



## OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference 2025

### Plenary Session 10: Fundamental Freedoms II Freedom of peaceful association and human rights defenders

16 October 2025

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC), founded in 1989, is an independent human rights watchdog dedicated to protecting human dignity through legal and public activities. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee wishes to draw the attention of the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to the alarmingly shrinking civic space and the persistent obstacles faced by human rights defenders in Hungary.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders are vital for a healthy democracy and a society where people can enjoy their fundamental freedoms. To achieve this, CSOs should be able to work without fear in a supportive environment. However, for the past over 10 years, Hungarian independent CSOs have been facing an increasing number of challenges which severely hinder them in carrying out their legitimate work. These have included legislative changes that stigmatised and even criminalised civil society activities and in general had a restrictive impact on civil society environment; administrative measures designed to hamper the operation of CSOs; the constant shrinking of avenues of cooperation and dialogue with domestic authorities; an unfavourable environment in terms of funding and financial viability; as well as smear campaigns and stigmatising rhetoric used by government representatives and governing party politicians that question the legitimacy of CSO work, resulting in a strong chilling effect. These attacks against independent civil society form an integral part of Hungary's rule of law backsliding, and have intensified since the OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference of 2024.<sup>1</sup>

After a decade of constant smear campaigns and harassment of targeted civic actors and recurring legal restrictions of civil space, a further escalation has been observed with the adoption of the Sovereignty Protection Act in December 2023, and the creation of its implementing body, the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) in 2024 tasked with collecting information and publishing 'reports' on actors viewed as exerting foreign influence on public life. Accordingly, the SPO has publicised investigations against leading watchdogs and media (e.g., TI Hungary, Átlátszó) with sweeping access to state and intelligence data and is regularly portraying<sup>2</sup> EU-funded programmes<sup>3</sup> and organisations as a threat to Hungary's sovereignty. Not even the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) is spared.<sup>4</sup> The European Commission referred the Act to the CJEU for breaching EU law; the Court

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<sup>1</sup> See the HHC's detailed submission to the 2024 WHDC: [https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/10/OSCE-Warsaw-Human-Dimension-Conference\\_Fundamental-freedoms\\_HU-CSO-input\\_02102024.pdf](https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/10/OSCE-Warsaw-Human-Dimension-Conference_Fundamental-freedoms_HU-CSO-input_02102024.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/A-Horizont-programok-szerepe-a-globalista-halozat-mukodeseben.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/Az-Europai-Bizottsag-CERV-programja-lgy-nyitotta-meg-Brusszel-a-penzcsapot-a-Soros-halozat-finanszirozasara.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/dokumentumok/szuverenitasi-kockazatok-az-unios-birosagi-aktivizmus.pdf>

placed the case on an expedited procedure in February 2025.<sup>5</sup> The Venice Commission had already found that the law's scope and the SPO's powers unduly restrict rights and risk arbitrary interference with the freedoms of association and expression.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop and building on this architecture, in May 2025 the Government tabled the Bill on the Transparency of Public Life,<sup>7</sup> that would allow the Government to blacklist CSOs, independent media, and even for-profit companies deemed “sovereignty risks”; block or hinder to the extent of practical impossibility their funding from outside of Hungary, while imposing administrative limitations on receiving domestic funding that in practice make that impossible, too; monitor bank accounts; fine, suspend or dissolve targeted entities. The SPO would be tasked to propose which entities would be blacklisted, without appropriate legal remedies.

The adoption of the proposal was postponed in June to the autumn parliamentary session and is currently pending.

## Recommendations

**We call on the OSCE and OSCE Participating States to**

1. **Urge the Government** to abandon the May 2025 Bill and repeal existing legislation that contributes to a shrinking civic space.
2. **Continue monitoring** the situation of human rights defenders in Hungary and intensify efforts to empower and support them, including through political, legal, and financial assistance.
3. **Urge the Government of Hungary** to fully implement the OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Most notably, the Government should be urged to refrain from using accusatory and labelling rhetoric against human rights defenders and independent civil society organisations; instead, it should be encouraged to take proactive steps to counter discrediting of human rights defenders by political leaders and in the media.
4. **Call on the Government of Hungary** to ensure non-politicized access to domestic public funding for all civil society organisations, including those working to promote democracy, fundamental rights, and the rule of law; and ensure that funding processes are open, transparent and inclusive.
5. **Encourage the Government of Hungary** to strengthen the dialogue between the Government and civil society.

<sup>5</sup> See the case file, including relevant submissions at the CJEU website:

<https://curia.europa.eu/juris/documents.jsf?nat=or&mat=or&pcs=Oor&jur=C%2CT%2CF&num=C-829%252F24&for=&jge=&dates=&language=en&pro=&cit=none%252CC%252CCJ%252CR%252C2008E%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252C%252Ctrue%252Cfalse%252Cfalse&oqp=&td=%3BALL&avg=&lgrc=en&page=1&lg=&cjd=2001426>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD%282024%29001-e&utm>

<sup>7</sup> See all documents, including a translation of the Bill and a joint civil society legal analysis of the proposal at <https://helsinki.hu/en/operation-starve-and-strangle-20250522/>