Europe's Shameful Silence - An Open Letter to EU Leaders from Jean Monnet Chairs

Alberto Alemanno, R. Daniel Kelemen & Laurent Pech

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Dear Presidents Juncker, Tajani, and Tusk,

We, the undersigned, all hold or have held Jean Monnet Chairs, an honorific title bestowed by the European Commission on university professors in recognition of excellence in teaching and research on European integration. We come from a wide variety of backgrounds, we live in countries across the EU and the world, and we have political views and partisan affiliations across a broad spectrum. For all our differences, one thing we have in common is a belief that the European Union (EU) should uphold its core democratic values as articulated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which states, "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

Because we share a commitment to a European Union based on democratic values, we are writing to you to express our profound disappointment and outrage about the EU's failure to respond more robustly to recent developments in Hungary. On 1 December 2018, after a long running campaign of egregious harassment, the Hungarian government forced the Central European University to leave Hungary. The fact that an independent university could be expelled from an EU member state is a galling attack on academic freedom that contravenes the Union's core democratic values. Sadly, we are accustomed to seeing such attacks on academic freedom in authoritarian regimes such as Russia and Turkey, but the fact that this could occur within the EU is a truly shameful moment in the history of European integration.

Of course, the blame lies primarily with the Hungarian government which orchestrated this attack as part of its broader assault on pluralist democracy – an assault well documented in the European Parliament's Sargentini Report. However, your and other EU leaders' inaction in the face of the Hungarian government's attacks on the CEU has also contributed to making this possible. Not only has the EU failed to impose meaningful sanctions on Orbán's government for these actions, his party Fidesz retains a stamp of approval as a member in good standing of the European People's Party – a group with which all three of you are affiliated.

While the recent vote in the European Parliament to trigger Article 7(1) against Hungary marks an important step forward, more generally EU institutions have abjectly failed to stand up to the Orbán government's repeated and sustained attacks on democratic values in recent years. And it is not as if we were not warned about what was to unfold. In 2013, the Tavares Report called for decisive action and yet nothing meaningful was done. The eviction of the CEU reflects the fact that the Hungarian government has learned that it can violate EU norms with impunity, crossing every supposed 'red line' without facing meaningful consequences.

But enough is enough. We call on you to stand up for the democratic values on which the European Union is based. We call on all three of you – and the institutions that you lead – to issue strong denunciations of the Hungarian government's expulsion of the CEU ahead of the next European Parliament elections. Moreover, we call on you, as prominent figures in the European People's Party, to demand that the party's

leaders take immediate action to uphold the fundamental principles on which both the EPP and the EU itself are based and make it clear that there is no room in the EPP for parties like Fidesz that violate those principles on an industrial scale. What is at stake is not only academic freedom, but the opportunity of every EU resident to think, move and act within this unprecedented space of freedom, rule of law, and democracy that is the European Union.

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If you are Jean Monnet Professor and wish to co-sign this letter and show your support, please leave a comment with your name and affiliation. Much appreciated!

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