Ágnes Kövér*, Attila Antal and Izabella Deák

Civil Society and COVID-19 in Hungary: The Complete Annexation of Civil Space

<https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2020-0060>

Received November 25, 2020; accepted January 18, 2021

Abstract: The paper examines the CSOs – government relations during the COVID-19 pandemic, first introducing how the pandemic affected the already authoritarian regime in Hungary and how this regime utilized the epidemic to extend and fortify its power. Then the paper presents the antecedents of the relationship between civil society and government in the frame of the National System of Cooperation (NSC). This relationship is unilaterally dominated by the government, and it may appear as a “4C strategy”: Cooptation, Coercion, Crowding out, Creation (the creation of a new, loyal civil society). Exploring the civil society and government relations during the pandemic, the study will conclude that there was no government attempt to coordinate the activities of CSOs or to try to harmonize sectoral cooperation from a broader perspective. The occurrences demonstrated the explosion of solidarity and the carnival of solidarity. These forms of solidarity, however, remain informal and leave deepening structural problems untouched. The paper presents the results of an empirical research which was conducted between March and September of 2020. The nodal points of the research include the resilience and flexibility of the organizations, their efforts to assist during the emergency and lockdown, as well as the issues of networking and the nature of their relations with the national and local authorities.

Keywords: civil society – government relations, COVID-19, exceptional legal order, resilience and flexibility of civil organizations

---

*Corresponding author: Ágnes Kövér, Institute of Social Studies, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary, E-mail: kovera@tatk.elte.hu. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7596-6473>

Attila Antal, Institute of Political Science, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary

Izabella Deák, Doctoral School, Debreceni Egyetem, Debrecen, Hungary

1 COVID-19 Pandemic and its Consequences in Hungary

State power has an eminent position in the fight against the virus; one of its basic tasks is to organize the protection of the population. Accordingly, on March 11, 2020, the government declared a national emergency, and on March 30, the parliament adopted the so-called coronavirus law,¹ which allowed for exceptional legal order indefinitely. An Operational Tribunal (Group/Body) has been formed, headed by the Minister of the Interior and the majority of its nine members are representatives of the police, counter-terrorism and other armed bodies, while medical profession was represented by three doctors. The (already insignificant) health state secretariat and professional leadership within the EMMI (Ministry of Human Resources) have become invisible. Soldiers were commanded to head the hospitals and the fight against the virus was given a military interpretation instead of a medical-professional framework. (The system of health care institutions that would have to deal with the pandemic had already undergone a transformation after 2010 that departs from and opposes the aspects of effective operation. It was subordinated to an extreme degree of centralization of public administration and opportunistic fiscal policy (Orosz 2020).)

Infection rates remained very low in the first wave of the epidemic, with the daily number of infections peaking for one day in mid-April at around 200, fluctuating from about 100 before and after. Then after May it gradually decreased (see Figures 1 and 2).

The country was closed and shut down gradually from the end of March, with the introduction of a partial curfew. These timely measures successfully prevented the further spread of the infection in the first wave of the epidemic.

The exceptional legal order was abolished on 18 June 2020, but it was replaced by transitional laws² which kept in order numerous regulations that are out of accord with³ the rule of law. Within the framework of the exceptional legal order, the government has passed or amended nearly 150 regulations. Some of these have had a positive effect on the civil (NGO) sector, some have had a negative effect, and others have undermined minority rights. These will be reported on in detail later.

---

1 Act 12 of 2020.

2 Act No. LVIII of 2020.

3 Helsinki Committee, Analysis of the Transitional Act. Source: <https://www.helsinki.hu/elemzes-az-atmeneti-torvenyrol/>.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.

Figure 1: Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Hungary between March 5 and October 27.

Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

Shown is the rolling 7-day average. The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.

Figure 2: Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people compared with some European and non-European countries' data.

Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>.

The lockdown in the first wave had serious economic and social consequences. Perhaps the most significant involved the increase in unemployment: the number of registered unemployed jobseekers in June was higher by 128,000 compared to the

same time last year, and this number is even higher when including the unregistered unemployed (160,000).⁴ It should be noted that the unemployment benefit period is 3 months in Hungary, one of the shortest in the European Union.

2 The Antecedents of the Relationship between Civil Society and Government in the National System of Cooperation (NSC)

In Hungary, the relations between the government and civil society are characterized by an asymmetry of power in which the governmental actor seeks to produce its desired hegemony⁵ – including consensus – by applying increasing levels of coercion. This strategy, unilaterally dominated by the government may be seen as a “4C strategy”: Cooptation, Coercion, Crowding out, Creation (the creation of a new, loyal civil society). Here we modify Najam’s 4C model (Cooperation, Cooptation, Complementarity, Confrontation in the matrix of goals (ends) and preferred strategies (means)) (Najam 2000, 383), observing that while dealing with issues of power asymmetry, it cannot adequately reflect the aspirations of governmental hegemony in an authoritarian system operating with a multitude of coercions. The 4C model presented here, transformed to fit authoritarian conditions, comprehends government-civil society relations in a country where the development of civil society essentially dates back only 30 years, and where the implementation of authoritarian governance techniques, with minor interruptions, shows historical continuity. The illiberal Orbán government, reigning since 2010, one-sidedly shapes CSOs-government relations by means of coercion, co-optation, displacement (crowding out) and the creation of pseudo-civil organizations. With these four tools, it seeks to achieve hegemonic governance, time and again finding that its efforts to reach consensus are hampered by the fact that a significant proportion of NGOs do not engage in support of either the goals or the strategy of the system (Najam 2000; Pauly, de Rynck, and Verschuere 2016).

---

⁴ Has there been a miracle or brutal unemployment in Hungary? Portfolio, September 7, 2020. Source: <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20200907/brutalis-munkanelkuliseg-van-vagy-csoda-tortent-magyarorszagon-447012>.

⁵ According to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, the ruling class can manipulate society’s values and habits, and those in power exercise power over subordinates through a combination of coercion and persuasion (Simon 1999). Hegemony is only hegemonic if those affected by it also agree and fight for it in the name of common sense (Laurie 2015).

2.1

The best example of **co-optation** is found in the herding of civil service and educational NGOs into Church frames. As a result of the intertwine of state and Church, the system classifies churches as residing within the governmental sphere of power, thus implementing its educational and social service policy primarily through “recognized” churches⁶ or non-profit service providers established by churches, narrowing the space for independent CSOs on this field. In this context, the supplementary and complementary functions of civil organizations, as identified by Young (2000), were limited to a minimum by the state.

2.1.1

The co-optation process is defined by Najam (2000) as the government and NGOs accomplishing similar strategy, but with different goals. The diversion of civil services into churches falls into this category because, although civic human service providers and educational organizations often pursue strategies similar to those of government, they typically avoid ideological commitment. Such organizations address their tasks of serving disadvantaged or marginalized groups while seeking to operate in accordance with the Constitution, laws, and respected fundamental rights. On the other hand, the government, with its intertwined churches, embarked on a radical transformation of public education toward ideological commitment, as part of a political program to replace liberal cultural hegemony. So, when we talk about co-optation of human service provider and educational CSOs, it is essentially a government-led process of fusing CSOs into churches, channeling them into an ideological tube. In this way, a delivery system based on self-organization and local activism of citizens is replaced by an ideologically and politically committed “transmission belt”⁷ within the ecclesiastical order (Kövéér 2015a).

2.1.2

A similar process has taken place in the field of education. After the political transition of 1989, educational CSOs have proliferated, by 2000 there were already thousands of such organizations providing educational services in the country

---

⁶ As a result of the Ecclesiastical Act of 2011, according to the former Act IV of 1990, the majority of churches legally operating in Hungary lost their original legal status, and only 14 (+13) churches were recognized as established by the Act.

⁷ Merle Feinsod’s concept.

(Várdai 2003). Then, from the late 2000s, the number of church-based educational institutions began to increase swiftly, to the expense of civil/nonprofit and private educational institutions. The number of students in Church institutions doubled in 10 years.⁸ However, skimming can be traced since disadvantaged students and students with learning disabilities remained in the public system (Herman and Varga 2016). The state spends four times more on students in Church schools than on those who study in public education,⁹ which means that not only civil or private education, but also secular public education, is marginalized by this policy.

The predominance of Church educational institutions is particularly concerning because, in most cases, their programs operate in stark contrast to those of NGOs as regards the assistance of disadvantaged groups. Church schools often segregate Roma children, as they are exempted from the prohibition of discrimination under ministerial authority. Schools maintained by churches thus realize segregation from two directions, on the one hand sucking good students into their elite schools where Roma are not admitted, and on the other hand, creating ghetto schools only for Roma students, which further increases social exclusion (Kegye 2015).¹⁰

At the same time, after 2010, came the cancellation of normative support for educational CSOs¹¹ (or their total abolition, as was continuously floated), and then the mandatory making of the NCC (National Core Curriculum),¹² which eliminated all pedagogical leeway for these schools. Then came, since 2019, their control by administrative means, by changing the registration rules of foundation and private schools.¹³ So, the government seizes every means it can find to limit or eliminate alternative education based on the principle of equality and inclusive teaching methods.

2.2

The **crowding-out** strategy is generally applied by the regime to NGOs that prioritize the interests of target groups and seek to maintain their autonomy over

---

⁸ https://index.hu/gazdasag/2019/05/08/negyszer_tobb_penz_forras_egyhazi_iskolak_allami_koltsegetes_tanulok diak_roma_cigany_szegregacio_elkulonites/.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ In its decision of 22 April 2015 in the Nyíregyháza segregation case, the Curia stated that the ethnic segregation of Roma people is not segregation because the school has a Church maintainer. This set a precedent for religiously based segregated education.

¹¹ <https://www.nonprofit.hu/hirek/nagy-bajban-lehetnek-az-alapitvanyi-es-maganiskolak>.

¹² In 2016 https://eduline.hu/kozoktatasi/Kinyirjak_az_alternativ_es_alapitvanyi_isko_U14CC3 and in 2019 <https://magyararancs.hu/belpol/moresre-tanitanak-121638>.

¹³ Registration requires a ministerial opinion. <https://ckpinfo.hu/2020/01/15/ujabb-menekulout-zarulhat-be-tamadas-a-maganiskolak-ellen/>.

loyalty to the government. Two major strategies for crowding out have been identified in the recent period: removal of public funding and public discrediting.

2.2.1

Public funding of CSOs is a common practice in which the state allocates budgetary resources for the implementation of programs that fill deficiencies flow from the state and the market operations (Rymysz and Zimmer 2004; Salamon, Hems, and Chinnock 2000); or that meet the heterogeneous needs of citizens (Anheier and Toepler 2018); or voice marginalized actors (Ibrahim and Hulme 2010); and contribute to the accountability and transparency of political systems (Jessen 2017). There are various models of public funding for civil society, of which the Hungarian model followed the principle of civil self-governance before 2010. Community funds were distributed in bodies organized at the national level and filled by representatives of CSOs through electors, where the government was also represented.

After 2010, this status changed. The government established the National Cooperation Fund (NCF),¹⁴ in which the principle of civil self-governance does not prevail either in its composition or operation (Ágh 2016; Kövér 2015b; Nagy 2014). The NCF Council has no autonomy or regulatory power. In its sub-committees, the former qualified civilian majority has been transformed into a qualified governmental majority, and the President of the College is appointed by the Minister at his own discretion. The number of decision-makers and bodies of the previous system was reduced, but this did not lead to greater transparency, but only ensured a decrease in the number of civilians (Kákai 2013; Nagy 2014). Council decisions are not transparent,¹⁵ the organization has no website, no annual reports, and the President of the Council has prevented the press from covering its public meetings several times (Nagy 2014). The changes clearly reduced CSOs' access to public resources and strengthened their political dependence (Bíró 2016). As a matter of fact, state tenders are awarded to organizations that are in some way tied to the government.¹⁶ These funding strategies clearly crowd out independent organizations from civil space.

---

14 By Act No. CLXXV of 2011 on the right of association, public benefit status and the operation and support of non-governmental organizations.

15 It is only possible to search for individual data in the decision lists, so it is not possible to examine public finance control aspects.

16 András Becker: Here is the list of civilian subsidies: it's cool to demonstrate on the side of the government. <https://atlatszo.hu/2012/10/22/itt-a-civil-tamogatasok-listaja-a-kormany-mellett-demonstralni-meno/>.

2.2.2

Another important strategy of crowding out seeks to incriminate independent CSOs and weaken public confidence in civil society. This approach has unfolded in campaigns and legislation since 2010. A prominent example involves the campaign against foreign-backed NGOs, which began in 2014 with attacks on the Norwegian Civil Support Fund (NCSF) on the grounds of “malpractices” in distribution of funds received from NCSF. Organizations were first attacked in the media, then the Government Audit Office, and the police were also utilized in the action (Nagy 2016). The government’s allegations were not substantiated in the final report of the Government Audit Office. Then in January 2015, National Tax Authority launched tax audits and the Public Prosecution initiated legality investigations at a further seven organizations. An investigation against Ökotárs Foundation and a further 17 CSOs supported by the NCSF fund was concluded on October 20, 2015, and did not confirm any allegations by the government, yet rhetoric against CSOs continued to suggest that a violation of the law had been committed.¹⁷ The government has organized a well-structured media strategy to invalidate the civil organizations in the public eye. At the outset of the investigation, the seizure of documents and computers, and even the detention of CSO leaders, was reported as “hot” news ubiquitous in the media. Then, when the investigations were closed, and the accusations were found to be baseless, no public information was available about it.

2.3

Coercion most often applied in the case of advocacy or watchdog organizations, which were constantly being attacked by the government vehemently. These organizations have been one of the pillars of democracy (Gaventa 2006; Roniger 1994; Sztompka 1991) in Hungary since the political transition. They influence public policies, monitor the implementation of rights (watchdog), and represent the interests of marginalized, and minority groups (Boris and Mosher-Williams 1998; Habermas 1998). The advocacy function of CSOs also includes services for disadvantaged minority groups in the educational, cultural, and social fields (Salamon and Anheier 1996). Eventually, it is the controlling and corrective function of civil society over politics and governments (Gaventa 2011), defined by Young (2000) as adversarial function, which in many cases is extremely inconvenient for those in power. In democratic systems, power cooperates with advocacy organizations (Chinnock and Salamon 2002) and

---

¹⁷ Judit Torma: The “Norwegian-civilian” attacks in the NER https://ataszjelenti.blog.hu/2016/04/08/a_norveg_civil_tamadasok_a_ner-ben.

seeks to increase its own transparency, thereby enhancing its legitimacy. In the activities of NGOs, service functions are predominantly inseparable from the representation of the interests of target groups (e.g., the poor, the disadvantaged) (Young 2000, 2006), or cultural organizations' objectives from the struggle for the recognition of minorities (Mosley 2010). Thus, CSOs, even if they do not directly pursue advocacy, are agents of shaping government policies (Boris and Mosher-Williams 1998; Cohen and Arato 1997; Chinnock and Salamon 2002; Edwards 2011; Habib and Taylor 1999; Van Til 2000). At the same time, a clear distinction can be made between politics (party politics, politicization) and policy (Beck 1994; Mouffe 2005). The basis of the Orbán attack on advocacy organizations is precisely the act of consciously blurring these two words together. Although it should be noted that the more authoritarian a regime is, the more policy issues become politicized (O'Connor, Janenova, and Knox 2019).¹⁸

2.3.1

Funding for advocacy organizations is a delicate issue because the criterion of independence is particularly important (Neumayr, Schneider, and Meyer 2015). Some experience suggests that resource dependence on government reduces, while others say that it does not affect advocacy function (Mosley 2011; Neumayr, Schneider, and Meyer 2015), although the authors in each case strongly suggest revenue diversification (Haibach and Kreuzer 2004). The historical context of Hungary in particular, justifies the importance of the independence of advocacy organizations from the state. However, before 2010, these organizations received regular state or NCA (National Civil Fund)¹⁹ support, although they sought to diversify their revenues, relying in part on private grants, the taxpayers' 1% offerings, and resources from international organizations.

The latter practice serves as a basis for the government's attack after 2010, with the claim that advocacy organizations pursue open political goals, in the interest of foreign powers (Orbán 2014)²⁰ and pursue agendas completely contrary to the real interests of the Hungarian people.²¹ From this position of government-created

---

18 In the practice of many countries, it can be observed that the regulating power seeks to "deregulate" advocacy organizations and steer them towards the provision of services (Chinnock and Salamon 2002).

19 National Civil Fund – a resource allocation council based on the electoral representation of non-governmental organizations.

20 „these people are not civils, but soldiers of foreign interests” Viktor Orbán (Tusnádfürdő 2014).

21 Ervin Nagy (2020) “Civilians” influenced from the outside. XXI. Century Institute – founded by the government and headed by one of the government's main clients, Maria Schmidt. Source: <https://www.xxiszazadintezet.hu/kivulrol-befolyasolt-civilek/>.

trenches came the Law on the Transparency of Foreign-Supported Organizations,²² which applies to foundations and associations that receive monetary or other property benefits directly or indirectly from abroad.²³ Organizations must declare to the tribunal that they are sponsored from abroad, where they will be listed.²⁴ In the event of failure to report, the court will ultimately have the option to abolish the organization. 60 members of parliament have appealed to the Constitutional Court²⁵ and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) over the law. According to the judgment of the CJEU of 18 June 2020 (C-78/18), the aforementioned Law on Transparency violates the EU law in five areas.²⁶

Despite the decision of the CJEU, no law has been amended or repealed in Hungary. On the other hand, a campaign against the EU has been launched, branding the Court of Justice of the European Union and this decision as part of an international conspiracy against Hungary (led by George Soros). This campaign continuously defines the application submitted to the CJEU by 14 NGOs as an 'accusation/report', underlining the putative hostility of the act. It seeks to prove that all of the signatory organizations are engaging in anti-government political activity, even in the case of service provider organizations;²⁷ and it considers the decision of the Court itself to be politically biased, not a legal document but a political one.²⁸

2.3.2

The threatening of CSOs with criminal sanctions appeared on the agenda in connection with the refugee crisis as it unfolded in 2015. Hate speech against refugees and immigrants as a framework has played a major role in politics against

²² Act No. LXXVI of 2017.

²³ Worth HUF 7.2 million in a tax year, which is approx. \$ 23–\$ 25,000, approx. 19,000 Euro.

²⁴ A list of NGOs supported from abroad was soon posted on the Civil Information Portal. Available: <http://civil.info.hu/kulfoldrol-tamogatott-civil-szervezetek>. The unreality of the situation is shown by the fact that many organizations (e.g. Hungarian Ecumenical Relief Organization, Hungarian Red Cross) have been added to the list, for which there was no reasonable reason to politically attack them in the framework of the hate campaign related to refugees.

²⁵ The Constitutional Court suspended the proceedings due to proceedings before the CJEU.

²⁶ JUDGMENT OF THE COURT (Grand Chamber) 18 June 2020 <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=227569&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=5801068> According to the CJEU, the law violates the free movement of capital, the freedom of association, the right to respect for private and family life and the right to the protection of personal data.

²⁷ For example, the Igazgyöngy Foundation for the catching up of disadvantaged children or the Levegő Munkacsoport for environmental purposes.

²⁸ Ervin Nagy *ibid.*

CSOs. At the same time, the government recoded its enemy-forming messages in domestic and foreign policy, targeting CSOs supporting refugees, parts of the opposition, and George Soros, who is claimed as masterminding and financing the migration as a global “conspiracy”. That is why the organizing principle for the next phase of hate generating propaganda was “Stopping Brussels and Soros”. It also became part of the 2018 election campaign and the 2019 European Parliament election campaign.

The attack on NGOs sent a message to society that left-wing parties, civil society, and human rights organizations are “on the side of the foreigners” (Juhász, Molnár, and Zgut 2017). Meanwhile, the CSOs that aided refugees for humanitarian purposes and organized basic activities related to them, were performing tasks that should have been done by the government. For example, food, clothing, toiletries, medicine and legal information were provided to refugees arriving in Hungary, among whom there were many unaccompanied children. The government’s national “consultation” called “Stop Brussels” (2017) further deepened people’s awareness of the link between immigration and terrorism, fomented hatred of Brussels, and envisioned another anti-CSO campaign in the coming months. In addition to anti-refugee issues, the “consultation” questionnaire included a question about NGOs providing legal assistance and judicial representation to refugees. They were defined as foreign-supported organizations whose sole purpose is to intervene in the country’s internal affairs. The fully controlled media, the visual billboard campaign, and the so-called “questions” of national consultation prepared the next restrictive step against CSOs.

The Stop Soros “consultation” organized in 2018 marked a turning point in the thematicization of hate policy. The person of George Soros was deliberately embedded in the government’s hate policy framework, thereby personalizing the subject of hatred in a more tangible way than ever before (Antal 2019). The Stop Soros package, which came into force in July 2018, ordered the registration of “foreign-supported organizations promoting mass migration” and public accountability for their activities; amended the Penal Code and introduced the paragraph of “facilitation of illegal immigration”, which criminalizes organizing activities (such as the production and dissemination of information materials) that are not directly related to illegal immigration. All these limit NGOs’ assistance to victims²⁹ and penalize advocacy and campaigning activities.³⁰ They also penalize the initiation of asylum proceedings on behalf of refugees and the enforcement of other rights of asylum seekers. Natural persons or organizations providing legal

---

²⁹ This restricts the rights guaranteed by Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

³⁰ Which constitutes an unlawful interference with the freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention.

assistance to immigrants are called upon to face criminal proceedings. No distinction is provided between the individual criminal liability of a member of a non-governmental organization and the liability of a legal person, and the legal consequence of convicting a member of a non-governmental organization on the basis of facts to facilitate illegal immigration may be abolished. According to the Venice Commission, all this restricts freedom of association and expression.³¹ The aim was no longer the “illegal” but to eliminate all activities that aided migration in general.

The Open Society Foundations, Amnesty International³² and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee³³ have also appealed to the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for the nullification of the law because they believe the law illegally criminalizes the work of individuals and NGOs, and impedes constitutional expression, and their freedom of assembly.³⁴ The petition also protests the fact that the new laws also introduce a special tax of 25% after “support for immigration assistance activities”. The Constitutional Court rejected the applications. No judgment has yet been handed down in the ECtHR proceedings.

On 19 June 2018, the European Commission initiated infringement procedure against Hungary for the Stop Soros package. At the request of the Commission, the Hungarian authorities did not provide a satisfactory response to the concerns, and on 25 July 2019, the infringement proceedings were entered into the final court stage.

2.4

The **creation** strategy is two-way, on the one hand the government is making efforts to create a new, loyal civil society, which can be achieved through creating and supporting GONGOs and pseudo-civilians, on the other hand through

---

31 Venice Commission 919/2018. s. Opinion – OSCE/ODIHR NGO-ENG/326/2018 s opinion <https://www.osce.org/en/odihr/386636?download=true>.

32 Amnesty International’s complaint to the Constitutional Court https://www.amnesty.hu/data/file/4270-20181011_ai_ab_benyujtott_final.pdf?version=1415642342.

33 Complaint of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee to the Constitutional Court [http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/757eb39cc72e8780c125832b00340008/\\$FILE/IV_1426_2018_ind%C3%ADtv%C3%A1ny_anonim.pdf](http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/757eb39cc72e8780c125832b00340008/$FILE/IV_1426_2018_ind%C3%ADtv%C3%A1ny_anonim.pdf).

34 Complaint of the Open Society Foundations to the Constitutional Court [http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/7536507ec197d856c125832b0033fe29/\\$FILE/IV_1446_1_2018_ind%C3%ADtv%C3%A1ny_anonim.pdf](http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/7536507ec197d856c125832b0033fe29/$FILE/IV_1446_1_2018_ind%C3%ADtv%C3%A1ny_anonim.pdf).

extending governance to transborder Hungarian CSOs, with which the government tries to fortify its hegemony within the borders.

2.4.1

The National System of “Cooperation” (NSC) primarily supports fake-civilians³⁵ or pseudo-civilians³⁶ created directly or indirectly by itself, whose main purpose is to strengthen the government policy, and the civil organizations created by recognized churches who prove trustworthy (Antal 2016; Ágh 2016; Kövér 2015a; Kuti and Marshall 2020). Thus, a dual strategy emerges against civil society, on the one hand to displace autonomous civil society organizations from the social space, and on the other hand to instrumentalize the right of citizens to associate in order to demonstrate the support of the NCS system (Ágh 2016; Varga 2016).

The creation of NGOs is well exemplified by the hundreds of NGOs³⁷ founded for political purposes in 2002 after lost election, through which FIDESZ sought to maintain and strengthen its political presence (Kövé 2015a). These organizations were disbanded after the 2010 winning elections, and their leaders landed in local or national politics or merged into political power in one way or another (Kövé 2015b). The aim of the “non-governmental” organizations established and supported after 2010 was to support the construction of a new, centralized system of political institutions, and to create ideological unity in the most diverse areas of social functioning. The Orbán system envisions and organizes everything along political logics, which is why the system’s “own civil” organizations are also utilized as political actors, used by the regime from time to time to put pressure on the public and demonstrate the mass base of their own policies. The system strategically uses and exploits the right of citizens to associate.

---

35 False civilians (GONGO) are government-sponsored or government-initiated NGOs funded by the executive to imitate civil society, promote authoritarian interests, and obstruct the work of legitimate NGOs (Tóth 2019). We can talk about professional GONGOs, who become experts in a particular field, and we can talk about diffuse GONGOs, whose main activities are to serve the government, repel attacks on the government, and organize mass demonstrations (Zsolt 2016, 257).

36 The founders of pseudocivil organizations take advantage of the fact that NGOs seem more credible in politics or professional debates than politicians and political parties. The express purpose of these organizations is to deceive voters through the media by creating the appearance of independence (Varga 2015, 238).

37 They are usually registered as a non-governmental organization under the name of some kind of civic circle.

2.4.2

The means of creating a new, expanded civil society is to use the transborder non-governmental organizations of Hungarians in order to create political hegemony inside the borders. The ideological dimension of the strategy is the concept of a cultural nation, through which it integrates transborder Hungarians into the nation, thus creating “national reunification” (Zakariás 2016). One of the tools for this is the support policy, which finances transborder organizations far beyond the resources localized to the National Cooperation Fund, through the Bethlen Gábor Fund (BGF).³⁸ Among other things, the annual budgets document³⁹ that the grants distributed through the Bethlen Gábor Fund have reached seven to 10 times the annual resources allocated to NCF. Although it is a fact that the BGF does not exclusively support NGOs across borders, researches show that most of these are provided by NGOs (associations, foundations, NGOs and non-profit corporations). According to a study conducted in Transcarpathia, 88.7% of grants are received by these civil/non-profit companies (Vaskeba 2019).⁴⁰ At the same time, it should be noted here that the distribution of budget funds through the Bethlen Gábor Fund has no publicity, it is not possible to obtain accurate information on the distribution of Hungarian taxpayers’ money.

The fact that a significant part of the few billion forints already available under the NCF also migrates to cross-border organizations, partly through the National Cohesion Sub-Committee and partly through other subcommittees,⁴¹ also contributes to the funding disparities. This support policy demonstrates that the NSC is distrustful of domestic organizations, while it sees cross-border civil society as its

---

38 Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt, a business company established in April 2011, operates the Bethlen Gábor Fund, which is a non-profit business company. This is aimed at promoting the realization of the goals related to the national policy strategy of the Hungarian Government. The Bethlen Gábor Fund (BGA) is a “segregated public fund, the purpose of which is to comply with CLXXXII.tv. according to him, the prosperity of the Hungarians living abroad in their homeland – individually and communally - ....” <http://archive.bgazrt.hu/magunkrol/tevekenysegunk/>.

39 Among other things, the 2019 budget document documents that the support provided to the NEA was HUF 7.7 billion (of which HUF 5.9 billion went to NGOs through tenders (Annual Report of the National Cooperation Fund. Source: Ervin Nagy (2020)), while the Gábor Bethlen Fund received HUF 46.4 billion in support, but there was a year when cross-border organizations did not receive a 10th of the Hungarians’ support. About the support of 2020: <https://bgazrt.hu/tobb-mint-22-milliard-forintos-tamogatas-a-kulhoni-magyar-kozossegeknek/>.

40 Vaskeba Hajnalka (2019) Research in the master’s thesis entitled Presentation of Hungarian Civil Organizations in Transcarpathia from the Perspective of Their Regulation and Operation, conducted by Ágnes Kövér-Van Til under the supervision of a consultant.

41 See, for example, the tender notices NEAN-KP, NEAG-KP, NEAO-KP, which tender amounts are always managed by BGA Zrt.

true mass base. The government's strategy, according to which it intends to strengthen the autonomy⁴² of the Hungarians there and thereby ensure its hegemony within Hungary's borders, is clearly visible. The policy of the National System of Cooperation thus instrumentalizes the national emotions of transborder Hungarians and utilizes minority Hungarians' to strengthen their own power. The political goals are quite obvious: "*The Fidesz-KDNP party alliance enjoys more than 96% support among Hungarian voters across the border, and -" although it will be difficult to increase this number -" the party will do its best to live up to their confidence.*" – says Árpád Potápi, Secretary of State for National Policy in Tüskés.⁴³

Meanwhile, in the discourse related to the support policy, the essentialized category of "the" transborder Hungarian is created, which signifies a culturally homogeneous, unified population and even community (Zombory 2011), which needs support, help and even patronage, but whose Hungarian-ness is more authentic and valuable than Hungarians in Hungary (Zakariás 2016; Zombory 2011). Development-backwardness and modern-traditional dichotomies represent a culturally colonial discourse that constitutes both backwardness and originality (Zombory 2011, 222). The general and deep lack of trust in the Hungarian population and CSOs fundamentally characterizes the National System of Cooperation. They do not trust their citizens and organizations living in their own country at all, because these citizens and CSOs have enough autonomy to express alternative or different opinions.

All this government policy is not only divisive, which contrasts domestic independent NGOs with cross-border civilians, but also sends the message that the National System of Cooperation does not need independent CSOs in Hungary because its mass base is provided by transborder civilians. The two-faced government policy refers to universal human rights on behalf of transborder Hungarians, against the nation-state of Hungarians living abroad, while constantly undermining the autonomy of Hungarian civil society, restricting the right of association in many forms, and pushing human rights discourse aside as "liberal".

3 The Relationship between Government and Civil Society in the COVID-19 Situation

The presence of cross-sectoral cooperation is extremely important in an emergency, in which the civil sector also has a huge role to play. All are involved in

---

⁴² Against their own nation-state.

⁴³ Tüskés, 2018: The unification of the nation in public law is practically completed c. article quotes <https://bgazrt.hu/tusvanyos-a-nemzet-kozjogi-egyesitese-gyakorlatilag-befejezodott/>.

dealing with the consequences of the emergency, alleviating the difficulties faced by people, and managing the conflicts that arise (Simo and Bias 2007). Governance technologies that build on cross-sectoral collaboration can successfully contribute to reducing harm and to the self-building, self-healing processes of communities. In their study on the role of non-profit organizations in disasters and emergencies, Simo and Bias (2007) highlight the important role of civil society in cross-sectoral cooperation, especially due to specific non-profit characteristics such as volunteer recruitment and high levels of responsiveness they can give to local problems. Alvez and de Costa (2020) have already developed recommendations for government-civil society cooperation on the COVID-19 epidemic, which include targeted and coordinated institutional philanthropy to build the capacity of NGOs; a permanent relationship between government and CSOs on public policy issues, which fosters trust and positive relationships; effective two-way communication; transparency and open governance; and last but not least, flexibility of procedures and control.

The Hungarian government, in seeking to avert consequences of the pandemic of 2020 and remedy its outcomes, relied solely on its own central resources and made no attempt to organize cross-sectoral cooperation. The relationship between government and civil society in the epidemic has also been unilaterally defined by the stronger party. Government measures ranged from hostile moves to ignorance and to supportive policies. A positive measure is found in new tax rules, which consider an emergency donation to be tax-free, thus motivating the donation and giving CSOs more opportunities to channel grants to their target group.⁴⁴ NGOs were also helped by the decision to change the deadline for their reporting obligations from 31 May to 30 September.

However, the National System of Cooperation has performed poorly in the pandemic in collaboration with autonomous, civil, or professional and advocacy organizations. A good example of this is its relationship with the Hungarian Medical Chamber (HMC).⁴⁵ Despite the statutory goal of chambers (such as the HMC) to shape health policy and participate in decision-making,⁴⁶ the government completely ignores the organization and does not involve it in the development of epidemic-related measures,⁴⁷ rather using it for its own

---

⁴⁴ <https://ado.hu/ado/adozas-koronavirus-idejen-3-resz/>.

⁴⁵ It is an independent, democratic, guild-like body of Hungarian doctors, whose members are intended to protect the professional, moral and financial interests of its members. <https://mok.hu/a-kamararol/kuldetesunk-alapelveink>.

⁴⁶ Act XC VII of 2006, as amended in 2011, introduction to the law.

⁴⁷ Letter to the Minister of the Interior. The chamber is still not involved in the preparation of legislation. <https://mok.hu/hirek/mokhirek/level-a-belugyminiszternek>.

political games.⁴⁸ Even in this situation, authoritarian politicization practices do not allow for cooperation with an independent advocacy organization.

Ignoring civil/non-profit society is also reflected in another government decision on the economic bailout package. The government wage subsidy program aims to prevent labor dismissal due to severe income losses by the epidemic. However, this program does not cover CSOs as employers, even though the sector employs more than 166,000 people and is responsible for 5.2% of GDP.⁴⁹

The government's decision to reduce or eliminate support for certain CSOs deemed undesirable, citing the economic difficulties caused by the epidemic and closure, may also be considered a hostile move. At the height of the first wave, the government decided to withdraw financial support from three NGOs whose institutions have been educating deprived, often Roma, children living in multiple disadvantaged areas for decades. In this way, the programs and institutions of the Igazgyöngy Foundation, the Ámbédkár School and the Hungarian Lutheran Brotherhood affecting hundreds of disadvantaged children were endangered, which is ultimately an attack not only on the organizations, but also on their target groups. At the same time, for example, the government supported the tennis federation, whose president is one of the leading FIDESZ politicians, with tens of billions of forints. While the deprived organizations provided tremendous assistance during the epidemic to local children and their families. A form of political resistance can be discovered in the way citizens and economic actors have reacted to this government decision. Within days, significant donations were offered to these organizations that exceeded the amount withdrawn. The solidarity of citizens was indicated clearly in these actions, which demonstrates at the same time the resistance against exclusionary policies of the government.

At the same time, the executive power, disproportionately strengthened by the exceptional legal order, was used by the government not only to deal with the epidemic, but also to attack certain civilian groups. "Emergency" legislation, for example, has curtailed the right of transgender people to change their name. By amending the Registry Act, the concept of "birth sex" was created instead of the previous "sex", which cannot be changed afterwards. This aims at the administrative disappearance of a group that is considered undesirable, thereby violating human dignity, the right to privacy, and the prohibition of discrimination. The timing of this regulation has made the advocacy work of NGOs and raising the issue in public almost impossible. In addition, it is dangerous to speak out in a political space where government-generated moral panic surrounds gender issues.

---

⁴⁸ In the case of the Act on the Settlement of Medical Payments and the New Health Legal Relationship, which was new legislation at the time of the COVID-19 epidemic.

⁴⁹ https://index.hu/gazdasag/allas/2020/05/20/bertamogatas_civil_szervezetek/.

It should be noted, however, that the exceptional legal order is not exceptional in Hungary. The second and third Orbán governments regularly make use of the state of emergency tools and steering techniques. In connection with the refugee and immigration crisis, from September 2015, the exceptional legal order was extended gradually to the whole country because of the so-called a “crisis caused by mass immigration” – for which the legal conditions were not and do not exist (Helsinki Commission 2019). This crisis coincided with the coronavirus-crisis. At the outset of the epidemic, the Prime Minister even linked illegal migration to the epidemic: “... *There is a clear link between illegal migration and the coronavirus epidemic, as many immigrants come from or through Iran, which is one of the focal points of the infection.*”⁵⁰ However, this was later changed and rebuilt the epidemic into a new exceptional legal order: the “*human epidemic causing mass illness endangering the safety of life and property*”.⁵¹ A state of emergency has been declared and the Act on Control Coronavirus⁵² has been passed on regulatory governance. By government decree, you may suspend the application of certain laws, deviate from statutory provisions, and take other extraordinary measures.⁵³

In summary, during the first wave of epidemic, there has been no government attempt to coordinate the activities of CSOs or to try to harmonize sectoral cooperation from a broader perspective. That is cross-sectoral cooperation has not emerged as a government strategy for epidemic management. Nevertheless, civil society’s contribution in alleviating the hardship at the local level, in a self-organizing way, was significant.

At the municipal level, one may discern in many cases strategies that involve CSOs. For example, the Budapest self-government has contracted with several key CSOs working in the capital. Based on the experience of the first wave, the General Assembly of the capital self-government issued a civil decree to provide for the possibility of regular and formalized co-operation with CSOs in a number of thematic areas (environment, equal opportunities and housing, civic participation).

In this context, the fact that in a short time 81 community fundraising campaigns were organized by CSOs, during which HUF 150 million HUF (cc. \$500,000) was raised for those in need, in the form of online and telephone donations, is particularly significant. This amount was 18 times higher than the donation collected in the same period a year earlier. The Stay Home community initiative and campaign was also

---

50 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán briefed his EU colleagues on the situation in Hungary. 2020. 03.10. <https://koronavirus.gov.hu/cikkek/orban-viktor-miniszterelnok-ismertette-unios-kollegaival-magyarorszagi-helyzetet>.

51 40/2020. (III. 11.) Government Decree.

52 Act No. XII. of 2020.

53 The declared emergency raises a number of constitutional problems from the outset (Szente 2020).

extremely successful, also organized and run by CSOs. As part of this, a multitude of spontaneously developed services were offered to the elderly, from daily shopping to drug purchase; and for those in need of culture, from quarantine concerts, online guided museum tours and Stay Home Festival. The events demonstrated the two forms of solidarity described by Zygmunt Bauman (2013): the explosion of solidarity and the carnival of solidarity. These forms of solidarity, however, remain informal and leave deepening structural problems untouched.

4 Research on the State of CSOs during the First Wave of the Pandemic

The research was conducted in the first wave of the coronavirus epidemic, between March 1, 2020, and September 1 and concentrated on the CSOs – government/local government relations and cooperation during this period. As methodology, three in-depth interviews were conducted with CSO leaders, and a questionnaire was developed, which was made online available to organizations between September 1, 2020, and September 15, 2020. During this short period, 24 organizations filled in the highly detailed questionnaire, including an umbrella organization with more than 25 member organizations nationwide.

The nodal questions of the study were the resilience and flexibility of the organizations; the ability of CSOs for developing new strategies which accommodate them to the new situation; the adequacy of the organization's resources; participation in overcoming local difficulties and implementation of services/assistance provided to target groups; the issues of networking opportunities and the nature of relations with the government/municipalities.

4.1 Characteristics of the Organizations Involved in the Study

Most of the organizations (66%) were located in Budapest, the rest in rural areas. Most of them are organizations established before 2010 (70%), and more than half of them have public benefit status.⁵⁴ Most of the CSOs without public benefit status are older, pre-2010 organizations, and their annual budget remains below

---

⁵⁴ Public benefit status is defined as: public benefit activity is any activity by which an organization directly or indirectly assists in the performance of a state or municipal public task defined by law, thereby contributing to the satisfaction of the common needs of society and the individual. An organization may perform public benefit activities without having a public benefit qualification, however, a state, administrative or budgetary body may enter into a public service contract with a

\$32,000, two-thirds of them have a budget of less than \$15,000. Three-quarters of the organizations which participated in the research indicated advocacy, legal protection, and support for disadvantaged and minority groups as their core mission, either exclusively or in addition to service provision. Services indicated were most often provision of education, maintenance of schools or school programs, offering of cultural services, and provision of social services in addition to advocacy (see Figure 3).

The target groups of the organizations include disadvantaged groups (poor, Roma, women, people with disabilities, homeless), age groups (elderly, young people, children), sexual minorities, and professional groups. 66% of the organizations perform state tasks in the fields of social, educational, child protection. More than half of the organizations had a budget of less than \$32,000 per year in 2019, while there were some organizations with a budget of more than \$180,000 – these are the tendering and resource allocation organizations (see Figure 4).

A quarter of the organizations surveyed have neither permanent nor contract staff, more than half have 1 to 10 employees, and some have 10 or even more than 15 employees. Volunteers working with organizations range from 1 to 15 for most organizations, but for 40% of organizations the number of volunteers is over 15 and in case of 3 is over 100. Although the number of organizations

Figure 3: Distribution of organizations according to their activities included in the memorandum of association.

Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

---

non-governmental organization only if the non-governmental organization has a public benefit status and the vast majority of tenders are public benefit status.

Figure 4: Distribution of the organizations participating in the study according to their 2019 budget.

Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

participating in the study is small, so it cannot be considered representative, it can be said that the study covers a wide range of organizations working in the field of advocacy.

4.2 How Flexible were CSOs to Adapt to the Conditions of Epidemic and Lockdown?

Only a quarter of the organizations stated that their organizational conditions were strong enough to meet the challenges of the epidemic and the shutdown. A significant majority of them had to make major changes and had to seek external assistance to be able to continue their activities. Most organizations did not have to lay off employees, but there were some from which some employees had to be laid off because their salaries became uncovered. In several cases, organizations had to terminate ad hoc or agency contracts, but the majority did not report termination of such contracts. The activities of volunteers are fundamental to the life of CSOs, and in most cases (75%), the organisation's volunteers were reported to have continued their contribution and even been active during the lockdown. In some cases, there was a significant increase in the number of volunteers in the crisis.

The functional operation of the organizations in the emergency required the performance of a large number of extra tasks, as reported by 90% of the organizations. These extra tasks appeared in a variety of forms: from the regular disinfection, to coping with quarantine rules, but most often the extra tasks were related to the target groups. Due to the transition to home offices, it was common for staff to work at night, as children staying at home did not allow sufficient time for parents to work productively during daytime hours.

The CSOs implemented their own internal crisis management in terms of their institutional functioning. As part of this, half of the organizations introduced organizational changes that allowed for flexible adaptation. These changes mainly meant the transition to online activities (homeoffice), but there were those who introduced flexible working hours and digital education. However, there was one organization that was forced to apply a reduction in working hours.

A significant part of the CSOs studied initiated strategic planning and focused on professional cooperation. 70% of organizations reported that they developed new strategies responsive to the pandemic's challenges, by supporting and assisting people in need, extending online space as by setting up a donation webshop, organizing a virtual exhibition, performing digital learning assistance programs and creating online training materials; by application of new digital technologies, telephone and online 24-hour information service and counselling, legal assistance for businesses in trouble or people became unemployed, etc. Some CSOs used their own revenues to set up aid funds and distributed money and digital devices among smaller organizations and needy citizens. These new strategies were developed within a few weeks, but usually within one month. In some cases, the activities of CSOs narrowed, as the previously planned offline programs could not be organized, and as a result, they suffered serious financial and prestige losses. All in all, most of the organizations were operating continuously after the online transition; however, some organizations were forced to close all or part of their activities (see Figure 5).

Similar data were reported by NIOK⁵⁵ in April 2020, in a survey of 57 organizations that found 17% of organizations were forced to shut down completely.⁵⁶

Figure 5: Way of operation of CSOs during the first wave of pandemic.
Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

⁵⁵ Nonprofit Information and Training Center Foundation.

⁵⁶ <https://www.nonprofit.hu/hirek/Az-online-terbe-koltozes-a-legnagyobb-gond-koronavirus-felmeresunk-megallapitasai>.

Employees working for NGOs were also threatened by the virus, so the organizations had to ensure their protection. Most organizations have been able to do this, partly through the introduction of homeoffice and partly using protective equipment. Most CSOs did not have any extra resources to provide protective equipment (masks, disinfectants and cleaners, gloves), often the staff solved their own protection from their personal resources (75%). They did not receive external support for providing protective equipment to their clients, but creative fundraising online events helped them to fill this gap.

Cooperation and networking with other CSOs have become one of the most important guarantees of active survival. Three-quarter of the organizations initiated new collaboration with other CSOs and new forms of collaborations have emerged that they have not tried before. Such new forms of cooperation were online meetings and consultations, as well as new forms of knowledge sharing, networking, and joint planning of crisis grant applications and fundraising.

4.3 The Resources of CSOs during the First Wave of COVID-19

CSOs responded uniformly that they had not received any extra resources or support from the government (or governmental body) to carry out their tasks in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it should be noted here that they have achieved their tasks under those radically changed conditions, and in many cases have even expanded their activities. Very few organizations reported that they received extra funding (or other support) from the Budapest self-government. None of the rural organizations were supported, even some of them fell victims to government funding cuts, as we previously mentioned. More than half of the CSOs indicated that their activities had already been funded by foreign grants and private donations, and that several maintained their programs by volunteer activities.

We received information about the vision, or future perspectives, of the examined CSOs based on three indicators: expected future resources, future policy level support of their target group, and general political support of the civil sector. Most organizations have a negative perspective on these issues. They do not trust that they will receive additional resources, or that their target group will be more strongly supported by politics. Nor do they expect that better policies will be developed than has been the case so far, and they also do not anticipate that policies towards civil society will be more appropriate in the future. Though some organizations expressed a positive vision of the future, undoubtedly those supported from abroad, they are however the ones stigmatized by governmental politics.

The smaller the budget of the CSOs, the more negative were the future expectations they expressed. An interesting correlation is that all organizations with a negative vision were founded before 2005, all located in rural areas, and all believing that their prospects are bleak. These organizations operate primarily in the disadvantaged eastern part of the country and work with disadvantaged people, families and children. This climate of opinion well reflects the government’s exclusion-based policy, which shows no intention of helping marginalized populations. In the background of the CSOs’ more optimistic attitude in the Capital stand expectations of future corporate donations and foreign aid.

The current resources of the organizations in most cases allow them to continue their activities. However, three organizations stated that their resources are not sufficient to achieve their organizational goals in the current extreme situation. We examined the quality (appropriate, inadequate) of the current set of conditions of CSOs and the correlation of their future perspectives. This often showed that even those organizations that thought that their existing resources would allow them to continue to operate and achieve their organizational goals had a very negative assessment of their prospects. Some stated that their target group cannot count on support from governmental resources. And some attributed their negative expectation to governmental dislike of independent civilians. These organizations have often reduced their activities to a minimum or have moved

Figure 6: The rural and Budapest CSOs’ idea about their future perspectives, and their experience of their own organizational conditions during the pandemic.
Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

toward lower-cost modes, based primarily on volunteering and the use of their own personal resources (see Figure 6).

Most organizations (65%) studied were also negatively affected financially by the postponement or deletion of their offline programs, which in many cases could not be made up online. This figure is consistent with the results of a survey conducted by NIOK, which found that 45% of organizations responding had problems transferring their programs to online space because those were not compatible online.⁵⁷

4.4 Target Groups of Organizations and Support Provided to Them

Despite all the difficulties reflected above, the examined CSOs were able to provide support to their target groups. Only four organizations stated the opposite; they were the ones whose organizational and financial conditions were not sufficient to adapt to the situation. In most cases, CSOs collected and provided donations (37%), provided psychological support and information (25%), legal advice (25%), and online programs (25%). The most common was the collection and donation of food, mostly durable, which was the greatest need of clients and local people.

Figure 7: Organizations' assistance and services to their target group in the first wave of COVID-19.

Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

⁵⁷ <https://www.nonprofit.hu/hirek/Az-online-terbe-koltozes-a-legnagyobb-gond-koronavirus-felmeresunk-megallapitasai>.

Distribution of rural and Budapest CSOs according to the type of assistance provided to their target groups

n=43

Figure 8: Distribution of organizations in Budapest and rural areas according to the assistance they provided to their target groups.

Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

Furthermore, CSOs provided several types of help to their target groups: some distributed laptop, tablet and smartphone donations which were offered by individuals or companies who wanted to assist disadvantaged children to allow their participation in online education (see Figures 7 and 8).

In most cases, the number of clients or target groups of the CSOs increased as organizations reached out to new clients or those in need of help. Most often, they received those in need and provided services even beyond their usual territorial area. The reason for the expansion of the target group was often that they became more visible online than they were before, and it was possible to join their online programs at the national level, not only in the settlement of the organization.

Beyond the services and support which were provided to needy and disadvantaged people and children, the number of elderly people has increased among the clients who often claimed information, mental and physical support. One of the CSOs which runs a telephone 24-hour hotline for the elderly was compelled to hire more volunteers than before and to reduce the original 20 min of talk time to 10 min because of the huge number of calls asking for information and mental support. Hundreds of phone calls were handled every day. Clients and target groups were seeking help with a variety of problems and needs. The family members of trans people as a new target group appeared who searched for mental and legal assistance because of the homophobic and anti-trans legislation and government policy.

Figure 9: Distribution of the problems of those who turn to the organizations participating in the study for help.

Source: The chart was generated by the authors.

Citizens most often turned to CSOs for social support, followed by a mental support, issues related to online education⁵⁸, and then home problems (sometimes domestic violence). While in some cases, advocacy was sought from the organizations. More than three-quarters of CSOs were able to aid to those who approached them (see Figure 9).

To the knowledge of CSOs, the clients or target groups who approached them in the majority (83%) did not receive support from the municipality or other state (e.g. social) institution. Only in 4 cases was it mentioned that some of their clients received any support from the local government or any other state institution. Local government subsidies to the target group appeared mainly in the form of masks and cleansers, though in some cases they provided minimal food contributions and, rarely, digital devices for children to study at home. The demonstrative expression of solidarity was especially important during this period and appeared several times: partly towards CSOs that were deprived of state support at the time of the epidemic, and partly against a new statutory provision targeting the LGBTQ community. The oppositional municipalities in Budapest, the Capital and several districts hoisted a rainbow flag on their building after the change in legislation, also during the Budapest Pride, and assured the LGBTQ community of their support.

The organizations participating in the research unanimously stated that they did not consider the government crisis management provided to the target groups

⁵⁸ As the entire public and higher education system has switched to online training.

or clients of the organizations to be effective. They unanimously reported that disadvantaged, minority groups are not only completely left out of government policy but are often treated as scapegoats and engage in explicitly racist and homophobic discourse.

The examined CSOs did not consider the effectiveness of government crisis management satisfactory in relation to civil society either. Most of them do not consider crisis management to be effective because CSOs did not receive any support or information, they were not involved in any way in the crisis management, and the government essentially ignored them. This prompted CSOs to seek local solutions and rely on their own resources.

However there have also been good practices during the pandemic, which organizations want to continue in the future, although only organizations in Budapest have been able to give an example. Such good practices were mentioned by the organizations as the use of information technology (ZOOM, free TEAMS, the use of the Slack program for internal communication), the development of new type of own websites to provide more information to clients and stakeholders, as well as more intensive and effective communication with other NGOs, cooperation and the start of networking.

4.5 Summary of the Results of the Survey

The first striking result is the justification of a double discrimination that has been clear feedback from NGOs. On the one hand, this means the discrimination of CSOs that provide protection for minorities, or services to disadvantaged people and children. On the other hand, this is accompanied by the discrimination against their target groups who are either poor, Roma, or of an undesirable sexual identity according to the ideology of the government. The two are, of course, interrelated, as helping and protecting the interests of undesirable groups is also undesirable. Organizations that make otherwise ‘voiceless’ and ‘invisible’ disadvantaged and minority groups visible share their exclusion. Support for these organizations was reduced/discontinued by the government during the epidemic, whose officials stated that the support they provide does “not pay off”. Probably on the stage of such Potemkin politics, they will not pay off as it becomes apparent how millions of people in the country live in deep poverty. The only chance of survival for these groups is provided by these CSOs, who provide even more than this: the real chance for children to escape exclusion and be integrated into society. The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that these organizations can provide incredibly valuable help to people, even if their work is not recognized and their resources are scarce. At the same time, we have witnessed unprecedented social

cohesion, for example in the case of the Igazgyöngy Foundation or the disenfranchisement of LGBTQ groups. This shows that independent CSOs are supported by citizens and the economic actors. Although, in fear of retaliation, companies often dare not donate to independent CSOs and, in practice, tell them exactly to which GONGO to offer 1% of their tax to and provide generous support (CSR).

The other striking phenomenon is that rural organizations are in a worse position than those in Budapest and do not even expect to receive support in the future. In the case of these CSOs, complete or partial cessation due to the epidemic was more common. Their most common problems were the lack of Internet and IT tools. But even so, most of them tried to help in their area: they organized food distributions, fundraising, distributed free masks, hygiene products, provided digital training, and issued a crisis tender for smaller organizations in their vicinity. The biggest problem in their area was hunger management, the livelihood problems of families who became unemployed, and then the children who couldn't spend their time in school during the day and had a lot of problems at home. There is a significant difference between organizations when looking at the year of foundation. CSOs founded before 2005 face several difficulties: their budget is often below 15,000, their vision is always negative, they do not expect support from anywhere, their resources often do not allow them to continue operating. They were less able to cooperate effectively with other NGOs in the new situation, their new collaborations did not develop. It is also evident from the data that these non-profit organizations struggle the most for survival.

Most of these organizations are not public benefit CSOs. However, they carry out public benefit activities and mostly meet the conditions required by law, yet they are not accepted legally as public benefit organizations. From these data, it can be concluded that these organizations have been struggling to survive for a long time and are running out of human, material and social capital. They can still operate under average conditions, but they can no longer adapt flexibly to a new situation.

CSOs, even non-profit organizations without public benefit status, have provided tremendous support locally to social groups that are completely neglected by the National System of Cooperation's policy. This experience shows that CSOs, as an entwined system of roots, interweave society and deliver life-sustaining and survival energies to all walks of life. The main goal of the NSC policy is to make this system of social roots wither away. It is also clear that the system, based on self-organization and local-political activism of citizens, is widely desired to be replaced with an ideologically and politically committed Church and a civil society loyal to the National System of Cooperation.

5 Summary and Discussion

The National System of Cooperation seeks the annexation of civil space, that is, to make the existence of independent organizations impossible. The government's strategy can be summarized in the concept of the so-called 4C policy, which is: Co-optation, Coercion, Crowding out, Creation (creating a new, loyal civil society). The multifaceted adverse practices against CSOs prove that the system does not trust its civil society; it seeks to create a hegemony that requires consensus by establishing pseudo-civilian organizations and by continuous and extensive instrumentalizing of Hungarian minority organizations outside the border. However, this is only partially sufficient for legitimacy based on a symbolic or community-cultural definition (Daloz 2009; Farkas 2015). The system's efforts to control civil activism fail and members of society from time to time show that they understand the importance of independent CSOs and their social responsibilities.

We presumed that the pandemic would favor autocrats and the system which seeks to eradicate independent civil society on several levels. The atmosphere of fear of the virus strengthens the rescuer role of the central power, further increases citizens' dependency and their mentality of 'looking up' and 'waiting for solutions from the good King' – thus transforming citizens into subalterns, just as it was under state socialism. At the same time, civil and civic autonomy is drastically reduced and the content and significance of the right of association is severely eroded. As a result of the lockdown, society has been closing down more than ever before, i.e. in the already family-centered Hungarian culture there is even less opportunity for networking and public activities. The arenas of solidarity are shrinking, which favors authoritarian aspirations of the power. In the long run, the support of CSOs will also decline, mainly for economic reasons. Against these general tendencies, however, in the first wave of the epidemic, a strong civil activity and social solidarity unfolded, showing a social rejection of authoritarian governance and preferences.

At the same time, epidemiological, health and social measures show the increasingly authoritarian nature of the system, and at least as tragic is the economic crisis management program that the Orbán system has put together. The essence of this is a neoliberal policy whose main goal is to directly help capital and large corporations, while the state provides help to workers and those in need only as a last resort. Behind this is Orbán's statement that "there is no going back to an aid-based economy". In an authoritarian system that serves the interests of capital, therefore, any concessions made to workers can only reach them through the filter of capitalists. This is exemplified by the 70 per cent wage subsidy for short-time work announced on 7 April 2020, as the system could no longer delay taking the

same step that any other European country had already taken. However, these state wage subsidies represent only about 10–35% of the total wage costs. “In return” during the epidemic, the Orbán system has introduced a 24-month working time frame that is freely available to employers. This means that anyone can be required to work overtime in remote work at any time. Thus, neoliberal tendencies are further strengthening in all areas, and the epidemic has even been used by the system to continue the amortization of public higher education and the withdrawal of the status of cultural employees as public servants.

CSOs have shown their strength during the first wave of the epidemic. A variety of adaptation strategies in the epidemic have been developed and, in the absence of formal state or municipal mandates, informal mechanisms and personal contacts have been used for addressing emergency issues (Alvez and da Costa 2020). However, in the absence of governmental cooperation and coordination, the efforts of CSOs have remained contingent and informal, which are still of great importance, but not all the potential of CSOs has been utilized for the common good. Hungarian data confirm the international experience that non-profit participation in cross-sectoral co-operation would be particularly important (Simo and Bies 2007), especially in light of the fact that disadvantaged social groups do not have access to the quantity of help and services sufficient to meet their needs.

References

- Ágh, A. 2016. “Vitairat a „civilek hatalmáról” – A védekező társadalom, avagy a civilek hatalma: töprengések a magyar civil társadalom helyzetéről.” In *A civilek hatalma. A politikai tér visszafoglalása*, edited by A. Antal, 29–30, 11–46. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Anheier, H. K., and S. Toepler. 2018. “Civil Society Organizations.” In *Need of New Regulatory Models. Social Cohesion*. Argentina: Global Governance and the Future of Politics, T20.
- Antal, A., ed. 2016. *A civilek hatalma. A politikai tér visszafoglalása*. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Antal, A. 2019. *Orbán bárkája. Az autoriter állam és a kapitalizmus házassága*. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Aquino Alves, M., and M. Marchesini da Costa. 2020. “The Collaboration between Governments and Civil Society Organizations in Response to Emergency Situations.” *Brazilian Journal of Public Administration* 54 (4): 923–35.
- Bauman, Z. 2013. “Solidarity: A Word in Search of Flesh.” <https://www.eurozine.com/solidarity-a-word-in-search-of-flesh/>.
- Beck, U. 1994. “The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization.” In *Reflexive Modernization*, edited by U. Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash, 1–55. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Bíró E. 2016. "Itt tartunk! (2016) Válaszok a Hol tartunk? (2010) által feltett kérdésekre. A civil nonprofit szervezetek jogi szabályozásának változásai 2010 és 2016 között." In *A civilek hatalma. A politikai tér visszafoglalása*, edited by A. Antal, 105–45. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Boris, E., and R. Mosher-Williams. 1998. "Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations: Assessing the Definitions, Classifications, and Data." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 27 (4): 488–506.
- Chinnock, K. L., and L. M. Salamon. 2002. *Determinants of Nonprofit Impact: A Preliminary Analysis. Paper presented at the panel session on "Nonprofit Impacts: Evidence from Around the Globe," Fifth International ISTR Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.* https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lester_Salamon/publication/242075314_Determinants_of_Nonprofit_Impact_A_Preliminary_Analysis/links/550214040cf231de076da258/Determinants-of-Nonprofit-Impact-A-Preliminary-Analysis.pdf.
- Cohen, J. L., and A. Arato. 1997. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Daloz, J.-P. 2009. "How Political Representatives Earn Legitimacy: A Symbolic Approach." *International Social Science Journal* 60 (196): 285–96.
- Edwards, M. 2011. In *Civil Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Farkas, Z. 2015. "A Hatalom Elfogadottsága és Legitimitása." *Szellem és Tudomány* 6 (1–2): 209–35.
- Gaventa, J. 2006. "Triumph, Deficit or Contestation? Deepening the 'Deepening Democracy' Debate." IDS Working Paper, Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex Brighton.
- Gaventa, J. 2011. "Civil Society and Power." In *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, edited by M. Edwards, 416–27. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Habermas, J. 1998. *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Habib, A., and R. Taylor. 1999. "South Africa: Anti-apartheid NGOs in Transition." *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 10 (1): 73–82.
- Haibach, M., and T. Kreuzer. 2004. "Fundraising." In *Future of Civil Society*, edited by A. Zimmer, and E. Priller. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Helsinki, B. 2019. "Álsághelyzet ez, nem válsághelyzet: Saját törvényét is megsérti a kormány." 2019. szeptember 5 <https://www.helsinki.hu/alsaghelyzet-ez-nem-valsaghelyzet-sajat-torvenyet-is-megserti-a-kormany/>.
- Hermann, Z., and J. Varga. 2016. "Intézmények, szociális ellátórendszer." Source: <http://real.mtak.hu/42018/1/15hermann.pdf>.
- Ibrahim, S., and D. Hulme. 2010. *Has Civil Society Helped The Poor? – A Review of the Roles and Contributions of Civil Society to Poverty Reduction?* University of Manchester, Brooks World Poverty Institute. www.manchester.ac.uk.bwpi.
- Jessen, M. H. 2017. "Should Civil Society be Political? The Political Role of Civil Society in Light of the Refugee Crisis." Source: <http://blog.cbs.dk/dbp/2017/01/26/should-civil-society-be-political-the-political-role-of-civil-society-in-light-of-the-refugee-crisis/>.
- Juhász, A., C. Molnár, and E. Zgut. 2017. *Menekültügy és migráció Magyarországon*. Budapest: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung e.V. Prága, Political Capital.
- Kákai, L. 2013. "Nemzeti Civil Alapprogram és Nemzeti Együttműködési Alap: Hasonlóságok és különbségek a régi és új támogatási alapok között." *Civil Szemle* 55 (3): 45–71.
- Kegye, A. 2015. "Áldott szegregáció." *Fundamentum* 76 (1): 75–85.
- Kövér, Á. 2015a. "Captured by State and Church: Concerns about Civil Society in Democratic Hungary." *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 6 (2): 187–212.
- Kövér, Á. 2015b. "Demokrácia és Civil Társadalom." *Civil Szemle* 12 (3): 5–28.

- Kuti, É., and M. Marchall. 2020. "A „birodalom” visszavág? Defenzívában a globális „harmadik szektor”." *Civil Szemle* 17 (1): 37–48.
- Laurie, T. 2015. "Masculinity Studies and the Jargon of Strategy." *Angelaki* 20 (1): 13–30.
- Mosley, J. E. 2010. "Understanding the Policy Advocacy Involvement of Human Service Nonprofits." *Social Service Review* 84 (1): 57–76.
- Mosley, J. E. 2011. "Institutionalization, Privatization, and Political Opportunity: What Tactical Choices Reveal About the Policy Advocacy of Human Service Nonprofits." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 40 (3): 435–57.
- Mouffe, C. 2005. *On the Political*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nagy, Á. 2014. "A Nemzeti Civil Alaprogram és a Nemzeti Együttműködési Alap összehasonlító elemzése." *Civil szemle* 11 (3): 47–68.
- Nagy, Á. 2016. "A magyar állam civil társadalommal szembeni hét halálos bűne." In *A civilek hatalma*, edited by A. Antal, 146–61. Budapest: Noran Libro Kiadó.
- Nagy, E. 2020. "Kívülről befolyásolt „civilek”." <https://www.xxiszazadintezet.hu/kivulrol-befolyasolt-civilek/>.
- Najam, A. 2000. "The Four-C's of Third Sector–Government Relations. Cooperation, Confrontation, Complementarity, and Co-optation." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 10 (4): 375–95.
- Neumayr, M., U. Schneider, and M. Meyer. 2015. "Public Funding and Its Impact on Nonprofit Advocacy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 44 (2): 297–318.
- O'Connor, K., S. Janenova, and C. Knox. 2019. "Open Government in Authoritarian Regimes." *International Review of Public Policy* 1 (1): 65–82.
- Orbán, V. 2014. *Tusnádfürdői beszéd*. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/archivum/belfold-archivum/orban-viktor-teljes-beszede-2-4054256/>.
- Orosz, É. 2020. "Kikényszeríthet-e változást a koronavírus-járvány a magyar egészségügy helyzetében?" In *Koronavírus idején*, edited by F. Nikosz, K. Zsuzsanna, and V. Júlia, 143–50. Budapest: Replika e-könyv.
- Pauly, R., P. de Rynck, and B. Verschuere. 2016. "The Relationship between Government and Civil Society. A Neo-Gramscian Framework for Analysis." <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8065871>.
- Roniger, L. 1994. "Civil Society, Patronage and Democracy." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 35 (3–4): 207–20.
- Rymsza, M., and A. Zimmer. 2004. "Embeddedness of Nonprofit Organizations: Government - Nonprofit Relationships." In *Future of Civil Society*, edited by A. Zimmer, and E. Priller. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Salamon, L. M., and H. K. Anheier. 1996. "The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations: Incpo-Revision 1, 1996." Working Papers of the The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project.
- Salamon, L. M., L. C. Hems, and K. Chinnoek. 2000. *The Nonprofit Sector: For What and for Whom?* Working Papers of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, no. 37. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies.
- Simo, G., and A. L. Bies. 2007. "The Role of Nonprofits in Disaster Response: An Expanded Model of Cross-Sector Collaboration." *Public Administration Review* 67 (1): 125–42.
- Simon, R. 1999. *Gramsci's Political Thought*. London: Elec Book.
- Szente Z. 2020. "A 2020. március 11-én kihirdetett veszélyhelyzet alkotmányossági problémái." MTA Law Working Papers 9. <http://jog.tk.mta.hu/mtalwp>.

- Sztompka, P. 1991. "Dilemmas of the Great Transition: A Tentative Catalogue." http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~ces/publications/docs/pdfs/CEE_WP19.pdf (Accessed June 11, 2014).
- Tóth Gábor, A. 2019. "Constitutional Markers of Authoritarianism." *Hauge Journal on the Rule of Law* 1: 37–61.
- Van Til, J. 2000. *Growing Civil Society. From Nonprofit Sector to Third Space*. Indianapolis, Ind: Indiana University Press.
- Varga, Á. 2016. "A GONGO-jelenség és kormányzati civilek Magyarországon." In *A civilek hatalma. A politikai tér visszafoglalása*, edited by A. Antal, 242–5, 234–48. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Vaskeba, H. 2019. "A Kárpátaljai Magyar Civil Szervezetek Bemutatása Szabályozásuk és Működésük Szempontjából." *Közösségi és Civil Tanulmányok mesterszak szakdolgozat*. Kézirat, a szerző rendelkezésre bocsátása alapján.
- Várdai, M. 2003. "A civil szervezetek szerepe a társadalmi folyamatokban és a szemléletformálásban." *Pedagógiai Szemle* 9, <https://folyoiratok.oh.gov.hu/uj-pedagogiai-szemle/a-civil-szervezetek-szerepe-a-tarsadalmi-folyamatokban-es-a>.
- Young, D. R. 2000. "Alternative Models of Government-Nonprofit Sector Relations: Theoretical and International Perspectives." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 29 (1): 149–72.
- Young, D. R. 2006. "Complementary, Supplementary, or Adversarial? Nonprofit-Government Relations." In *Nonprofits & Governments. Collaboration & Conflict*, edited by E. T. Boris, and C. E. Steuerle, 37–79. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.
- Zakariás, I. 2016. "Szolidaritás és hatalom a kisebbségi magyarokra irányuló jótékonyásban." http://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/917/1/Zakarias_Ildiko.pdf.
- Zombori, M. 2011. *Az emlékezés térképei. Magyarország és a nemzeti azonosság 1989 után*. Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó.
- Zsolt P. 2016. "A civil társadalmunk deliberatív megszervezési kísérlete." In *A civilek hatalma. A politikai tér visszafoglalása*, edited by A. Antal, 249–65. Budapest: Noran Libro.