

WHAT IS HCLU?

For over two decades, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért, TASZ) has been on the forefront of protecting the rights of citizens against undue interference by those in positions of public power. HCLU monitors legislation, pursues strategic litigation, conducts public education and launches awareness-raising media campaigns. It stands by citizens unable to defend themselves, assisting them in protecting their basic rights. HCLU is present in the courtrooms, in the ministries, at international events, universities and small villages. Its many partners include domestic and foreign individuals and institutions, as well as international organizations. It works in cooperation with volunteers to ensure that fundamental rights and principles may indeed prevail in Hungary.

HCLU SUCCESSES

In its 20-year history, HCLU scored successes in numerous high profile cases. Some examples:

- The first ethnic profiling case in Hungary dealing with discriminative police practices against Roma, won on first instance;
- Ensuring the right to assembly for LGBT Pride March participants in consecutive years after police attempts to ban the event;
- Formal declaration of the Equal Treatment Authority stating that refusal by health care services for people with HIV/AIDS violates their right to equal treatment;
- Providing legal assistance to people with mental disabilities in guardianship lawsuits to regain their right to vote;
- Successfully representing, in a self-reporting campaign, a needle exchange service worker

The investigation was terminated, proving that provision of harm reduction services do not constitute a criminal offense;

- A successful campaign in cooperation with the self-advocacy group the City for All, against legislation criminalizing sleeping rough. As a result the legislation was annulled by the Constitutional Court.

MISSION:

HCLU STRIVES TO EDUCATE CITIZENS ABOUT THEIR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS, AND TAKES A STAND AGAINST UNDUE INTERFERENCE AND ABUSE OF POWER BY THOSE IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY.

HCLU at the European Court of Human Rights:

- TASZ v. Hungary – the Court ruled that retaining certain public data violates freedom of expression;
- Uj Peter v. Hungary – According to the Court’s conviction for libel of a journalist, describing the quality of a certain wine as ‘shitty’ constitutes a violation of freedom of expression;
- In Ternovszky v. Hungary the Court ruled that the right to choose the circumstances of giving birth, including home birth, is protected under the right to respect for private and family life;
- Kiss Borbála v. Hungary - According to the Court police brutality against a Romani woman constitutes a violation of the prohibition of torture in Article 3.

ACTIVITIES:

Since its establishment, HCLU’s activities cover two major areas: [1] the protection of civil liberties, including the freedom of speech, the right to protest, freedom of information, privacy rights, etc.; and [2] safeguarding equality under the protection of the law for the most disadvantaged groups: the Roma, people living with HIV / AIDS, LGBTQI people, drug users, and people with mental disabilities.

In order to carry out its tasks and responsibilities, the HCLU utilizes numerous tools:

- legal advocacy (letters, negotiations, opinion letters, participation in certain governmental work groups);
- monitoring the implementation and enforcement of certain legislation;
- legal aid service and strategic litigation;
- public education activities and legal empowerment trainings;
- awareness raising and contribution to the public discussion of issues of concern (report, policy papers, advocacy videos, media campaigns).

AWARDS:

The HCLU has won numerous awards for its activities. The Sozial Marie prize rewards social innovations: the HCLU won for its Mediamonitor project (2007), Disability Rights Program (2012) and the coalition with the City for All against the criminalization of homelessness (2013). The HCLU won two awards from the Erste Foundation Award for Social Integration (Practitioners' Award for Advocacy, 2011; Honorary Award for the Roma Program, 2011) and was a finalist with its Crisis intervention at Gyöngyöspata project, in 2013. Our video advocacy team has also won several awards at competitions hosted by Kreatív: an Online Video Award 2nd best prize for Children of the canals: HIV epidemic among drug users in Romania (2014), an Online Video Award for Room in the 8th district (2015).

CURRENT STRATEGY:

Following the 2010 elections, the government of Hungary gradually weakened the democratic institutional system established after 1989, eliminated the system of checks and balances, and regularly violated fundamental rights. The government is increasingly involved in serious conflicts with the European Union and institutions of the Council of Europe. The country is steadily moving towards having an authoritarian government. In response to constitutional de-construction, the HCLU has strengthened its Political Freedoms activities and launched its Political Participatory Rights Program to monitor the implementation of the new electoral legislation. The goals are to expand the scope of political freedoms; protect privacy from illegal political invasion; improve the rule of law; legal empowerment; and foster political participatory rights. The opening of the second term of the Orban government in 2014 has seen even more challenges: new impetus was given to questioning the credibility and hindering the independent financing of autonomous civil organizations still representing a counterbalance to the government. The organization continues implementing its strategy adopted in 2014 by putting greater emphasis on its public education and awareness-raising activities, and by playing a leading role in responding to the campaign against independent civil society.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

HCLU is led by Executive Director, Ms. Stefania Kapronczay and Director of Programs, Mr. Mate Daniel Szabo. They share the responsibility of overseeing the legal and policy work of the HCLU's programs. The Executive Director is solely responsible for operations of the organization. HCLU's daily operations are run by a staff of 30: heads of programs, program officers, a communication team, a video advocacy team, attorneys, administrative staff, and fundraising staff. The organization also has a strong and active volunteer base with close to 100 members. The directors are appointed by a five-member Board. Members of the Board are elected by the General Assembly of the association.

FUNDING:

HCLU's budget is 900.000 USD per annum. Past and present donors include the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, CEE Trust for Civil Society, Norway Grants, European Commission, Embassy of France, Embassy of the Royal Netherlands, Embassy of the United States of America, British Embassy, Media Law Defense Initiative, American House Foundation, Common Sense for Drug Policy Foundation, as well as a growing number of private individuals. To truly preserve its independence, the HCLU does not apply for, and does not accept any funding from the Hungarian state, government or any of its institutions, nor from political parties. In order to finance activities connected to current challenges related to drastic constitutional de-construction in Hungary, and to fulfill HCLU's increased number of duties and tasks, the organizations is constantly searching for further funding opportunities.