

[Attila Mraz: Human rights defender from Hungary](#)

25.09.2015

Attila Mraz talks to ISHR about his work advocating for political participatory rights in Hungary where the rule of law is systematically deteriorating.



Attila Mraz works for the [Hungarian Civil Liberties Union](#) (HCLU) on political participatory rights, while also completing a PhD in political theory focusing on the required conditions for a State to be qualified 'democratic'.

Talking about the reasons for his commitment to political participatory rights he said:

'Democratic rights fascinate me because they are such an important feature of human life - we have to live together and solve certain problems despite having diverse perspectives. Political participatory rights provide necessary guarantees for equal and fair participation which facilitates the resolution of different societal views - that is what I care about.'

Deterioration of political rights in Hungary

Since 2012 a new constitution and several key laws have been passed which have led to a deterioration of political rights in Hungary.

'In some respects the legal environment certainly does not allow for fair elections.'

Attila explained that a change made in 2013 in the Constitution preventing the electronic media (TV and radio channels) from accepting monetary compensation for political advertisements was actually a means to silence political opposition campaigns. Commercial stations had indeed no incentive to broadcast their material and as a result 'voters did not have a reasonable chance of being informed about alternatives' during 2014 elections.

In his opinion, the electoral procedure can also be considered as 'discriminatory' against citizens voting from abroad. Hungarian citizens who are not residents are able to complete postal votes whilst Hungarian residents who are temporarily absent are not able to do so - they must travel to a Hungarian embassy or consulate-general. Attila stated that this procedure effectively favoured the current Government, as an unprecedented 95% of the votes mailed by Hungarian non-resident citizens were in support of the current Government - the one which enfranchised them in the first place.

Risks and challenges facing HRDs in Hungary

A wide number of restrictions are being imposed to HRDs and NGOs in Hungary:

'Some HRDs in Hungary, especially those working for foundations that distribute foreign funding, have been subject to police raids and criminal investigations. More generally, HRDs working for major watchdog NGOs, including the HCLU, have been subject to unlawful investigations by Government agencies and often face stigmatisation by the Government, being labelled as "serving foreign interests".'

Attila explained that administrative burdens and harassment by authorities increased the HCLU's workload, requiring capacity-building and increased fund-raising efforts.

'The general systematic deterioration of the rule of law we experience in Hungary includes: Government agencies acting without legal authorisation; without providing reasons for their investigations; using Government agencies to get hold of sensitive information from NGOs such as names of volunteers; and disproportionate police action in investigations.'

Attila also noted that the Hungarian Constitutional Court's increasing lack of independence is a key challenge for HRDs, especially in relation to strategic litigation.

Difficulties of engaging with the UN

Attila and the HCLU are currently collaborating with other NGOs to submit recommendations for Hungary's Universal Periodic Review. Their aim is to increase international pressure on the Hungarian Government to comply with international human rights standards.

Attila also proposed some ways to facilitate access to the UN system for NGOs.

'The procedure of filing individual complaints with some treaty bodies is still less facilitated compared to other international judicial bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights, for instance, which supplies clear and extensive guidelines of admissibility, fact sheets summarising recent developments in case law, and has an easily searchable database of case law. Similar assistance would make all treaty bodies accessible to a wider public.'

Moving forward

Attila spoke about the importance of working to raise public awareness in Hungary about the value of human rights.

'The reconstruction of domestic human rights guarantees crucially requires that we reinforce our efforts to inform the wider public about the significance of human rights and the concrete benefits they can reap from the domestic protection of human rights. The relapse in the level of HRD protection in Hungary was partly made possible by a lack of emphasis on wider awareness-raising and empowerment which allows people to make the best use of human rights, stand up for protecting them and recognising and fighting violations.'

Engaging with international human rights mechanisms is becoming more and more crucial. As Attila underlined, this is particularly accurate in the current context of weakening constitutional protection for human rights at the national level. More generally strategic litigation is of increasing importance as the Hungarian Government is reluctant to engage in a dialogue with civil society.