Question for written answer  E-006347/2020  
to the Commission

Rule 138

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Subject: Lack of Commission response to complaints about alleged unlawful State aid and its impact on media freedom in Hungary

Since 2011, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his government have regularly taken steps to dismantle press freedom in Hungary, leading to frequent politically motivated dismissals of independent media leaders, and politically driven economic pressure on independent outlets.

In 2016 and 2018, two complaints against alleged unlawful State aid were lodged with the Commission, but have not received any official response yet.

According to complaint No. 45463, the Public Service Broadcaster (PSB), serves as an echo chamber for the government party, FIDESZ, and concentrates most government funding, thereby establishing dominance over independent outlets.

According to the complaint No. 53108, state advertising mostly goes to pro-government outlets, irrespective of their number of readers, therefore distorting the media market.

Given that the state of media freedom has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that serious concerns were raised by the Commission in its Annual Rule of Law Report:

1. Why has the Commission not yet acted on these complaints in spite of the urgency of the situation?

2. Has the Commission decided to initiate a formal investigation procedure, in line with Articles 6, 12 and 20 of Regulation (EU) 2015/1589 (the Procedural Regulation)?

3. If not, what procedural steps is the Commission planning to take next, and what is the timeline for them?