

Council of Europe
The Secretary General

Strasbourg, 24 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

The COVID-19 pandemic legitimately prompted Council of Europe member states to take drastic measures to protect public health. These measures are restricting a number of individual rights and liberties enshrined in constitutions and in the European Convention on Human Rights. Whereas the applicable national and international human rights norms allow for such restrictions, their severity may require the implementation of a derogatory regime in the form of a state of emergency, as provided for by the national constitutional order.

I am following the developments concerning the state of emergency in Hungary with great attention. In this context, I should like to underline that the measures which member states take in the present exceptional circumstances of the pandemic must comply with both national constitutions and international standards, and observe the very essence of democratic principles. An indefinite and uncontrolled state of emergency cannot guarantee that the basic principles of democracy will be observed and that the emergency measures restricting fundamental human rights are strictly proportionate to the threat which they are supposed to counter.

Also, democratic debate in national parliaments, in the media and the internet, as well as access to official information and documents are essential elements of any free and democratic order and of particular importance in crisis situations to maintain trust and confidence within society.

Our member states are rightly determined to address the threat resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, but this must be done in a manner that respects the fundamental values of the Organisation: democracy, rule of law and human rights. The Council of Europe remains ready to help them in this endeavour, including by making available all expertise and assistance which may be useful. I invite the Hungarian authorities to seize this opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



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