
Hungary: PM Orban granted sweeping powers. Von der Leyen, “respect for European values and freedom of expression”

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European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a statement to explicitly defend the EU’s common values enshrined in the Treaties. Without mentioning Hungary, she referred to the decisions taken in Budapest yesterday, which gave sweeping powers to Prime Minister Viktor Orban. “The European Union is founded on the values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights”, von der Leyen began. “These values are common to all of us. We must uphold and defend them, even in these challenging times”. “Over the past weeks – she explained –, several EU governments took emergency measures to address the health crisis caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus. We are living in extraordinary times, and governments, in principle, need to have the necessary tools to act rapidly and effectively to protect the public health of our citizens”. But - the Commission head insisted - “it is of utmost importance that emergency measures are not at the expense of our fundamental principles and values as set out in the Treaties. Democracy cannot work without free and independent media. Respect for freedom of expression and legal certainty are essential in these uncertain times. Now, it is more important than ever that journalists are able to do their job freely and precisely, so as to counter disinformation and to ensure that our citizens have access to crucial information”. Finally a warning: “Any emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary and strictly proportionate. They must not last indefinitely. Moreover, governments must make sure that such measures are subject to regular scrutiny”. For this reason, “the European Commission will closely monitor, in a spirit of cooperation, the application of emergency measures in all Member States. We all need to work together to master this crisis. On this path, we will uphold our European values and human rights. This is who we are, and this is what we stand for”.

Valentina Bombelli