

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

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

#### **Austria**

51. Global Responsibility - Austrian Platform for Development and Humanitarian Aid (Globale Verantwortung - Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Entwicklung und Humanitäre Hilfe)
52. Interest Group of Public Benefit Organisations (IGO - Die Stimme der Gemeinnützigen)
53. RED NOSES - Clowndoctors International
54. South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

#### **Belgium**

55. Association for Ethics in Fundraising (VEF-AERF - Vereniging voor Ethiek in de Fondsenwerving - Association pour une Éthique dans les Récoltes de Fonds)
56. Belgian Federation of Philanthropic Foundations (lesfondations.be - stichtingen.be)
57. De Verenigde Verenigingen
58. Kif Kif
59. Pour la Solidarité (PLS)

#### **Bulgaria**

60. Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL)
61. Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives (BILI)
62. Citizen Participation Forum (CPF)
63. European Institute Foundation

#### **Croatia**

64. Association Terra
65. Center for Cultural Activities
66. Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights - Osijek
67. Centre for Peace Studies - Croatia (CMS)

68. Civil Rights Project - Sisak
  69. Community Foundation Slagalica
  70. Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity (CROSOL)
  71. Croatian Youth Network (Mreža mladih Hrvatske)
  72. Croatian Union of Associations for Autism (SUZAH)
  73. DKolektiv - organizacija za društveni razvoj (Organisation for social development)
  74. Europska civilna inicijativa Zagreb
  75. Gong
  76. Human Rights House Zagreb
  77. Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ)
  78. ISKORAK
  79. Kurziv - Platforma za pitanja kulture, medija i društva (Platform for Matters of Culture, Media and Society)
  80. ODRAZ - Održivi razvoj zajednice
  81. Parents in Action (RODA)
  82. Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma (RCT Zagreb)
  83. SOLIDARNA Foundation
- Cyprus**
84. Civil Society Advocates
- Czech Republic**
85. Asociace NNO Libereckého kraje, ZO ČSOP Armillaria
  86. Association for International Affairs (AMO)
  87. Aufferi, o.p.s.
  88. Centrum Kašpar, z.s.
  89. ClimaCare, z. s., Mendel University in Brno
  90. Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation
  91. Czech Helsinki Committee
  92. Czech High School Students' Union (CSU)
  93. DEMAS - Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights
  94. Evropský Institut Renaissance
  95. Glopolis
  96. Independent Social Ecological Movement (NESEHNUTI)
  97. Nadace na ochranu zvířat
  98. Nadační fond proti korupci
  99. Okrašlovací spolek čelákovický
  100. Open Society Fund Prague
  101. Platform for Citizen's Assemblies
  102. RADKA z.s.
  103. Reconstruction of the State
  104. Spiralís - Platform for NGO's Development
  105. Systemický institut, s.r.o.
  106. Zakroužkuj ženu, z.s.
  107. EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy
- Denmark**
108. Fairplay
  109. ENAR-Denmark & Ethnic Debate Forum
  110. Nyt Europa
- Estonia**
111. Estonian Human Rights Centre
  112. Network of Estonian Non-profit Organizations
- Finland**
113. Anti-Racist Forum
  114. The Central Union for Child Welfare
  115. Migrant Tales

**France**

- 116. Action Droits des Musulmans
- 117. Animafac
- 118. Association France Palestine  
Solidarité
- 119. CAP MAGELLAN
- 120. Collectif des Associations Citoyennes
- 121. CRID (Centre de Recherche et  
d'Information pour le Développement)
- 122. Fédération Française des Maisons de  
l'Europe
- 123. La Coalition pour les Libertés  
Associatives
- 124. La ligue de l'enseignement
- 125. Le Mouvement Associatif
- 126. Les Francas
- 127. Ligue des droits de l'Homme
- 128. Maison de l'Europe - Paris
- 129. Parlement Européen des Jeunes  
France
- 130. Pas Sans Nous
- 131. Tous Migrants
- 132. VoxPublic
- 133. International Federation of ACAT  
(FIACAT)

**Germany**

- 134. #mybrainmychoice Initiative
- 135. Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische  
Welt e.V.
- 136. Allianz Kulturstiftung
- 137. Allianz "Rechtssicherheit für  
politische Willensbildung"
- 138. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung
- 139. Association of German Foundations
- 140. Bewegungsstiftung in Verden
- 141. BBE – Bundesnetzwerk  
Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (National  
Network for Civil Society)

- 142. Campact e.V.
- 143. Collective Leadership Institute
- 144. Democracy international e.V.
- 145. Deutsch-Bulgarische Elterninitiative  
"Jan Bibijan" e.V.
- 146. EuropaNova Germany
- 147. Forschungs- und  
Dokumentationszentrum  
Chile-Lateinamerika e.V. (FDCL)
- 148. Forum Menschenrechte
- 149. Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e.V.
- 150. German Fundraising Association
- 151. Grundrechte Komitee
- 152. Guatemalagruppe Nürnberg e. V.
- 153. Guerrilla Foundation
- 154. innn.it e.V.
- 155. Interessenvertretung Selbstbestimmt  
Leben in Deutschland e.V. - ISL
- 156. issa e.V.
- 157. Maecenata Foundation
- 158. MENSCHENRECHTE 3000 e.V.
- 159. Society for Threatened Peoples  
(Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker)
- 160. TERRE DES FEMMES e.V.
- 161. Wartesaal - Kultur in Besigheim e.V.
- 162. We are Europe! e.V.
- 163. Whistleblower-Netzwerk (WBN)
- 164. YES Forum

**Greece**

- 165. ANTIGONE - Information and  
Documentation Centre on Racism,  
Ecology, Peace and Non Violence
- 166. Consumer Association the Quality of  
Life-EKPIZO
- 167. Greek Forum of Migrants
- 168. Greek Forum of Refugees
- 169. Ivorian Community Of Greece
- 170. Solidarity Now

### **Hungary**

- 171. European House
- 172. Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
- 173. Hungarian Helsinki Committee
- 174. Nyomtass te is!
- 175. Ökotárs - Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation

### **Ireland**

- 176. Africa Solidarity Centre Ireland
- 177. Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign
- 178. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- 179. Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- 180. One Family
- 181. Outhouse - LGBT+ Community Centre
- 182. The Wheel
- 183. Waterford Integration Services
- 184. Intersex Ireland

### **Italy**

- 185. A Buon Diritto
- 186. Àltera
- 187. ARCI
- 188. Associazione Antigone
- 189. Babylon Couleur
- 190. Coordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidarietà Internazionale
- 191. European movement Italy (Movimento Europeo)
- 192. LIBERA Onlus

### **Latvia**

- 193. Association "Papardes zieds"
- 194. Civic Alliance Latvia
- 195. Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation LAPAS
- 196. Latvijas Vacu savienība

- 197. Riga German Culture Society, Kandava branch

### **Lithuania**

- 198. Center for Equality Advancement
- 199. National Coalition of non-governmental Organisations
- 200. Non-Governmental Organisation Information and Support Centre (NISC)

### **Luxembourg**

- 201. Alzheimer Europe

### **Malta**

- 202. SOS Malta
- 203. Migrant Women Association Malta

### **Netherlands**

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

### **Poland**

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

216. Fundacja Centrum im. prof. Bronisława Geremka
217. Fundacja Collegium Polonicum
218. Fundacja Dokładam Się
219. Fundacja Edukacji Parlamentarnej
220. Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana
221. Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA
222. Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej im. Jerzego Regulskiego
223. Greenways Poland Association
224. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
225. IDEALNA GMINA FOUNDATION
226. In.Europa Institute
227. Information Society Development Foundation
228. Inicjatywa 30. Rok Wolności
229. Institute of Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych)
230. Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej w Warszawie
231. LIBERAL CULTURE (KULTURA LIBERALNA)
232. National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)
233. Open Republic - Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia
234. Panoptykon Foundation
235. Parents in Education Association (Stowarzyszenie Rodzice w Edukacji)
236. Partnership Fund
237. Polish Donors Forum
238. Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet)
239. Polska Fundacja im. Roberta Schumana
240. Polish Janusz Korczak Association (Polskie Stowarzyszenie im. Janusza Korczaka)
241. School with Class Foundation (Fundacja Szkoła z Klasą)
242. Shipyard Foundation (Fundacja Stocznia)
243. Stefan Batory Foundation (Batorego Fundacja)
244. The Field of Dialogue Foundation (Fundacja Pole Dialogu)
- Portugal**
245. Academia Cidadã - Citizenship Academy
246. Djass- Association of Afrodescendants
247. Plataforma PAJE
248. Portuguese NGDO Platform (Plataforma Portuguesa das ONGD)
249. Transparency International Portugal
- Romania**
250. APADOR-CH
251. Civil Society Development Foundation (Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile - FDSC)
252. Environmental Partnership Foundation
253. Expert Forum Association
- Slovakia**
254. Association for Culture, Education and Communication (ACEC)
255. Association of social services providers in the Slovak Republic
256. Carpathian Foundation Slovakia (Karpatská nadácia)
257. Center for Community Organizing
258. Center for Environmental Activities (Centrum environmentálnych aktivít)



259. Centre for Philanthropy (Centrum pre filantropiu n.o.)
260. Cvernovka Foundation
261. Donio n.f.
262. Ekopolis Foundation
263. Friends of the Earth-CEPA
264. Iniciatíva Inakosť
265. Institute for Public Affairs Slovakia (IVO)
266. Open Society Foundation (Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti Bratislava NOS-OSF)
267. Nadacia Rafael
268. PDCS
269. People in Need Slovakia
270. Post Bellum Slovakia
271. Slovak humanitarian council
272. Slovak Mountain Rescue Team Mala Fatra Region
273. SOSNA
274. Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations
- Slovenia**
275. Association for culture and education PiNA
276. Association SOS Helpline for Women and Children Victims of Violence
277. Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS)
278. Društvo Ekologi brez meja
279. Focus Association for Sustainable Development
280. Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation
281. Institute Circle
282. LRF za Pomurje
283. Peace Institute
284. Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (PIC)
285. REgionalno sticisce Novus
286. Slovenian NGO platform for development, global education and humanitarian aid (SLOGA)
287. Umanotera, The Slovenian Foundation for Sustainable Development
288. Zavod Dobra druzba
289. Zavod PIP
290. Zavod TRI
291. ZLHT
- Spain**
292. Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana
293. Calala Women's Fund
294. Fundacion CIVES
295. Irídia, Centre per la Defensa dels Drets Humans
296. Liga Española de la Educación
297. NOVACT - International Institute for Nonviolent Action
298. Òmnium Cultural
- Non-EU countries**
299. Agora Association, Turkey
300. ALFA Centre Niksic, Montenegro
301. Community Development institute – CDI, North Macedonia
302. ENORB, United Kingdom
303. Initiative for Development and cooperation (IDC) Serbia
304. Ministarstvo Prostora, Serbia
305. Trend of Evolution for Ukraine, Switzerland