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## Hungary's New Bill Threatens to End Civil Society and Empower the Government to Persecute with Impunity

Raphaël Kergueno · Monday, May 19th, 2025

*Proposed law aims to annihilate critical civil society organisations and independent media.*

A new legislative proposal in Hungary, deceptively titled the “Transparency of Public Life” bill, would give the government sweeping and authoritarian powers to punish organisations it deems a threat to national sovereignty. Entities receiving foreign support without government authorisation could be fined up to 25 times the amount received, with failure to pay resulting in activity ban and forced closure.

The law would apply not only to EU grants and foreign donations as small as 5€, but could also target domestic donations within Hungary. Its vague language leaves wide room for political misuse, threatening a broad swathe of civil society — including independent media, watchdog organisations, and ordinary citizens engaged in public life.

The 2023 Law on the Defence of National Sovereignty established the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) — a powerful and opaque body tasked with combating “foreign influence” in broad, undefined terms. This new proposed law attempts to expand the SPO’s authority to target specific organisations (NGOs, media, academic, LGBTQ+ groups) as “threats” if they receive foreign funding or challenge government-aligned values. However, if passed, this law would not only endanger civil society and public participation, but it could also be used to sanction for-profits of the corporate sector as well as companies registered in other EU member states. This clearly runs the risk to embolden similar authoritarian measures across the EU.

Transparency International calls on EU member states and EU institutions to condemn at highest levels this attempt to eliminate the last traces of independent civil society, and to advance the Article 7(1) EU procedure by recommending actions or voting to recognise a serious breach of EU values by Hungary. It urges the European Commission to request interim measures by the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in the process relating to Hungary’s sovereignty law — and the Sovereignty Protection Office enforcing it, aiming to suspend application. Transparency International also calls on the Commission to bring Hungary back to court for failing to comply

with the CJEU's ruling on the 2017 Transparency Law — and to seek financial penalties for continued non-compliance.

**Quote from Transparency International Chair François Valérian.**

“Authoritarianism and hostility to foreign countries never serve the citizens, they only serve those abusing their power. The proposed bill marks a dark turning point not just for Hungary, but for Europe. It is designed to crush dissent, silence civil society, and dismantle the pillars of democracy. We call on EU leaders to act now, not only to protect Hungarian citizens, but to preserve democratic life for all citizens across the Union.”

**Quote from Transparency International EU Director Nick Aiossa.**

“The Commission is the ultimate guardian of the EU's treaties, and it is high time it acted as such. If adopted, this law will be immediately weaponised against those trying to preserve the rule of law in Hungary. The EU institutions cannot and must not sit idly by while Hungary targets civil society and destroys democracy from the inside.”

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