

Open Letter to Donors and Institutions Concerned with the Quality and Sustainability of Civil Society and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe

Dear Madam or Sir:

We, the undersigned representatives of civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe, are increasingly uneasy and concerned about current news, events and actions affecting civil society organizations and structures in our region.

We are about to commemorate 25 years of transformation and democracy-building at all levels of society in the CEE region. Some have been fortunate enough to become part of the NATO and the EU over the years and to build more or less solid capacity and infrastructure for civil society growth and action. Some are still struggling to build the internal capacity of the civic sector and other democracy supporting infrastructure. Some are under the tremendous stress of the threat of war. Some are subjected to censorship and government repression.

The invasion of Crimea and of eastern Ukraine, continued control over Abkhazia and Transnistria, Russian corporate sponsorship in Czech presidential elections along with police confiscations of servers and computers of key Hungarian NGOs worry us and make us realize that the considerable achievements in building democracy in the region may be far more fragile than we would have liked to hope. At the same time, we acknowledge that there is but one CEE region that wants to be able to refer to itself as being truly “post-Soviet”.

We have helped and supported one another in our region. We have formed alliances to promote civic values which are increasingly more evident in the perception of our work: courage, strength, generosity, tolerance, respect and commitment.

To ensure our ultimate success, we need your continued help and support. Many of you have played and continue to play a key role in jump-starting the civic sector in our region and making it grow over the years. We are deeply grateful for your assistance, inspiration and mentoring. And this is why we are drawing your attention to the current situation in our region. Now, more than ever in the course of the past 25 years, it is of key importance for the CEE civic sector for you to stand by our side. Your investments have helped make us strong, and the days ahead will require increased strength which we believe your continuing partnership with us can provide.

Thank you.

PS: We – of course – welcome the current United States government initiatives (see bellow), yet more inspiration and value is brought to the civic sector in our region by private action that is specific to and based on understanding of the history and the diverse nature of Central and Eastern Europe.

In September 2013, President Obama launched Stand with Civil Society, a global call to action to support, defend, and sustain civil society amid a rising tide of restrictions on its operations globally. Working in partnership with other governments, the philanthropic

community, and multilateral initiatives, including the [Community of Democracies](#) and [Lifeline: Embattled CSO Assistance Fund](#), the United States Government has focused on three lines of effort over the past year: (1) promoting laws, policies, and practices that foster a supportive environment for civil society in accordance with international norms; (2) coordinating multilateral, diplomatic pressure to push back against undue restrictions on civil society; and (3) identifying innovative ways of providing technical, financial, and logistical support to promote a transparent and vibrant civil society. The United States is the largest supporter of civil society in the world, with more than \$2.7 billion invested to strengthen civil society since 2010.
<http://m.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/23/fact-sheet-us-support-civil-society>

Name	Organization/position	Country
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