

**Board of Directors of the Society**

**for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen**

**Grashaus, Fischmarkt 3**

**52062 Aachen, Germany**

**To Mr. Jürgen Linden**

**Chairman of the Board of Directors**

**Dear Sir,**

We wish to bring to the attention of the Board of Directors our serious concerns regarding this year's recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize, Mr. Klaus Werner Iohannis.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> Romanian President Klaus Iohannis made a statement claiming that the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) helped Hungarians in an attempt to obtain the Transylvania region of Romania, through the tacit approval of a draft law on the Autonomy of Szeklerland by the Romanian Chamber of Deputies. *"It is incredible what kind of agreements are being reached in the Romanian Parliament,"* President Iohannis stated, *"while we, me, the government and other authorities are fighting the coronavirus outbreak, the Romanian Social Democratic Party, the big Romanian Social Democratic Party, is fighting in secret parliamentary offices to give Transylvania to the Hungarians."* The President also mocked and disrespected the Hungarian language, a language spoken by more than 6% of the citizens of Romania, by saying "Good day" in Hungarian to the above-mentioned opposition party, using an extremely sarcastic tone and imitating a Hungarian accent.

By wanting to attack the biggest opposition party, the President also stigmatized the entire Hungarian community of Romania and consequently revived latent, but ever-present nationalist fears within Romanian society. Such unprecedented xenophobic rhetoric coming from the highest office in the country gives credibility to the false notion that the Hungarian minority represents a threat to the national security and the integrity of the country, while also giving

way to further attacks against the Hungarian community, as well as a visible increase in hate speech directed against Hungarians in recent weeks, both within the political discourse and the mainstream media.

We find it shocking that the Charlemagne Prize will be awarded to a politician who voiced grave accusations against a vulnerable minority community, with the sole purpose of gaining political capital, while being fully aware of the fact that in the long term his actions could result in the marginalization of this community and strengthen xenophobic attacks against it.

We believe that the work of a Charlemagne Prize laureate should reflect those European values, which encourage diversity, tolerance and the reconciliation of the peoples of Europe, ethnic peace and harmony between nations. As opposed to this, the appalling and false statement of President Klaus Iohannis brought back dark times characterized by the incitement of ethnic tension, the tearing down of ethnic peace and the intimidation of minority communities. Therefore, we strongly oppose President Iohannis being awarded this prestigious prize, given that his harsh nationalist outburst directed against the Hungarian community, the Hungarian language and culture, seriously damaged Romanian-Hungarian relations, and set back the possibility of political dialogue by several decades. We firmly condemn the President's instigatory rhetoric, which stigmatized an entire community, and we sincerely hope that a politician who incites hatred against a community will not be awarded the Charlemagne Prize, since European values represent the exact opposite of the recent behaviour exhibited by Mr. Klaus Iohannis.

Yours sincerely,



**Erika Benkó**

**President**

**Mikó Imre Minority Rights Legal Services Assistance**

May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania