

STATEMENT BY THE EPP PRESIDENT ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN HUNGARY

08-02-2007



The President of the European People's Party (EPP), **Wilfried Martens**, made today the following statement on the political situation in Hungary:

"Based on the unanimous opinion expressed at the Bureau meeting of the European People's Party in Brussels on 8-9 February, I express my solidarity with the action of FIDESZ MPs and MEPs on 2nd February this year when they dismantled the police cordon at Kossuth square in Budapest.

We view this as a responsible reaction in defence of freedom to months of government inaction and an intolerable situation that restricts basic civil rights.

I call on the Hungarian government to make steps and initiate the removal of the police cordon. Neither any perceived or real terrorist threat nor uncomfortable political views validate the limitation of free speech in a democracy. There are several examples of civilised solutions where it is possible to provide security without restricting basic civil rights.

I was present in Budapest on 23rd October 2006 addressing a commemorative ceremony of the 1956 Revolution, and it was on that day that police forces used extensive and arbitrary force against peaceful demonstrators.

Since that time, I have followed with special attention developments in Hungary. The freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly form a fundamental part of any democracy, and they have been restricted at Kossuth square in Budapest ever since 23rd October.

Democracies must guarantee the freedom for people to express their opinion, and the fact that their opinion may be critical of a government is no reason whatsoever to restrict the freedom to express it.

The above mentioned square in Budapest is named after Lajos Kossuth, a great 19th century democrat and campaigner for liberty. It is a disgrace that this very square has been blocked off for over 100 days by an illegal police cordon. What this cordon blocks in reality is the right of free speech and of free assembly.

This is not a Hungarian issue, it is a European one. Europe may only speak credibly for freedom in the world if freedom is not compromised in any of its member states. Hungary agreed to continuously implement the Copenhagen criteria when it joined the EU in 2004.

The provision of basic civil rights forms part of the Copenhagen criteria. By limiting the right to free speech in front of the Parliament, these criteria are not fully respected in Hungary today. I trust that Hungary – so far known as a solid, democratic state with stable democratic institutions – will find a solution that respects basic civil rights"

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