

Hungary: State of Affairs Report

Part 1: Country Snapshot

1.1 Brief Country Data

Hungary is an Eastern European nation with a population of about 10 million citizens, the majority of which live in urban cities. 75.6% of Hungarian households have access to the Internet. The government does not block social media, political or social content; the exception is content relating to Holocaust denial. There have been no recent reported arrests of bloggers. Freedom of the Internet remains relatively free though the past few years have seen an increase in attempted government interference.

Part 2: Access to Internet & Internet Services

2.1 Penetration

75.6% of Hungarians households have access to the Internet,[1] with over 2.7 millions citizens holding subscriptions to Internet services.[2] Half the population has basic digital competency and 4.9% of the Hungarian workforce specializes in ICT.[3] This percentage of the workforce specializing in ICT is relatively high compared with the European average but may not last forever. Hungary's National Core Curriculum cut many IT programs from primary and secondary schools in 2013, which Freedom House sees as threatening to cause to a digital divide in the future. This potential divide not just threatens Hungary compares to other European nations, but also divisions among economic classes within Hungary. The latest figures from the National Media and Infocommunications Authority of Hungary (NMHH) from 2014 show that there are over 2.4 million broadband Internet subscribers.[4]

2.2 Demographics

Freedom House's Freedom of the Net country Profile of Hungary notes several different demographic factors affecting access to the Internet. Freedom House found that the lowest levels of Internet penetration are in the poorer, rural communities.[5] The Internet penetration levels of the employed compared to unemployed Hungarians are also disproportionate, at 82% to 52%.[6]

2.3 Uses of Internet

According to the European Commission Digital Economy and Society Index, Hungary boasts the highest percentage of social network users in the EU.[7] While a vast majority of Hungarians are using the Internet to connect with each other and access news, the usage of the Internet for online banking and ecommerce are significantly below EU averages.

2.4 Barriers to access (ex. Government, poverty, etc)

According to Freedom House, "The government does not restrict bandwidth, routers, or switches, and backbone connections are owned by telecommunications companies rather than the state." [8] The

government also allows free access to social media platforms. The greatest threat of internet access is potential of government intervention.

Part 3: ICT Actors & Infrastructure

3.1 Fixed Communication

Over two-thirds of the fixed broadband market is controlled by three ISPs.[9] The largest of these three fixed broadband ISPs is Magyar Telekom, which holds 36.1% of the market.[10] The most common type of fixed broadband subscriptions used in Hungary is via cable, followed by xDSL lines and FTTH.[11]

3.2 Mobile Connection

Only 34.3% of Hungarians subscribe to mobile broadband networks with speeds of 256 kbit/s or greater, putting Hungary at the bottom of all EU countries.[12] This weak mobile broadband network is due to Hungary's non-competitive mobile market inhibiting mobile infrastructure. According to Freedom House, "There are three mobile phone service providers, all privately owned by foreign companies. The existence of only three mobile phone service providers (in addition to the resellers that use the networks of the three major mobile phone service providers) has created a relatively stagnant market in terms of mobile internet network expansion." [13] Even with the slower mobile internet speeds compared to the rest of EU, there has been a great a shift to mobile usage. The 2015 NMHH Internet Usage by Individuals Survey reveals a 5% decrease in the number of desk PC users and an increase of 8% and 3% in smartphone and tablet users.[14]

3.3 International Communication

Being an EU member national and centrally located, Hungary has attracted numerous large tech companies who have helped to expand the nation's international connectivity. Companies like IBM, Oracle, HP, SAP and Erickson opening up offices in the nation, combined with Hungary's relatively liberal telecommunications infrastructure have made the ICT sector 10% of the nation's GDP.[15]

Part 4: Regulatory ICT Policy

4.1 Regulatory/governing bodies and standards (National & International)

The 2010 Media Laws created **National Media and Info-communications Authority (NMHH)**, and its governing body, the **Media Council**. The NMHH is responsible for "allocating television and radio frequencies and penalizing violators of media regulations." [16], where the Media Council is responsible for cases of frequency distribution or media content supervision. The President of the Authority (NMHH) is endowed with power to impose fines on mobile service providers or other service providers who are not in compliance with prescribed regulations or for inappropriate content. The President is also entitled to impose fines for non-compliance under newly established obligations of application suppliers emerging under the anti-terror law of 2016. The process of the President appointing the head of the Media Council

draws concern that the political appointment has drawn criticism for creating an unfair politicization of the Hungarian media landscape.

The **National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information (NADP)** emerged in 2012 with enacting of the Freedom of Information Act and is tasked with protecting citizens' data and access to information. There is an inconsistency in the power of the NADP. Divisions managing protection of data are able impose fines for breaches of protection of data, however, divisions managing freedom of information have no such matching powers.

The NADP prematurely replaced the former, **Data Protection Commissioner**. The replacement of the office of the Data Protection Commissioner before its term was over was seen as a highly politicized move to put Fidesz leaders in power. The EU Court of Justice even ruled in 2014 that Hungary's replacement of the Data Protection Commissioner with the NADP did not oblige with EU law.[17]

Part 5: Information Security, Data Protection and Privacy

There are cases, according to provisions of Act CXXV of 1995 on national security agencies, where covert government surveillance can only be conducted based on the authority of judicial warrant. However, there are some cases where ministerial warrants are sufficient. The European Court of Human Rights declared that secret government surveillance based on ministerial authorization contradicted articles of the European Convention of Human Rights (unnecessary and therefore disproportionate restrictions on right to privacy). See Szabo and Vissy vs. Hungary. Legislators have to amend respective regulations in order to abolish non-judicial authorization of surveillance, but so far such measures have not been taken.

The secrecy of government surveillance makes it difficult to know full extent of Hungarian government surveillance, but Privacy International's 2015 report on Hungary reveals that the Hungarian government has purchased surveillance materials from the Hacking Team, an Italian Company, and from Gamma International, a German company. An August 2014 report revealed that the Hungarian government was a purchaser of Gamma International's Finfisher product and in July 2015 it was uncovered that the government purchased spyware from the Hacking Team.[19]

Part 6: Legal Overview

Terrorist Threat Amendment to Hungarian Constitution June 7th, 2016: Following the Brussels Terror Attack, Hungarian Parliament added a Constitutional Amendment in order to establish a new special legal order: the threat of terror. According to the amendment, in the event of an act of terror or its considerable and immediate danger, the National Assembly - at the initiative of the cabinet - can declare a state of emergency due to a threat of terror (with the support of two-third majority of MPs present). Based on the new rules, the cabinet can introduce special measures until parliamentary approval or up to 15 days. The Government may issue decrees empowered, under cardinal law, to suspend the application of certain laws or derogating from the provisions of laws, and to take other extraordinary measures.

Within the framework of the anti-terrorism legislation, Act LXIX of 2016, many other regulations were amended including the act on the national intelligence agencies, the police act, the act on electronic commerce and on information society services as well as the act on electronic communications: specifically a wide range of disproportionate restrictions on fundamental rights including the protection of online privacy of citizens.

Amendment to act CXXV of 1995 on National Security Services: The National Assembly also established the Counter-terrorism Intelligence and Criminal Analysis Centre (TIBEK), granting the government more power to conduct a range of anti-terror operations. One of these new powers focuses on the control of Internet communication and “collecting and analyzing data on public security threats.”[20]

Act L of 2013 on the Electronic Information Security of Central and Local Government Agencies

The Act created and organized the agencies responsible for information and cyber security. The Act was modified in 2015 in order to untie the numerous separate agencies into the single National Cyber Security Center.[24]

Act C of 2012: The Penal code defines the criminal acts concerning cases of libel and slander, therefore publishing (or disseminating) defamatory content is still criminalized in Hungary According to Freedom House, the Act does not distinguish between traditional media outlets and more modern online media outlets. This lack of distinction means that even the articles of small blogs are considered to be “before the public at large” and broadens the scope of media outlets capable of being accused of libel. [25]

Amendment to the Penal Code in November 2013: The Hungarian Parliament changed the penal code to make the publishing or distribution of defamatory videos or recordings punishable by a sentence of up to three years.[21] OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, expressed that the new change can be dangerously misused to silence investigative journalism and opposition media. Penal Code Revisions in 2013 further affected the nature of internet access by mandating that ISPs block illegal content hosted outside of the country.[22] The NMHH regulates which websites the ISPs are ordered to block using a database known as KEHTA, or Central Electronic Database of Decrees on Inaccessibility but one also needs a judicial decision to block content as KEHTA only contains data related to these decisions .[23]

Act CXII of 2011 on the Right of Informational Self-Determination and on the Freedom of Information (Freedom of Information Act).

Replaced the older Act LXIII of 1992 on the Protection of Personal Data. The Freedom of Information Act aims to ensure the rights of individuals to privacy and “to access and disseminate data of public interest”[26] and implements EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC.[27] The Act replaces the former Data Protection Commissioner with the new National Authority of Data Protection and Freedom of Information (NADP). Similarly to Act CLXXXV, the head of the NADP is “appointed by the president of the republic based on the suggestion of the prime minister for a nine-year term and can be dismissed by the president based on the suggestion of the prime minister on potentially arbitrary grounds,

calling into question the independence of the agency.”[28] An amendment was further added to the Freedom of Information Act in 2013 making it harder to access public information. The adopted motion stipulated that the requests for data with the purpose of a comprehensive, account level and itemized control of the financial management of a body with public service functions are regulated in a specific relevant law (therefore are exempted from the scope of public data requests filed by citizens). In 2015, the National Assembly adopted another motion aiming at discouraging people from filing requests. Data controllers became entitled to easily and arbitrarily charge data requesters not only for copying, processing and sending data, but also for fulfilling data requests as such. They can also deny requests relying on the argument that the requested data is a “preparatory document” that could also be used in the future during the preparation for a certain – closer non-definable – decision, or could restrict the fulfillment of the request based on copyright issues. The amended provisions were harshly criticized by K-MONITOR and TASZ, watchdog NGOs, who considered the modification of the law unconstitutional.

The act established the aforementioned National Data Protection and Freedom of Information Authority (NAIH), which is empowered to impose fines and sanctions on data controllers in certain circumstances. Regardless, freedom of information rights is not gained through imposition of fines. The NAIH is supposed to be independent from government instruction and influence, “however, such independence is questionable when the head of the NAIH is appointed for a period of nine years by the President based on the sole nomination of the Prime Minister.”[30]

Fundamental Law of Hungary: Freedom and Responsibility (Article VI 1-3, Article IX, 1-6.[31]) Article VI promises citizens the right to privacy, the protection of their personal data and the right to data of public interest. Article IX of the Fundamental law also grants citizens freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and established the rules for governing the media and telecommunications.[32]

Act CIV of 2010 on the Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content

The legislation was supported by the new governing, conservative party, Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance (in brief: Fidesz). The Act was created in order to conform to previously established European Union Media Laws. According to the legal representative of the Association of Hungarian Journalists, Dr. Márton Nehéz-Posony, Act CIV “outlines the basic and substantial rules of media content.”[33] The concerning features of the Act arise from the vagueness of writing and threat of biased interpretation by the governing powers. For instance, Article 12 of the Act reserves the right for individuals to request corrections in the press, which can hamper freedom of speech depending on enforcement. The Act regulates both the electronic media outlets (radio and television) and offline and online press, with similar content regulations in effect for the two different types of media.

Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Media: Where Act CIV of 2010 outlines the brief rules of media content, Act CLXXXV of 2010 focuses on the governing authorities, implementation, and regulation of the media. There is also a content-related provision. Act CLXXXV of 2010 established the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) for administration of media content, and established the Media Council President as the decision maker with the power to penalize and

suspend.[34] The leadership of the NMHH and the Media Council come from political nominations and appointments, which could allow the ruling parties to harness the media to stifle opposition. Section 189 of the Act even gives the Media Council the power to force ISPs to temporarily block certain online content.[35]

Act C on Electronic Communications 2003

Article 92 of the Electronic Communications Act stipulates that ISPs and other electronic communications providers are required to work with governmental authorities conducting covert investigations.[37] Agencies also “have the power to acquire the metadata relating to customer communications including, among others, traffic data, IMEI number, service use information, subscriber information, but not the content of the communications”[38] which providers are instructed to hold onto for 6 months. There is an ongoing legal procedure against one of the biggest mobile service provider, where a staff member of HCLU requested the company to provide information of which body was granted access to which pieces of the personal data (with the purpose of the data transfer as well) and to erase the retained information. The company refused to erase the retained data since it stated that it was its legal duty to retain and process it. The courts accepted the company’s argument; therefore the plaintiff submitted a constitutional complaint referring to the fact that provisions of 159/A § of the act on electronic communications contradict the Fundamental Law of Hungary.

Act CVIII on Electronic Commerce and Information Society Services of 2001

The Act on E-Commerce limits liability of ISPs and websites of intermediary services and aims to protect consumers from unsolicited commercial communication, such as emails. The Act also includes a “notice and takedown” procedure to be used when websites are violating copyright laws.[39] According to the newly adopted provisions of the law (based on the anti-terror motion), application suppliers (that is an entity that could provide information society services - including also featured encrypted communication between users) are required to store and disclose (meta)data of users in case of request of authorized services on a broader scale. Motion Packet LXIX of 2016 amended the act.

Litigation:

Hyperlinking Court Case 2016: A news story published on 444.hu in 2013 described rowdy football fans and contained a hyperlink to a YouTube video containing local interviews. One of the interviewees described the rowdy fans as “jobbikers,” a reference to Hungary’s far-right Jobbik Party. Though the Jobbik Party was not mentioned in the article, the mention in the hyperlinked video was enough to find 444.hu guilty of dissemination defamatory statements. This necessitated the redaction of the hyperlinked video from their site. 444.hu has challenged the Hungarian Court’s ruling and has brought the case the European Court of Human Rights.[42]

Szabo and Vissy v. Hungary 2016: The Civil Society Organization, Eötvös Károly Institute, brought suit against Hungary over the constitutionality of the Hungarian Law allowing surveillance and the collection of data without a warrant by the Hungarian Anti-Terrorism task Force, which was established by 2011 anti-terrorism legislation.[43] The Hungarian Constitutional court dismissed the case in 2011 which led

to Szabo and Vissy filing the case with the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR found in January of 2016 that the surveillance was a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

European Court of Human Rights: MTE & Index.hu vs Hungary, 2016:

MTE published an article criticizing the business practice of two real estate companies and the article was republished on Index. Angry readers took to the websites' comment sections to express their frustrations with the real estate companies. The two real estate companies brought suit against MTE and Index and the Hungarian court found them liable for the offensive comments in their comment sections. MTE and Index therefore took their case to the European Court of Human Rights. The European Court "considered that the Hungarian courts, when deciding on the notion of liability of the applicants' case, had not carried out a proper balancing between competing rights involved, namely between the applicants' right to freedom of expression and the real estate websites' right to respect for its commercial reputation"[48] and that Hungary breached Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

Case C-288/12, European Commission vs Hungary, April 8, 2014:

European Commission brought on lawsuit and forced Hungary to pay fees for failing to implement European Parliament standards (Directive 95/46/EC) for the protection of personal data and the free access of information. The European Commission also charged Hungary for prematurely ending the tenure of the Data Protection Commissioner and replacing the agency with a new National Authority of Data Protection (NADP), whose leadership is appointed by the President, in Act CXII of 2011.[44]

Facebook Post Lawsuit November 2014: Hungarian President, Janos Ader, sued Andras Vagvolgyi for one million HUF over a Facebook post Vagvolgyi wrote describing Ader's arrest and imprisonment for drunkenly shooting his pistol during his military service in 1978. Both Mr. Vagvolgyi and the portal (the subsequent sit disseminating the defamatory content) were condemned by the court to pay restitution, which was reduced by the Supreme Court of Hungary.

Kuruc.info Case May 2013: Kuruc.info is a far right, Hungarian website that publishes racially prejudice and inflammatory articles. Because the website is hosted outside the country, on US-servers, Kuruc.info could not be shut down directly by the Hungarian government. The Hungarian Government tried to subpoena U.S. Internet companies into providing details on kuruc.info but U.S. Courts denied the subpoena due to protection under the First Amendment, "and while certain classes of defamatory speech are unprotected by the First Amendment, (U.S.) judgments under foreign libel laws that are less speech-protective than American libel laws can't be enforced in the U.S." [47] In May 2013, a bill 50 was introduced to the parliament, which could be also called as "lex Kuruc.info." If accepted, it would enable the Hungarian state to block sites operated from abroad. If a domestic court finds a website illegal, the minister of justice calls the attention of the given country about the court's decision, and if the foreign authority does not respond or act for 30 days, the Hungarian authorities can block the site. The Hungarian Court therefore decided that based on its inflammatory content, the website would be blocked and made inaccessible from within Hungary.

Hungarian Constitutional Court Ruling No. 165/2011 (XII. 20) AB: Constitutional Court Ruling came after the implementation of Hungary's new media legislation in 2010 (Acts CIV & CLXXXV). The Court's decision found that the two new laws may have been implemented hurriedly but the process was constitutional. The ruling also found that printed and online media could be regulated under the new authority of the NMHH. With regards to the protection of journalistic sources, the regulations are constitutional "yet still insufficient development when compared with the previous regulations"[45] The Court did find the obligation for parties to provide data to the NMHH, even when outside of the NMHH's own procedures, to be unconstitutional. The Court further found that the appointed Media and Communications Commissioner, who oversees consumer complaints and infringements of rights, does not have the right to access data from service providers because it "affects the freedom of the press and editorial freedom and is prejudicial to freedom of the press, and is therefore unconstitutional."[46]

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union vs Telenor: The Court of Justice for the European Union found that Internet and telephone providers could not retain the data on clients. The ruling was not enforced because the Hungarian Act on Electronic Communication requires providers to hold data for six months. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union took the Phone Providers to the Hungarian Constitutional Court to repeal the data collection.

Uj v. Hungary 2008 (Libel Case): A journalist was found guilty of libel for describing the Hungarian Wine, Tokaj, as "shit." The case eventually made its way to the European Court for Human rights in 2011 where the defendant was acquitted.[49]

Part 7: Information Campaigns and Internet Activism

Tax Protests of 2014: When the Hungarian Government proposed charging ISPs a tax of about US \$0.61 per GB of data, mass protests erupted all over Hungary. Citizens understood that the new tax on the providers would be passed onto consumers; further restricting Hungarians access to the Internet. The protests proved to be successful and led to the government from removing the proposal.[50] These protests were coordinated along with the anti-corruption movement in Hungary. There were other internal political events concerning political leadership corruption and this tax proposal was seen as an outrageous move to shift attention from government corruption.

Social Networks: Social Networking platforms, like Facebook, enjoy wide popularity in Hungary with over 5 millions users.[51] With no government restrictions placed on the access of social networking sites, they have become an effective tool for organizing activist campaigns. The Tax Protests of 2014 were organized through Facebook and mobilized "tens of thousands of people." [52]

Opposition Media and Advertising: Opposition party media channels are weakened through the allocation of advertising spending. Freedom House noted that government companies have disproportionate power in advertising and tend to influence where private companies buy advertising space. By selecting media channels beneficial to the ruling party and bypassing opposition media

channels, opposition media loses revenue and its ability to reach large audiences. Freedom House uses the example of Stop.hu, an opposition Socialist party, who had to make numerous staff reductions in 2013 because businesses would not advertise on the website critical of the ruling party.

This issue is related to Hungarian political finance system and related corruption. Political parties spend heavily on media and advertising. These funds are often exempt from proper audits. Which means that campaign finance audits are incomplete.

Anonymous: On Christmas Day of 2015, hacker group Anonymous published a video declaring a hacking war of Hungarian ruling party Fidesz. Anonymous cited the ruling party's censoring of journalists, homophobia, treatment of refugees, and repression of freedom of speech as the reason for the start of targeted hacks. Anonymous pledged to continue the hacks until Fidesz made radical changes.[53]

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