

## THE EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF LISTENERS' & VIEWERS' ASSOCIATIONS (EURALVA)

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### ***Europe's Listeners and Viewers Express their Concern that Hungary's new Law will Chill Free Speech and fail to Guarantee the Independence of Public Service Broadcasting***

EURALVA (The European Alliance of Listeners' and Viewers' Associations) today expressed its concern that Hungary's new Media Law will chill free speech and engender distrust among listeners and viewers, as it will impose heavy fines on journalists and broadcasters, if they refuse to disclose their sources, or publish information deemed inappropriate by the Government.

“EURALVA is deeply concerned that Hungary's new law will both chill the freedom to report political corruption, and fail to fulfil the Council of Europe's Recommendations on the Independence of Public Service Broadcasting” said *Preben Sorensen*, the President of EURALVA.

The new law, as enacted, would seriously endanger the freedom of broadcasting by creating scope for a subjective judgement, along with the consequences of that judgment, about any individual news story, and penalise broadcasters and editors through government-controlled regulatory bodies.

The Chairman of the five-member Media Council, which regulates all media including the Internet and the Press, is directly appointed by the Prime Minister, while the other four members will be chosen by a committee of Members of Parliament dominated, because of weighted voting, by the Government.

Moreover, public service, publicly-funded broadcasters will be especially tightly controlled by the Government, thus undermining the trust of Hungary's listeners and viewers. In addition, the new law totally ignores the Recommendations, laid down in 1996 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and since then implicitly and repeatedly endorsed within the European Union, to guarantee the independence of public service broadcasting.

The eight-member Public Service Foundation, which will supervise all publicly-funded media and report to the Media Council, also has a built-in majority of Government supporters. Two members are to be directly appointed by the government-dominated Media Council, and a further three by members of parliament from the Government party. Only the three member minority will be chosen by opposition MPs.

Recommendation R (96) 10 of the Council of Europe requires that the rules governing the status of supervisory bodies for public service broadcasters should ensure that the members of supervisory bodies will be appointed in an open and pluralistic manner, and that they should represent collectively the interests of society in general. If passed in its present form, Hungary's new law will fail to fulfil these requirements.

EURALVA therefore calls on both the Council of Europe and the European Union to preserve free speech in Hungary, and to ensure that it passes laws establishing a pluralistic public service broadcaster.

Vincent Porter, Adviser on European Media Policy (23 December 2010)