

Statement Supporting NGOs in Hungary

As the leaders of private philanthropies in the United States and Europe, we are greatly concerned by the repeated efforts of the Hungarian government to restrict and stigmatize nongovernmental organizations operating in the public interest. This includes actions in recent years that have threatened the existence of organizations supported by Norwegian civil society grants and, more recently, steps that may force the closure of the Central European University. We are especially concerned with efforts to require entities that receive even modest international financial support to register as foreign-funded organizations and list this designation on their website and all publications, or face fines and potential closure.

We support transparency in the public, private, and social sectors and the reasonable regulation of civil society organizations, but some of the proposals currently under consideration go well beyond what is reasonable and would have the effect of discriminating against certain organizations and stigmatizing those that operate at world-class levels and are able to attract financial support from private foundations in Europe and globally. Hungarian law already requires all civil society organizations to report their sources of income and other support to the National Office for the Judiciary. We oppose public communications campaigns that undermine public trust in civil society organizations, falsely implying that such organizations in general, and those receiving foreign funding in particular, may be more prone to engaging in illegitimate activities than others. We are especially concerned that listing NGOs in a special registry of foreign-funded organizations may open the door to further, discriminatory treatment of these NGOs.

The ability to source funding from international donors is an important signal of the international quality and competitiveness of Hungarian NGOs, and it reflects Hungary's solidarity with the European commitment to civil society. We hope the Hungarian government will honor the country's and Europe's commitment to the freedom of its citizens to form organizations, debate the issues of the day, and seek financial support from all legitimate sources.

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