

The Hungarian government consults amendments to the media law with the European Commission

On 16 February, the European Commission approved the amendments to the media law proposed by the Hungarian government. The European Commissioner for Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes and representatives of Hungary found that the law with the amendments would fully comply with EU law. However, the Commission did not address the strongly criticised part of the law regarding the independence of the media board because the *acquis communautaire* does not include criteria for evaluating this problem. This issue is still being discussed both at the European Parliament and in Hungary.

The wording in four points of the law was made more precise. The agreed amendments ensure the implementation of: the 'country of origin principle' applicable in EU law, according to which this act will not affect media which broadcast their programmes from other countries; a narrowing down of the group of media on which the obligation of 'balanced informing' would be imposed only to the classic audiovisual broadcasters (excluding the Internet among other media); a softening of the regulations concerning media registration; and the removal of the overly broad interpretation of the ban on encouraging hatred and discrimination.

The Hungarian opposition, like the OSCE representatives and left-wing factions in the European Parliament, still support their opinion that these changes will not prevent the limitation of the freedom of speech. The main reservations are that the media board will be dependent on one political party. However, the European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, Viviane Reding, stated on 19 February that aside from Hungary this problem concerned at least ten other member states, and if the European Commission were to address the issue of the independence of media boards, this would require examining the regulations applicable in all other EU member states.

The Hungarian parliament is to deal with the amendment of the law already in February. The government coalition has a two-thirds majority in parliament, so no complications with adopting the agreed amendments should be expected. <szyl>