

Dear President Biden,

On the occasion of your visit to Brussels to meet with the European Union and NATO partners, the Media Freedom Rapid Response wants to draw your attention to a serious deterioration in media freedom in certain European countries that profoundly threatens the rule of law underpinning our democracies and mutual security.

We are particularly concerned by the situation in Poland and Hungary where the respective governments have set out on a steady path to erode media pluralism and silence critical journalism through a process of state-led capture of the media.

Hungary is the leading exponent of the state capture strategy, by applying regulatory, legal and financial powers and creating a hostile environment that punishes and excludes critical media while building a pro-government propaganda apparatus. Independent media are subjected to a range of state-driven economic pressures such as the withdrawal of state advertising, targeted taxing and the removal of licenses. Most recently, the license of the radio broadcaster [Klubrádió](#) was denied on arbitrary grounds, a move that has now prompted an [official enquiry](#) by the European Commission.

Poland is now firmly set on a similar trajectory with the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party systematically undermining independent media, including foreign-owned media such as TVN24. Efforts to tighten the screws on independent media include blocking unfavoured mergers, a proposed new advertising tax, the discriminatory use of state advertising and a stream of vexatious lawsuits against its media critics. PiS has engaged PKN Orlen, the state-controlled energy giant, as a vehicle for gaining control over independent media. Its acquisition of regional news publisher Polska Press has already led to an editorial purge ahead of local elections.

These are not isolated cases. Media freedom is under increased pressure as populist politicians around the world, and in Europe, abuse government power to attack free speech. This, in turn, threatens democracy and the rule of law as bedrocks of the transatlantic relationship.

The U.S. has long been a leader when it comes to championing press freedom and free speech around the world. We believe that your visit offers an important opportunity to reclaim that mantle at a critical time and reinforce the U.S.'s commitment to media freedom as a shared value.

We therefore urge you as President of the United States to support efforts by the European Commission to demand reform in Poland and Hungary that guarantee media pluralism and independent journalism.

Kind regards

International Press Institute
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

This letter has been written by the Media Freedom Rapid Response ([MFRR](#)), which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by a consortium led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Institute for Applied Informatics at the University of Leipzig (InfAI), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The project is co-funded by the European Commission.