

## **International Solidarity Action: Stop Targeting Hungarian NGOs!**

Since its re-election, the Hungarian government launched a campaign attacking the credibility of Hungarian NGOs and trying to gain controlling power over their funding distributed independently from the government. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, the Hungarian Government meets the representatives of Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein to discuss the European Economic Area / Norway Grants. While talks between the Norwegian and Hungarian officials is under way, a number of NGOs from around the world, from Kenya through Egypt to Slovakia are showing solidarity with Hungarian NGOs by publishing a joint statement at 9am in support of the Hungarian civil sector's independence and calling upon politicians to refrain from pressuring NGOs.

The Norway Financial Mechanism (Norway Grants) is part of an agreement between the EU and Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein on funding projects in less-developed European economies. The Hungarian government launched its attack against the Norway Grants at the beginning of April, only a day after its massive re-election victory. The Norwegian NGO Fund is a small portion of the Norway Grants, and is distributed by a consortium of four Hungarian NGOs, which have previously administered the grants with great success. The accusation is that through the four foundations, Norway is trying to influence Hungarian politics. Norway firmly denied these accusations.

When the Norwegian government rejected the charges, the Hungarian government sent agents of the Government Control Office (KEHI) to audit the Fund's administering organizations. The government has led an escalating campaign accusing the four NGOs, which assisted Norway in disbursing the grants, of political meddling. It said KEHI would audit Okotars, the consortium leader NGO, but sent KEHI agents to two other partner organizations as well. The foundations were threatened with the suspension of their tax number if they refused to cooperate, which step would basically paralyze the NGO. The legal basis of the audit is disputed by the administering organizations of the consortium.

In the past years, NGOs, especially those critical of the government were subjected to defamatory attempts. On May 30, 2014, an article was published, which stated that the government blacklisted independent Hungarian civil organizations which have benefitted from the Norwegian NGO Fund based on their alleged political affiliation. In an emailed statement to Reuters on this day, the government said it had no intention of fighting individual NGOs, but it repeated the charges that the grants sought to exert political influence.

Civil organizations' opportunities for legal advocacy and the room to maneuver are becoming rarer, and media publications may be henceforward constrained to exercise self-censorship because regulations of the media law curtailing the freedom of speech and judicial practices would hold them back from publishing articles which criticize the government.

"We believe that a dynamic and independent civil society plays a fundamental role in a democratic society as one of the key checks and balances to governing power. As

demonstrated by Putin's Russia, the harassment could easily lead to the criminalization of NGOs and effectively hindering their work." - said Hungarian NGO's.

Recommended articles, statements:

<http://www.liberties.eu/en/news/putins-methods-against-criticism>

[http://norvegivilalap.hu/en/government\\_attacks\\_hungarian\\_NGOs](http://norvegivilalap.hu/en/government_attacks_hungarian_NGOs)

<http://english.atlatszo.hu/2014/06/03/hungarian-govt-targets-ngos-atlatszo-hu-is-also-under-assault/>

[http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/transparency\\_international\\_calls\\_for\\_an\\_immediate\\_end\\_to\\_intimidation](http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/transparency_international_calls_for_an_immediate_end_to_intimidation)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/02/us-hungary-norway-funding-ngo-idUSKBN0ED1QW20140602?feedType=RSS&irpc=932>

**Please help our cause by distributing our story to your readers and please send your article's link to Ms. Anna Kertész, Communications Officer of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union at [kertesz.anna@tasz.hu](mailto:kertesz.anna@tasz.hu). Thank you!**

**List of NGOs which have joined the campaign:**

American Civil Liberties Union (US)

Central and Eastern European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health (ASTRA)

Centre for Philanthropy

Centro Italiano Opere Femminili Salesiane - Formazione Professionale (IT)

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Ekopolis Alapítvány

European Foundation Centre

European Schoolhead Association

European Women's Lobby

EWL: European Women's Lobby

Federation for Women and Family Planning/ASTRA Secretariat (Poland/CEE-region)

Global Voices Online

GONG (Croatia)

Government Accountability Project (US)

Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)

ILGA Europe

Irish Council for Civil Liberties

Kárpátok Alapítvány

Kenya Human Rights Commission

Liberties.eu

Liberty (UK)

NGO ALEG: Association for Gender Liberty and Equality (Romania)

NGO Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women of RM – ESE (Macedonia)

NGO Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (Bulgaria)

NGO Centre Women and Modern World (Azerbaijan)

NGO Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (Lithuania)

NGO GERT: Gender Education, Research and Technologies (Bulgaria)  
NGO HERA: Association for Health Education and Research (Macedonia)  
NGO Latvia's Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health (Latvia)  
NGO Real People Real Vision (Georgia)  
NGO Society Without Violence (Armenia)  
NGO Union Women Center (Georgia)  
NGO Women's Rights Center (Armenia)  
ngo.pl itt  
Open Data Albania  
Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres - PpDM  
Poderopedia (Chile)  
Public Concern at work (UK)  
Queer Leaders Forum (Slovakia LGBT)  
Sunlight Foundation (US)  
The International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion  
Transparency International Secretariat  
tranzit.org  
VAWE Network: Women Against Violence Europe itt  
WATCH DOCS (PL)  
Whistleblowing International Network