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Janša's government is abusing donor-states' money to revenge on the NGOs

Ljubljana, 2 July 2021 – Head of the right-wing government Janez Janša and his team of ministers continue their revanchist crusade, delivering on their pre-election promises to destroy the critically thinking NGO sector. Just before announcing the calls under the Norway Grants and European Economic Area (EEA) Grants mechanisms with donor countries Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, the ministry responsible for cohesion added discriminatory criteria to exclude the participation of nongovernmental organisations. Due to this breach, Slovenia is facing the risk of having 34 million euro blocked. This would not be the first time for funds to be blocked by donor countries – they did so to Hungary in 2014 due to excluding nongovernmental organisations.

“NGOs, move out on your own and start earning money for yourself. From membership fees and from donors. Can you do it? No? Well, then you are not worthy of existing! I don't know that anyone needs you and calls you apart from yourself. #abolishnow” By retweeting this SDS supporter, **Zvone Černač**, the minister responsible for cohesion, made known what he thought of nongovernmental organisations in July last year. This is just an example of insults, lies and revanchist threats by Janša's cabinet. As another example, in February in the national assembly, **Janez Janša** [blamed nongovernmental organisations](#) for the high number of excess deaths in the second wave of the epidemic, saying that in the past, they received more funds than hospitals and old people's homes. In January, amidst the unprecedented health crisis, the Ministry for Culture [ordered dozens of NGOs to vacate immediately](#) the premises they had been using legally since the 1990s.

Last year, the [Constitutional court withheld the controversial law](#), with which the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning wanted to prevent the participation of NGOs in procedures of obtaining integrated building permits. The conditions for participation were set so high that there was virtually no NGO that could comply. Now, the minister responsible for cohesion has sought to implant nearly identical participation conditions in the open calls of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

As we warned of the discriminatory criteria, the government office for cohesion [reacted by explaining](#) that “the criteria for NGOs to be able to apply to the open call will make sure that the projects submitted will grow the assets available. Having a responsibility towards the donors, Slovenia expects for funds to be used efficiently to ensure the highest added value.” This, of course, is not true. If the introduction of discriminatory criteria was about quality, the conditions would be such to ensure that only the best undertakings and NGOs were able to apply. But they are not. The conditions are such to enable every undertaking and virtually no nongovernmental organisation to participate. The bar has been set so high that nobody can reach it.

It is very telling that they were keeping the criteria secret from the donor countries, inserting them in the contract without the donors' knowledge – after a double contract coordination and confirmation

procedure with them. If the criteria were really to ensure quality and growing assets, they would surely want to boast about them to the donors.

It is clear that preventing the environmentalists and conservationists from participating in the call is an act of retaliation for having successfully blocked the previously mentioned anti-constitutional changes to the building legislation and, this spring, demanding a referendum regarding the [undemocratically adopted and detrimental Water Act](#). Representatives of donor countries have already reacted to the discriminatory criteria.

“We were informed about very worrying development, additional criteria for NGOs. Let me state this clear, any discriminatory eligibility criteria for NGOs are deemed unacceptable,” said **Trine Skymo**, Norwegian Ambassador to Hungary and Slovenia, at the presentation of calls by the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy on 16 June 2012. Similarly, **Árni Páll Arnason**, Deputy Managing Director of the Financial Mechanism Office and Director of the Country and Bilateral Cooperation Department, responded to the question on the controversial criteria posed by a journalist of the Radio Slovenia public broadcaster, saying that “The three donor states, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway attach great importance to support to Civil Society through the whole framework of the EEA and Norway Grants. We are aware of the issue you mention and we are in contact with our counterparts in Slovenia on this.”

An infringement of the donor contract is to be sanctioned by blocking the funds. In 2014, the donor countries took such action, blocking the funds for Hungary due to the infringement of the donor contract as the state in a unilateral and arbitrary move transferred the management of assets [from the ministry to a public agency](#), seeking to prevent the independent funding of NGOs. [The blockade](#) lasted from April 2014 to December 2015. According to the then Norwegian Minister of EEA and EU affairs, **Vidar Helgesen**, the temporary blockade was revoked once Hungary restored its compliance with the contract with the donor countries.

Clarification:

On the basis of their arrangement with the European Commission, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein have allocated 34 million euro to Slovenia to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to strengthen education. On 14 May, the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, being responsible for the management of funds, published two open calls for the allocation of funds ([Call for proposals for co-financing of projects under the programme education, scholarships, apprenticeship and youth entrepreneurship](#) and [Call for proposals for co-financing of projects under the programme climate change mitigation and adaptation](#)).