MISSION REPORT

following the mission to Hungary, 15-17 May 2023

Committee on Budgetary Control

Members of the mission:
Monika Hohlmeier (PPE) (Leader of the mission)
Petri Sarvamaa (PPE)
Lara Wolters (S&D)
Daniel Freund (Verts/ALE)

Ex officio members:
Sândor Rónai (S&D)
Katalin Cseh (Renew)
CONT delegation to Budapest (HU)
15-17 May 2023
Mission Report

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**A. Mission Programme**

**COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY CONTROL**

**MISSION TO BUDAPEST**  
(Hungary)  
15-17 May 2023

**PROGRAMME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1, Monday 15 May</th>
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<tr>
<td>a.m. Individual flights to Budapest</td>
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| 14:00 | Start of the official programme – Meeting at the EP Liaison Office (EPLO) in Budapest  
Address: H-1024 Budapest, Lövőház utca 35 |
| 14:00 - 15:30 | Meeting with investigative journalists:  
- Endre B. BOJTAR, Chief Editor of Magyar Narancs (National Independent Weekly)  
- Tamás BODOKY, Editor-in-Chief, Átlátszó.hu  
- Csaba LUKÁCS, Newspaper Director, Magyar Hang, representative of four independent public weekly newspapers |
| 15:45 - 17:15 | Meeting with NGOs and civil society representatives:  
- Sándor LÉDERER – Co-founder, K-Monitor  
- Miklós LIGETI – Legal Director, or Peter József MARTIN, Managing Director, Transparency International Hungary  
- MártA PARDAVI, Co-Chair, and Andras LEDERER, or Nora NOVOSZADEK, Senior Legal Officer, Hungarian Helsinki Committee  
- Balázs VÁRADI – Senior Researcher, Budapest Institute  
- Gábor IVÁNYI, Leader of OKE (Oltalom Charity) and MET, a Christian community based on Methodist ideals, winner of the European Citizen’s Prize 2020, and István ÓNODI, Financial Director of OKE |
<p>| 17:30 - 20:00 | Meeting with EU companies faced with discriminatory measures |
| 20:30 | Transfer to Hotel K+K Opera Address: Révay utca 24, 1065 Budapest |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>08:15</td>
<td>Transfer to Budapest City Hall</td>
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<td>Address: 1052 Budapest, Városház utca 9-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>08:45-9:45</td>
<td>Meeting with Gergely KARÁCSONY, Mayor of Budapest, and his team:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ambrus KISS, Deputy Mayor</td>
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<td>- Dr. Anett BŐSZ, Deputy Mayor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Gábor KERPEL-FRONIUS, Deputy Mayor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ada ÁMON, Head of Climate and Environment Department</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Oliver PILZ, City Diplomacy Unit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Anna KOROKNAI, City Diplomacy Unit</td>
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<td>9:45</td>
<td>Transfer to State Audit Office</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Address: 1052 Budapest, Apáczai Cs. J. u. 10</td>
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<td>10:15-11:15</td>
<td>Meeting with Dr László WINDISCH, President of the State Audit Office,</td>
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<td>and team:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Csaba SZOMOLAI, Vice President</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Simon JÓZSEF, Deputy Director, Audit Directorate for Central</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Level of Public Finances</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Gyula PULAY, Head of Department responsible for Special Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Tamás KERESZTES, Coordination Director</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Heléna NIKLAI, Coordination Deputy Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Kathi ATTLA, Head of the Communication and Protocol Department</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Andrea KINDL, Head of the International Department</td>
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<td>11:15</td>
<td>Transfer to the National Tax and Customs Administration</td>
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<td>Address: 1054 Budapest, Széchenyi u. 2</td>
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<td>11.45-12.45</td>
<td>Meeting with the National Tax and Customs Administration (NTCA):</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ferenc VÁGUJHELYI, Commissioner of the NTCA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Col. Dávid SZEVERÉNYI, Head of the OLAF Coordination Bureau, NTCA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Central Management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Col. Mónika VÁRADI, Head of Department of International Relations, NTCA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lt. Col. Ágnes Dr. GUBÁNÉ BUJTÁS, Head of Unit, Department of</td>
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International Relations, NTCA Central Management

- Anna Réka SOOS, Senior Officer, Department of International Relations, NTCA Central Management
- Officer from OLAF Coordination Bureau, NTCA Central Management
- Lt. Col. András TÓTH, Director, NTCA Directorate for Deployment
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Transfer to the Hungarian National Assembly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Address: 1055 Budapest, Kossuth Lajos tér 1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:10 - 14:30</td>
<td>Guided tour of the Hungarian Parliament</td>
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<td>13:30 - 14:30</td>
<td>Exchange of views with:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Erik BÁNKI, Chair of the Committee on Economics,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Imre VEJKEY, Chair of the Committee on Justice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dr. Hajnalka JUHÁSZ, Member of the Committee on European Affairs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hungarian National Assembly, Delegation Room</td>
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<td>14:30 - 14:45</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<td>14:45 - 15:45</td>
<td>Exchange of views with Zoltán VAJDA, Chair of the Committee on Budget</td>
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<td>Hungarian National Assembly, Delegation Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:45</td>
<td>Transfer to EPLO</td>
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<td>Address: 1024 Budapest, Lövőház utca 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:15-17:15</td>
<td>Meeting with Dr. Balázs DENCSŐ, Director General, Directorate General for Audit of EU Funds (“EUTAF”)</td>
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<td>17:30 - 18:45</td>
<td>Meeting with Ferenc BÍRÓ, President of the Hungarian Integrity Authority, and Gergely Pott, Advisor to the President</td>
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<td>19:00</td>
<td>Transfer to Hotel K+K Opera, Address: Révay utca 24, 1065 Budapest</td>
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<td><strong>08:15</strong></td>
<td>Transfer to the Ministry for Regional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>08:45 - 09:45</strong></td>
<td>Meeting with Dr Tibor NAVRACSICS, Minister for Regional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>09:45</strong></td>
<td>Transfer to the Ministry of Justice</td>
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| **10:00 - 11.00** | Meeting with János BÓKA, State Secretary for European Union Affairs of the Ministry of Justice and his team: | - Tamás CZOMBOS – Deputy State Secretary  
- Gábor JANCSÓ – Deputy State Secretary  
- Nándor PÁTKAI – Deputy State Secretary  
- Tivadar RÉVFY – Chief of Cabinet  
- Rita RÁCZ – Head of Department  
- Ágnes VÁRADI – Head of Department  
- Viktor KECSKÉS – Head of Department  
- Katalin REINITZ – Head of Unit  
- Lilla LÁSZLÓ – Head of Unit |
| **11:00**    | Transfer to EPLO                                                    | Address: 1024 Budapest, Lövőház utca 3                                 |
| **11:30 - 12:30** | Meeting with Members of the Association of Hungarian Municipalities (MÖSZ) Presidium: | - Dr László CSÖZIK, Mayor of Érd Town of County Rank  
- Tamás WITTINGHOFF, Mayor of Budaörs  
- Klara NYIRATI, Mayor of Baja |
| **12:30 - 14:00** | Preparation of the press conference                              |                                                                        |
| **14:00 - 15:00** | Press conference                                                   |                                                                        |
| **15:00**    | End of official programme                                         |                                                                        |
B. Overview of the mission

The mission’s objective was to focus on ongoing issues with the implementation of the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation and to consider Hungary’s capacity to manage any funding it may receive under the Resilience and Recovery Facility.

Six CONT members participated in the mission: Ms Monika HOHLMEIER (Chair of the delegation), Mr Petri SARVAMAA, Ms Lara WOLTERS, Mr Sandor RONAI, Ms Katalin CSEH, and Mr Daniel FREUND.

The CONT Coordinators agreed to open the mission to the participation (as observers) of the European Court of Auditors (Ms Annemie TURTELBOOM, Member of the Court), and the European Commission (Ms Ellitsa DALAMPOURA, Administrator in BUDG D1; Mr Kees VAN DUIN, Deputy Head of Unit in SG.RECOVER.C.1 – European Semester, Investment, Finance – BG, CZ, HU; and Mr László POLGÁR, External Auditor – Joint Audit Directorate for Cohesion (DAC) DG EMPL-DG REGIO) (List of participants in Annex I).

Members of the Delegation received a somewhat hostile welcome in Budapest. From the beginning, the mission was in the focus of a campaign by pro-government Hungarian media. Individual MEPs were deliberately defamed. The aim of the mission was described as a "witch hunt" or "inquisition".

The CONT Members met with civil society organisations and investigative journalists involved in the rule of law conditionality mechanism, EU companies faced with discriminatory measures, their counterparts in the Hungarian Parliament, the Minister for Regional Development and the State Secretary for European Union Affairs of the Ministry of Justice, the President of the Supreme Audit Office, the Director General for Audit of EU Funds, and the President of the Hungarian Integrity Authority. Furthermore, the mission also exchanged views with the Mayor of Budapest and representatives from the Association of Hungarian Municipalities.

The excellent cooperation with the EPLO in Budapest was a key element in the success of the mission. Thanks to their deep knowledge of Hungarian political structures, civil society and media ecosystems, colleagues at the EPLO helped the CONT Secretariat navigate the different layers of government before and during the mission.

The CONT mission attracted considerable media interest, attested to by the very well-attended in-person press conference held at the end of the programme (30 journalists) and the number of articles on the event that appeared in the written press.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Members appreciated the availability and willingness of civil society and stakeholders to meet the CONT delegation and answer their questions in a very open manner.

1 https://telex.hu/kulfold/2023/05/12/deutsch-tamas-europai-parlament-koltsagvetesi-ellenorzo-bizottsag-daniel-freund-olg;
https://telex.hu/kulfold/2023/05/12/deutsch-tamas-europai-parlament-koltsagvetesi-ellenorzo-bizottsag-daniel-freund-olg;
https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2023/05/deutsch-tamas-a-baloldal-politikai-nyomasara-tartjak-vissza-a-magyarorszagak-jaro-uniros-forrasokat;
https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20230516-cseh-katalin-momentum.html;
CONT Committee Members and all their counterparts shared the same view – EU funds represented a very big opportunity for the development of Hungary, and for the prosperity of Hungarian citizens. Members reiterated that their core concern was how the money could reach Hungarian citizens, businesses and regions in a transparent, fair and impartial way.

Members called on the Hungarian Government to achieve the 27 so-called super-milestones in the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan and implement the 17 remedial measures under the Conditionality Regulation and the four horizontal enabling conditions without any further delay, so as to finally unblock almost EUR 28 billion in funding.

Members noted some positive developments but remained, however, in-waiting for the Integrity Authority to come up with concrete findings of corruption in Hungary. They acknowledged the reforms increasing cooperation between the National Tax and Customs Administration and the EU Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), and the strengthening of the National Judicial Council.

Members raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of the State Audit Office in adequately auditing the planning, implementation and control of EU funds and the functioning of the national authorities. Their questions to the State Audit Office concerning misuse, manipulation of tenders, reliability of budget accounts and reporting of fraud cases to the prosecution remained unanswered. Equally, as far as the Recovery and Resilience Facility was concerned, the Hungarian State Audit Office offered no explanation on how it will follow and assess the use of the funds.

The CONT delegation also received information about issues related to public procurement. Civil society, the business community and local and regional authorities shared concerns about the concentration of public procurement contracts in the hands of certain companies and persons close to the current government.

Members received concrete information about the major concerns raised by the business community regarding the distorting measures of the government in the field of competition, taxation and EU internal market rules. The discriminatory measures presented included arbitrary overnight changes to laws, undue and unjustified measures under the pretext of a state of emergency, including unfair special taxes or fees, as well as damaging and distorting price caps in sectors such as retail, construction and transport. Members were also informed about intimidation tactics, such as visits by the secret police to companies’ offices or unjustifiably frequent inspections aimed at imposing arbitrary penalties and unjustified obligations to pave the way for a takeover.

In their meetings with representatives of the Hungarian Parliament and civil society, Members expressed concerns about flaws in the decision-making process, such as the reduced time for public consultations, overnight decrees and repeated changes to the budget via government decree. In 2022, the budget was modified 95 times without the involvement of Parliament in the decision-making process. They recalled that the need
for democratic oversight by Parliament was essential for the functioning of the rule of law and proper checks and balances.

– Finally, local and regional authorities raised concerns about their insufficient involvement in the design of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the insufficient recognition of their specific needs. Members wished to clearly underline that for the European Parliament and the CONT Committee, the adequate involvement of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of the national recovery plans was key to the success of this instrument.

– Members concluded they would follow up on the information they received during their fact-finding visit, and would include it in the next discharge process, as well as passing it on to the Commission, the European Court of Auditors, the EU anti-fraud watchdog (OLAF) and the EPPO.

Mission debriefing

Members are to hold an exchange of views on the mission and discussion on a potential follow-up during the CONT meeting of 4 September 2023, after which the report will be updated.
C. Summaries of meetings

15 May 2023

Meeting with investigative journalists: Endre B. BOJTAR, Chief Editor of Magyar Narancs (National Independent Weekly), Tamás BODOKY, Editor-in-Chief, Atlátszó.hu, Csaba LUKÁCS, Newspaper Director, Magyar Hang, representative of four independent public weekly newspapers

Ms Hohlmeier opened the meeting by thanking the journalists for their availability, after which she introduced the members of the delegation and presented the goals of the mission.

The investigative journalists underlined that equal access to free media was a priority and deplored the fact that the remedial measures included in the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism did not contain actions referring to media independence. Furthermore, the journalists argued that since 2010, the EU had been financing its own enemies in Hungary, oligarchs and tycoons, and that the “depoliticisation” of the media was therefore key.

The journalists described concrete practices pursued by the Government to intimidate the media, providing the example of one colleague who had been sued twelve times for similar or identical alleged offences. They argued that such attacks obliged them to spend a huge amount of time and energy to defend their case. There were several questions related to the Hungarian Government’s misuse of its power to intimidate critical journalists.

In relation to public procurement, the journalists described the situation of the share of contracts awarded in procedures with a single bidder, and thus without competition, which increased from 2020 to 2021 according to data from the Corruption Research Center Budapest (2021). Government Decree 63/2022 of 28 February 2022 introduced measures to reduce this high share of single bids, but targeted only public procurement above the EU public procurement thresholds, thus relating only to a limited proportion of procurement.
Meeting participants described a concrete example of an EU-funded project: the construction of a wooden canopy walk of several metres high, which visitors could walk along. During the construction of the walkway, the surrounding forest was allegedly cut down to finance the difference in costs resulting from increased construction prices. The reporting of this story by the newspaper resulted in the authorities suing journalists who had reported on the case. Átlátszó indicated that using EU funding to construct canopy walks is popular among local Fidesz politicians, and that this was not a unique case.

Finally, in relation to the case, the participants reported that a complaint had been sent to the Integrity Authority requesting that such canopy walks be investigated. DG AGRI had been made aware of the case through media reports and on 5 April 2023.

As regards the newly established Integrity Authority (“the Authority”), the journalists argued that this new body had very limited powers. In particular, they elaborated on the fact that NGOs had no access to the Authority’s work and the cases and investigations were not made public.

Meeting with NGOs and civil society representatives: Sándor LÉDERER – Co-founder, K-Monitor, Miklós LIGETI – Legal Director, and Peter József MARTIN, Managing Director, Transparency International Hungary; Márta PARDAVI, Co-Chair, and András LEDEKER, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Balázs VÁRADI – Senior Researcher, Budapest Institute, Gábor IVÁNYI, Leader of OKE (Oltalom Charity) and MET, and István ÓNODI, Financial Director of OKE
Ms Hohlmeier opened the meeting by thanking the NGOs and civil society representatives for their availability, after which she introduced the members of the delegation and presented the goals of the mission.

The NGOs and civil society representatives insisted that there was a lack of information on the misuse of EU funds. They claimed that part of these funds were being used to support the Prime Minister’s clientele and a growing number of cronies. Some of the participating NGOs had joined the newly established Anti-Corruption Task Force, and contributed to this process, even though they had voiced their discontent with the lack of commitment on implementation steps. NGOs were unhappy with the transparency process, with the time allowed to scrutinise proposals and with certain implementation steps. On whistle-blowers, NGOs argued that Hungary complied only formally with the EU Directive.

One of the topics raised by NGOs in the discussion was political favouritism. In this context, the use of EU funds for such purposes was condemned by the participants, who claimed that it was a matter of policy design.

Referring to the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism, the NGOs argued that since it had been triggered, some limited progress had been noted. They insisted on the fact that the Hungarian Government was not ready to make a full reversal of its previous legislative steps infringing the rule of law standards of the EU. The discussions focused also on the role of existing and newly established bodies at national level to address the remedial actions in the context of the Conditionality Mechanism. On the role of the Directorate-General for Audit of EU funds (“EUTAF”), the participants argued that its change of legal status would not lead to more efficiency. The representatives of the NGOs claimed that this body was aware of previous problems in the implementation of EU funds, but had not taken concrete action. On the newly-established Integrity Authority, the NGOs expressed their concern that although this body was functional, it relied heavily on cooperation with other authorities. Furthermore, the NGOs expressed doubts as to the willingness of the Integrity Authority to deal with all relevant cases of misuse of EU funds.

The participating NGOs argued that many EU funds had been redirected to PM Orbán’s allies and that control authorities could not properly investigate such cases. In this context, they complained that the reform of the criminal procedure had been repeatedly delayed and that the
Government acted in a way that limited the power to control authorities and therefore to reveal fraud or fund misuse.

Referring to one of the required measures for compliance with the horizontal enabling condition on the effective application and implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the participating NGOs criticised the Higher Education Act. According to the representatives of the participating NGOs, this Act endangered academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the case of the institutions maintained by public interest asset management foundations, this being the reason why Hungarian universities had been prevented from participating in Horizon 2020 and Erasmus programmes. The regulatory framework did not prevent either top-level officials from sitting on boards of public interest asset management foundations or conflicts of interest.

However, the NGOs considered that no access to EU funding represented an excessive price for the regime, which had given up on public interest trusts. The almost indefinite mandate of the top-level officials did not comply with international standards and raised questions as to the intention of the Government to maintain control over these entities.

**Meeting with EU companies faced with discriminatory measures**

EU companies mentioned the alleged use of intimidation methods, such as visits by the secret police at some companies’ offices, and other forms of pressure being applied by certain individuals allegedly connected to the Prime Minister’s close circle or office. According to the representatives of such companies, the main aim was to bring under control those parts of the Hungarian industry deemed to be “strategic”. They argued that in such “strategic” sectors, the government often lowered or exempted companies from regulatory standards, including under competition law and by using extraordinary legal regimes.

Business owners also reported systemic discriminatory practices against companies in Hungary in certain sectors and politically motivated business practices giving an unfair advantage to competitors.

Business owners underlined that the targeted companies operated predominantly in sectors such as telecommunications, food retail, construction, transportation, media, publishing, banking and...
insurance. They expressed their concern at the growing concentration of businesses in the hands of oligarchs with ties to the current government who had publicly signalled their intention to buy into those sectors.

The representatives of businesses participating in the meeting claimed that the discriminatory measures included arbitrary legislation, the arbitrary and discriminating denial of construction permits even against court decisions, special permit requirements, prolongation of additional and temporary COVID-19 taxes or levies, registration obligations concerning the import and export of materials, unreasonable price caps in the food retail sector, the increasing number of inspections and audits, and other intimidation tactics.

As a concrete example, business owners mentioned Decree 404/2021 which had introduced “supplementary mining royalties” (SMR) on certain companies. They claimed that the decree constituted an outright violation of EU law – internal market freedoms and procedures, such as the free movement of goods and establishment, right to property and taxation principles, right to good administration and compliance with the Single Market Transparency Directive.

The overall message of the delegation to the representatives of businesses was that the EU Treaties prohibited any discrimination on grounds of nationality in the EU single market.

The Members of the delegation promised to inform the Commission about these cases and expressed the expectation that the Commission would make use of all instruments at its disposal, including infringement procedures, and other actions before the Court of Justice of the European Union, leading also to possible sanctions.
16 May 2023

Meeting with Gergely KARÁCSONY, Mayor of Budapest and his team

The discussions with the Mayor of Budapest focused mostly on the discrimination the municipality is said to have experienced in access to EU funding, as well as the lack of involvement of local and regional authorities in the programming of EU funds.

The Mayor argued that discrimination based on party affiliation did exist in Hungary, since Fidesz-led cities allegedly had privileged access to more funds. The Mayor complained about the centralised use of EU funds, which he said had led to a lack of adequate implementation and delays. According to the Mayor, the centralisation of the implementation of public procurement and management processes (as envisaged in a Parliament draft law) had increased the risk of corruption and mismanagement, ultimately resulting also in projects which would not be implemented. He further argued that Budapest represented 20% of the Hungarian population and a third of Hungary’s GDP, but these figures would be not be translated when it came to access to EU funds.

The Mayor further outlined the measures adopted by the municipality to cope with the energy price crisis in order to avoid increases in price utilities for the population. Nevertheless, he explained that such measures had led to some financial difficulties for the municipality.

Replying to the questions of the delegation, the Mayor claimed that, although the municipality had provided input to the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan, this input had not been taken into account in the consultation. In this context, he argued that EU funding should be directly opened up to cities and regions in order to bypass the central government, as in his view
the partnership principle did not work in Hungary.

The Mayor criticised the recourse of the Government to loans from China, rather than the use of loans from EU development banks. In this context, the mayor recalled the use by the Budapest municipality of a credit framework with an EU development bank.
Meeting with Dr László WINDISCH, President of the State Audit Office, and team

Members explained the purpose of the mission, and reiterated that the visit was focused on fact-finding regarding the management and implementation of EU funds in Hungary, and Hungary's capacity to manage any funding it may receive under the RRF.

In this context, the intervention of the Members of the Delegation focused on topics relating to the independence of the State Audit Office (SAO), its investigations and follow-up, alleged manipulation of tenders, relations with the Integrity Authority, and the quality of financed infrastructure projects.

Members raised multiple questions related to the impartiality of the SAO, the results of its audits, including judicial follow-up, and the role of the SAO in cooperation with the prosecution.

The Delegation was surprised that the President of the SAO had constantly refrained from explaining the activity of the SAO in recent years, and had referred only to the plans to modernise the institution in the future. He did not reply to repeated questions related to systemic risks, manipulation of tenders and other irregularities related to the audits performed by the institution. He offered a general presentation of the work of the SAO, including general figures on the number of cases, but refused to give answers on more qualitative aspects of the audit procedures and of cooperation with the prosecution and judiciary.
Instead of providing concrete answers to the Delegation, he made more political statements, and argued that the Rule of Law Conditionality regime should not be a punishment.

On the Integrity Authority, he argued that his only role was the nomination of the Head of the Authority. Presenting the high number of audits performed during the pandemic, the President admitted that they were statistical rather than qualitative audits, since many companies also worked remotely during that time. In addition, he stated that there would be an enhanced audit of road quality. Equally, as far as the Resilience and Recovery funds are concerned, the Hungarian SAO offered no explanation as to how it would follow and assess the use of the funds. Finally, he also argued that he did not have a personal relationship with Prime Minister Orbán.

Members deplored the fact that their questions to the SAO concerning misuse, manipulation of tenders, reliability of budget accounts, and reporting of fraud cases to the prosecution remained unanswered.

**Meeting with the National Tax and Customs Administration (NTCA):**

Ferenc VÁGUJHELYI, Commissioner of the NTCA, Col. Dávid SZEVERÉNYI, Head of the OLAF Coordination Bureau, NTCA Central Management, Col. Mónika VÁRADI, Head of Department of International Relations, Lt. Col. Ágnes Dr. GUBÁNÉ BUJTÁS, Head of Unit, Department of International Relations, Anna Réka SOOS, Senior Officer, Department of International Relations, Lt. Col. András TÓTH, Director, NTCA Directorate for Deployment

Act XXIX, adopted on 4 October 2022, designated the NTCA as the competent national authority to assist OLAF and to introduce dissuasive financial sanctions to be imposed should an economic operator refuse to cooperate with OLAF.

The meeting focused on a description of the activity of the Directorate, its procedures and results. The Commissioner stated that cooperation with OLAF worked well. In the case of verification procedures, the Commissioner explained that NTCA could act only if investigative authorities had also opened criminal enquiries, which he said limited the possibility of such verifications.

The current biggest foreign investors were South Korea and China. The EU Customs Code did not allow for the categorisation of final users of Chinese products.

The questions of Members of the Delegation focused on, among other issues, the supplementary mining royalties, the cooperation of Hungary with the EPPO and the carrying of weapons by the NTCA officers during controls (which was signalled by one of the representatives of the
The Commissioner described the fact that in the past year, as part of the Rule of Law Conditionality milestones, the NTCA had adopted the Commission’s proposal to maintain a judicial guarantee. In addition to this, he explained that the supplementary mining royalties were not levied by the NTCA, that NTCA officers must carry weapons by law, and that although Hungary is not a member of the EPPO, it cooperated with the agency. Nevertheless, he argued that OLAF would remain the sole Union investigative administrative body competent to investigate allegations of fraud, corruption or any other activity affecting the financial interests of the Union.
Meetings with Hungarian Parliament Members

Two separate meetings were held, respectively with:

1) First, Erik BÁNKI, Chair of the Committee on Economics, Dr. Imre VEJKEY, Chair of the Committee on Justice, and Dr. Hajnalka JUHÁSZ, Member of the Committee on European Affairs.

The exchange focused on topics such as the commitment to fulfil the “super milestones” in the context of the Hungarian RRP, as well as the 17 remedial measures in the context of the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism. The Hungarian MPs claimed that the rule of law is a founding principle of the Hungarian Republic, which can be neither debated nor doubted. Furthermore, the MPs offered an assessment of the economic situation as well as the overall prospects for growth. Finally, they presented the status of preparation for the implementation of EU funds for the 2021-2027 period.

Members of the delegation questioned the national MPs about the manipulation of tenders, the share of single-bid public procurement procedures, and discriminatory, unfair practices affecting certain businesses. Furthermore, Members also expressed concern after their meeting with the SAO, during which their questions remained unanswered. They outlined the importance of local and regional authorities’ involvement in the drafting of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan as required by the RRF Regulation.
Erik BÁNKI, Chair of the Committee on Economics, presented a very optimistic description of the overall economic situation and the outcome of the economic crisis, including significant inflation (Hungarian inflation stood much higher than the EU average). He argued that the Hungarian economy had withstood the economic crisis and significant inflation. In this context he acknowledged the negative impact of the reduced level of investments on the national budget and labour market, but claimed that the measures adopted by the Government had stabilised the situation, proof of this being the low unemployment rate standing at 4.1 % between December 2022 and February 2023. Mr Bánki outlined that the government’s objective was to reach one-digit inflation.

Mr Bánki described the process of the adoption of the national budget and the next steps as regards the Budget 2024, which included a targeted deficit of less than 3% of GDP.

As for the 2014-2020 financial cycle, 85% of EU funds had been used. Hungary would aim for a more effective use of EU funds in the future.

Dr Imre VEJKEY, Chair of the Committee on Justice, insisted on the obligation of the EU Commission to respect the constitutional order of Member States and described the efforts of the authorities to address the 17 remedial measures in the context of the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism, as well as the adopted laws related to judicial independence, notably increasing the powers of the National Judicial Council, which had been endorsed by the Commission.

Members expressed doubts as to the very optimistic forecasts. Referring to the arbitrary and discriminatory measures against companies in Hungary, in breach of single market rules, Members questioned the commitment of the authorities to addressing these issues.

2) Second, Zoltán Vajda, Chair of the Committee on the Budget:

Zoltán Vajda, Chair of the Committee on the Budget, described the process of the adoption of the budget and the status of the economy, which according to him, was in a critical state, despite the statements of the governing party.

He further highlighted that Hungary’s GDP growth had originally been forecast to reach 4% but that it would be close to zero in 2023, close to a recession, adding that it was expected that annual inflation would decelerate
slowly over the rest of the year to 10%.

Members mentioned the conflicting economic figures presented by previous committee chairs and asked for clarifications.

Mr Zoltán Vajda also indicated that the budget was the most important law passed each year. He said that the Government permanently used decrees to modify the annual budget, whereby the 2022 budget of Hungary had been modified 95 times without the prior involvement of the Parliament. He argued that this practice completely bypassed the normal budgetary procedure and the role of the Parliament and made the democratic scrutiny of the planning, implementation and control of spending practically impossible.

Meeting with Dr Balázs DENCSŐ, Director-General, Directorate-General for Audit of EU funds (“EUTAF”)

The Director-General of EUTAF described the functioning of his DG and its role in the EU funding landscape in Hungary. He further recalled the limits of EUTAF, particularly as regards public procurement, audit sampling, etc. Finally, he reiterated that the budgetary independence of EUTAF stemmed from the fact that it was not part of the Government budget and any modification of the EUTAF budget, even by the Parliament, would require his approval as the Head of the DG.

Members of the Delegation enquired about the relationship of EUTAF with the Integrity Authority, with the Government and Parliament, the financing and staffing of the DG, its role in addressing public procurement issues and other systemic issues.

The Director-General of EUTAF outlined his role in the nomination of the members of the Integrity Authority, whereby a selection committee, convened by the EUTAF Director-General, had prepared a shortlist of applicants for the Authority’s leadership positions (the president and two vice-presidents), while the actual leadership members had been appointed by the President of the Republic on a formal proposal of the State Audit Office’s president.
The Director-General argued that EUTAF was an independent department and while it reported to the Hungarian Parliament, it had no relationship with its Members, working in an isolated manner. Furthermore, the Director-General insisted that EUTAF was financially independent, as it did not fall under the Government’s remit and its budget was presented to the Hungarian Parliament and could only be changed following the agreement of EUTAF’s Director-General.

The EUTAF Director-General further outlined that EUTAF did not provide cases to the prosecutor, but to the police, tax authority or competition authority.

Concerning public procurement, according to the EUTAF Director-General, EUTAF’s tools were limited, as it scrutinised the contracts awarded in a random manner. He pointed out the procurement procedures in infrastructure projects where framework contracts had been announced and very few companies could apply, leading to possible distortion of competition. Finally, as regards the financing and staffing of the DG, the DG stated that in principle, the DG enjoyed sufficient financial and staffing resources, but he reiterated that the main challenge of the authority in the coming years would be to scrutinise the spending of both the RRF and traditional MFF funding.

On relations with the European Commission and other EU institutions, the Director-General argued that EUTAF was audited annually in past decades with no serious problems identified. He indicated that, under Remedial measure 2 under the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism, the Commission had stressed that EUTAF would need to check the number of single bids financed from EU and domestic funds.
Meeting with Ferenc Bíró, President of the Hungarian Integrity Authority, and Gergely Pott, Advisor to the President

The President of the Authority provided a short personal summary of his previous activities, and explained that although the Authority was still at the beginning of its activities, he was confident that he could achieve the desired results. He further provided some indicative data on the cases opened by the Authority, and expressed his desire to focus on major cases involving higher amounts of funds.

He indicated that, in his opinion, it was not the system but people who were corrupt, and that while some international studies had ranked Hungary as the most corrupt Member State in the EU, these studies were based on perceptions. Reliable data on corruption were needed. He went further in arguing in favour of a change in culture in Hungary, and acknowledged the importance of having investigative powers and carrying out fact-finding missions.

Members of the Delegation enquired about the capacity of the Authority to carry out its tasks, including as regards resources, its structure and leadership, and its ongoing investigations.

The President of the Authority pointed to the fact that, in mid-May 2023, he had employed around 70 staff, and that that figure would reach 100 by the end of the year (a majority of professional staff being auditors and lawyers), while financial resources would be sufficient for the moment.

Mr Bíró described the appointment process for the leadership of the Authority, and explained that the two Vice-Presidents had to go through a selection procedure. Furthermore, he outlined that he was not aware that one of the two Vice-Presidents had a position in Fidesz.

As regards relations with the Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF), Mr Bíró mentioned that the ACTF would monitor and review the measures taken in Hungary to prevent, detect, prosecute and sanction corruption, and that half of ACTF members were representatives of independent non-governmental actors who had been selected by the Authority’s leadership on the basis of a public call. Furthermore, he described the ACTF as independent from the Authority.

On the ongoing cases investigated by the Authority, the President refrained from providing any concrete examples, as they could not be disclosed until the cases had been closed, but he informed the Members that between 30 and 40 investigations had been launched (involving only EU funding), and that they mainly concerned major cases with no selective criteria to investigate. He expressed his intention to look into the activity of managing authorities in order to ensure their proper functioning, without duplicating the activities of other bodies, such as OLAF.
The Members of the Delegation insisted on the main objectives of the visit to Budapest as well as the questions which remained unanswered. They presented to the Minister for Regional Development their perspectives on the visits undertaken so far, and insisted on the issues in relation to the functioning of the SAO, the access of the Budapest municipality to EU funding and the alleged discrimination against it, the intimidation and discrimination of certain private companies, and the implementation of the measures under the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism, etc.

Members also underlined that on the budget, Hungary needed an open debate in Parliament and that there was no more justification for emergency measures. In raising these issues, Members said that they did not want to blame anybody, but invited the Minister for Regional Development to pay attention to those concerns.
The Minister for Regional Development acknowledged that “government discrimination may exist but it is not systemic.” He agreed with the Mayor of Budapest on the use of a framework, which had enabled good cooperation, an example being the opening and renovation of a metro line. The Minister for Regional Development expressed his support to the city of Budapest in general, but he recalled that two thirds of Hungarian regions were underdeveloped, and therefore that the municipality of Budapest would need to contribute to the development of these poorest regions, insisting on the need for burden sharing.

Minister Tibor NAVRACSICS claimed that there would be no generalised discrimination on a political basis, that the Government talked to all Budapest districts and that he would constantly negotiate with Budapest on the RRF. Referring to the dispute surrounding the Chain Bridge project, he argued that the Government wished to allow car traffic on the bridge. Addressing the dispute surrounding the politicisation of access to EU funds, the Minister argued that Northern cities led by Fidesz would receive less funding.
Meeting with János BÓKA, State Secretary for European Union Affairs of the Ministry of Justice, and his team:

State Secretary Bóka presented the super milestones – measures concerning judicial independence included in the ongoing Article 7 procedure, recent country-specific recommendations, and the Commission’s annual Rule of Law Reports – adopted by the Hungarian National Assembly at the beginning of May 2022 in the following three areas:

- Increasing the powers of the independent National Judicial Council, to limit undue influence and discretionary decisions, and ensure more objective and transparent administration in the courts;
- Reforming the functioning of the Supreme Court to limit the risk of political influence;
- Removing the role of the Constitutional Court in reviewing final decisions by judges at the request of public authorities.

Members insisted that the focus of the reforms should be implementation, not only the adoption of laws. They further expressed their irritation about the discrimination of NGOs and companies, and expressed their deep concern about the endless prolongation of the state of emergency, which allowed for the state budget to be permanently modified without prior consultation of the Parliament. Furthermore Members questioned the State Secretary on the fulfilment of the 27 super milestones in the context of the Hungarian RRP, as well as regarding the involvement of civil society stakeholders, including NGOs, in the judiciary reform process, and on the problems related to public procurement and single-bid tenders.

On the involvement of NGOs and civil society in the justice reform, the State Secretary described the process whereby NGOs had received the first draft on the judiciary reform and had had two weeks to provide comments. He further informed the Delegation that the Ministry of Justice did not negotiate with NGOs but had taken on board some of their comments and submitted a revised draft, which had fulfilled the transparency requirements. Furthermore, he informed the Delegation that civil society had agreed on the major points, but had proposed additional ones, which according to the State Secretary, were out of the reform scope and went further away from milestones.

Referring to the implementation of the 17 remedial measures in the context of the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism, the State Secretary claimed that five had been partially implemented in line with the Commission’s requirements. As for five other commitments, the Commission and Council were not satisfied.

Furthermore, in relation to the state of emergency, the State Secretary claimed it would not be a risk for the Rule of Law Conditionality mechanism.

Replying to the issues identified by Members in relation to public procurement, the State Secretary claimed that the number of single bidders had decreased in the meantime during the year 2023 as a reaction to the criticism expressed by the Commission. In contradiction to the statements of the Delegation, the number of single bids was not relevant to the overall discussion, but the Ministry of Justice supported the decrease in single bidding.
Finally, replying to questions related to judicial appointments at the Kúria, the State Secretary stated that the independence of the Supreme Court was not at risk and that its President had been appointed in a regular manner.
Meeting with Members of the Association of Hungarian Municipalities (MÖSZ)

Presidium: Dr László CSŐZIK, Mayor of Érd Town of County Rank, Tamás WITTINGHOFF, Mayor of Budaörs, Ms Klara NYIRATI, Mayor of Baja.

The participating members of the Association of Hungarian Municipalities claimed that they were genuinely opposition members. They condemned the ongoing centralisation and the lack of involvement of local governments in the use of EU funds. According to the participants, governing parties and Members of Parliament exerted control over the most important political aspects and governing party councils were using EU funds for political aims, to secure political benefit for themselves.

Representatives of the Association of Hungarian Municipalities provided several examples of discrimination against opposition-led towns:

- The solidarity tax to be paid by members of the Association of Hungarian Municipalities was developed by the governing party a couple of years ago, who took away more from opposition-led towns than they were receiving from the central government. Notably, Budapest city did not need to pay that solidarity contribution previously; then it had to pay HUF 5 million. In addition, after the opposition won the mayorship of Budapest, the city had to pay HUF 15 million, which went against the Hungarian Constitution and the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

- The Hungarian Government exerted pressure on local municipality members, including through the use of fake photos, and it prevented opposition members from taking public office. Candidates from the opposition feared losing their career, job and respect. In general, room for manoeuvre for the opposition was very limited. The Government had taken control of the media; it did all it could to exploit people in a difficult financial situation, and it was also trying to restrict local municipalities’ revenues. The Government’s aim was to communicate that “opposition-led towns have no ability to lead these towns.”

- Between 1990 and 2010, Hungarian local authorities were much stronger and were given a lot of tasks to carry out. Since Fidesz took power, significant changes and centralisation had taken place. The central government held administrative control over schools, construction architecture, and town planning/development, etc.

- Since 2019, when many councils were led by the opposition, the central Government had left just enough money to opposition-led municipalities not to go bankrupt, with the aim of showing that they were not able to govern better than Fidesz-controlled towns.
The most important source of tax was a vehicle tax for which the Government had introduced a number of restrictions. Local municipalities were now completely dependent upon the Hungarian Government for funds.

– Fidesz introduced a decree that gave Fidesz-led town councils HUF 1.5 billion each while opposition-led municipalities did not receive anything, which represented open discrimination. This unfair treatment helped Fidesz-led municipalities to show that they had much more ability to combat the pandemic.

– The Hungarian Government was preparing a “vendetta” by organising, for the first time, EU and Hungarian local elections on the same day, on 1 June 2024. This was a manoeuvre to take back the local authorities led by the opposition: those councils, elected in June, were to enter office in October. The opposition needed to unite and having EU and local elections on the same day would oblige opposition members/parties to stand individually, preventing them from having a united opposition.

– Finally, the Association of Hungarian Municipalities, as a solution to the ongoing situation, suggested that Hungary should join the EPPO, and that direct funding of local authorities should be made possible. Member States should allow for local authorities to decide on matters that involve local priorities, such as the construction of roads and buildings. Local municipalities needed proper construction projects and investments rather than “soft costs”.
Fact-finding mission of EP CONT committee to visit Hungary / Ezúttal az EP költségvetési ellenőrző bizottságának munkatársai vizsgálódnak Magyarországon

Hír TV - 11 May 2023 - [ Video Broadcast Time: 18:00, Duration: 2 ]
Left-liberal forces in the EU want to voice new lies and accusations against Hungary, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) told HírTV channel in Strasbourg. He added that the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) will visit Hungary next week with the aim of discrediting the government. He added that the timing of the visit is not a coincidence, as Hungary's new judicial package, which meets all of the expectation of the European Commission, will enter into force as of 1 June.

Daily news – Visit / Napi aktuális - Látogatás

Hír TV - 12 May 2023 - [ Video Broadcast Time: 05:00, Duration: 10 ]
MEP Guy VERHOFSTADT (RE) and MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) are set to visit Hungary next week at the invitation of opposition party Momentum Movement. Commenting on the issue, Hajnalka JUHASZ, an MP of ruling party KDNP, told HírTV channel that the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is scheduled to visit Hungary next week. The invitation shows that Momentum Movement agrees with the values of MEP VERHOFSTADT and MEP FREUND, she said. She reminded that the EP plans to hold another plenary debate about the Hungarian rule of law in May. MEP VERHOFSTADT was invited to Hungary to place the European Commission under pressure, she said. Concerning the Brussels corruption scandal, she noted that the EP's fact-finding mission will come to Hungary to divert attention from corruption in the EP. She criticised that MEP Eva KAILI (NI) wants to return to the EP and that HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE), who got embroiled in a corruption scandal, will be a member of the EP's fact-finding mission.
It seems that Varga will not meet EP fact-finding mission, which will arrive at Hungary on Monday / Úgy tudni, Varga Judit nem találkozik az EP hétfőn érkező delegációjával Klubrádió - 12 May 2023 - [ Radio Broadcast Time: 07:00, Duration: 3 ]

It seems that Hungarian Justice Minister Judit VARGA will not meet the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), which will arrive in Hungary on Monday. She was the only one who has not confirmed the meeting yet, MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D), a member of the EP's fact-finding mission, told Klubrádió. MEPs intend to directly examine whether EU funds are sent to the right place in Hungary and whether the Hungarian government honours so-called super-milestones. MEPs also want to learn whether rule of law expectations are honoured and whether corruption was reduced. The fact-finding mission will be led by MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP) and will include MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA).

Cseh, who is implicated in corruption case, will examine corruption in Hungary / A korrupciós ügyben érintett Cseh Katalin is vizsgálja majd a magyarországi korrupciót Hir TV - 13 May 2023 - [ Video Broadcast Time: 17:00, Duration: 4 ]

HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE), who is implicated in a corruption scandal, will examine the situation of corruption in Hungary. News emerged in 2021 that a network of companies, including the family company of MEP CSEH, obtained billions of forints in EU funds under suspicious circumstances. MEP CSEH rejected accusations. However, Hungarian investigative authorities already have a suspect, who faces accusations of tax fraud. Authorities have recently seized assets worth more than HUF 1bn from the suspect recently. MEP CSEH is set to visit Hungary this week as a member of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT). The visit is aimed at defaming the Hungarian government, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) said. He noted that MEP CSEH should take MEPs to visit her family's company, where there is corruption. Momentum Movement's fight against corruption is not credible, Gergely GULYÁS, Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, said at a press conference last week.

Daily news – fact-finding mission of EP CONT committee to visit Hungary on Monday / Napi aktuális - Hétfőn Magyarországra látogat az Európai Parlament Költségvetési Ellenőrző Bizottsága

Hir TV - 12 May 2023 - [ Video Broadcast Time 19:56, Duration 10 ]

The European Parliament (EP) has adopted a set of documents on the implementation of the 2021 EU budget. MEP Eva KAILI (NI) was active during 2021, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) told Hir TV channel, recalling the details of the Brussels corruption scandal. However, EP reports do not even mention the scandal, he added. He reiterated that the EU has several control bodies, which failed to notice corruption in their vicinity. He recalled that the fact-finding mission of the EP’s Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is scheduled to visit Hungary this week, pointing out that the special committee failed to address the Brussels corruption scandal at its meetings. Commenting on news that MEP Guy VERHOFSTADT (RE) and MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) will visit Hungary, he noted that MEP FREUND, who has little political talent, realised that he could gain public attention if he criticises Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN. He noted that HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) will be a member of the EP’s fact-finding mission, even though her family’ company was implicated in a corruption scandal in Hungary.

EU funds / Uniós pénzek

TV2 - 14 May 2023 - [ Video Broadcast Time: 18:00, Duration: 3 ]

The European Commission is withholding Hungary's EU funds for political reasons due to
pressure from the Hungarian and European left-wing, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) told Kossuth Rádió on Sunday. According to MEP DEUTSCH, EU institutions are conducting sham proceedings against Hungary, as Brussels is trying to place Hungary under political pressure by slandering the country. He recalled that the European Parliament (EP) will hold another plenary debate about the Hungarian rule of law on 31 May, where he expects the same Hungarophobic MEPs to throw unfounded accusations at Hungary. Concerning the fact-finding mission of the EP’s Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), he noted that MEPs are biased and adopted a deliberately provocative attitude.

**Pressure / Nyomásgyakorlás**

*Hir TV - 14 May 2023* - [ Video Broadcast Time: 17:00, Duration: 3 ]

Brussels has been setting newer and newer conditions the Hungarian government is trying to meet, Csaba DÖMÖTÖR, Parliamentary State Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office, told HirTV channel. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN made it clear on social media that the government wants "no migration, no gender and no war". A MEP in turn stated that "no EU funds," he said. The Hungarian opposition has been assisting efforts to block Hungary's EU funds, he added. He reminded that HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) will be a member of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), which will visit Hungary this week. He noted that MEP CSEH has criticised her own country over EU funds, while her family's company could be implicated in a budgetary fraud case linked to EU funds.

**EU fact-finding mission visits Hungary / Uniós ellenőrzési bizottság érkezik Magyarországra**

*ATV - 14 May 2023* - [ Video Broadcast Time: 17:00, Duration: 3 ]

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is set to make a three-day visit to Hungary this week. HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) on Sunday told Kossuth Rádió that MEPs are biased and are not interested in what is happening in Hungary, adding that he expects MEPs to reiterate their slanderous position in spite of any facts they are presented with that refutes their original position. The left-wing is concerned that Hungary will manage to fulfil commitments, removing any obstacle to Hungary's access to wrongfully frozen EU funds, he said. According to HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D), the EU is checking the utilisation of EU funds due to corruption in Hungary. They see a corrupt country leader, who better meets the expectations of Russian President Vladimir PUTIN than that of the EU, he added. MEP DEUTSCH has admitted that pressurising attempts have been successful, as Hungary has no access to EU funds, Attila Tibor NAGY, political analyst, told ATV channel.

**EP delegation conducts biased investigation / Elfogult vizsgálatot tartott az EP-delegáció**

*Magyar Nemzet - 18 May 2023 - Printed (p1,3)*

Minister for Regional Development Tibor NAVRACSICS said at a press briefing following his meeting with the delegation of the European Parliament’s (EP) Budgetary Control Committee (CONT) that he felt that the delegation had ‘unfortunately’ not read the background documents sent in advance by the Hungarian government, and that the delegation was ‘biased’. NAVRACSICS added that he was ‘moderately optimistic’ about the visit, but hoped that when writing its report, the delegation would take into account the data provided by the government. The minister said he hoped that the government had
succeeded in convincing the delegation with data and facts, and that on the long run the delegation would support Hungary’s access to its EU funds. (by Éva Harangozó)

**MEPs worried about future of European project** / **Aggódnak az EP-képviselők az európai projekt jövőjéért**

*Magyar Nemzet* - 18 May 2023 - *Printed (p2)*

At the press conference of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) delegation, German MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP) cited the efficiency of the State Audit Office, the functioning of public procurement, distortive measures introduced in the context of the emergency situation and rushed legislation among the shortcomings. Finnish MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) said the delegation would go everywhere in the EU and that they had no problems with Hungarians specifically. Dutch MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D) said they were worried about the future of the European project, but did not want to attack Hungary. German MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) said it was his eighth visit to Hungary. He added that they wanted EU funds to reach Hungary as soon as possible. (by Éva Harangozó)

**War blackmail from Brussels** / **Háborús zsarolás Brüsszelből**

*Magyar Nemzet* - 18 May 2023 - *Printed (p3)*

Attila KOVÁCS, EU research director of Center for Fundamental Rights told the press that the visit of the European Parliament’s (EP) Budgetary Control Committee (CONT) was a ‘blackmailing mission’ and that such delegations always pay visits when Hungary is facing an ‘important milestone’. According to KOVÁCS, the essence of the visit was that the EU would provide money ‘in exchange for war’. KOVÁCS said that the visit was also ‘ironic and hypocritical’, because the delegation included HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D) and HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE), and the latter’s circles are involved ‘in a serious financial scandal’.

**EP Commission mentions serious problems** / **Súlyos gondokat említ az EP-bizottság**

*Népszava* - 18 May 2023 - *Printed (p4)*

Citing the website “Portfolio”, Népszava reports that MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), the Bavarian head of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) delegation, told a closing press conference that the delegation had learned of a number of problems during its visit in Hungary. She said that the government was 'supporting a privileged group of people', that some companies were being 'harassed by the authorities' and that there were a number of problems with the functioning of the State Audit Office. She also mentioned that opposition-run municipalities are at a disadvantage. Meanwhile, pro-government politicians had previously said that the delegation had communicated beforehand that the delegation was formulating misconceptions and groundless accusations.

**MEP Daniel Freund on his last day in Budapest: “We want to know: Did they do their rule-of-law-homework or not”** / „Szeretnénk tudni: elvégezték-e a jogállamisági házi feladatukat” – Freund az utolsó budapesti napján is felkérdez

*mandiner.hu* - 17 May 2023 - *Web*

MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) posted on his Twitter page about his last day in Budapest as a member of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT). In his post, MEP FREUND highlighted that on Wednesday, the delegation will meet with representatives of the government of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN to discuss EU funds. MEP FREUND stressed that CONT wants to know whether they have done their “rule-of-law-homework” or not. Earlier, Mandiner reported that almost immediately after arriving in Budapest, MEP FREUND noted that there are serious
problems with media freedom in Hungary.

**This is how MEP Katalin Cseh wants to take EU money away from Hungary / Így akarja elvenni Cseh Katka az uniós pénzeket Magyarországtól**

origo.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web

HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) has previously revealed that Momentum is currently working to block negotiations between the Hungarian government and Brussels on EU funds. In February last year, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a report, named after MEP CSEH, calling for EU funds to bypass the government and reach only local authorities and NGOs in Hungary. MEP CSEH lobbied for the adoption of the CSEH report by the EP together with Mayor of Budapest, Gergely KARÁCSONY. In the meantime, the family business of MEP CSEH and its network of related companies have bid for and won a total of HUF 4.8 billion in EU funds in a coordinated and criminal manner.

**Brussels officials do not care that Zelensky is blackmailing Hungary with help of von der Leyen / Nem érdekli a brüsszeli képviselőként, hogy Von der Leyen segítségével zsarolja Magyarországot Zelenszkij**

origo.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web

According to Volodymyr TSEPENDA, Director General of JSC Ukrtransnafta, they received permission from European Commission President Ursula VON DER LEYEN to stop oil deliveries to Hungary through the Druzhba pipeline if Hungary maintains its imports ban against Ukrainian food products. Concerning the issue, MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), leader of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), stated in Budapest that it is not their task to comment on who Hungary's friends and enemies are, their focus is the EU budget. The news portal cited The Washington Post, which reported that Ukrainian President Volodymyr ZELENSKY has considered bombing the pipeline. (by András Kovács)

**According to ministry, EP fact-finding mission voiced political expectation in Hungary / A minisztérium szerint az EP-delegáció politikai elvárást is megfogalmazott Magyarországon**

index.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web

The Ministry of Justice has announced in a press release that they received the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) in Budapest on Wednesday. János BÓKA, State Secretary for EU Affairs in the Ministry of Justice, talked about Hungary's progress with meeting supermilestones and commitments based on the country's agreement with the European Commission. MEPs were not received on a ministerial level. The ministry noted that it rejected political expectations MEPs voiced, warning that using political pressure jeopardises the credibility of proceedings. The ministry underlined that Hungary has fulfilled commitments related to the judiciary.

**Centre for Fundamental Rights: Brussels wants to blackmail Hungary into war / Alapjogokért Központ: Brüsszelből akarják belezasrolni a háborúba**

MTV online - 17 May 2023 - Web

The visit of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is aimed at dragging, blackmailing Hungary into the Ukrainian war, said Attila KOVÁCS, Director of EU Research at the Centre for Fundamental Rights, at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. He labelled the visit a "blackmailing mission". "EU funds in exchange for war," he said. According to KOVÁCS, MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) earlier implied in a Twitter post that Hungary can only receive EU funds if it says yes to migration, gender propaganda and the war. He said that it was
hypocritical that the corruption-ridden EP had sent a fact-finding mission to Hungary, which was assisted by HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE).

**Brussels wants to blackmail Hungary into war by freezing EU funds** / Brüsszel az uniós források visszatartásával akarja Magyarországot belezsarolni a háborúba

"This is not a fact-finding mission, but a blackmailing mission," said Attila KOVÁCS, Director of EU Research at the Centre for Fundamental Rights, at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. According to KOVÁCS, the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) visited Hungary to place the European Commission under pressure to prevent Hungary from meeting milestones. He noted that the timing of the visit was deliberate, adding that EU institutions are trying to blackmail Hungary into war. One of the tweets of MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) implied that if Hungary does not fall into line regarding migration, gender and the war, it will not receive EU funds, he said. He criticised that HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) assisted the delegation. (by Barna Szecsődi)

**Centre for Fundamental Rights: Brussels wants to drag Hungary into the war through blackmail** / Alapjogokért Központ: Magyarországot Brüsszelből akarják belezsarolni a háborúba

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) is visiting Hungary with the aim of dragging Hungary into the Ukrainian war, said Attila KOVÁCS, Director of EU Research at the Centre for Fundamental Rights, at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. He added that this shows that the timing of MEPs' visit was deliberate, reminding that debates about Hungary's EU funds have recently reached a milestone. He cited a tweet of MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA), saying that the message implied that Hungary will only receive EU funds if it says yes to migration, gender propaganda and the war. He said it was hypocritical that HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) had helped the fact-finding mission's work, even though she had been implicated in a corruption scandal.

**Deutsch: It does not matter what fact-finding mission of EP CONT did while exerting political pressure** / Deutsch Tamás: Nem oszt, nem szoroz, amit az EP költségvetési ellenőrző bizottsága politikai nyomásgyakorlása során csinált

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has visited Hungary in a bid to intensify political pressure to force Hungary into getting involved in the Ukrainian war, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) said at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. He underlined that neither the EP and nor its special committees are supreme bodies of Hungary that make binding decisions, therefore they do not except that MEPs travel to Hungary to tell Hungarians what to do. He added that it does not matter what the committee does to exert political pressure, noting that MEPs were not interested in facts. Hungarians are not interested in the slander of MEPs, he said.

**EU fact-finding mission reports an overflow of problems** / Problémák özenőt jelezték a Budapesten tartózkodó uniós vizsgálóbizottság

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has called on the Hungarian government to more responsibly disburse EU funds, involve those concerned in decisions and meet conditions to access EU funds, said
MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP) at a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. She expressed doubt that companies and Hungarians benefit from EU funds, adding that government measures distorted market conditions. MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) said that the fact-finding mission aimed to ensure respect for the rule of law and the protection of the EU budget. MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D) noted that it was necessary to freeze EU funds, because Budapest was unwilling to make progress with the rule of law. MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) added that they expect the adequate utilisation of EU funds.

**MEP Tamás Deutsch: No matter what EP committee wants as political pressure** / Deutsch Tamás: Nem oszt, nem szoroz, amit az EP költségvetési ellenőrző bizottsága politikai nyomásnyakorlása során csinált

*MTV online - 17 May 2023 - Web*

HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) declared at the press conference on Wednesday that the visit of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) to Budapest was only part of the political pressure from Brussels and has no direct impact on the country’s operations, as it is not a supreme body of Hungary. According to MEP DEUTSCH, Brussels expects member states to adopt a migrant-friendly position and would make “gender-ideological madness” the accepted norm in Europe. MEP DEUTSCH stressed that the Hungarian government continues to stand by the principle of “no war, no migration, no gender” and refuses to compromise.

**EP fact-finding mission is received in Ministry of Justice** / Az Igazságügyi Minisztériumban fogadták az Európai Parlament delegációját

*MTV online - 17 May 2023 - Web*

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) was received at the Ministry of Justice in Budapest on Wednesday. János BÓKA, State Secretary for EU Affairs, outlined the implementation of Hungary's commitments and super-milestones to MEPs, announced the ministry in a press release. The EP's fact-finding mission voiced several political expectations that go beyond milestones and conditionality proceedings. The Justice Ministry rejected these and told MEPs that the use of political pressure jeopardised the credibility of proceedings. EU funds are utilised well and lawfully in Hungary, the ministry said.

**MEP Tamás Deutsch: It does neither good nor harm what EP committee did as political pressure** / Deutsch Tamás: Nem oszt, nem szoroz, amit az EP-delegáció politikai nyomásnyakorlása során csinált

*Magyarhirlap.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web*

At a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday, HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI) assessed the visit of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) to Budapest as part of political pressure from Brussels. MEP DEUTSCH also underlined that the EP is not a superior body of Hungary, so it “does neither good nor harm” whatever it decides. According to MEP DEUTSCH, the main goal of the delegation is “to force Hungary into the war in Ukraine”. MEP DEUTSCH also said that, based on the experience of the last few days, the members of the delegation are not interested in the facts and therefore “the Hungarians are not interested in the lies of the committee”.

**Freund: We know that freezing EU funds causes suffering to Hungary** / Daniel Freund: Tudjuk, hogy az uniós pénzek visszatartása szenvedést okoz

*pestisracok.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web*

MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) has admitted that they are aware that freezing EU funds causes suffering to Hungary, adding that he is convinced that these funds would end
up in the pockets of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN's family and friends. The news portal noted that the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has a problem with the Hungarian State Audit Office, public procurements and the situation of the city of Budapest.

**Members of fact finding mission visiting Hungary** / Ők a Magyarországra látogató ellenőrző bizottság tagjai

The European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) visited Hungary on 15-17 May to assess the situation regarding the use of EU funds and the rule of law in Hungary. The delegation was led by MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), who said that the cut in EU funds was by no means small and should make the Hungarian government realise that it must act. MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP), MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D) and MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) are also members, joined by HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) and HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D) as observers. MEP SARVAMAA, in an earlier interview with HVG, compared the Hungarian government to a thieving neighbour who needs to be watched with CCTV cameras. (by Ildikó Ungvári)

**MEPs worry about future of EU project** / Az EP-képviselők aggódnak, hogy mennyire valósul meg az európai projekt jövője

Speaking at a press conference at the end of a three-day visit by the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), head of the delegation, said that after questioning NGOs she had learned that the organisations receiving funding were those close to the Hungarian government. Members of the delegation stressed that the Hungarian National Assembly is very hasty in its decision-making, regional governments have a limited role in the national recovery plan and some actors say they are intimidated by the authorities. MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D) expressed concern about the future of the EU project, adding that they did not want to attack Hungary. (by Éva Harangozó)

**EP Committee on Budgetary Control still has unanswered questions in Hungary** / Maradtak megválaszolatlan kérdései az EP költségvetési ellenőrző bizottságának Magyarországon

MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), Chair of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), said after the delegation’s three-day visit to Budapest that the aim is to bring EU funds to the Hungarian people, but this requires a “fair and unbiased distribution system”. MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) stressed that “this is not just about Hungary” as similar fact-finding delegations are taking place in many other Member States. MEP HOHLMEIER pointed out that local governments complained about the concentration of public procurement in the hands of certain companies and that they had not been involved in drawing up the spending plan for the EU’s reconstruction fund. (by Balázs Márton)

**This is what EP delegation visiting Budapest urged government to do** / Erre szólította fel a kormányt a Budapestre látogatott EP-delegáció

The European Parliament’s Committee on Budgetary Control, led by MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), visited Budapest on Wednesday and expressed reservations about whether Hungarian citizens and entrepreneurs are the real beneficiaries of EU funds. MEP HOHLMEIER criticised in particular the failure of the President of the State Audit Office,
László WINDISCH, to provide information on the fate of 29 cases involving 1.48 billion euros of EU funds. MEP HOHLMEIER also said that the Hungarian government has introduced a number of “distorting measures” that restrict competition, such as special taxes, changing laws without consultation and intimidating stakeholders. (by Sándor Márton Németh) (also covered by 444.hu, vg.hu, propeller.hu, hang.hu)

**EP committee finds serious problems in Hungary / Súlyos problémákat talált az uniós vizsgálóbizottság Magyarországon**

*HVG Online - 17 May 2023 - Web*

During their visit to Budapest, members of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) met with NGOs, private sector representatives, members of the government and local leaders. MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), head of the delegation, said at Wednesday’s press conference that CONT is the only committee that can scrutinise the democratic way in which EU funds are spent. MEP HOHLMEIER outlined a number of problems, such as the government’s support for a privileged group, the disadvantage of opposition-led local governments and the lack of involvement of regional governments in development negotiations. MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) said that every time he visits Hungary he sees “things that cannot happen in other EU countries”.

**Fox set to watch geese: European Parliament scrutinises Hungarian budget / Kecskére a káposztát – a magyar költségvetést ellenőrzi az Európai Parlament**

*mandiner.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web*

A delegation from the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) spent three days in Hungary to gather information on the use of EU funds. According to the CONT, the European Commission had received reports of manipulated public procurement procedures and corruption in the granting of subsidies. The Civil Society Forum pointed out that the one-sidedness of the CONT is best demonstrated by the fact that it has not met with conservative actors, but only with opposition journalists, NGOs and political actors. According to Zoltán KASZAB, a journalist for Mandiner, the CONT’s investigation in Hungary is in fact part of a “huge theatre play”. (by Zoltán Kaszab)

**EP delegation calls on Hungarian government to implement conditions to release EU funds / Az EP delegációja felszólította a kormányt, hogy hajtsa végre a pénzek felszabádításához szükséges feltételeket**

*Magyarhirlap.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web*

The European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has urged the Hungarian government to be more responsible in the use of EU funds, during its recent visit to Budapest. The head of the delegation, MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP), stressed that the government should not take decisions “from the top down”, but should involve stakeholders and implement the necessary conditions for the release of EU funds. MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) said they did not want “Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN’s friends and family to get rich” from EU funds. According to MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D), the “hostile media” made their visit tenser, even though they came in a spirit of openness and cooperation.

**Another blackmailing mission comes to Budapest / Újabb zsarolómissziót köszönthettünk Budapesten**

*mandiner.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web*

Brussels continues to blackmail Hungary to force the country into war, stated the Centre for Fundamental Rights. The latest chapter of these efforts is the three-day visit of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control
to Hungary, the organisation added. The organisation reminded that HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D) and HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) assisted in the work of the fact-finding mission, which was led by MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP). The fact-finding mission's other members were MEP Lara WOLTERS (S&D), MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) and MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA), who regularly criticises the Hungarian government. The Centre for Fundamental Rights implied that MEPs were biased.

"This is not about Hungary" - press conference of fact-finding mission of EP CONT committee begins / „Ez nem Magyarországról szól” – elkezdődött a CONT-delegáció sajtótájékoztatója

The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) ended its three-day visit to Hungary with a press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. The delegation was led by MEP Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP) and counted MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA), HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) and HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D) among its members. MEP HOHLMEIER told journalists that their meetings in Hungary proved that EU funds play a major role in Hungary's development. She added that the disbursement of EU funds should not be biased or influenced by political interests. MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) underlined that nobody has a problem with Hungarians, adding that this is not about Hungary. MEP FREUND noted that they want EU funds to reach schools and communities in Hungary.

MEP Freund posts Knock knock joke at Orbán’s office / Kipp-kopp-viccet posztolt Orbán írodája mellől Daniel Freund EP-képviselő

A delegation from the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has arrived in Hungary for a three-day visit to learn about the use of EU funds. Tibor NAVRACSICS, Minister of Regional Development and Utilization of EU Funds, reported on Wednesday’s talks with the delegation of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT). NAVRACSICS said that he was moderately
optimistic after the talks and sensed bias on the part of the committee members. According to NAVRACSICS, the Hungarian representatives tried to refute claims about the government being politically biased in the allocation of EU funds. NAVRACSICS also mentioned that the Erasmus scholarship programme was not discussed in the talks, but that he had raised the issue in Brussels on Tuesday and would send the Hungarian position to the European Commission and EU Commissioner Johannes HAHN next week. (by Péter Alvarez)

**Tibor Navracsics: EP committee questions contained factual errors / Navracsics Tibor:** Tényszerű tévedések is előfordultak az EP-bizottság kérdéseiben

**Tibor:** The talks were objective and aimed at mutual understanding.

**Navracsics:** The delegation did not read the background material sent to them by the government in advance, and political prejudices influenced the opinions of many MEPs, sometimes leading to factual errors in their questions. NAVRACSICS was hopeful that they could persuade the committee members on some issues and in the long run find an advocate for Hungary’s access to EU funds.

**Dániel Bohár: They came from Brussels to insult Hungary / Bohár Dániel:** Eljöttek Brüsszelből gyalázni Magyarországot

The European Parliament’s Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) arrived in Hungary on Monday for a three-day visit. Dániel BOHÁR, a journalist for Origo, called the CONT’s work “scandalous” and stressed that the delegation was not at all interested in the Hungarian side’s opinion. According to BOHÁR, CONT is biased against Hungary because it only met with left-wing opposition actors, such as representatives of Transparency International, the Helsinki Committee or Hungarian Voice. BOHÁR also pointed out that MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) is exacerbating the situation of the Hungarian government, as “defaming Hungary has become the most important task of his life”. (by Dániel Bohár)

**Tibor Navracsics: We had objective discussion with delegation of EP’s Committee on Budgetary Control / Navracsics Tibor:** Tárgyszerű beszélgetést folytattunk az EP költségvetési ellenőrző bizottságának delegációjával

Tibor NAVRACSICS, Hungarian Minister of Regional Development and Utilization of EU Funds, held a press conference after meeting a delegation from the European Parliament’s Committee on Budgetary Control on Wednesday. According to NAVRACSICS, it was clear from the questions raised that “Budapest feels insulted” and the mayor believes he is being treated unfairly by the government. NAVRACSICS pointed out that in the current difficult economic climate, the government is giving more financial support to regions below the EU average. NAVRACSICS is confident that the government was able to at least refine the delegation’s position on several issues. (also covered by mandiner.hu, hang.hu, 24.hu)

**Balázs Orbán engages in meme war: He concisely responds to Freund / Orbán Balázs is beszállt a mém-háborúba: frappánsan visszavágott Daniel Freundnak**

MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) posted an apathetic photo of himself on Twitter with the caption: "Me, when I hear from the Orban government that they are making good
progress on the rule of law and anti-corruption”. Balázs ORBÁN, Political Director of the Prime Minister, in turn posted a cheerful portrait of himself with the following caption: "Me when a leftist Member of the European Parliament tries to school us about corruption".

German MEP makes joke in door of Orbán’s office / Viccel jelentkezett be Orbán irodájának ajtajából a német EP-képviselő

24.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
The fact-finding mission of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) has been in Hungary since Monday. MEPs met four parliamentary committees. The delegation only met the chairs of three of the above mentioned committees, all of whom are members of Fidesz-KDNP, news portal 24.hu wrote, citing hvg.hu. MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) and MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP) took a picture in the door of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN’s office in the Hungarian Parliament. MEP FREUND posted a tweet on the issue, writing that "Knock, Knock. Who’s there? Budgetary Control."

German MEP jokes before door of Orbán / Orbán Viktor ajtaja előtt viccelődött a német EP-képviselő

index.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) visited Hungary as a member of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT). The politician posted a selfie about himself in the door of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN’s office in the Hungarian Parliament. He tweeted: "Knock, Knock. Who’s there? Budgetary Control." After arriving at Hungary on Monday, he stated on Twitter that media freedom is under enormous pressure in Hungary. (by Benedek Balizs)

MEP Daniel Freund makes knock-knock joke in front of Viktor Orbán’s office / Kipp-kopp viccel kedveskedett Orbán Viktor irodája előtt Daniel Freund

Nepszava.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
According to hvg.hu, MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) visited Hungary on Monday as a member of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) together with MEP Petri SARVAMAA (EPP). MEP FREUND posted a photo on Twitter with MEP SARVAMAA with a “knock-knock” joke, showing them at the door of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN’s parliamentary office. During their visit, the delegation met with several Hungarian parliamentary committees, but only with the chairs of three ruling Fidesz-KDNP parties, not with committee members, among whom were members of the opposition. The reasons for this were unclear, with one Fidesz chair saying it was at the request of partners, while an official letter contradicted this.

Proof: Brussels would drag Hungary into war / Itt a bizonyíték: Brüsszel belerángatná Magyarországot a háborúba - videó

origo.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
Responding to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor ORBÁN’s speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), MEP Daniel FREUND (Greens/EFA) said that if Hungary continues its “pro-peace” stance, it will not receive EU funds. Csaba DÖMÖTÖR, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, also reacted to MEP FREUND’s statement in his latest Facebook video. DÖMÖTÖR stressed that the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT), which recently visited Hungary, is simply using EU funds that would otherwise be rightfully due to Hungary for political blackmail.

According to Deutsch, political pressure of fact-finding mission of EP CONT does not matter / Deutsch Tamás már megüzente, hogy nem oszt, nem szoroz az EP
költségvetési ellenőrző bizottságának „politikai nyomásnyakorlása”
Nepszava.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
According to HU MEP Tamás DEUTSCH (NI), the visit of the fact-finding mission of the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) visited Hungary to intensify political pressure in order to push Hungary into the Ukrainian war. He added that they insist on their "no war, no migration, no gender" policy. He noted that the EP and its special committees are not above Hungary, they are not an authority that make binding decisions. Therefore, they do not accept that MEPs from other EU countries come here from Brussels to tell Hungarians what to do, he said at press conference in Budapest on Wednesday. He noted that it does not matter what the CONT committee does to exert political pressure.

We did not give in to pressure from Brussels again today / A mai napon sem engedtünk a brüsszeli nyomásnyakorlásnak
mandiner.hu - 17 May 2023 - Web
Hungarian Minister of Justice Judit VARGA assessed the 3-day visit of the European Parliament’s (EP) Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) in Hungary in a Facebook post. She stressed that the country’s commitments are being met on time, and the government will bring home the EU funds “even in the face of the biggest headwinds”. She called the delegation’s visit a “politically motivated touristic visit by the pro-war Hungarian and the European Left, including the European People's Party”, adding that the left-wing majority in the EP is unable to accept that Hungary is engaged in forward-looking and constructive negotiations with the European Commission. She wrote the mission had visited Hungary as “part of a political campaign to put pressure on the Hungarian people”.

Cseh is proud of her undermining work in EU / Cseh Katalin büszke az uniós aknamunkájára
Magyar Nemzet - 18 May 2023 - Printed (p2)
According to daily Magyar Nemzet, the latest statements of HU MEP Katalin CSEH (RE) show that she is working to halt negotiations between the Hungarian government and Brussels about Hungary's EU funds. MEP CSEH wants to enable non-elected political organisations to apply for EU funds, bypassing the government. The European Parliament (EP) has adopted the CSEH report, cities will be able to directly access EU funds at the initiate of Hungarians, MEP CSEH posted on Facebook. She added that they and the local government of Budapest have been lobbying the EU to achieve this for years. She welcomed that the EP adopted the DELBOS-CORFIELD report in 2022. It is strange that MEP CSEH is lobbying against the government and EU funds, while Hungary's tax authority suspects a person of tax fraud in an EU scandal linked to MEP CSEH, the daily added.

One of Eva Kaili’s people among delegates / Eva Kaili embere a küldöttek között
Magyar Nemzet - 18 May 2023 - Printed (p2)
The membership as observer of HU MEP Sándor RÓNAI (S&D) in the delegation of the European Parliament’s (EP) Budgetary Control Committee (CONT) that visited Hungary to monitor he use of EU funds is ‘awkward’, because he is ‘practically one of MEP Eva KAILI’s (NI) confidants’, Magyar Nemzet reports. The article brings as example that in 2020 MEP RÓNAI was invited by MEP KAILI to a meeting on EU environmental issues with Commissioner for Environment Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS that only 13 MEPs were invited to. Magyar Nemzet adds that MEP RÓNAI ‘has also earned their trust’ by expressing support for arms deliveries to Ukraine, and mentions that a few years ago German police escorted MEP RÓNAI away from a boarding gate at Munich airport over a
disagreement with airport staff, but the details of the case have not been disclosed. (by Gyula Haraszti).

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**ANNEXE**

**Annex I**

**List of participants**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members (1+3) official, in protocol order</th>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms Monika HOHLMEIER (PR) - Leader of the mission</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Petri SARVAMAA</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Lara WOLTERS</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Daniel FREUND</td>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<th>Accompanying Members (&quot;out of quota&quot; Members) (2)</th>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms Katalin CSEH</td>
<td>RENEW</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Sandor RONAI</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
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**Political Group Advisers**

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<tr>
<th>Mr Horia Alexandru CERCEL</th>
<th>EPP</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Siobhan DILLON</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Stéphanie ANTOINE-JACQUEMARD</td>
<td>Renew</td>
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<td>Mr Robert GODINA</td>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
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**CONT Committee Secretariat (2)**

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<th>Mr Benoît LEFORT (AD)</th>
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<td>Ms Anca BALCANU (AST)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretation team (6) DE-EN-HU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms Barbara HORVATH</td>
<td>DE EN ES FR HU RO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Britta Margareta WALCH</td>
<td>DE EN ES FR PT SV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Oliver WHITFIELD</td>
<td>EN DE ES FR HU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Latifa SADOC</td>
<td>EN DE ES FR PT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Róbert GULYÁS</td>
<td>HU DE EN FR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Katalin VOLFORD</td>
<td>HU DE EN FR</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Technician (1)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Ioannis ANDRIKOPOULOS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT LIAISON OFFICE IN HUNGARY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Andrea LOVEI</td>
<td>Head of Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Katalin Palfy</td>
<td>Press officer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DG COMM (1)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Agnese KRIVADE</td>
<td>Press Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balázs DUDÁS</td>
<td>Audio-visual producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>István KÚRTI</td>
<td>Cameraman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gábor KEREKES</td>
<td>Sound engineer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ferenc ISZA</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS (Observers)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Annemie TURTELBOOM</td>
<td>ECA Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Eric BRAUCOURT</td>
<td>Head of Office</td>
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<td><strong>EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Observers)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Ellitsa DALAMPOURA</td>
<td>DG BUDG D.1 Coordination, Partnership with MS, EDES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Kees VAN DUIN, Deputy Head of Unit</td>
<td>SG.RECOVER.C.1 - European Semester, Investment, Finance – BG, CZ, HU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr László POLGÁR, External Auditor</td>
<td>Joint Audit Directorate for Cohesion (DAC) DG EMPL-DG REGIO</td>
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