

**Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission**

**Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament**

**Herman Van Rompuy, acting President of European Council**

**Donald Tusk, President of European Council**

**Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights**

Date: September 22, 2014

**Re: Expression of Solidarity with the Hungarian civil sector**

Dear Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission,

Dear Mr. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament,

Dear Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, acting President of European Council,

Dear Mr. Donald Tusk, newly appointed President of European Council,

Dear Mr. Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe.

We, the representatives of European civil society organizations consider a well-developed civil society to be an essential part of healthy and stable democracies. As active and responsible citizens, we proudly share the common values, political culture and legal norms of the European Union and its allies.

We therefore feel obliged to respond to the events of the last few days, which are taking place under the guise of a democratic political and legally legitimate struggle in Hungary, a fellow member of the European and Transatlantic political alliances.

We are highly concerned that, since its re-election in April 2014, Viktor Orbán's government is undertaking a campaign that compromises the credibility and threatens the independence of Hungarian civil society organizations.

On Monday, September 8, a new line was crossed, when police officers and investigators raided the offices of Ökotárs and DemNet Foundations as well as apartments of Foundations' staff in search of documents and files connected with their statutory operation. Both foundations have outstanding reputation in the Central and Eastern Europe NGO sector for their expertise, experience, high standards and good practice. These were the qualities which qualified them to be selected as operators of the EEA Civic Fund in Hungary whose major donor is Norwegian government. The fact that this Fund is administered outside the direct control of the Orbán's government supporting

organizations that monitor rule of law, human rights violations and discriminatory action is at the core of the case, which in recent days has grown into an unprecedented demonstration of force.

The harassment of Hungarian civil society organizations by Orbán's government in the attempt to superimpose full state control over their activity is a direct violation of basic freedoms and tenets of European Union. It is unacceptable that such conduct - modelled on the mistreatment of NGO sector in autocratic regimes of Belarus, Russia and Azerbaijan - be tolerated in the heart of the European Union.

We, the undersigned representatives of NGOs in Europe, express our solidarity with the independent NGO sector in Hungary.

We express our desire for cooperation within international structures, where there is unquestioned place for free, independent and critical thinking.

We call for remembrance of the recent historical experience of societies in Central and Eastern Europe. We express our commitment to refuse dictatorial politics, and we denounce this manifestation of authoritarian power in Hungary.

Dear Sirs,

In the light of recent developments in Hungary, we, the undersigned representatives of NGOs from all across Europe, call upon the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council to not remain inactive, and to take the lead in undertaking both diplomatic efforts and effective measures to prevent the undermining of democratic values in an EU member state.

Since the current situation in Hungary constitutes another serious breach of fundamental values on which the European Union is founded, we call upon the EU to apply the measures provided by the Treaty of Lisbon in article 7 to tackle serious and persistent breaches of democracy, freedom and the rule of law in any of the EU Member States. We call upon the European Commission and the European Parliament to use the new framework<sup>1</sup> for addressing systemic threats to the rule of law adopted in March 2014 and enter a dialogue with Hungarian government to prevent the further escalation of civic rights violation.

We are concerned that the action of the Hungarian government should not be overlooked as one of many insignificant events. Civic organizations, which are now under attack, act as a bulwark in the effort to protect and promote the very key values on which the EU was founded: respect for human rights, democracy, freedom, citizens' participation, tolerance and solidarity.

We are convinced that Hungarian civic organizations should not remain alone in their struggle to defend their legitimacy and independence, and that this case deserves the attention of the highest European institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-237\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-237_en.htm)