

**October 2, 2019**

**OPEN LETTER**

**Position of civic society organizations against attempts of political parties and their leaders to exercise pressure over the civil society**

On September 30, 2019 in the course of the election campaign for local elections, the nationalist party IMRO-BNM has sent a signal to the Prosecutor General to cease the activity of the human rights organization – Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. We consider such public attacks for inadmissible, they erode the public trust in the nongovernmental sector and they are used for political purposes which contradict the public interest.

The Constitution guarantees people their right of association so they can fully participate in the public life. The nongovernmental sector is the main driving force of a civil society. Civic organizations have goals and values which serve the people and provide them with possibility to contribute to the social development, but they also protect civic rights and lawful interests even if they have to oppose institutions, political parties and companies. Its existence is at the very core of democracy.

Statements that say, that by “organizing seminars” and presenting awards an organization can “exercise pressure and influence over court decisions” and its activity “contradicts the Constitution and the good morals”, as stated by IMRO-BNM, are absurd and populist. In case such dangerous perceptions are accepted as a ground for branding or closing of an organization, this will mean that every association can be attacked by any political party which does not like the topic of an organized training, for example. It can also mean that any political party can try to silence different opinions and positions. The purpose of the civil organizations is exactly this – to provide opportunity for discussion of topics which are important for the society.

All attempts to redirect the negative public energy against the civil organizations because they protect human rights and organize trainings, is a very dangerous tendency which increases public mistrust in the civil sector and has a freezing effect over it. Civic sector activities is actually a sign showing that civil society does exist in Bulgaria and it is part of an open public debate which facilitates the functioning of a democratic state.

The right of association is a basic civil right which guarantees peoples' participation in such debates and in taking decisions without necessarily participating in a political party. All attacks against civic engagement and activity and against free media are an attempt to silence peoples' voice.

1. Bulgarian Donors' Forum
2. Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law
3. Center for Humane Policy
4. Time Heroes Foundation
5. Association of Parks in Bulgaria
6. Association for Shared Learning ELA
7. Bulgarian Fund for Women
8. Access to Information Programme
9. Greanpeace Bulgaria
10. Programme and Analytical Center for European Law Foundation
11. Institute for Market Economy
12. C.E.G.A. Foundation
13. Maria's World Foundation
14. BCause Foundation
15. Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
16. Bulgarian Environmental Partnerships Foundation
17. Bulgarian Society for Phytocoenology – 2001
18. Bulgarian Society of Patients with Pulmonary Hypertension
19. Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism
20. Earth Association
21. Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association
22. SOS Children's Villages
23. Listen Up Foundation
24. Information and Consultations Association
25. Child and Space Association
26. Health and Social Development Foundation
27. Global Initiative on Psychiatry - Sofia
28. Concordia Bulgaria Foundation
29. Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation
30. Lumos Bulgaria

31. Hope Foundation
32. Institute for Social Activities and Practices
33. Children with Oncohematologic Diseases Association
34. Initiative for Health Foundation
35. Care for social wealth Foundation
36. International Social Services Bulgaria
37. Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion
38. For Our Children Foundation
39. Teddy Bear Operation Association
40. Nim Animations Association
41. Water and Life Bulgaria Foundation
42. Anticorruption Fund Bulgaria
43. Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives
44. Institute for Public Environment Development
45. AGORA Platform
46. Art Movement Circle
47. Bluelink Foundation
48. Devetaki Plateau Association
49. Innovative Community Centres Association
50. Chitalishte Skills-2003
51. Agency for Regional Economical Development Stara Zagora
52. Roma Foundation Iskra – Shumen
53. European spaces 21 Association
54. European Institute Foundation
55. Chovekolubie Association
56. Amalipe Center
57. Community Bridges Association
58. National Network for Children
59. America for Bulgaria Foundation
60. Next Page Foundation
61. Our Premature Children Foundation
62. Hypophysis Association
63. Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria
64. GLAS Foundation
65. Research Practices Association
66. Balkani Wildlife Society
67. Agrolink Association

68. WWF Bulgaria
69. Teach for Bulgaria Foundation
70. National Association for Foster Care
71. Mission Wings Foundation
72. Sofia lodge Carmel B'nai B'rith Bulgaria
73. Open Society Institute – Sofia
74. INTEGRO Association
75. Equal Opportunities Association
76. Roma Health Foundation
77. GORD Association
78. Sun for All Association
79. Partnership in Action Association
80. Pro European Network Association
81. Community Center Roma Vazovo 2007
82. Leader Association
83. Hayachi Association
84. Trust for Social Achievement Foundation
85. Bulgarian Association of Holocaust Survivors and Their Children