

Hungarian PM to EU: 'We won't be a colony'

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BRUSSELS - Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Thursday (15 March) accused the EU of colonialism and meddling in his country's domestic affairs.

His words come after Budapest was hit with a €500 million EU funds freeze for its continued budget deficit and with legal action over constitutional changes limiting the independence of media, judges and the central bank.

"We will not be a colony. Hungarians won't live according to the commands of foreign powers, they won't give up their independence or their freedom," Orban told over 100,000 people gathered outside the parliament in Budapest on the anniversary of the country's 1848 revolution against Hapsburg rule.

"As a European nation we demand equal treatment. We will not be second class European citizens. Our rightful demand is to have the same standards apply to us, which apply to other countries," he said.

These words reflect a sense that Brussels is keener to apply its new tough budget rules to smaller countries, than it is to larger ones. Earlier this week, a budget concession was granted to Spain while Hungary was sanctioned.

Orban's centre-right party (Fidesz) enjoys a super-majority in the parliament after a landslide win in the 2010 elections. The political dominance has allowed him to pass sweeping constitutional changes - changes that the European Parliament and democracy watchdogs have since deemed anti-democratic.

An anti-Communist himself, Orban compared EU meddling with Soviet rule: "We are more than familiar with the character of unsolicited comradely assistance, even if it comes wearing a finely tailored suit and not a uniform with shoulder patches."

In his view, "European bureaucrats" look at Budapest with distrust because the government chose "new ways" of tackling public debt and has not shied away from proclaiming the supremacy of nation states.

"If we don't act in time, in the end, the whole of Europe can become a colony of the modern financial system," he said, vowing to 'protect' the Hungarian constitution by any means.

Fidesz' public support has dropped by 20 percent compared to 2010 when it won with over 60 percent of the vote. Last year was marked by anti-government protests following the constitutional changes. Meanwhile, several thousand people - mainly students and grassroots organisations - staged a peaceful demonstration in another part of Budapest on Thursday.

"If we choose to stay (in the EU) then we need to resolve our problems based on the club's rules," Levente Halasz, one of the protesters told Reuters.

(EUobserver.com)