

**Question for written answer E-005684/2017  
to the Commission**  
Rule 130  
**Henna Virkkunen (PPE)**

Subject: Defence of the EU's basic values

All Member States of the European Union are committed to protecting fundamental values: human rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law. However, recent developments in some EU Member States have endangered the realisation of these fundamental values.

The situation gives most cause for concern in Poland and Hungary, where freedom of the press and the development of the rule of law have been jeopardised. The scope for the operation of the press has been reduced, and the Constitutional Court's powers have been limited.

At the same time, while countries are acting in breach of the fundamental values of the EU, they nevertheless receive billions of euros in support from the EU Cohesion Funds.

In order to ensure respect for the common values of the European Union, Article 7 was inserted in the Treaty, according to which, under the rule of law procedure, the Council can suspend a Member State's membership rights if it persistently and seriously breaches the Union's core values. In practice, this means a temporary loss of voting rights in the Council. However, the freezing of EU financial assistance could be a more effective way of ensuring adherence to fundamental values.

Currently, financial support from the Cohesion Funds can be suspended by a Council decision only if a Member State's deficit is too high and if no action has been taken by the Member State to address it.

What possibilities are currently provided for in EU legislation to safeguard the EU's fundamental values and penalise breaches thereof? Will the Commission take steps to reform the rules so that breaches of fundamental values could lead to a suspension of Cohesion Fund support?