

RESOLUTION

There is no society without civil society: Hungary needs us.

The work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is essential to Hungarian society. We do diverse and irreplaceable work while striving for the common good and the achievement of democracy: the self-organisation of citizens provides shared opportunities for cultural, educational, health and environmental advocacy. Moreover, it allows groups of citizens to jointly represent their interests, participate in public life, and keep the political power of office holders in check at all times.

We, the undersigned NGOs resolve to reject the Hungarian Government's aspirations to restrict and stigmatise civil society. We are indispensable to Hungarian society to deal with and monitor matters that others do not pay enough attention to. We stand up for ourselves and for each other.

Hungary needs NGOs

Parliament's legislative plan for the first half of 2017 includes the intention to amend the regulation which defines the legal functioning of NGOs. During a press conference held on 14 March 2017, it was announced that Fidesz-led coalition would initiate a five-party consultation on a draft law concerning "foreign-funded" organisations. The actual content of this so-called "national consultation" is yet unknown. However, some politicians have gone so far as to propose that the process be used as a method to "clear away" certain NGOs, while others labelled particular NGOs as foreign agents.

We the undersigned NGOs, strongly protest. Pursuing such a legislative agenda would infringe upon the freedom of association. Furthermore, we reject the attempt to stigmatise NGOs, their clients, sympathisers and supporters. Such a move not only impinges on the perception of the valuable work and credibility of organisations in question, but also limits of democratic expression and the possibility of citizen participation in public affairs as a whole. Based on statements concerning the proposed legislation up until now, the modifications would run contrary to international conventions signed by Hungary, and probably not pass the test of constitutionality.

We maintain that the so-called "national consultation" is an unsuitable method to assess the true facts and state of public opinion. Based on past experience, it is clear that this cannot be a substitute for real social debate.

The current Hungarian regulation regarding the NGO sector provides an adequate framework that guarantees legal safeguards, as well as the transparency and accountability for the activities for which the civil organisations were established. Management transparency is already sufficiently regulated, as highlighted by data made publicly available in a number of press releases.

Therefore, it is unacceptable that we can only keep abreast of information concerning the new legislative ideas and "national consultation" from the press when certain politicians make statements to discredit civil society. We anticipate that the formulation of any new law (amendment) must involve stakeholders and professional debate before it reaches its final form; as one would expect in a democratic constitutional state, and as required by Hungarian law.

We demand that the regulation governing the functioning of civil society's fundraising and activities be transparent, and that it be consistent with international and European standards. Most importantly, the regulation must guarantee the right of citizens to freely associate, organise their activities and search for funds.