To the President of the European Commission

Open letter: Demand for the resignation of Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement

Strasbourg, 17th October 2023

Dear President,

On October 9th, Olivér Várhelyi suddenly announced on X the immediate suspension of the disbursement of the European development funds dedicated to Palestine, in reaction to the horrific attacks of Hamas on Israeli civilians on October 7th.

Affirming “there can be no business as usual”, he unilaterally declared: “all payments immediately suspended. All projects put under review. All new budget proposals, incl. for 2023 postponed under further notice. Comprehensive assessment of the whole portfolio”.

Commissioner Várhelyi had no authority to unilaterally decide this, nor to officially communicate this on his social media accounts without this decision being taken with due process. The HR/VP’s ensuing communication set the record straight that such a decision had in fact not been taken with due process. The communication by several Member States opposing the announcement by Mr Várhelyi also indicated that the Council had not been consulted, in breach of inter-institutional rules. As expressed by Eric Mamer, the Commission’s chief spokesman, “Commissioner Várhelyi’s announcement was not preceded by any consultation with any member of the College”.

Mr Várhelyi’s communication targeted the 691 millions euros of EU funds dedicated to development and humanitarian aid in Palestine.

Unilaterally, Mr Várhelyi implied through his communication that EU funds used for the promotion of the rule of law, healthcare, education and civil servants' salaries were likely to have been used to fund Hamas. Yet, according to sources within the Commission, these funds are among the most scrutinized by the Commission.

The European Commission had to rectify on Monday 9th in an official press release, this time, that there would not be any suspension but that an urgent revision of the aid was needed to
ensure that “no EU funding indirectly enables a terrorist organisation to carry out attacks against Israel”.

This is not the first time Mr Várhelyi steps out of line and goes against inter-institutional rules. In the context of EU assistance to Palestinians alone, the Commissioner already had suspended the disbursement of 215 millions euros of funds on unbased allegations concerning Palestinian school books.

In February 2023, many of us already called for Mr Várhelyi’s resignation after he had referred to MEPs as “idiots” in the Parliament’s plenary session.

We no longer condone the offenses of Mr Várhelyi to the EU’s institutions and their democratic functioning. We therefore ask Commissioner Várhelyi to resign or for him to be relieved of his duties.

Dear President, the Commission needs to be exemplary in its democratic functioning. Commissioner Várhelyi’s actions undermine not only the image of our institutions, but the trust that EU citizens put in the Commission.

Yours sincerely,

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