

To the attention of the Managing Authorities and the Monitoring Committees

On 18 June 2024, Hungary's Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) launched a probe into the Hungarian chapter of global anti-corruption organisation Transparency International.¹ The SPO was established by Act LXXXVIII of 2023.

As members of the Monitoring Committees charged with overseeing the spending of European Union money via Hungary's Partnership Agreement, the operational programmes, the post-Covid Recovery and Resilience Plan and the home affairs funds (including the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument) during the 2021-2027 programming period, the signatories of this letter are following with special attention and with deep concern the SPO targeting Transparency International (TI) Hungary – also a Monitoring Committee member – with an investigation. TI Hungary is also a member of the Anti-Corruption Task Force, an advisory body to the Integrity Authority.

In its official letter to TI Hungary, the SPO alleged that the organisation “is using foreign financial support to perform activities aimed at influencing the will of voters (...) or it is supporting activities to this end.” In other words, TI Hungary is described as a “foreign-funded organisation,” which “may harm or undermine Hungary's sovereignty.” Many of the 62, partly abusive questions the SPO has levelled at TI Hungary are related to TI Hungary's cooperation with European Union institutions or to its participation in different EU procedures.

The signatories of this letter have been delegated by Hungarian civil society organisations to the Monitoring Committees to make sure that Hungary's share of EU funding is spent in accordance with the relevant rules and the approved plans, designed to boost the development of the whole of Hungary. Therefore, as Monitoring Committee members we find the intimidating pressure the SPO attempts to exert through this investigation on a fellow committee member delegated by TI Hungary unacceptable.

We reject in the strongest possible terms the allegation that the organisations participating in the Monitoring Committees or the activities of their delegates in these committees may in any form harm the sovereignty of Hungary. We carry out our duties based on the highest professional standards, in line with our convictions and in full respect of the Hungarian and European Union laws. We would like to highlight that our engagement in the Monitoring Committees is the result of a selection process undertaken by the Hungarian government. We receive a symbolic sum as remuneration from the European Commission for our work in the Monitoring Committees, and using the limited means we have, we try to reach out to the general public as best we can.

We cannot but interpret the investigation against TI Hungary as an attempt by the SPO to intimidate all of us. Therefore, we hereby declare our full support to, and solidarity with, TI Hungary and its staff. We also consider the SPO's simultaneous investigation into Hungary's investigative news portal atlatzso.hu unacceptable.² Even though the organisation operating the news portal is not a Monitoring Committee member, they provide valuable information that may help the Monitoring Committees and the Managing Authorities to uncover potential misuse of EU and public funds.

To enable us to continue our work as Monitoring Committee members, we hereby call for an extraordinary session of the Committees to clarify whether under current Hungarian laws our

¹ <https://transparency.hu/en/news/spo-targets-ti-hungary/>

² <https://english.atlatzso.hu/2024/06/25/the-sovereignty-protection-office-launched-an-investigation-against-atlatzso/>

activities can be regarded as a threat to the country's sovereignty. Inseparable from this is whether the intimidation of anti-corruption and investigative organisations and news portals and their staff is compatible with the efficient operation of the Monitoring Committees.

We propose to invite to the extraordinary Monitoring Committee sessions a representative of the SPO. We also request that the unhindered access of the Hungarian and international media to these extraordinary sessions are ensured.

4 July 2024

Best regards,

Tibor Béres, Autonomy Foundation, member of the Digital Renewal Operational Programme (DIMOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Áron Demeter and Balázs Váradi, Amnesty International Hungary, members of the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP Pusz) Monitoring Committee

Valéria Dósa, Egalipe Network, substitute member of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee

Borbála Fernezelyi, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), member of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

András Kéri, Energiaklub, member of the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan Monitoring Committee and of the Energy Subcommittee of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee

András Léderer, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, member of the Home Affairs Funds Monitoring Committee

András Lukács, Clean Air Action Group, member of the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan Monitoring Committee

Erzsébet Nagy, Democratic Association of Teachers (PDSz), member of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Erzsébet Emese Nagy, Egalipe Network, substitute member of the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP Pusz) Monitoring Committee

András Nun, delegated as member to the Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP Plusz) and as substitute member to the Digital Renewal Operational Programme (DIMOP Plusz) Monitoring Committees by the Autonomy Foundation; also representing the Egalipe Network in the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee and in the Developing Settlements (FETE) Thematic Committee, a sub-committee within the EFOP Plusz Operational Programme

János Orsós, Egalipe Network, member of the education sub-committee of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee

Gergely Pongrácz, Hungarian Transport Club (MKK), member of the Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme (IKOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Réka Sáfrány, Hungarian Women's Lobby, member of the Implementation Operational Programme (VOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Máté Szabó, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), member of the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan Monitoring Committee

Katalin Tarr, National Council of Environmental Organisations, Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee

Tamás Totyik, Democratic Association of Teachers (PDSz), member of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Vivien Vadasi, Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants, member of the Home Affairs Funds Monitoring Committee

Márton Vargha, Clean Air Action Group, member of the Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme (IKOP Plusz) Monitoring Committee

Orsolya Vincze and István Pósfai, K-Monitor, member and substitute member of the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan and the Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP Plusz) Monitoring Committees

Adrienn Zubek, Civic Foundation/Egalipe Network, member of the Partnership Agreement and the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP Plusz) Monitoring Committees