



Full-fledged democracy under attack in Hungary

2013 Human Dimension Implementation meeting

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In the past few years the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has been keeping a close eye on developments in Hungary. The background is a range of rapid changes to essential laws introduced by the FIDESZ government led by Viktor Orbán. A landslide victory in the 2010 elections gave the party a 2/3 parliamentary majority, and allowed it to adopt new laws without proper consultation with the opposition or with civil society.

European institutions and organizations, including the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, have been alarmed by the direction and the pace of these reforms, seeing them as undermining some of the key requirements of a full-fledged democracy, including the independence of the judiciary, free media and the maintenance of basic checks and balances.

Clearly, compromising the independence of institutions central to the rule of law and democracy should be a cause for alarm especially when it happens in a member state of the European Union.

Even after the government's concession to some of the criticism from European institutions, there are still laws in place that undermine basic democratic principles. These laws:

- narrow the mandate of the Constitutional Court, limiting its ability to provide effective constitutional oversight of laws and policies;
- allow the Government and FIDESZ to appoint an unprecedented and unsound number of people with FIDESZ affiliation and sympathies to central positions and thereby cementing FIDESZ domination and thereby undermining checks and balances;
- centralize power of organizing the judiciary, central bank and licensing media.

Recent developments in Hungary demonstrate the need to protect democratic values in young, emerging democracies. Although institutions may be in place, a democratic culture is also needed. It takes time to develop such a culture. There is a need for the European Union Institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and its participating states to remain alerted on the situation in Hungary.

- ✓ The Norwegian Helsinki Committee urges key OSCE institutions to continue to monitor developments and be a constant reminder that one cannot get away with measures that weakens democratic rule just by claiming to be democratic;
- ✓ We also urge Hungarian authorities to learn from the well-intended criticism of European institutions and governments in order strengthen respect of democratic principles in the country. They should restore a culture of political talks and consultations with the opposition and with civil society.