

Statement of civil society organizations on Hungary's renewed membership in the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies.

The Chair of the International Steering Committee and the entire Civil Society Pillar of the Community of Democracies express their deepest disappointment over the decision to renew Hungary's membership to the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies (CoD). This outcome will have a significant negative impact on the credibility and integrity of the Community as a champion of democratic values and will discourage pro-democratic civil society activists from cooperating with this organization.

Member-States of the Governing Council are bound to comply with the Warsaw Declaration and uphold the highest standards and principles within the CoD and to the world. Unfortunately, the renewal of Hungary calls into question and weakens the Community of Democracies abilities and commitment to advance and protect democratic freedoms, strengthen democratic institutions, and expand political participation around the globe.

The Civil Society Pillar has conclusively demonstrated the government of Hungary's lack of compliance with the Warsaw Declaration based on in depth analysis carried out by Hungarian civil society. Some of the most disturbing findings include:

1. Hungary has the second worst performance in the European Union according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2021. In addition, the latest report of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) found that Hungary performed poorly in complying with its recommendations on anti-corruption measures.
2. Public media had been degraded from public service to state-run, and many other privately owned organs changed owners and became servants of those in power. As a consequence, the government currently controls most of Hungary's media apart from the internet segment. Furthermore,

government-controlled media has disseminated authoritarian political propaganda and disinformation to the Hungarian public; and some journalists' safety is threatened by the government's use of the Pegasus spyware.

3. There is little to none political pluralism in the country. The opposition remains fragmented, and increasingly faces obstacles and restrictions that detract their ability to gain power through democratic means. This includes unequal access to media, unremitting smear campaigns, and politicized audits.
4. The government continues to restrict the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and reinforce gender discrimination through government policies and communications while downplaying the importance of gender equality.
5. Transparency International reports state that the government's response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the intentional deconstruction of the country's democracy. A case in point is the introduction of a rule by decree regime, which substantially broadened the government's power and room for maneuver.

These concerns for the state of democracy in Hungary were also raised by other international institutions outside the Community of Democracies. For example, in 2022 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe sent a full mission to Hungary's election, which is unprecedented in the European Union. Furthermore, the European Commission has not approved the Hungarian Partnership Agreement and triggered the so-called conditionality mechanism for the first time due to the systemic breach of the principles of rule of law and the inadequate anti-corruption performance of the Hungarian government.

The renewal of Hungary to the CG is one of multiple examples where the CoD has once again decided not to listen to the advice and concerns of its Civil Society Pillar partners. It is also a turning point that compels civil society organization members of the CSP to redefine and reconsider their engagement in the Community. Let us not forget that the Community of Democracies was

envisaged as a forum to work collaboratively and to learn from each other - including with civil society - and identify global priorities for both diplomatic and concerted action to advance and defend democracy.

The regrettable vote by the Governing Council to renew Hungary's membership despite its government's determined erosion of democratic norms, values and institutions, has led the CSP to undertake a much closer look at the utility of its participation in a could-be catalytic force that is far from meeting its potential. This is a defining moment for the Community.