

**Ms Ursula von der Leyen**

President of the European Commission

**cc: Ms Vera Jourova**

Vice-President of the European Commission

**Mr Didier Reynders**

Commissioner for Justice

Brussels, 21 June 2022

**Object: European Commission work programme 2023: the need to include the development of a European Civil Society Strategy**

Honourable President,

**We, civil society organisations acting at local, national and European level, call on the European Commission to include in the work programme of 2023 a proposal for a European Civil Society Strategy<sup>1</sup>.**

Civil society organisations, such as citizens' associations, NGOs and public benefits foundations, and human rights defenders are instrumental to make effective the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the rights proclaimed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, on a daily basis, both at European and national level.

Our action strives to leave no one behind and is crucial in the area of culture, social care, education, health, anti-corruption, environment, anti-discrimination and much more.

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<sup>1</sup> European Civic Forum, [TOWARDS VIBRANT EUROPEAN CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE, The case for a European civil society strategy and preliminary reflections on the gaps, challenges and opportunities to be addressed](#) (2022).

We intervene as democratic antibodies when rights, democracy and the rule of law are under attack.

Our role is key to build public spaces, upscale participatory democracy and channel citizens' participation.

Our rapid mobilisations and recommendations have been and are essential in the context of the multifaceted crises affecting our societies which each time exacerbate the many vulnerabilities people are confronted with, such as the financial crisis in the early 2010s, the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian crisis following the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the environmental catastrophes resulting from the climate emergency.

Unfortunately, evidence from the field<sup>2</sup> shows growing obstacles and attacks affecting civil society's ability to act in full capacities and independence, as research<sup>3</sup> and the findings of the European Commission rule of law report<sup>4</sup> confirm. As a result of these attacks, **our collective European future is jeopardised.**

The ongoing measures and actions taken at the European level in support of civic actors' activities have mostly been limited in scope and impact. It is now urgent to provide an overarching solution to fill the gaps of existing policies and mainstream positive practices.

The call for a civil society strategy has been a long-term demand of CSOs at European and national level<sup>5</sup>. This demand is now supported by a **European Parliament resolution on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe (2021/2103(INI))** voted with a large majority on 8 March 2022, and recommendation 36.8 of **final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe**<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> European Civic Forum, Civic Space Watch report 2021 - ACTIVIZENSHIP #6 (2022); Civil Liberties Union for Europe, Bringing human rights and Article 2 values to life: the roles, challenges and solutions for civil society (2022); Civil Society Europe, Contribution to 2022 Rule of Law Report (2022); CIVICUS, People Power under attack 2021 (2022); European Youth Forum, Safeguarding civic space for young people in Europe (2022).

<sup>3</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Protecting civic space in the EU (2021); Civic space – experiences of organisations in 2019 (2020); Civil society space: views of organisations (2018); Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU (2018).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 2020 Rule of law report - Communication and country chapters (2020); 2021 Rule of law report | European Commission (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Including though CSOs joint statement Civil Society on the Frontline - 5 points for EU action 2019-2024 (2019), Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, Recommendations for a Comprehensive European Policy and Strategy on Civil Society (2022), final output of the Civil society convention for the future of Europe (2022), Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe (RARE)'s Advocacy brief on an European strategy for civil society: recognition, inclusion, protection (2022), HRDN Submission to the European Commission in the framework of the 2nd Annual Rule of Law Review Cycle (2021).

<sup>6</sup> Conference on the Future of Europe, Report on the final outcome (2022), p.79.

**We urge the European Commission to consider all this, and in consequence to give substance to the mandate of the Vice President of the European Commission for values and transparency and resources for carrying out a regular, open and transparent civil dialogue - along the provision of Article 11 of the Treaty - and safeguard civil society space by developing, in cooperation with CSOs and human rights defenders, a comprehensive European civil society strategy before the end of the current five-years term.**

We remain at your disposal to discuss the overall content of such a strategy, and the steps to be started immediately.

For further communication, you can contact the initiators of the letter: Civil Society Europe (Carlotta Besozzi, [carlotta.besozzi@civilsocietyeurope.eu](mailto:carlotta.besozzi@civilsocietyeurope.eu)) and European Civic Forum (Alexandrina Najmowicz, [anajmowicz@civic-forum.eu](mailto:anajmowicz@civic-forum.eu)).

#### **Initial signatories:**

##### **European organisations and networks**

1. Alzheimer Europe
2. Amnesty International
3. Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE)
4. Centre for European Volunteering (CEV)
5. Civil Liberties Union for Europe
6. CIVICUS
7. CONCORD Europe
8. Culture Action Europe
9. Eurochild
10. Eurodiaconia
11. Eurogroup for Animals
12. European Alliance for Responsible R&D and Affordable Medicines
13. European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)
14. European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD)
15. European Citizen Action Network (ECAS)
16. European Civic Forum
17. European Council of Associations of General Interest (Comité européen des associations d'intérêt général - CEDAG)
18. European Disability Forum
19. European Federation of Elderly and Retired People
20. European Federation for Intercultural Learning
21. European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW)
22. European Humanist Federation
23. European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
24. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
25. European Network on Religion & Belief
26. European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)

27. European Patients' Forum
28. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
29. European Students' Union (ESU)
30. European Women's Lobby
31. European Youth Forum
32. EURORDIS - Rare Diseases Europe
33. EU4Health Civil Society Alliance
34. Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO)
35. Green 10
36. Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), EU Internal Human Rights Policy Working Group
37. Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)
38. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
39. International Federation of ACAT (FIACAT)
40. JEUNE - Young Entrepreneurs Organization of European Union
41. Lifelong Learning Platform
42. New Europeans
43. Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association
44. RECLAIM (reclaiming.eu)
45. Revibra Europa
46. SMES - Europa (Santé Mentale Exclusion Sociale)
47. Social Platform
48. SOLIDAR Foundation
49. Transparency International EU
50. YES Forum
51. Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)
52. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
53. Volonteurpe

#### **Austria**

54. Global Responsibility - Austrian Platform for Development and Humanitarian Aid

55. Interest Group of Public Benefit Organisations (IGO - Die Stimme der Gemeinnützigen)
56. RED NOSES - Clowndoctors International
57. South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

#### **Belgium**

58. Association for Ethics in Fundraising (VEF-AERF)
59. Belgian Federation of Philanthropic Foundations (lesfondations.be - stichtingen.be)
60. De Verenigde Verenigingen
61. Kif Kif
62. Pour la Solidarité (PLS)

#### **Bulgaria**

63. Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL)
64. Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives (BILI)
65. Citizen Participation Forum (CPF)
66. European Institute Foundation

#### **Croatia**

67. Association Terra
68. Center for Cultural Activities
69. Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights - Osijek
70. Centre for Peace Studies - Croatia (CMS)
71. Civil Rights Project - Sisak
72. Community Foundation Slagalica
73. Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity (CROSOL)
74. Croatian Youth Network (Mreža mladih Hrvatske)
75. Croatian Union of Associations for Autism (SUZAH)

76. DKolektiv - organizacija za društveni razvoj (Organisation for social development)
  77. Europska civilna inicijativa Zagreb
  78. Gong
  79. Human Rights House Zagreb
  80. Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ)
  81. ISKORAK
  82. Kurziv - Platforma za pitanja kulture, medija i društva (Platform for Matters of Culture, Media and Society)
  83. ODRAZ - Održivi razvoj zajednice
  84. Parents in Action (RODA)
  85. Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma (RCT Zagreb)
  86. SOLIDARNA Foundation
- Cyprus**
87. Civil Society Advocates
  88. KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism
- Czech Republic**
89. Asociace NNO Libereckého kraje, ZO ČSOP Armillaria
  90. Association for International Affairs (AMO)
  91. Auffer, o.p.s.
  92. Centrum Kašpar, z.s.
  93. ClimaCare, z. s., Mendel University in Brno
  94. Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation
  95. Czech Forest Kindergartens Association
  96. Czech Helsinki Committee
  97. Czech High School Students' Union (CSU)
  98. DEMAS - Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights
99. Evropský Institut Renaissance
  100. Glopolis
  101. Independent Social Ecological Movement (NESEHNUTI)
  102. Nadace na ochranu zvířat
  103. Nadační fond proti korupci
  104. Okrašlovací spolek čelákovický
  105. Open Society Fund Prague
  106. Platform for Citizen's Assemblies
  107. RADKA z.s.
  108. Reconstruction of the State
  109. Spiralis - Platform for NGO's Development
  110. Systemický institut, s.r.o.
  111. Zakroužkuj ženu, z.s.
  112. EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy
- Denmark**
113. ENAR - Denmark & Ethnic Debate Forum
  114. Fairplay
  115. Nyt Europa
- Estonia**
116. Estonian Human Rights Centre
  117. Network of Estonian Non-profit Organizations (NENO)
- Finland**
118. Anti-Racist Forum (ARF)
  119. Central Union for Child Welfare (Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto - LSKL)
  120. Migrant Tales
- France**
121. Action Droits des Musulmans (ADM)
  122. Animafac

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| <p>123. Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS)</p> <p>124. Cap Magellan</p> <p>125. Collectif des Associations Citoyennes (CAC)</p> <p>126. CRID (Centre de Recherche et d'Information pour le Développement)</p> <p>127. Fédération Française des Maisons de l'Europe (FFME)</p> <p>128. La Coalition pour les Libertés Associatives (L.A. Coalition)</p> <p>129. La Ligue de l'Enseignement</p> <p>130. Le Mouvement associatif</p> <p>131. Les Francas</p> <p>132. Ligue des Droits de l'Homme</p> <p>133. Maison de l'Europe de Paris</p> <p>134. Parlement Européen des Jeunes - France</p> <p>135. Pas Sans Nous</p> <p>136. Tous Migrants</p> <p>137. VoxPublic</p> <p><b>Germany</b></p> <p>138. #mybrainmychoice Initiative</p> <p>139. Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt e.V.</p> <p>140. Allianz Kulturstiftung</p> <p>141. Allianz "Rechtssicherheit für politische Willensbildung"</p> <p>142. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung</p> <p>143. Association of German Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen)</p> <p>144. Bewegungsstiftung in Verden</p> <p>145. Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (National Network for Civil Society - BBE)</p> <p>146. Campact e.V.</p> <p>147. Collective Leadership Institute</p> <p>148. Democracy International e.V.</p> | <p>149. Deutsch-Bulgarische Elterninitiative "Jan Bibijan" e.V.</p> <p>150. EuropaNova Germany</p> <p>151. Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika e.V. (FDCL)</p> <p>152. Forum Menschenrechte</p> <p>153. Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V. (forumZFD)</p> <p>154. German Fundraising Association</p> <p>155. Grundrechte Komitee</p> <p>156. Guatemalagruppe Nürnberg e. V.</p> <p>157. Guerrilla Foundation</p> <p>158. innn.it e.V.</p> <p>159. Interessenvertretung Selbstbestimmt Leben in Deutschland e.V. (ISL)</p> <p>160. issa e.V.</p> <p>161. Maecenata Foundation</p> <p>162. MENSCHENRECHTE 3000 e.V.</p> <p>163. Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker)</p> <p>164. TERRE DES FEMMES e.V.</p> <p>165. Wartesaal - Kultur in Besigheim e.V.</p> <p>166. We are Europe! e.V.</p> <p>167. Whistleblower-Netzwerk (WBN)</p> <p><b>Greece</b></p> <p>168. ANTIGONE - Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence</p> <p>169. Consumers' Association "The Quality of Life" - EKPIZO</p> <p>170. Greek Forum of Migrants</p> <p>171. Greek Forum of Refugees</p> <p>172. Ivorian Community Of Greece (La Communauté Ivoirienne de la Grèce - CIG)</p> <p>173. SolidarityNow</p> |
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### **Hungary**

- 174. European House (EH)
- 175. Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU)
- 176. Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC)
- 177. Nyomtass te is!
- 178. Ökotárs Alapítvány (Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation)

### **Ireland**

- 179. Africa Solidarity Centre Ireland
- 180. CityWide Drugs Crisis Campaign
- 181. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC)
- 182. Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
- 183. One Family
- 184. Outhouse - LGBT+ Community Centre
- 185. The Wheel
- 186. Waterford Integration Services
- 187. Intersex Ireland

### **Italy**

- 188. A Buon Diritto
- 189. Àltera
- 190. ARCI
- 191. Associazione Antigone
- 192. Babylon Couleur
- 193. Coordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidarietà Internazionale (CIPSI)
- 194. European Movement Italy (EMI - Movimento Europeo)
- 195. Libera contro le mafie

### **Latvia**

- 196. Association "Papardes zieds"
- 197. Civic Alliance Latvia (CAL)
- 198. Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS)

- 199. Latvijas Vacu savienība (LVS)
- 200. Riga German Culture Society (RDKV), Kandava branch

### **Lithuania**

- 201. Center for Equality Advancement
- 202. National NGO Coalition
- 203. Non-Governmental Organisation Information and Support Centre (NISC)

### **Malta**

- 204. Migrant Women Association Malta
- 205. SOS Malta

### **Netherlands**

- 206. Association of Charitable Funds in The Netherlands (FIN)
- 207. Dutch Association of Volunteer Organizations (Vereniging Nederlandse Organisaties Vrijwilligerswerk - NOV)
- 208. European Network for Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity
- 209. Goede Doelen Nederland
- 210. Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC)
- 211. Netwerk Democratie

### **Poland**

- 212. "Blue Line" - Institute of Health Psychology Polish Psychological Association
- 213. Association for Legal Intervention (SIP)
- 214. Citizens Network Watchdog Poland
- 215. Civic Movement Citizens for Education
- 216. Committee for the Defence of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji - KOD)

- 217. Foundation for Polish Science (FNP)
- 218. Fundacja Centrum im. prof. Bronisława Geremka
- 219. Fundacja Collegium Polonicum
- 220. Fundacja Dokładam Się
- 221. Fundacja Edukacji Parlamentarnej
- 222. Fundacja Idealna Gmina
- 223. Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana
- 224. Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA
- 225. Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej im. Jerzego Regulskiego
- 226. Greenways Poland Association
- 227. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR)
- 228. In.Europa Institute
- 229. Information Society Development Foundation
- 230. Inicjatywa 30. Rok Wolności
- 231. Institute of Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych)
- 232. Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej w Warszawie
- 233. Liberal Culture (Kultura Liberalna)
- 234. National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)
- 235. Open Republic - Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia
- 236. Panoptykon Foundation
- 237. Parents in Education Association (Stowarzyszenie Rodzice w Edukacji)
- 238. Partnership Fund
- 239. Polish Donors Forum
- 240. Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet)
- 241. Polska Fundacja im. Roberta Schumana
- 242. Polish Janusz Korczak Association (Polskie Stowarzyszenie im. Janusza Korczaka)

- 243. School with Class Foundation (Fundacja Szkoła z Klasą)
- 244. Shipyard Foundation (Fundacja Stocznia)
- 245. Stefan Batory Foundation (Batorego Fundacja)
- 246. The Field of Dialogue Foundation (Fundacja Pole Dialogu)

### **Portugal**

- 247. Academia Cidadã - Citizenship Academy
- 248. Djass- Association of Afrodescendants
- 249. Plataforma PAJE
- 250. Portuguese NGDO Platform (Plataforma Portuguesa das ONGD)
- 251. Transparency International Portugal

### **Romania**

- 252. APADOR-CH
- 253. Civil Society Development Foundation (Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile - FDSC)
- 254. Environmental Partnership Foundation
- 255. Expert Forum Association

### **Slovakia**

- 256. Association for Culture, Education and Communication (ACEC)
- 257. Association of social services providers in the Slovak Republic
- 258. Carpathian Foundation Slovakia (Karpatská nadácia)
- 259. Center for Community Organizing
- 260. Center for Environmental Activities (Centrum environmentálnych aktivít)



- 261. Centre for Philanthropy (Centrum pre filantropiu n.o.)
- 262. Cvernovka Foundation
- 263. Donio n.f.
- 264. Ekopolis Foundation
- 265. Friends of the Earth-CEPA
- 266. Iniciatíva Inakosť
- 267. Institute for Public Affairs Slovakia
- 268. Open Society Foundation (Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti Bratislava NOS-OSF)
- 269. Nadacia Rafael
- 270. PDCS
- 271. People in Need Slovakia
- 272. Post Bellum Slovakia
- 273. Slovak humanitarian council
- 274. Slovak Mountain Rescue Team Mala Fatra Region
- 275. SOSNA
- 276. Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations

**Slovenia**

- 277. Association for culture and education PiNA
- 278. Association SOS Helpline for Women and Children Victims of Violence
- 279. Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS)
- 280. Društvo Ekologi brez meja
- 281. Focus Association for Sustainable Development
- 282. Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation
- 283. Institute Circle
- 284. LRF za Pomurje
- 285. Peace Institute

- 286. Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (PIC)
- 287. REgionalno sticisce Novus
- 288. Slovenian NGO platform for development, global education and humanitarian aid (SLOGA)
- 289. Umanotera, The Slovenian Foundation for Sustainable Development
- 290. Zavod Dobra druzba
- 291. Zavod PIP
- 292. Zavod TRI
- 293. ZLHT

**Spain**

- 294. Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana
- 295. Calala Women's Fund
- 296. Fundacion CIVES
- 297. Irídia, Centre per la Defensa dels Drets Humans
- 298. Liga Española de la Educación
- 299. NOVACT - International Institute for Nonviolent Action
- 300. Òmnium Cultural

**Non-EU countries**

- 301. Agora Association, Turkey
- 302. ALFA Centre Niksic, Montenegro
- 303. Community Development institute – CDI, North Macedonia
- 304. ENORB, United Kingdom
- 305. Initiative for Development and cooperation (IDC) Serbia
- 306. Ministarstvo Prostora, Serbia
- 307. Trend of Evolution for Ukraine, Switzerland