



NGOs, media freedom and EU role at the heart of Hungary human rights debate

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The recent clampdown on an NGO, media freedom and the potential for the EU to monitor the fundamental rights situation in member states were among the main issues raised at a public hearing on human rights in Hungary. The hearing took place on 22 January in the Parliament's justice committee with representatives of NGOs, international organisations and the Hungarian government in attendance.

Claude Moraes, a British S&D member and chair of the justice committee, pointed out that "the European Parliament has to make an effort to ensure that fundamental rights are respected in member states, even if it is one of the most difficult and sensitive tasks."

However, according to Veronika Móra, director of a Budapest-based environmental NGO, NGOs feel that if they speak up they will be intimidated. *Ókotárs Alapítvány* was raided by police last September following allegations of links to the opposition and the mismanagement of funds granted by Norway. The allegations are unfounded, said Móra: "A government body (KEHI) started investigations without jurisdiction."

Zoltán Kovács, international spokesperson of the Hungarian government, responded that having a legal dispute with one NGO does not mean that the whole sector is threatened.

On the issue of media freedom, Attila Mong, editor of investigative journalism portal *Atlatzso.hu*, warned of threats to plurality: "The public broadcaster shows government propaganda, the advertising tax targets the biggest commercial TV station investigating government corruption, and journalists are experiencing political pressure."

Fundamental rights: What role can the EU play?

Speaking at the hearing experts from Amnesty International and the Council of Europe stressed that the EU should play an important role in ensuring that fundamental rights are respected in all member states. With regards media legislation or constitutional changes Mr Kovács said that the Hungarian government has resolved controversial issues with the relevant EU institutions.

[Click here to watch a recording of the hearing.](#)