

Hungarian journalists work in climate of self-censorship, fear

Committee for Protect Journalists meets with local journalists and officials; government spokesman defends record

Budapest, October 17, 2014—On a rare mission to a European Union country, a CPJ delegation led by board member Kati Marton was in Hungary this week to meet with journalists, media lawyers, managers, rights defenders, policy analysts, and government officials to discuss **Hungary's press freedom record**.

In a meeting with CPJ on Thursday, Zoltan Kovacs, the international spokesman for Hungary's prime minister, defended Hungary's record and dismissed as unfounded any assertion that the country has slid backwards on media freedom. However, dozens of journalists who met with the delegation described restrictive measures such as: the suppression of independent, critical reporting, including through legal and financial means; concentration of media regulatory power with the state ; restricting access to information; and distributing advertising money in favor of establishment-friendly outlets. They cited, among other things, the 2010 **media law**, which places regulatory powers in the hands of government loyalists; a 2013 legal amendment giving authorities broad power to **refuse access** to information; and a recent progressive **tax on advertising revenue** that mainly affects one commercial television station, RTL Klub.

“After a promising early democratization process, Hungary is now heading in a repressive direction, particularly when it comes to the media,” CPJ's Marton said. “We found a general climate of self-censorship, even fear, among the press corps, which is striking for an EU member.”

Journalists told CPJ of cases of direct and indirect pressure by authorities on their media owners and managers to tone down or abandon sensitive, critical stories. Repercussions for failing to do so include the filing of defamation lawsuits by disgruntled officials; harassment for alleged non-compliance with vague regulations; and **job dismissal**. Investigative journalists who report on alleged government wrongdoing are at particular risk of punitive action. These measures, and the self-censorship they inspire, ultimately deprive the public of essential, independent news.

“Hungary's government is using allocation of state advertising money as a means to control news reporting,” Kati Marton said. “We find this dangerous for a new democracy , and we call on authorities to reverse this trend of manipulation and repression of the media, which belongs in the past. It is impossible for Hungary to move to the next level of democratic development without a free and fearless press.” Following the mission, CPJ will relay its findings to officials at the new European Commission, the chair of the European Council, and members of the European Parliament. CPJ **urges** these institutions to take measures to ensure that Hungary respects the spirit and the letter of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Along with Marton, the mission included CPJ Deputy Director Robert Mahoney, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator Nina Ognianova, and Europe Representative Jean-Paul Marthoz.

CPJ is a global, independent, nonprofit organization that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide

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