

**To: Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality**

23-08-2018, Brussels, Belgium

Dear Věra Jourová,

As civil society organizations in Europe that are promoting gender equality in the global South and in Europe, united in the network WIDE+ (Women In Development Europe+), we are hugely concerned about the recent proposal from the Hungarian government to abolish the existing gender studies programmes in Hungary. This is part of an ongoing backlash towards hard-fought policies and laws that aim to protect women's rights and promote gender equality. It is particularly distressing that women's rights defenders in civil society and the academic arena are attacked and blackmailed though they are contributing substantially to democracy and social justice.

### **Hungary's actions will undermine EU's core values**

We have received information from different sources about the Hungarian government's proposed law to abolish the accredited MA programmes in gender studies in Hungary. According to the Hungarian Journal, "the part of the amendment which concerns gender studies provides no explanation whatsoever. Two universities are concerned: Hungary's biggest state-funded university ELTE, and the Central European University. If the amendment becomes official, it will mean that nobody can attend gender studies courses in Hungary and get a degree in the subject."

There is no basis to question or ban gender studies, an academic field in which Hungary enjoys an excellent reputation. This discipline, which is taught in the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the world, has significantly contributed to the advancement of academia, democratization, and the enlightenment of society. Perspectives from gender studies on questions of human wellbeing, equality, identity, difference, and diversity today are also recognized within the framework of human rights as well as many other scientific disciplines, from medicine, law, political sciences, economics, sociology, history to cultural and literary studies, languages and art.

The EU has firmly committed itself to promoting and ensuring gender equality and academic freedom, which are both an integral part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in article 13 and article 23. If this proposal will be implemented, Hungary will act in clear violation to the fundamental values of the EU, threatening the core democratic foundations on which the EU is built.

We see the proposal of the Hungarian government in a context of growing authoritarianism and hostility against individuals and organisations that advocate for women's rights and gender equality. Across Europe, anti-feminist discourses discredit research and advocacy on women's rights, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence.

We call on you to propose actions as European Commission to:

- publicly condemn the proposal for abolishment of gender studies in Hungary, emphasizing the importance and benefits of gender studies as an academic discipline,

## Request for action to protect gender studies in Hungary



- and condemn any anti-democratic and authoritarian rhetoric and attempts to control academic freedom and knowledge creation with regard to gender, gendered human rights and liberation.
- In case the government implements the proposed ban of gender studies, consider possible sanctions towards Hungary.
- Initiate new policy initiatives that support women's and LGBTI people's rights defenders in civil society and academia, by allocating additional financial resources and making visible their positive contributions to societies.

Yours Sincerely,

WIDE+ Caucus on behalf of WIDE+ (Women In Development Europe+), [info@wide-network.org](mailto:info@wide-network.org)