

## Hungary blasted over 'Stop Soros' bill targeting NGOs

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Human rights groups and critics have decried the right-wing Hungarian government's introduction of legislation targeting NGOs that work with refugees and migrants.

The bill - dubbed by government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs as the "Stop Soros" bill - was introduced on Wednesday and would oblige NGOs that support "illegal immigration" to pay a 25 percent tax on foreign donations, among other restrictions.

The government has [accused George Soros](#), an 87-year-old Hungarian-American billionaire and philanthropist, of attempting to undermine the country's sovereignty by encouraging an influx of refugees and migrants, mostly from Muslim-majority countries.

Speaking to the local Kossuth Radio on Thursday morning, Kovacs defended the bill.

"George Soros's network is working to ensure that as many people as possible reach Europe, because they believe this is what will ensure the future of the continent," he said, according to a transcript posted on the Hungarian government's website.

"This is a political programme in which organisations that help migrants are taking part 'disguised' as human rights organisations'."

Nora Koves, a human rights expert at the Budapest-based Eotvos Karoly Policy Institute, described the new bill as "utter nonsense".

"It doesn't make sense, not even in a legal perspective," she told Al Jazeera by telephone. "We have no idea what the bill has to do with Soros. It's basically just part of the government's propaganda."

The bill would also allow for restraining orders that prevent activists from working in areas on the country's Serbian border, which is a frontier for the European Union, and similar restrictions for foreign nationals anywhere in the country.

"This new bill is just the next step along the way of undermining NGOs and distracting public opinion from actual problems like corruption," Koves said.

Several Hungary-based NGOs are slated to hold a press conference about the bill on Friday.

Ultra-nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is expected to win reelection in [April's national elections](#), has railed against the presence of refugees and migrants.

'Fertile ground for populists'

In July, the government also accused Soros of encouraging asylum seekers to come to [Hungary](#) to "Muslimise" the country.

Pushing for broader acceptance of asylum seekers in Eastern and Central Europe, the [Open Society Foundations](#), which was founded by Soros, has been the frequent target of right-wing governments in the region.

After Gergely Gulyas, leader of the ruling Fidesz party's parliamentary group, accused Soros of a "full frontal" attack on Hungary in November, Soros described the ongoing campaign against him as "distortion and lies".

On Thursday, Human Rights Watch released its [World Report - 2018](#), in which it described Orban's rule as "illiberal democracy".

"Central Europe has become especially fertile ground for populists, as certain leaders use fear of migration elsewhere in Europe to undermine checks and balances on their power at home," the report said, referring specifically to Hungary and Poland.

HRW went on to praise the EU's pushback against Hungarian policies, which included a plan to close the Central European University, founded by Soros.

In July, the Hungarian parliament passed a law imposing strict rules on NGOs that receive foreign funding, requiring those that receive more than \$26,000 a year from international sources to be registered as "foreign-supported".

The broader campaign against human rights groups and humanitarian organisations "could mean the end of NGOs" in Hungary, Koves said.

Referring to Wednesday's bill, she added: "It's a huge amount of money that most NGOs simply don't have... Clearly, the goal is to shut down NGOs."