

Clumsy Restrictions

Immersed in a FBI director's testimony, senate hearings and baseball games, most of us likely missed recent legislation approved by Hungary's parliament which imposes strict regulations on foreign-funded non-government organizations (NGOs).

College Church missionary David Ginn and his wife, Shari, and their family served with Cru in Hungary for 14 years. The Ginns relocated to Romania early in 2017. We welcome Dave's perspective on this new law.

There are times that government decisions have far-reaching effects that extend beyond the target of the government's focus. This is one of those laws.

We need to consider the significant context in which this law has been passed. Prime Minister Viktor Orban's administration has been quite nationalistic and protective. About seven years ago, the government passed a law which removed church status from many, many churches across the country. If you weren't part of about 15 specific churches/denominations, you lost the right to be viewed by the government as a church.

The church that we attended in Budapest suffered consequences of this law, though it wasn't specifically targeting churches like ours. Since this law was passed, the government has shown no ill-will toward our church. However, the clumsy way that the government attempted to solve one problem removed church status from hundreds of evangelical congregations across the country. To this day, we have a document submitted to the state which requests that as soon as the law is rescinded we want to automatically re-apply for church status.

This new ruling (passed on June 13) that targets billionaire George Soros looks to me to be the same clumsy approach to dealing with a felt need. The article (read the BBC article here: <https://goo.gl/WLWeKx>) is correct when it states that Soros has ideological differences with the current administration in Hungary and the power of Soros's investments in the country feels threatening to the powers that be. It is a shame for new regulations to roll across all NGOs when the intent of the law is to target a person like Soros.

I am not familiar with the additional paperwork that will be required nor the extra hoops that NGOs will need to jump through since we are now in Romania. I assume that no small number of man hours will be invested to comply with new regulations. I don't see this busy work as threatening nor do I believe that the evangelical population is a target. In fact, the prime minister's son often frequents a prayer initiative that is led by Hungarian young people. Thus, the law is clumsy rather than mean-spirited in my view.

Personally, there is a greater and immediate impact that concerns me. During our last four years in Budapest, our church worked with an ever-increasing number of international students from the Central European University. This university is clearly one of the targets of the new law. Danube International Church has been encouraging, exhorting and discipling 20-30 students from that university. It would be a great shame for our cooperation with these students to come to an end because of an ideological war waged between two significant leaders.

There is plenty to pray about:

1. Pray that Hungary (and other governments) would be protected by the Lord from making clumsy decisions that adversely affect God's work.
2. Pray that church status would be returned to hundreds of congregations across Hungary.
3. Pray that governments would chose to esteem the work of NGOs. From my point of view, most NGOs have a positive influence.
4. Pray that the amount of busy work this law creates for mission agencies and missionaries will decrease. We truly want to remain focused on our task.

On the bright side, I'd like to mention that four years ago God blessed the work of missions in

Hungary with something nearly akin to a miracle. There are court rulings that specify that Christian workers from the U.S. are not liable to pay income taxes nor social taxes in the country. There are some countries that are a bit chaotic and never have enforced taxation on missionaries, there are very, very few countries that have court rulings that declare there is no taxation. My organization knows of no other country in Europe that has provided such rulings. This is God's grace which is keeping some of the costs of life and work in Hungary lower than they would be otherwise.

It is also a grace to know that God is sovereign in the affairs of governments and nations, and one day, every knee will bow.

