

People in Need (PIN) is concerned about the deteriorating situation of civil society in Transnistria caused by the adoption of the 2018 NGO legislation. To a great extent, it copies Russia's notorious "foreign agent" law and it forbids local non-profit organizations that receive foreign donations to engage in "political activity" under the threat of liquidation. According to senior UN expert on human rights Thomas Hammarberg this "ambiguous legislation" has to be reviewed as it "intimidates a broad range of civil society and human rights activism."

Since the law's adoption in February 2018, it has become clear that the Transnistrian de-facto authorities are determined to use it as an instrument to exercise pressure on local civil society organizations (CSOs) and to limit the freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly in the region even further.

Under the legislation, any public debate or discussion touching upon social issues can be interpreted as a political activity and can become a motive for shutting down the host organization. The Information and Legal Center Apriori, one of the most active CSOs in the region whose work is devoted to empowering of the local civil society and the promotion of basic human rights and freedoms, has become the first target of the new law.

The de-facto authorities interpreted two discussions that took place in 2018 (only one of them was organized by Apriori, in the second case Apriori merely provided the venue) as a "political activity." Subsequently, the State Prosecutor's Office issued a verdict finding Apriori guilty of violating the new law. The document contained multiple mistakes and was appealed by Apriori first in the Tiraspol City Court and then in the Supreme Court. They lost in both cases.

PIN was following the situation closely and we strongly believe that Apriori's right to a fair and public trial was violated in this case. Moreover, since November 2018 other kinds of pressure were exerted on Apriori. A check based on an anonymous complaint was initiated by the local Fire Department; there also was an attempt to pressure the landlord of Apriori's office into breaking the lease. On June 17, 2019, Apriori lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Court asking it to recognize the new NGO law as unconstitutional. They are currently awaiting the first session.

While Apriori's case is the only one that became public and received media attention, other organizations in the region were either served with a similar verdict or received "a warning" from special services requiring them to eliminate any traces of "political activity" from their work.

It is therefore clear that the new legislation presents a serious threat to effective and independent functioning of CSOs in Transnistria. PIN urges the de-facto authorities of Transnistria to stop exerting pressure on CSOs and to revise the law. We also call on the OSCE/ODIHR stakeholders to encourage the the-facto authorities to revise the NGO legal framework.