



The American Hungarian Federation

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A RUSH TO JUDGMENT: THE REACTION TO HUNGARY'S MEDIA LAW

January 11, 2011, cosigned by former Yale Professor Bela Liptak

As Americans of Hungarian descent steeped in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, it is our unassailable and firm conviction that freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democracy and liberty. Our conviction is reinforced by the fact that many of our members or their parents fought against and fled from tyranny, as in 1956 when the Hungarians rose up against Soviet Communism and occupation or when they fought and fled Nazi occupation and persecution in 1944. At the same time, it is our steadfast conviction that judgments made about a country whose liberty was denied for over four decades by the force of tanks, secret police and their collaborators in all walks of life, including the media, should be objective, fair, balanced and based on facts and not generalizations.

We should certainly be vigilant and attentive to press freedoms and the laws governing them in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe. However, there has been an unprecedented rush to judgment and vitriolic media coverage of the newly enacted media law in Hungary. This judgment seems to have been based, at best, on a partial understanding of the law itself and, in some cases, appears to be motivated by bias or political considerations. The negative coverage is premature, unfair and paints a false picture of Hungary, a nation which emerged from over 40 years of Soviet-imposed Communist repression to successfully re-join the democratic community of nations. Hungary has amply demonstrated its commitment to Western values – now and in the past.

The Hungarian government supports a full review of the media law by the European Union and has stated it would make changes as needed. The Ministry responsible released an English version on January 3rd. Judgment should be reserved until the law has been fully reviewed. Such reservation is especially indicated since the Hungarian government has insisted its new media law is based on elements of already existing media laws in Europe. The English and Hungarian versions of the new media law are available on <http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org>.

As the charge has been made that the media law violates European Union standards, fundamental fairness demands that the law be compared with the laws governing media in other West European countries. All European democracies have varying laws and regulations governing free speech based on their own societal norms – norms Budapest claims to have incorporated in its law – yet none have evoked such hostility as Hungary's law.

Following the adoption of Britain's Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, Tony Blair was not compared to dictators as has been Hungary's democratically elected Prime Minister. Furthermore, Hungary successfully emerged from its Communist past and is only 1 of 8 former Soviet-bloc countries with a "free" press according to Freedom House's [2010 International Press Rankings](#). Many of the established Western democracies, including Britain, are not in the top 25. Hungary and France, for example, are ranked 40. Italy, however, is ranked 72 and only "partly free."

The American Hungarian Federation, representing a broad cross section of the Hungarian-American community, believes this complex subject deserves in-depth and objective analysis rather than hyperbole.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS 2010

TABLE OF GLOBAL PRESS FREEDOM RANKINGS

Rank 2010	Country	Rating	Status
24	United States of America	18	Free
26	United Kingdom	19	Free
37	Australia	22	Free
40	France	23	Free
	Hungary	23	Free
47	Poland	24	Free
	Spain	24	Free
63	Greece	29	Free
72	Italy	33	Partly Free

Source: www.freedomhouse.org

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE / FORMER SOVIET UNION

Rank 2010	Country	Rating	Status
1	Estonia	17	Free
2	Czech Republic	18	Free
3	Lithuania	21	Free
4	Hungary	23	Free
	Slovakia	23	Free
6	Poland	24	Free
7	Slovenia	25	Free
8	Latvia	26	Free

Source: www.freedomhouse.org