

9th April 2020

**In these times of Pandemic, let us defend European values:
Democracy and Human Rights**

On Monday 30 March the Hungarian Parliament granted Prime Minister Viktor Orban "full powers" for an indefinite period of time to deal with the Coronavirus epidemic that is currently sweeping the country. For a period whose expiry is not announced, but just linked to the end of the pandemic, the head of government will have full powers to govern by decree, without the need to have his decisions ratified by parliament. Anyone who disseminates « false » information will be liable to a criminal conviction.

Faced with the reactions of national opposition forces, criticism from other European Union Member States, the European Commission and the reservations of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Orban replied, through his spokesperson on the government website, that "if the Council of Europe is not in a position to help, then let it keep quiet". This reply was subsequently withdrawn and replaced by the statement that the law on the pandemic is in line with the principles of the rule of law.

We, the Christian-inspired organisations and movements present in the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe, express our strongest disapproval of this contemptuous response. It shows a total disregard not only for the role of the Secretary General, but above all for the rights and duties which membership of the Organisation implies on the part of the authorities of a State which was triumphantly welcomed into the Organisation in 1990, the first of the « new democracies » resulting from the collapse of the communist regimes in eastern Europe.

Being a member means not only respecting human rights, the principles of the rule of law and democracy, but also considering that these rights and principles are a common heritage for which all Member States must feel responsible. These rights and principles are not just for others. Reminding States to respect their obligations, proposing and implementing dialogue and co-operation if difficulties or exceptional situations arise, accepting to be invited to review behaviour and political choices which appear to be in contradiction with these principles: that is what being a member of the Council of Europe is all about.

We reaffirm our attachment to this Organisation and to the values it represents and defends and call on Member States to show the same loyalty and attachment to this common heritage bequeathed to us by the founders. It is up to all Member States and members of civil society to keep them alive and flourishing.

The pandemic will not be defeated if democracy is humiliated or fundamental rights are trampled underfoot. Our societies will not emerge great from this ordeal if the price to be paid for recovered health is the decline of our values, solidarity and fraternity which are at the heart of the European project.

Together we can win these battles!

Signatures:

AIC, International Association of Charities

CEP, European Colloquy of Parishes

Justice and Peace Europe

MIAMSI, International Movement of Apostolate in Middle and Upper Classes pendants
PAX ROMANA, International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs
OCIPE, Catholic Office for Information and Initiative for Europe
OIEC, Office International d'Enseignement Catholique
PAX CHRISTI, International Catholic Peace Movement
RENATE, Religious in Europa against Trafficking & Exploitation
EN-RE European Network Church on the Move
UMOFC, World Union of Catholic Women Organisation
UNAEC-Europe, European Union of Former Students of Catholic Education