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The EU Cannot Remain Silent About the Putinization of Hungary Any Longer

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) condemns today's police raids against Hungarian NGOs as politically motivated actions that elevate the illiberal Orban government's attack against civil society to a new, unprecedented level.



by Hungarian Civil Liberties Union September 08, 2014

On the morning of September 8, dozens of policemen from the National Bureau of Investigation (NNI) raided the offices of Ökotárs and Demnet, two NGOs responsible for the distribution of Norway NGO Grants in Hungary. These NGOs have been under attack for several months now because of accusations fabricated by the Orban government, which claimed that the Norway NGO Grant is mismanaged and linked to opposition parties ([read our previous article here](#)). What really worries the government, behind the official propaganda, is that the Norway NGO Grant supports NGOs to strengthen democracy.

Excessive and unwarranted policing

The police are accusing the NGOs of “fraudulent misuse of funds,” which reminds us of current attacks against civil society in countries like Russia and [Azerbaijan](#), where autocratic

governments use these accusations to neutralize independent NGOs that receive funds from international donors.

Earlier this year, the Government Control Office (KEHI) was commissioned to carry out investigations against NGOs in receipt of funds from the Norway NGO Grant. This investigation has been unsuccessful in providing any evidence so far that necessitates the use of this magnitude of police force; the aim is clearly to intimidate civil society and silence critical voices.

HCLU sues Government Control Office

The HCLU has sent a freedom of information request to the Government Control Office to find out who commissioned it to carry out the investigations. The agency denied access to public data, so the HCLU is now suing it for violating the constitutional right to freedom of information.

In July, Prime Minister Orbán made a speech in which he said Hungary is aiming to become an illiberal state. The EU Commission declined comment on his words. Today's actions prove again that the Orbán government is challenging the core values and fundamental principles of the European Union. The HCLU agrees with Vidar Helgesen, the EU minister of Norway, who said, "When the Hungarian government is challenging these values it challenges the EU itself."

Peter Sarosi

Update: During the afternoon of September 8, Hungarian police forces raided the homes of some Ökotárs employees, according to the latest reports.