



Resolution 2226 (2018)¹

New restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its [Resolution 2096 \(2016\)](#) and [Recommendation 2086 \(2016\)](#) How can inappropriate restrictions on NGO activities in Europe be prevented?, its previous [Resolutions 1660 \(2009\)](#), [1891 \(2012\)](#) and [2095 \(2016\)](#) and [Recommendation 2085 \(2016\)](#) concerning human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States, as well as [Resolution 2060 \(2015\)](#), [Recommendation 2073 \(2015\)](#), [Resolution 1729 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1916 \(2010\)](#) on the protection of whistle-blowers.
2. The Assembly reiterates the importance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the development and realisation of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. They do this, in particular, by promoting public awareness and participation in public life, securing the transparency and accountability of public authorities, and contributing to the cultural life and social well-being of democratic societies. The Assembly pays tribute to all NGOs, whose work has strengthened human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the member States of the Council of Europe.
3. The Assembly recalls that by acceding to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the member States of the Council of Europe agreed to ensure, without discrimination, respect for the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, which are inextricably linked to one another and are vital to the proper functioning of civil society. Any restriction of the above rights shall be “prescribed by law”, “necessary in a democratic society” and proportionate to the envisaged legitimate aim.
4. The Assembly notes with concern that, in several Council of Europe member States, the space for civil society has been shrinking over the last few years, especially in respect of NGOs working in the area of human rights. This has been mainly due to restrictive laws and regulations concerning registration requirements or funding, administrative harassment, smear campaigns against certain groups and threats or intimidation against NGO leaders and activists.
5. The Assembly recalls its [Resolution 2184 \(2017\)](#) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan and [Resolution 2185 \(2017\)](#) Azerbaijan’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: what follow-up on respect for human rights? and condemns the lack of a conducive environment for the activities of NGOs and reprisals against civil society activists in Azerbaijan. It calls on Azerbaijan to amend its legislation on NGOs in accordance with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the recommendations of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) (Opinions Nos. 636/2011 and 787/2014).
6. Recalling its [Resolution 2162 \(2017\)](#) Alarming developments in Hungary: draft NGO law restricting civil society and possible closure of the European Central University, the Assembly expresses concern about the entry into force of the law on the transparency of organisations receiving support from abroad and calls on Hungary to repeal the provisions of this text that are not in line with the Venice Commission’s recommendations (Opinion No. 889/2017). It is also alarmed by the adoption by the Hungarian Parliament of the “Stop-Soros” package of laws restricting the freedoms of NGOs working for refugees’ and migrants’ rights

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 June 2018 (23rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 14570](#), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Yves Cruchten). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 June 2018 (23rd Sitting). See also [Recommendation 2134 \(2018\)](#).



and their members, and calls on Hungary to revise these laws in accordance with the opinion of the Venice Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) adopted on 22 June 2018.

7. The Assembly remains concerned about the implementation of the “foreign agents law” and the “law on undesirable organisations”, which has led to the closure of dozens of domestic NGOs that received foreign funding and termination of operations of the major international and foreign donor organisations that supported the activities of Russian NGOs. The Assembly reiterates its calls on the Russian Federation to amend the legislation on NGOs in accordance with the Venice Commission Opinions Nos. 716/2013, 717/2013 and 814/2015.

8. Recalling its [Resolutions 2156 \(2017\)](#) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey and 2209 (2018) State of emergency: proportionality issues under Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Assembly is particularly worried about the high number of associations and foundations (nearly 1 600) closed on the basis of state of emergency measures. It calls on Turkey to lift the state of emergency as soon as possible, to ensure that the closed NGOs dispose of an effective remedy against the decision concerning their definitive closure and to reconsider the necessity and proportionality of the measures restricting the freedoms of association, assembly and expression, in light of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the recommendations of the Venice Commission (Opinion No. 865/2016).

9. The Assembly calls on Romania and Ukraine to reject the recently proposed draft laws imposing additional financial reporting obligations on NGOs, unless they are amended according to the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR (see, respectively, Opinions Nos. 914/2017 and 912/2018) and to submit them to broad public consultations. It also calls on Ukraine to repeal as soon as possible the e-declaration requirements for anti-corruption activists introduced by Law No. 1975-VIII of 23 March 2017.

10. The Assembly calls on all member States to:

10.1. fully implement Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe;

10.2. review and repeal or amend legislation that impedes the free and independent work of NGOs and ensure that this legislation is in conformity with international human rights instruments regarding the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression (including the Joint Venice Commission–OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on Freedom of Association and on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly), by making use of the Council of Europe, and in particular of the Venice Commission and the Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations;

10.3. refrain from adopting new laws which would result in unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions or financial burdens on NGO activities;

10.4. ensure that NGOs can seek, receive and use transparent funding and other resources, whether domestic or foreign, without discrimination or undue impediments;

10.5. ensure that NGOs are effectively involved in the consultation process concerning new legislation which concerns them and other issues of particular importance to society, such as the protection of human rights;

10.6. ensure an enabling environment for civil society, in particular by refraining from any harassment (judicial, administrative or tax-related), negative public discourse, smear campaigns against NGOs and intimidation of civil society activists;

10.7. sign and/or ratify the European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organisations (ETS No. 124), if this has not yet been done.

11. The Assembly, mindful of the shrinking space for civil society in many member States of the Council of the Europe, resolves to remain seized of the matter.