

Historic EU rally against Orbán's crackdown on civil society

By RECLAIM

Brussels, 28/02/25 – Fourteen EU Member States, Norway and the European Parliament have formally intervened in the [European Commission's lawsuit against Hungary's anti-NGO law](#), marking the largest legal mobilizations against shrinking democratic space in EU history.

Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Estonia, Lithuania, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal have officially requested to join the proceedings, and two more governments are expected to back the case when the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) holds its hearings.

This historic response is the result of relentless civil society advocacy. RECLAIM developed the legal analysis that shaped the case, briefed key stakeholders, and led the Member State campaign. Today's legal pushback sends a clear message: Orbán's assault on civil society will not go unchallenged.

Background

On January 6, the European Commission referred Hungary's Sovereignty Protection Law to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). This [Russia-style foreign agents law](#) created the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO)—a [Fidesz-controlled agency](#) with unchecked power to intimidate NGOs, silence independent media, and suppress dissent. In direct retaliation for their anti-corruption investigations, the SPO has launched punitive investigations against watchdogs [Transparency International Hungary](#) and investigative outlet [Átlátszó](#).

"We're being accused of treason, espionage and the like, for making an independent newspaper. In the eyes of the government, the investigative journalist is a political opponent. The SPO's investigation reminds us of the communist witch-hunt of the 1950s: there is a predetermined verdict they are trying to pass off as an investigation",

Tamás Bodoky, editor-in-chief and managing director of Átlátszó.

The message from Budapest is clear: repression will escalate. On February 22, during his [State of the Nation address](#), Orbán doubled down, vowing to "wind up" independent NGOs and media before Easter as part of a "spring cleaning." He praised Trump's cuts to USAID as "beautiful and inspiring" and labelled civil society, journalists, judges, prosecutors, and Brussels itself as "enemies of Hungary."

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This case is bigger than Hungary. [Slovakia](#) and [Bulgaria](#) are already considering similar laws, and [Georgia](#) has already passed one.

"Orbán has turned Hungary into Putin and Trump's outpost in Europe and is copying their playbook to crush civil society. Emboldened by Trump's cuts to USAID, he has vowed to wipe out pro-democracy groups before Easter. This isn't just rhetoric—it's a roadmap to dismantling democracy. The EU's response is clear: crushing civic freedoms won't go unanswered"

Esther Martínez González, Director of RECLAIM.

The powerful reaction from EU Member States also proves that human rights are not relics of the past; they remain the foundation of the EU. And those who trample on them must be held accountable. Today, Europe has taken a decisive step in ensuring that no EU leader can silence civil society and democracy unchecked.

But the fight is far from over: Orbán's crackdown won't wait for a court ruling. And neither should the EU.

"Waiting years for a court ruling is not an option. The Commission must act now and request interim measures to suspend the law before Hungary's civil society is dismantled. Our colleagues in Hungary depend on it."

Alejandro Menéndez Fernández, Legal Advisor of RECLAIM.

Full RECLAIM legal and policy briefings about the Hungarian "Sovereignty Protection" law can be found on:



[RECLAIM' Factsheet](#)

[Legal Opinion](#)

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About RECLAIM:

RECLAIM is a Brussels-based NGO dedicated to defending civic space, the rule of law, and human rights across the EU. Through strategic litigation, advocacy, and coalition-building, RECLAIM ensures that European governments uphold their commitments to fundamental rights. For more information, visit www.reclaiming.eu.

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