

*News release*

## **Letter from EU to Hungarian PM cannot be qualified as private data insist media freedom organisations**

*13 January 2012, Berlin/Budapest/Madrid* – Three international media freedom and human rights organisations today call on the Hungarian Minister of Interior Sándor Pintér to withdraw the threat of criminal prosecution for breach of privacy rights against Hungarian journalist Attila Mong who published a leaked letter from EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on his blog.

The Hungarian Interior Ministry has alleged that the 19 December 2011 letter, in which Barroso criticises Hungary's new central bank law for being incompatible with EU legislation, should not have been published as it constitutes a violation of the privacy of correspondence of the Prime Minister. Interior Minister Pintér is reported to have said that the journalist Attila Mong could face several years' imprisonment for this criminal offence.

Access Info Europe, n-ost Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe and the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM) today expressed their concerns about the threats of criminal charges against the journalist and the chilling effect that such threats are likely to have on freedom of expression in Hungary.

The media freedom organisations note that while the head of the new National Agency for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, Attila Péterfalvi, refused to comment on the case to the media, the former commissioner for data protection, András Jóri, contradicted the Interior Minister saying that the contents of the letter were of public interest and it was therefore not a private affair. Recognised experts in data protection likewise stressed that Mong had not broken the law by publishing the letter.

*"The threatened prosecution of Attila Mong will create an atmosphere of fear and cause great unease among journalistic sources in future,"* commented Christian Mihr of n-ost.

*"It is simply not credible that a letter between the EU and the head of the Hungarian government about whether new laws meet EU standards is a private matter,"* commented Helen Darbishire of Access Info Europe.

The three organisations had previously criticised Hungary's new constitution for undermining access to information in Hungary and have raised concerns about the media law. They note that the new data protection agency does not enjoy the same independence or rights as the office of Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection, which was abolished with the new constitution.

### **Contact:**

Christian Mihr / Andreas Bock

**n-ost Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe**

+49 - 30 - 259 32 83 – 0

[mihr@n-ost.org](mailto:mihr@n-ost.org)

Helen Darbishire

Access Info Europe

+34 667 685 319

[helen@access-info.org](mailto:helen@access-info.org)

Sandor Orban

South East European Network for Professionalization of Media

+

[director.seenpm@gmail.com](mailto:director.seenpm@gmail.com)

***Notes for Editors:***

1. n-ost, Access Info Europe and SEENPM are campaigning to promote and protect the right of access to information in Hungary as part of the Legal Leaks Project which aims to increase government transparency and reduce the need for journalists to rely on leaked information for stories of public interest.
2. Access Info Europe, n-ost, and SEENPM noted that the new data protection law is one of the measures over which Brussels is launching legal proceedings against Hungary for failing to meet European standards.