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New Pro-Government Media Conglomerate Threatens Media Pluralism

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ Non-state

CATEGORY  ▶ Other acts having chilling effects on media freedom

PARTNER: EFJ/IFJ, AEJ, CPJ, Index, RSF

The owners of a majority of Hungary's pro-government media outlets announced on 28 November 2018 that they are donating their companies to a foundation, the "Central European Press and Media Foundation". This new media conglomerate will include cable news channels, online news portals, tabloid and sports newspapers and all of Hungary's county newspapers, several radio stations and numerous magazines.

Among the media companies to be under its control are Echo Penisola Ltd. (Part FM radio station), Gong Radio Ltd. (Gong FM radio station), Hír TV (Hír TV station), Hold Reklam Ltd. (Retro radio station), Hung-Ister Jsc. (audiovisual producer), K4A Publishing House Ltd. (Figyelo weekly magazine), Mandiner Press Ltd. (mandiner.hu), Modern Media Group Jsc. (Lokal daily, Lokal Extra paper, lokal.hu and 888.hu), Napfenymedia (Deli Szo naewspaper and szegedma.hu), Ripost Media Ltd. (Ripost daily, Hello! weekly, ripost.hu, faktor.hu).

Some other media companies announced that they are ready to assign their ownership rights to the Foundation: Opus Press Ltd. (Opus closed down Nepszabadsag daily and owns all the county newspapers through Mediaworks Co., the Nemzeti Sport leading sport daily, the Bors tabloid daily, Vilaggazdasag economic daily, and weeklies), Echo Hungaria TV Jsc. (Echo TV), Magyar Idok Ltd (Magyar Idok daily), New Wawe Media Group (origo.hu, life.hu, travelo.hu, etc.). According to media reports, most of the publications donated to the Foundation were acquired or founded by allies of Prime Minister Viktor Orban in the past few years. Some of them turned from relatively independent outlets into supporters of the government, with copious state and government advertising.

The Foundation's media operations will be led by Gabor Liskay, a newspaper publisher known for his loyalty to Viktor Orban.

On 28 November, the National Federation of Hungarian Journalists (MUOSZ) sent a letter to the Media Authority and the Competition Office in Hungary, in order to denounce the hegemonic position of the new conglomerate, in many areas of the press, including national commercial radio and county newspapers.

02 Jul 2020: On 5 June 2020, the Constitutional Court ruled that the decree by which the Government proclaimed the merger's "strategic importance at national level", thus exempting it from review by the National Competition Authority, was in line with the Constitution. The Constitutional Court was seized in December 2018 by a quarter of the Member of Parliament, who argued that the decree undermined the Act on the Prohibition of Unfair Market Practices and Restrictions of Competition, did not satisfy the definition of "strategic importance at national level", and violated constitutional provisions regarding media pluralism.

- ➔ **Article by Index.hu "Hungarian Constitutional Court approves exempting pro-government media from antitrust regulation"**
- ➔ **Ruling of the Constitutional Court**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ▼

- ➔ **Update to Mapping Media Freedom report: "New media conglomerate exempted from scrutiny"**
- ➔ **Mapping Media Freedom report: "Hungary: Creation of huge pro-government media conglomerate raises fears over media freedom"**
- ➔ **444.hu news report: "Példátlan médiabirodalom állt össze Liszkay Gábor vezetésével" [Unprecedented media empire set up headed by Gábor Liszkay]**
- ➔ **AP news report: "Huge pro-government media conglomerate formed in Hungary"**
- ➔ **Statement from the National Federation of Hungarian Journalists (MUOSZ): "Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány: nyílt levélben fordult a MÚOSZ a média- és a versenyhatósághoz"**
- ➔ **EFJ-IFJ statement: "Hungary: new pro-government media conglomerate threatens pluralism"**

STATE REPLIES ▼



29 Jan 2019 | Reply from the Hungarian authorities (information received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

- ➔ **Letter from the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the Council of Europe**

FOLLOW-UPS



30 Mar 2021 | Commissioner for Human Rights: “It is high time for Hungary to restore journalistic and media freedoms”

 **Country Memorandum**