

TIMELINE OF GOVERNMENTAL ATTACKS AGAINST HUNGARIAN NGO SPHERE

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Since the elections in 2010, the current governing party has systematically undermined the rule of law in Hungary, seriously disrupting the system of checks and balances. The adoption of the new constitution without the consent of the opposition and the widely criticized media regulation were followed by legislative steps weakening independent institutions (e.g. the Constitutional Court, the judiciary and the Ombudsman system) and violating human rights (e.g. the right to fair trial) in mass numbers. These legislative steps were accompanied by the early removal of leaders of independent institutions and the “court-packing” of the Constitutional Court. As shown by the international criticism e.g. on behalf of the European Union and the Council of Europe, several rules adopted by the governing majority were not in compliance with democratic values and international standards. The series of governmental attacks against Hungarian NGOs, which organizations operate by their nature as checks and critics of the state power and fight for reinforcing the rule of law and ensuring the protection of human rights, is another step in the process aimed at establishing an “illiberal state”.

These attacks included condemning public statements by high-ranking state officials (including the Prime Minister) alleging that some NGOs are closely linked to political parties and/or serve “foreign interests”; an illegitimate state audit by the Government Control Office into the use of the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund; criminal procedures launched against members of the consortium of NGOs distributing the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund; a police raid of their offices (later found unlawful by the investigation judge); and the suspension of their tax numbers. Even though the official proceedings launched as part of the governmental attacks against the Hungarian consortium of NGOs distributing the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund and organizations supported by the NGO Fund ceased or were terminated (without any criminal charges brought) by the beginning of 2016, critical and threatening statements from the government and the governing parties against human rights and watchdog NGOs continued, primarily targeting NGOs supported by the Open Society Foundations.

<p>14-15 August 2013</p>	<p>NGOs “serving foreign interests” are listed by government-friendly newspapers; it is alleged that the “crew” of György Soros has an “outstanding role” in distributing the money in the framework of the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund. Allegations are declined both by the Ökotárs Foundation (which leads the Hungarian consortium of fund operators) and the Norwegian government.</p>
<p>17 August 2013</p>	<p>The spokesperson of the governing party Fidesz echoes the newspapers’ above allegations. Later on, in a civil procedure launched against the spokesperson and the Fidesz by an NGO, they do not even try to substantiate the spokesperson’s statements.</p>
<p>8 April 2014</p>	<p>The head of the Prime Minister’s Office claims in a letter to the Norwegian government that the Ökotárs is in his view closely linked to an opposition party. Allegations of political influence are again rejected by the Ökotárs and Norway.</p>
<p>11 April 2014</p>	<p>It turns out that Századvég Foundation, an important background institution of the government, also participated in the tender for the position of fund operator with regard to the NGO Fund, but was not considered impartial and was not selected.</p>

30 April 2014	Senior representative of the Prime Minister’s Office calls the operators of the Hungarian NGO Fund “party-dependent, cheating nobodies”.
6 May 2014	The head of the Prime Minister’s Office requests from Norway in vain that the NGO Fund in Hungary is “suspended” , and indicates that the government wishes to enter into negotiations as to the new fund operator.
21 May 2014	The government requests the Government Control Office (GCO) , a state agency vested with the right to audit state money, to launch an audit into how the NGO Fund is managed. The secretariat of the donor countries (the Financial Mechanism Office, FMO) states that the audit is in breach of the respective agreements .
28 May – 1 June 2014	It comes to light that a governmental list has been prepared about potentially “problematic” NGO projects under the EEA/Norway Grants, corresponding with the list of NGOs cited by newspapers in August 2013. A governmental list of “left wing” and “incompatible” evaluators also emerges.
2 June 2014	The GCO carries out an on-site audit at three members of the consortium of fund operators and demands that certain documents are handed over . The Norwegian authorities express their strong concern about Hungary’s actions.
12 June 2014	After a high-level state meeting, Norway expresses that halting the GCO’s audit is one of the preconditions for lifting the earlier suspension of the EEA and Norway Grants . (Payments to Hungary under the EEA and Norway Grants scheme were suspended in May 2014 because Hungary has breached the respective agreements.)
16 June 2014	Even though the FMO asked the GCO earlier to address further requests to the FMO instead of the fund operators, the GCO requests another set of documents from the Ökotárs, which does not comply with the request after the FMO asks it not to.
25-27 June 2014	A government-friendly newspaper falsely states that an audit report prepared by Ernst & Young supports the state’s accusations. The government refers for the first time to the possibility that the Ökotárs may have committed a criminal offence .
June 2014	The GCO requests , with a very short deadline, project documentation and organizational materials from 58 NGOs supported by the NGO Fund . Some of the NGOs question the legal basis of the audit , but comply with the request (taking also into account that the GCO may suspend their tax numbers in case of non-cooperation). Four NGOs decide to make project documentation available on their websites instead of submitting it to the GCO.
21 July 2014	The GCO sends another request for documents to Ökotárs , now threatening to impose fines and/or to suspend the organization’s tax number in case of non-cooperation. The new documents concern also the NGOs supported . The Ökotárs questions why these documents are necessary to achieve the stated goal of the investigation.
23 July 2014	Upon the complaints of NGOs the Ombudsperson of Hungary concludes that the interpretation of Norway shall be also taken into account with regard to the audit of

	the funds. However, the Ombudsperson did not take any further action.
<i>26 July 2014</i>	In the speech declaring that he and his government build an “illiberal state”, the Prime Minister says that their efforts in that regard are obstructed by civil society organizations, and refers to NGOs as “paid political activists who are trying to help foreign interests” .
<i>August 2014</i>	A criminal procedure is launched against the Ökotárs on the suspicion of fraud by an individual; the underlying criminal offence is altered to fraudulent misuse of funds later on.
<i>3 September 2014</i>	It is announced that the GCO initiated a criminal procedure on the suspicion of “unauthorized financial activities” , supposedly against the Ökotárs, which states that it has indeed given loans to NGOs from its own capital to help with the financing of their EU-projects, but did not derive any benefit from it, this activity was included in its public reports, and is not related to the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund.
<i>4 September 2014</i>	The Hungarian DPA obliges the Ökotárs to disclose the list of non-supported applicants and the justification for not supporting them to a government-friendly television channel.
<i>8 September 2014</i>	Offices of fund operators Ökotárs and DemNet are raided by the police , who show up in disproportionately high numbers; homes of certain staff members are searched. The police especially seize documents concerning the 13 “blacklisted” NGOs , giving rise to suspicions that the criminal procedure was used to access documents the GCO could not. The Norwegian Minister of EEA and EU Affairs states that the police raid was “completely unacceptable”.
<i>11 September 2014</i>	The scope of the GCO’s audit is extended to funds received by the Ökotárs in the framework of the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme and from other state budget sources.
<i>15 September 2014</i>	In his speech delivered at the opening of the autumn session of the Parliament Prime Minister Viktor Orbán suggests that NGOs apply double standards .
<i>18-24 September 2014</i>	The tax number of fund operators is suspended . Later, fund operators request a judicial review of the decision suspending their tax numbers.
<i>23-24 September 2014</i>	U.S. President’s statement on Hungary intimidating NGOs is labelled as being without any factual basis by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
<i>1 October 2014</i>	A representative of the Prime Minister’s Office says that the reason behind the U.S. President’s above statement is that American political circles fear for their “network” in Hungary .
<i>22 October 2014</i>	The GCO publishes its audit report , containing generalized and highly questionable critical conclusions. Later on, Norway states that the NGO Fund donors will not accept the GCO’s audit report and engage in discussions based on it, and will base their evaluation of the NGO Fund on an independent audit instead.

12 November 2014	The GCO initiates criminal procedure on the basis of the report and requests an extraordinary tax audit on the basis of its findings.
15 December 2014	The Prime Minister states in an interview that he would back legislation to force NGOs funded from abroad to be specially registered , because it's important to know "who's in the background" of such groups.
16 December 2014	The Prime Minister's Office decides to carry out an own investigation regarding the use of the Swiss NGO Fund , and that until that investigation is over, no payments can be realized from the Swiss NGO Fund.
19 January 2015	The Ökotárs informs the press that state investigations are extended to NGOs only receiving grants from the NGO Fund : two such NGOs are investigated by the national tax authority, while the prosecutor's office investigates the lawfulness of the operations of another two such NGOs (these are not criminal investigations).
23 January 2015	A court decision concludes with regard to the police raid of consortium members in September 2014 that the ordering of the searches and seizures conducted in the offices of consortium members and homes of Ökotárs representatives has been unlawful .
11 February 2015	An independent evaluation , conducted by a consulting company commissioned by the FMO concludes e.g. that the "selection of the current Fund Operator in Hungary has been an excellent one" and that it is "of critical importance that the NGO Programme in Hungary continues its implementation independently from the Government and operated by the current consortium".
20 February 2015	The head of the Prime Minister's Office states that NGOs should not only account for where their money comes from, but also for their leaders' personal assets .
23 February 2015	The court sets a date for the hearing in the case of the suspension of three consortium members' tax numbers, and suspends the application of the tax authority's respective decision until the end of the court procedure, allowing the NGOs to continue their operation.
28 May 2015	The court proceeding in the tax number case of the fourth consortium member decides to suspend the court procedure and files a request to the Constitutional Court for the constitutional review of the decision suspending the organization's tax number and of the government decree on the GCO .
28 May 2015	An independent accounting company commissioned by Norway to review the NGO Fund's distribution in Hungary concludes that the handling of the fund and the evaluation mechanisms in place complied with the respective regulations .
28 May 2015	The National Anti-Corruption Program for 2015–2018 is published, which foresees severing rules on NGOs regarding their transparency and examining the possibilities of widening the scope of civil society leaders obliged to submit a declaration of property.
30 June 2015	The prosecutorial investigation into the lawfulness of the operation of seven NGOs who received funding from the NGO Fund is concluded and finds only administrative irregularities regarding three NGOs (others have ceased to operate or the legal basis of the investigation ceased).

<p>5 October 2015</p>	<p>The Constitutional Court rules that the legal provision on the basis of which the tax number of the consortium members was suspended is constitutional. The decision was delivered with a 4-1 vote. In her dissenting opinion, one of the CC judges claims that the challenged provision renders judicial review formal and void and therefore violates the right to a fair procedure.</p>
<p>7 October 2015</p>	<p>The criminal investigation against Ökotárs and 17 other NGO's is terminated by the tax authority's investigative unit, partly because no criminal offence has been committed, and partly because the continuation of the investigation is unlikely to yield any result.</p>
<p>21 October 2015</p>	<p>The head of the Prime Minister's Office claims in an interview that despite the termination of the investigation, he is of the view that Ökotárs carries out its activities in an unlawful manner when it distributes the funds discriminatively.</p>
<p>30 October 2015</p>	<p>The Prime Minister says in a radio interview that the flooding in of migrants is enhanced by those activists "who support everything that weakens the nation states", and that this Western way of thinking and network of activists may best be hallmarked by the name of George Soros.</p>
<p>6 November 2015</p>	<p>An MP of the coalition partner of Fidesz sends an open letter to a number of NGO's supported by the Open Society Foundations (OSF), stating that George Soros regards it his task to eliminate the borders of sovereign countries so that refugees could have an easier access to Europe, and asking the NGOs to clarify whether it is fair to presume that they support George Soros's ideas.</p>
<p>24 November 2015</p>	<p>The FMO and the Hungarian government conclude an agreement about lifting the suspension of EEA/Norway Grants funds for government projects, an express condition of this agreement being that the Hungarian government terminates all proceedings against organizations handling and receiving grants from the NGO Fund, and that it guarantees that it would not launch any more such proceedings against these NGOs.</p>
<p>9-11 December 2015</p>	<p>The suspension of the disbursement of funds to Hungary under the EEA/Norway Grants scheme is lifted.</p>
<p>11 December 2015</p>	<p>The head of the Prime Minister's Office makes anti-NGO statements at the delegate congress of Fidesz, including that there are NGOs which are paid to demonstrate and advocate for certain causes and who enjoy the support of George Soros.</p>
<p>January–February 2016</p>	<p>Procedures launched by the National Tax and Customs Administration into NGOs are closed by January–February 2016 without any result, the tax authority stating that no further official proceedings would be launched on the basis of the investigations.</p>
<p>16 February 2016</p>	<p>The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders points out after his visit to Hungary that human rights defenders in the country "are increasingly working in a rather polarised and politicised environment," and criticises attempts to delegitimize defenders and undermine their peaceful and legitimate activities through criminal defamation and excessive administrative and financial pressure.</p>
<p>20 May 2016</p>	<p>The Prime Minister states in an interview that organizations sponsored by George Soros are a "background power," who were not elected by anyone, but "they still constantly aim to gain political influence".</p>

<p>25 May 2016</p>	<p>A news portal enjoying state subvention lists NGOs supported by George Soros, referring to them as “Soros-network”, expressing concerns about the transparency of these NGOs’ financing. The list of NGOs corresponds with the earlier lists that appeared in relation to the government attacks against the NGOs receiving support through the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund.</p>
<p>25 May 2016</p>	<p>The head of the Prime Minister’s Office states that the “entire domestic pro-migrant civil sector belongs to the sphere of influence of Soros,” claiming that his opinion is based on reports of the national security services. After called before the Parliament’s National Security Committee regarding this issue, he states that no NGOs are under surveillance by national security services.</p>
<p>8 June 2016</p>	<p>The Eötvös Károly Policy Institute (EKINT, one of the organizations listed earlier as part of the “Soros-network”) reports that an electronic device attached to telephone and internet cables has been found in its offices, which, according to an expert opinion, is suitable for data transmission.</p>
<p>11 June 2016</p>	<p>The government spokesperson states in an interview that NGOs linked to George Soros had a positive role after the transition, but nowadays they have crossed the line and try to intervene with the life of Central and Eastern European societies through illicit measures.</p>
<p>29 June 2016</p>	<p>A final court judgment concludes that the Fidesz had violated the Hungarian Helsinki Committee’s (HHC) right to a good reputation. The lawsuit was launched by the HHC in 2015, after Fidesz had stated that the HHC is a “fake” NGO, which “executes the political orders” of international actors and tampers with data concerning asylum-seekers.</p>
<p>29 June 2016 and 6 October 2016</p>	<p>On 29 June 2016, the Supreme Court decides in a lawsuit launched by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) in 2014 that the GCO shall disclose on whose instruction the GCO’s state audit and investigation into NGOs was launched. The documentation acquired based on the above court decision shows that the state audit of the GCO into NGOs was launched on the basis of the instruction of the Prime Minister himself.</p>
<p>26 September 2016</p>	<p>MP Szilárd Németh, Vice President of the Fidesz and of the Parliament’s National Security Committee announces that he has requested the National Security Committee and the national security services to inspect the organizations “cooperating with the Soros-network”, and states that these NGOs participate in politics unlawfully, with “black money”.</p>
<p>14 December 2016</p>	<p>The submitted legislative agenda of the Parliament for 2017 spring foresees the amendment of the law on civil organizations and the scope of those obliged to submit a declaration of assets.</p>
<p>10-11 January 2017</p>	<p>MP Szilárd Németh, the Vice President of the Fidesz states that “the Soros empire’s fake civil organizations [...] have to be rolled back with every means, and [...] they have to be swept out of here”, and that the Fidesz will support legislative efforts such as the planned law prescribing that NGO leaders have to submit a declaration of assets. The next day he specifically names the HCLU, the HHC and Transparency International Hungary (TI Hungary) as the NGOs that have to be “swept out”, claiming that these NGOs want to have a say in politics without “legitimate participation”.</p>

<p>11 January 2017</p>	<p>An MP of the coalition partner of Fidesz states that there are NGOs which, even though they are registered as civil organizations, have primarily political goals, and even though they may not receive public funds, they may be corrupted, so the suggestion that NGO leaders should submit a declaration of assets may be justified.</p>
<p>12 January 2017</p>	<p>MP Szilárd Németh refers to national security risks with regard to the activities of the HCLU and the HHC in relation to refugees, and says that those NGOs about whom it turns out that “they serve the interests of foreign powers and the international big business as opposed to Hungarians, have nothing to do here”. Meanwhile, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office states that “sweeping out” NGOs as such is not on the government’s agenda, but those who want to influence politics have to undertake publicity.</p>
<p>13 January 2017</p>	<p>The government spokesperson suggests in relation to NGOs funded by George Soros that people calling themselves human rights defenders and civils fraternize or cooperate with terrorist and human trafficking organizations. He also states that as far as its content goes, the government agrees with the statements of MP Szilárd Németh, and that even though the NGOs in question were not elected by anybody, they still form opinions and try to take concrete political steps.</p>
<p>10 February 2017</p>	<p>The Prime Minister says the following in his annual state of the nation speech: “in 2017 we will also need to take up the struggle against international organizations’ increasingly strong activists. [...] It is a problem that foreign funding is being secretly used to influence Hungarian politics. [...] We are [talking about] paid activists from international organizations and their branch offices in Hungary.” The Prime Minister also states that “the organizations of George Soros are working tirelessly to bring hundreds of thousands of migrants into Europe”.</p>
<p>17 February 2017</p>	<p>The head of the Fidesz parliamentary group says that the Fidesz plans to submit a Bill to the Parliament with the aim to ensure the transparency of the Hungarian branches of international organizations, the reason behind the planned Bill being that “the Hungarian voters should know if these organizations want to exert influence in Hungary by using foreign funding”.</p>
<p>20 February 2017</p>	<p>In his speech opening the Parliament’s spring session, the Prime Minister announces that a “national consultation” will be held about five threats to Hungary, including “illegal migration” and the “foreign influencing attempts”.</p>
<p>21 February 2017</p>	<p>It is reported that at the parliamentary group meeting of Fidesz the NGOs supported by the OSF, and specifically the HCLU, the HHC and TI Hungary were named as the target group of the envisaged Bill on the foreign funding of NGOs. According to sources, a new registry category, the “organization supported from abroad” may be introduced for those NGOs whose foreign funding exceeds a certain sum or proportion.</p>
<p>21 February 2017</p>	<p>It is reported that even though the Prime Minister’s Office claimed that the Hungarian government will have a veto power with regard to the selection of the Hungarian organization managing the funds from the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund, Norway states that those managing the distribution of the NGO Fund will be selected by the donor countries instead.</p>



For FAQ in English regarding the EEA/Norway Grants and the NGO Fund in Hungary, see the information issued by the Royal Norwegian Embassy [here](#).

A communication brief on the government attacks against Hungarian NGOs between 2013 and 2016 is available [here](#) in English.