

BOTH HUNGARIAN NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS RAISED CONCERNS IN RELATION TO THE MEASURES OF THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT AGAINST NGOS AT AN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS EVENT OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE).



At the OSCE's event [Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014](#) the measures taken by the Hungarian government against the country's NGOs were also discussed. The event, which takes place in Warsaw and commenced on 22 September, is attended by the representatives of OSCE's 57 member states and that of the European Union, and is the most important human rights event of the continent.

In her keynote speech, Elisa Massimino, President and Chief Executive of [Human Rights First](#) stated that "the crackdown on civil society that works to protect the rights of the vulnerable" is a symptom of and leads to "broader insecurity", and governmental attempts to intimidate and silence NGOs endanger security and stability within the region. In that regard, she harshly condemned treating Hungarian NGOs expressing criticism over the government's actions as "foreign agents" and their harassment by authorities. The latter was also considered a hostile step by J. Brian Atwood, U.S. Head of Delegation. Furthermore, another representative of the United States [raised objections](#) against the increasing intimidation of Hungarian civil society already before the conference, on 18 September. In its speech delivered at the Warsaw event, Ambassador Thomas Greminger, Swiss Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, [stressed](#) "the crucial role of civil society to support participating States in the full protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law".

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was also attended by four Hungarian NGOs: the Eötvös Károly Institute (EKINT), the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) and Transparency International Hungary (TI). In their presentation delivered on 23 September, they outlined the state of democratic institutions in Hungary, the governmental steps taken against NGOs and current developments related to corruption.

In their presentation on the Hungarian state of affairs and the current state of democracy, HCLU and EKINT described the process of dismantling constitutionality. "Disrupting the system of checks and balances resulted that even though Hungary has a new Fundamental Law, it has no constitution as understood in a modern sense" – stated Máté Dániel Szabó, Director of Programs of HCLU, and added that "building the illiberal state as currently announced has already been realized by eliminating constitutional institutions".

Although it was not affected by the audit of the Government Control Office, the HHC recently left the government-operated Human Rights Roundtable in objection to the steps taken against the civil society. The developments regarding the governmental offensive were presented by the co-chair of the HHC, András Kristóf Kádár, who considered it “an extremely dangerous development” that “the Hungarian government puts a continually increasing pressure on ‘inconvenient’ NGOs, after it did not succeed in discrediting them through accusations that they are politically positively prejudiced with regard to the opposition”.

Miklós Ligeti, legal director of TI talked about the scandalous re-distribution of tobacco kiosk licenses and the tricky way of how savings cooperatives were nationalized and re-privatized to those with government ties, and showed through these examples how the government abuses its power to ensure undue advantages to certain favoured groups via law-making. According to the expert’s opinion, “the performance of the government in battling corruption is disappointing”. In addition, “if its momentary interests require so, the government is ready to limit the fundamental freedoms of citizens, as happened for example with regard to the right to information, which was restricted by the government to a considerable extent in order to being able to conceal the details of the tobacco retail scandal”.

The participation of the four Hungarian NGOs at the event was supported by the Open Society Foundations.

*The English factsheets on the Hungarian situation, prepared for the event, are available [here](#). The topics addressed by the factsheets are the following:*

- 1. Undermining constitutionality*
- 2. Disrupting the system of checks and balances; weakening independent institutions*
- 3. The violation of particular human rights*
- 4. Free but not fair elections*
- 5. Media regulation; distorting the market*
- 6. Building crony capitalism; opening the door to rent seeking*

*A shorter and a longer version of the timeline of the governmental attacks against the Hungarian NGO sphere are available here:*

- [Timeline – short](#)*
- [Timeline – long](#)*