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News | 24.04.2017

Greens/EFA sounds the alarm against attacks on civil society and NGOs

It is beyond dispute that there is an increasing trend across the world, and within countries that are considered “developed” and “democratic”, to undermine democratic principles and shrink the freedoms and liberties that citizens and civil society organisations now enjoy. Hungary, Poland and Romania are recent EU examples of this.

The Greens/EFA group is extremely concerned about this increasing aggressiveness towards the public and organised citizens, which is now being manifested inside the European Parliament by Markus Pieper, a conservative German MEP (EPP Group). Taking transparency in the spending of public funds as the main rationale, Pieper has actually penned a report in the budgetary control committee that is little more than a badly-disguised attack on non-governmental organisations in general.

In what appears to be either a disregard for, or lack of understanding of, how democracy is supposed to function, the draft report proposes to make NGOs eligible for EU funding only if they engage in activities that are in line with EU policies, including “strategic commercial and security-policy objectives”. In his defence of the report, Pieper has specifically mentioned organisations that were opposed to or critical of TTIP as organisations that he believes should not be able to get EU funding. Pieper also accuses non-governmental organisations of not being transparent and of knowingly using false data to make their point.

This rally against civil society from within the European Union’s only democratically elected institution is alarming. It has the potential to set a dangerous precedent and certainly contributes to a growing push-back against citizens and NGOs. Given this clear attempt to prevent organised civil society from having an impact and gaining power, it is perhaps no coincidence that Pieper is part of the same political family as Viktor Orban in Hungary.

To be fair, there are a couple of proposals that seek to increase transparency of NGO financing which are not entirely irrelevant, but the key question remains: Why focus on NGOs, and particularly on attacking environmental, social and health NGOs, when there are so many other pressing issues that should be tackled far more urgently?

Next steps

Greens/EFA MEPs in the CONT committee have already strongly opposed the EPP’s draft report and we

are liaising with other political parties in an effort to secure a majority that will actually defend civic space rather than attack organised citizens. If the report is not entirely reworded, it will need to be rejected outright.

The vote in the CONT committee is scheduled to take place in May, though it may be delayed due to the controversy surrounding the report. We will keep you updated - watch this space!

What can you do?

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT!

- email your mep!
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- call your mep!

Write to your MEP and tell them to vote against the report! Spread the news!

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