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"Stealthy accusations are nasty tools" - MEP Hankiss' letter to members of the LIBE Committee

Dear Colleagues,

Budapest, 8th February 2012

The other day I saw a TV report featuring one of the socialist members of the European Parliament. Our fellow colleague talked about the allegedly raging anti-Semitism in Hungary. Concerned about the fate of Hungarian Jews, she essentially stated the same thing as others stated in recent months on the political left and in the left-leaning media. It was not surprised by her statements themselves, as I witnessed several smear-campaigns slandering the government of Hungary before. I was shocked simply because I have known her as an intelligent and open-minded person who had been ready for compromises while we had been working together on several dossiers in the committee. This is why it struck me when she made the unfounded allegations, which she had most probably learnt from sources she considered unconditionally credible, with deep empathy and belief. My honourable colleague was thus badly deceived, most probably by those whose struggle for regaining power does not even shy away from deceiving their fellow group members.

Stealthy accusations are nasty tools: they are impossible to prove and rarely hold up to challenge in the open. In case of confrontation the accuser would retreat, but only to restart later as if nothing happened before. The accused one is scared because even self-defence might prove to be counter-productive. Let me ask you a question: if those accusing the Hungarian government could quote a single bad or controversial sentence revealing anti-Semitism wouldn't they have provided you with it by now?

My father was released half dead from a Nazi concentration camp. My grandmother escaped the Budapest ghetto with her children and the family cat. Their lives were saved by deeply religious, Christian people having risked their own lives while hiding my family and others in their basement. My grandmother's husband was stripped of his clothes and was shot into the Danube during Christmas 1944. Her younger sister fell victim to Mengele who performed experiments on her. Afterwards, doctors fought for many years so that she could have children. In my books on Jewish mysticism I tried to solve the secret of survival...but this is a different story.

My bond to the founders and leaders of the Fidesz party has been based on friendship and solidarity for the past twenty years and it has not been shaken ever since. I have never had a reason to question this bond.

I am Hungarian. A Hungarian patriot if you like, attached to her native country, Hungary as well as to those fellow Hungarians living beyond the national borders, with thousands of strings like knowledge, emotion and care. I have never considered this identity to be

contradictory to that deep and manifold loyalty binding me to each and every victim of the Jewish tragedy and to all the spiritual values and fights for survival of Jewish history. This kind of controversy is always generated from the outside with ulterior motives.

It is not true that nowadays people with Jewish origins should be scared in Hungary. It is a sad fact however that the left-liberal political community has been using the charge of anti-Semitism as pretext in the fight against the central-right governments to regain or retain power. They suggest that only their rule on power can guarantee the safety of minorities and if they are in opposition, minorities are in imminent danger. This is a rough and rather toxic lie. Believe me, many Hungarian Jews see this clearly but remain silent because the pressure of the group is too strong.

During my visit to Israel with the EP delegation I had a chance to talk about these matters with a wise and open-minded Israeli diplomat. We could understand each other from half words. He understood precisely that we, the central-right do not want anything more than a home held together and kept alive during dangers and crises by a sense of belonging and a common faith in shared values.

Does anti-Semitism exist in Hungary? Sporadically and on the extreme right naturally it does, as is the case in almost all European countries. According to Rabbi Slomo Köves, interviewed by Jerusalem Post, "there is less anti-Semitism on the streets of Budapest than there is in Western Europe". Nevertheless, there is press freedom in Hungary and therefore there are no means to step up legally against some of the truly repulsive media.

Honourable Colleagues,

Please forgive me for the unusually personal tone. Accusing the Hungarian government with anti-Semitism is a serious and unjust charge. Politics uses different kinds of tools. However slandering with anti-Semitism should not be part of the toolkit. There should be a limit to cynicism in politics! The historical tragedy of the Jews and the sensitivity which genocide left in the souls of many generations should not be an asset for political manipulation. Please respect the memory of the dead! And respect the faith of the living in the hope and possibility of shedding these historical burdens through understanding and goodwill!

Let me ask you, honourable colleagues in the European Parliament, to consider calmly the above. In case anyone would like to gain a deeper insight into the contemporary Hungarian situation, I stay at your disposal.

Ágnes Hankiss MEP