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Thursday, October 30, 2014

## Newsletter

### Protests in Hungary against the tax on the use of the Internet

The draft law on the taxation of Internet use has been announced by the government Tuesday, October 21, as a measure to replenish the state coffers. For the opposition it is an anti-democratic measure.

#### What's in the bill

The initiative of the executive provides for the payment of 150 HUF (about 50 cents of euro) for each gigabyte

downloaded. Opponents of the project argue that with this tax Internet will become so expensive to force users to go back to slow internet services of the 90s. The opposition points out that nowadays Internet is a public utility service like electrical supply and is part of everyday life of the people, and highlights the contradictory attitude of the government that in the last two years has pledged to cut bills and now sees a tax on the use of Internet. The Ministry of Economy said that the tax would generate an annual turnover of 20 billion forints and pointed out that in 2013 Internet traffic in Hungary exceeded one billion gigabytes, which would result in a revenue of about 175 billion forints .

### **The demonstrations**

The protests took place on Sunday, October 26 and Tuesday 28. The first one took place in front of the Ministry of Economy and, according to the opposition newspaper *Népszabadság*, was characterized by the participation of about 40,000 people. The second one went through the city center and was more massive, it speaks of some 100,000 protesters who participated in a long procession bearing signs with phrases like "Orbán go away." Sunday

night, one of the organizers of the street protests promised a second event if the government had not withdrawn the project within 48 hours. The executive then announced changes that essentially consist of an upper limit of 700 HUF (a little over two Euros) in terms of gigabytes downloaded. The tax is still confirmed as part of the financial framework for the next year. The changes were not enough for supporters of the protest, which, as already stated, returned to the streets Tuesday night.

### **International criticism**

The measure has been called a disgrace to the Hungarian government by Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for the new technologies and it seems that it does not enjoy full support within the ruling party Fidesz. Then it became the subject of international criticism. Recently the American authorities intensified the critics against the Hungarian government even before the announcement of the bill. The US authorities criticized the Orbán government for its "repressive" attitude against NGOs who refuse to comply with government policy. These criticisms were uttered by President

Obama. At a conference held to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs Victoria Nuland publicly denounced the behavior of those leaders of Central and Eastern Europe who, in his view, are engaged in the creation of anti-liberal and nationalist systems, affect the freedom of the press and of opinion and persecute civil organizations. The criticism of Nuland was directed at those who, in his opinion, take advantage of the benefits offered by membership in NATO and the EU, but deny the values that underlie Western countries. The Hungarian diplomacy rejects the criticism and argues that American leaders are not well informed about what is happening in the country. Meanwhile, recently, the US authorities have refused entry visas to government officials and businessmen in Hungary on suspicion of corruption, a scourge against which, according to Washington, Budapest is not doing enough. For the opposition that asks to the government for an investigation, the US measure is a warning against the anti-democratic

orientation of the Orbán government and the support it has given to Putin's in the crisis in Ukraine.

### **Statement**

The statement made by the President of the Hungarian Parliament Laszlo Kövér to Echo TV, a small right-wing broadcaster, has contributed to the tense atmosphere of these days. According to Kövér if Brussels continues to impose diktats to Budapest, Hungary should consider a gradual withdrawal from the EU. This statement was perhaps made to please the right wing supporters, but it has predictably provoked strong reactions from the European institutions. So that Manfred Weber, leader of the EPP in the European Parliament was asked to take a stand as there is questionable whether Fidesz will still be part of the EPP.

Meanwhile, the mobilization against the tax on the use of Internet increases, and the next event is scheduled for November 17.



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