



## RESOLUTION ON HUNGARY

We would like to express our profound concern about allegations of foul play related to the capture of the media landscape<sup>1</sup> in the Hungarian elections of 8 April 2018 that saw Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who champions nativism and has made ‘illiberal democracy’ a tenant of his political ideology, re-elected for a third consecutive term.

Although, in recent years, we have seen rising levels of hate speech before and during election processes in other countries, and a rise to power of some political parties that made use of it, the situation in Hungary stands out. The apparent landslide victory and consecutive political success of one such party in Hungary – *Fidesz* – is a cause for concern because of their overt targeting and hateful rhetoric towards immigrants, Roma people, Jewish people, LGBTI individuals, and academics and NGOs critical of the regime.

There were allegations that the press coverage of the campaign and election was highly polarised and lacked critical debate as the consequence of Orbán’s extensive reshaping of the media landscape over the past six years. In a report by the OSCE<sup>2</sup> the elections were characterized ‘*by a pervasive overlap between state and ruling party resources, undermining contestants’ ability to compete on an equal basis*’.

PEN International is appalled by the findings of the OSCE, as well as the reported racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism by Orbán and other members of his *Fidesz* party and other right-wing parties which marred the election campaign. In a speech commemorating the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1848 revolution on 15 March 2018, Orbán reportedly said that ‘*we must fight against an opponent which is different from us ... they are not national, but international; they do not believe in work, but speculate with money; they have no homeland, but feel that the whole world is theirs*’. His rhetoric pits different groups in society against each other, stating that ‘*we, the millions with national feelings, are on one side; the elite ‘citizens of the world’ are on the other side ... on one side, national and democratic forces; and, on the other side, supranational and anti-democratic forces*’.<sup>3</sup>

Typically, Orbán presents George Soros as the leader of this alleged international conspiracy, ‘*we are up against media outlets maintained by foreign concerns and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking protest organisers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator, summed up and embodied in the name George Soros*’.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ‘Hungary, Parliamentary Elections, 8 April 2018: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions’, 9 April 2018, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/377410>.

<sup>2</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ‘Hungary, Parliamentary Elections, 8 April 2018: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions’, 9 April 2018, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/377410>.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Prime Minister, ‘Orbán Viktor’s ceremonial speech on the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848’, 16 March 2018, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/orban-viktor-s-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848>.

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House, ‘In His Own Words: The Preoccupations of Hungary’s Viktor Orbán’, 4 April 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/his-own-words-preoccupations-hungary-s-viktor-orb-n>.

In his reported speeches, Orbán identifies migration as the key threat to Hungary. Although tied to religious and cultural identity, there is a strong racist undertone, maintaining for instance that *'Hungarians are an endangered species'*. Allegedly, on 8 February, he told a gathering of Hungarian mayors that *'we do not want to be multi-coloured by being mixed ... with others'*.<sup>5</sup>

Orbán's policies that deal with these purported threats have repeatedly violated the country's international obligations.<sup>6</sup> For one, Hungary's stance on refugees, including attempts to prevent those seeking international protection from traveling through their borders and the use of draconian measures that entail the treatment of refugees and migrants as criminals, is in breach of international human rights law and refugee law, as well as EU directives. In addition, as documented by PEN International and others, Orbán's administration has in the past and continues to curtail space for civil society and academic freedom thus limiting dissent. Furthermore, PEN International has documented attempts to politicise also the cultural field, hindering the expression of unfettered artistic freedom.

In view of these concerns highlighted at the 50<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Writers for Peace Committee in Bled in 2018, the PEN community reiterates its concern in relation to respect for the rights to freedom of expression and non-discrimination in Hungary.

**The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the government of Hungary to:**

- Investigate and prosecute all racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic crimes, as well as acts that amount to incitement to violence against immigrants, Jewish people and other minority groups
- End its campaign against dissenting voices, independent civil society groups and certain parts of critical academia and instead publicly recognize the value of these actors in promoting and protecting an open, transparent and tolerant society;
- End the propagation of xenophobic ideology and instead, take all possible measures to combat xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment;
- Repeal all laws that discriminate against or target foreign-funded NGOs.

---

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House, 'In His Own Words: The Preoccupations of Hungary's Viktor Orbán', 4 April 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/his-own-words-preoccupations-hungary-s-viktor-orb-n>.

<sup>6</sup> See *inter alia* various opinions of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, available at <http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?country=17&year=all>.