

Individual Name/Organization: Hungarian Europe Society

Applicant's Contact Information

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Today's Date:

Proposed Project Start Date: 1/10/2020

Proposed Project End Date: 30/9/2021

Amount Requested: 12.990 USD

Proposal Summary:

Short narrative (1-2 paragraphs) that outlines the proposed project, including project objectives and anticipated impact.

Project title: Uncertain Times: The Future of Trans-Atlantic Relations from the Perspective of NGOs and Think Tanks in Central Europe and Hungary

In our tumultuous times faced with the growing challenges of climate change, great power politics and their security implications, inequality in all its forms, or the economic recovery in the aftermath of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of dialogue and creative, innovative thinking is indisputable. In the era of fake news and disinformation, respectful and fact-based exchange on how we as a transatlantic community want to shape our future is essential. In line with its mission to provoke and promote dialogue on current affairs, the proposed project of the Hungarian Europe Society seeks to provide platform for such an exchange between opinion leaders with conflicting views from Europe and the United States and the wider public - in the form of essays and online discussions - on topics ranging from the future of transatlantic relation, transition to a green economy, the challenges of digitalization or the future of liberal democracy.

Our aim is to improve our understanding of the implications of selected challenges, generate potential common solutions and to facilitate exchange and contacts between American and European (especially Central European) communities. We plan to close the project with a workshop that will function as an idea-incubator and will kick-off new, innovative projects based on the year-long exchange between HES and its partners.

Introduction to the Organization or Individual applying:

The Hungarian Europe Society (HES) as a non-governmental and non-partisan organisation, intends to be involved in the ongoing international dialogue on the future of liberal democracies. The core of its interest and activities - although not exclusively - is the European Union and the Hungarian membership inside the Union. Its objective is to represent and promote the idea of a united Europe, the European common values in Hungary and abroad, and the importance of transatlantic cooperation between the EU and the United States of America as well as in the framework of NATO for the future development of global politics.

Since its establishment, HES has been involved in international networks, research projects; it organizes lectures, conferences, and other events to study and discuss European and transatlantic issues, and to raise awareness of the importance of liberal democracies. It monitors and evaluates the activities of the EU institutions, as well as the behavior of the member states, with special regard to the Hungarian government and other political players of Hungary in the European Union. HES continuously seeks to identify new fora to present its and its members' scientific results beyond mass and social media.

HES has no previous grants from the U.S. Embassy and/or U.S. government agencies. However, HES has well-established and good relations with American organizations: we are the Hungarian partner of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and István Hegedűs, chairman of HES, is a GMF Memorial Fellow and he regularly holds presentations and courses at different universities around the United States of America.

Problem Statement and Project Goals and Objectives:

A concise description of the problem you are addressing and a description of what the project is intended to achieve.

We live in a world that is permanently changing with an accelerated speed. The next decade of the 21st century will be different from the life we know today. Technological revolutions, social turbulences, political tensions, transformation of the media systems, great power conflicts are significant spheres of the current transformation period. Today's crisis management might lead to a new global order or to a disorder - under the increasing threat of climate emergency. Against this backdrop, the covid-19 pandemic and its consequences add further uncertainties.

In the proposed project, the Hungarian Europe Society will focus on such themes - as parts of the broader problem package - which have special Central European regional relevance as well as direct impacts on the development of the European Union as a whole. Initiating local, national, transnational and supranational public discussions about our common future is an important task for supporters of liberal democracy. This is especially true in the case of NGO-s and think tanks believing in social and political dialogue, learning processes and the crucial role that citizens and civil society are playing when shaping political choices. In line with this mission therefore HES aims to encourage, facilitate and further discussion between individuals, civil groups, journalists, experts, and other stake-holders to create a network of alternative thinkers inside the Central European region and beyond.

Among such pressing themes we have identified and plan to explore throughout the one year the following 8 key topics:

- 1.) Transatlantic ties: American - (Central) European relations after the 2020 United States presidential election
- 2.) Energy and climate policy: A green future amidst competing interests
- 3.) The challenges of digitalisation and economic competitiveness
- 4.) Security policy challenges in the 21st century: The role of great power politics in Central Europe
- 5.) Media freedom and media pluralism: the role of social media in modern democracies on the two sides of the Atlantic
- 6.) The future of liberal democracies: The rise is populism
- 7.) Shrinking space for civil society: The future of civic activism
- 8.) Inclusiveness and its challenges: The situation of minorities in the West

To kick-off the deliberative process, HES will invite leading thinkers, opinion leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to kick off the discussion with short, thought-provoking essays on this set of themes reflecting key challenges the transatlantic community faces in the coming years.

The exchange will then be continued in the form of online discussions with the participation of the invited authors of the opinion pieces, and will be open to anyone to join from both sides of the Atlantic. The debate will be streamed and the recording uploaded to HES's Youtube channel.

To facilitate these discussions and exchanges in an easily accessible manner, especially amidst the uncertainties the consequences of the current pandemic holds, HES can build on its very own deliberative platform, the Open Space (<https://europatarsasag.hu/en/open-space>). The OS is a newly launched innovative semi-automatic, self-organising community platform, which forms the technical basis of a sustainable network of exchange giving floor to fruitful dialogue and debate including our old and new partners. It serves as a library of research, policy, and advocacy materials, but also a hub for exchanging ideas, opinion and best practices from EU member states and other countries.

Project Activities:

- I. Series of articles written by invited experts and opinion leaders on the above mentioned topics (in total: 8 topics; approximately 1 topic in every 6 weeks)
 - Problem statement from one of the most recognized experts on the topic
 - 2 opinion pieces from other internationally well-recognized experts
- II. On-line based discussions and debates after publishing papers involving international partners (in total: 8 on-line events, approximately 1 event in every 6 weeks)
- III. Further continuous, vibrant and lively discussion facilitated on the Open Space with exchange of publications, written materials, research papers, ideas from our partners (Open Space as a library and hub at the same time)
- IV. High-level workshop with transatlantic participation

Project Beneficiaries:

- scholars, intellectuals from the CEE/SEE region and beyond committed to democratic values and principles
- academics, university staff members, independent researchers, research groups and research institutes
- national, European, international NGOs and their staff members
- journalists (their articles and reports on the project could have multiplier effect)
- decision-makers

- university students
- wider public

Proposed Project Schedule:

The proposed timeline for the project activities. Include the dates, times, and locations of planned activities and events.

We expect to start the project right upon the positive grant-decision, ideally no later than October 1, 2020.

Month 1.: preparatory steps, identifying the timeline of the topics and key experts

Month 2-11.: publishing activity (one topic per every six weeks) and management of continuous on-line discussion on the Open Space; periodically organized on-line events (one event in every two months)

Month 12.: high-level workshop in Budapest with a wide audience in the region and beyond with a special matchmaking event in order to determine the potential further ways of collaboration. At the end of the 1-year project HES will also evaluate feedback from partners and the donor. Final financial and narrative report.

Key Personnel:

The Hungarian Europe Society, based on its experience, will create a team in order to implement this new project.

Key project team

- István Hegedűs, sociologist, chairman of the Hungarian Europe Society. Hegedűs has been a liberal member of the first free elected Hungarian Parliament in 1990 and also served as the vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Following this period, Hegedűs worked as a free-lanced scholar and lecturer in several higher education institutions. He received his Ph.D. in sociology at Corvinus University of Budapest in 2004.
- Erik Uszkiewicz, lawyer, researcher one of the vice-chairpersons of HES. He is currently a Ph.D.-candidate at ELTE University and a member of the MTA-ELTE Lendület SPECTRA Research Group. In the recent past, Erik worked for various civil society organizations as a researcher and project manager.
- Zsuzsanna Végh, political analyst, one of the vice-chairpersons of HES. She is a researcher, and PhD candidate at the European University Viadrina focusing on the role and impact of the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe. She is an associate

researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations and a Rethink.CEE fellow at the GMF of the United States.

Further contributors (opinion leaders from the fields of academia, politics, civic activism, journalism as well as young professionals), editors, communication experts from Hungary and beyond will be identified upon the start of the project.

As we see now Open Space is a human resource driven platform which means at the early stage it requires a part-time professional who could serve the facilitator's, moderator's and editor's role.

Project Partners:

Traditionally, we have always cooperated with Polish, Czech, Slovak, Western-Balkans, Ukrainian and Baltic organisations as well as individuals and institutions from Western Europe and the United States. This time again we will build on this pool, and our partners will have an essential role in the success of the whole project, especially with the written contribution and participating in the lively debate on Open Space. We intend to have a lively and fruitful dialogue with our regional partners learning from good practices.

Expected Results:

What is the expected outcome of this project, and how will the activities be monitored? What is success, and how will you measure it?

We aim to reach a better understanding of the nature of the challenges we face, how they might alter our lives, our transatlantic partnership and seek to generate ideas on sustainable and mutually beneficial solutions to them. In this vein, we aim to engage conflicting views in a respectful, thoughtful and fact-based exchange among opinion leaders. Spreading such discussions and through them a deliberative debate culture is a contribution that aligns with HES's mission, especially in an era and space where this is sorely missing in Hungary.

In terms of measurable outputs, the project will generate approximately 20-24 short essays and 8 online debates addressing current challenges in the transatlantic community. The debates will be recorded and the videos will be made available on HES's Youtube channel. The debates will be organized at times that are accessible both for European and American audiences at the time of airing (late afternoon in the EU, AM/midday in the US). As the project proceeds, we seek to progressively increase the online audience who directly joins the debates (though of course, some topics might provoke more interest than others). To achieve this, we will publicize the debates using social media channels. Our OS coordinator will actively reach out to our (regional) partners to invite them to engage in the opinion exchange on our online platform to keep the exchange going after the discussion too. Measurable indicators are the number of participants, visits to the Open Space, engagements in forms of comments on the OS, views on the Youtube channel.

The concluding workshop serves to further cooperation between HES and invited authors, partners who have engaged in the project and will function as a mini-incubator of ideas. The aim is to generate 2-3 concrete project ideas growing out from the one year of exchange that can be taken further.

Future Funding or Sustainability:

The Open Space and the other communication channels will be operated in the long run. In the first period operating the so-called Open Space surface requires extra efforts from the staff, but in the long run it will be part of the daily routine. Content production will remain the core activity but HES' broad network, good relations with hundreds of experts and will create a perspectivevely sustainable project. If the interactive service (Q&A, comments, deliberative debate) becomes more popular than expected, and requires extra workforce, HES will apply for grants at donors.

Final event serves also as an incubator for future cooperation and grant seeking with like-minded contributors of the project. Potential further donors could be the National Endowment for Democracy, International Visegrad Fund and GMF.

Public Engagement Plan:

Applicant's strategy for creating content for social media, the web, or printed materials that promote the project activity or joint U.S.-Hungarian cooperation during the program timeline. List all media and social media you plan to use.

Next to the OpenSpace our results will be shared with our partner organisations and distributed intensively via social media - websites, Facebook groups, twitter accounts - as well as through our email list containing almost five-thousand addressees from Hungary, the region and beyond.

We continuously inform journalists on our activities in order to raise attention through traditional media channels to our ideas, especially to our forthcoming publications, events.

Additional information and instructions

Please list all prior U.S. Embassy and U.S. government grants:

Required attachments

Attach the following documents: