



Brussels, 2 February 2015

Ref: B1653

Dear Member of the LIBE Committee,

THEIR BACKS TO THE WALL: CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER PRESSURE IN HUNGARY

Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to our enclosed report [*Their backs to the wall: civil society under pressure in Hungary*](#), published today. The report details the orchestrated attacks on rights groups by the Hungarian authorities over the past year. These have included public smearing, criminal investigations, office raids and the seizure of equipment, and a politically motivated audit which could eventually lead to the closure of organisations.

In May 2014, government officials started accusing a number of NGOs of being “paid political activists” who were “attempting to enforce foreign interests” in Hungary. These allegations were regularly repeated, and been echoed in hostile media campaigns, seeking to discredit the NGOs and delegitimise their work in the eyes of the public. The pressure escalated, and the government ordered an audit of 59 NGOs distributing and receiving grants from the EEA/Norway grant. Four NGOs are now facing separate legal proceedings that could lead to them losing their tax registration numbers and effectively being shut down.

These actions against Hungarian NGOs have drawn strong criticism, including from the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. In December 2014, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr. Nils Muižnieks expressed concerns about the stigmatisation of NGOs, and declared himself particularly worried about further developments, including the audit and subsequent criminal proceedings.

It is important to emphasise that the human right to freedom of association is not violated only when activists are jailed and NGOs closed down; the impact of the attacks on civil society are already being felt in Hungary, and have had a chilling effect on those speaking out against human rights abuses.

Ultimately, the price of harassment and intimidation of NGOs working in the field of human rights and other areas of public interest is paid by the people these NGOs work to protect. Victims of domestic violence, members of marginalised minority groups, and those defending the rights of others, to name a few, will have less support. Society in Hungary and other European Union (EU) member states will be worse off if critical voices are silenced.

Amnesty International is encouraged by the persistent attention that the LIBE Committee has shown in scrutinising the human rights situation in Hungary, most recently by organising a hearing on 22 January 2015. As stated in our report, we urge the EP to continue to speak out against attacks on freedom of association in Hungary, and to hold the other EU institutions to account for their action in response to these abuses.

It is crucial that the Hungarian authorities end their campaign against independent voices in civil society, and that the EU, and the international community more broadly, insist that they do so.

We thank you for your attention and remain at your disposal for a meeting on this, or any further information you may need.

Yours sincerely,

Ivorna McGowan
Acting Director
Amnesty International European Institutions Office