, particularly in the digital sphere. Crises tend to accelerate and deepen existing trends, and this will most certainly be the case for the growing trend of authoritarianism if the EU does not act decisively.

Both the legitimacy of democratic governance and the future of multilateral cooperation are at risk. With international cooperation as the best way to deal with this crisis, it is upon the EU to invest in working with likeminded partners. More than ever, democracy will need to be a top priority of the EU's internal and external affairs. This will need to be reflected in the new MFF proposal, particularly in the European Rights and Values Programme.

We urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure the Commission draft will reflect the need to prioritise democratic governance in the new MFF proposal.

Yours sincerely,



Ken Godfrey
Executive Director

CC: *Acting* Director-General Salla Saastamoinen (DG JUST)