

To: President Ursula von der Leyen
Prime Minister Donald Tusk
President Roberta Metsola

3 April 2025, Brussels

Subject: Strengthening and shielding European democracy with the upcoming MFF

Eighty years ago, the defeat of Nazi fascism and the end of World War II gave rise to a vision of a united Europe built on peace, democracy, equality, and the rule of law. The foundation of new democratic states committed to social welfare and fundamental rights for all set the stage for decades of unprecedented economic and social developments, and peace. This model, while not perfect, gave hope to those in Europe still under authoritarian regimes and acted as the basis for our common and shared security in the region. All along these decades, civil society has been a driving force behind historical moments of democratic transformation. From the struggles for democracy in Spain, Portugal, and Greece in the 1970s to movements like Solidarnosc in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, civic actors have played a critical role in shaping a shared European future. The lessons of these struggles remain deeply relevant today.

As Europe grapples with complex and interconnected crises — including climate change, widening economic precarity, and eroding trust in democratic institutions — the very fabric of our democracies is at risk. Growing social divisions and declining trust in institutions leave societies vulnerable to forces seeking to weaken democracy. These vulnerabilities create fertile ground for external factors — like Putin's Russia and the Trump administration — and internal forces seeking to dismantle democratic principles, challenging the very notion that rights are universal. A democracy that does not actively protect and advance equality and the wellbeing of all ceases to be a democracy in the true sense of the word.

In this context, the strength of our democracies vis a vis these challenges depend on a robust civil society. Organised civil society has played a crucial role in responding to crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the displacement of Ukrainians fleeing war and the response to environmental disasters. With few means and little direct power, they are often the first ones to arrive and the last ones to leave where people are in need, and when democracy is under stress. Poland serves as a recent example of how civil society played a critical role in restoring the rule of law and democracy when they were undermined.

Recognising the gravity of these challenges, you have made a firm commitment to "A free and democratic Europe" and to support, empower, and protect civil society. We now ask that this vision be fully reflected in the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), including by strengthening the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme financing as one of the crucially needed tools of the European democracy shield, the Civil Society Strategy and the European Equality Strategies.

Four reasons to strengthen the CERV programme to defend democracy:

1. CERV is a key EU instrument to promote democracy, equality, and fundamental rights for all.

Since 2020, the CERV programme has been a lifeline for civic organisations' interventions across Europe, particularly through multiannual core funding and outreach to remoted areas via the regranting scheme. It has led to tangible improvements in democratic participation, legal protections for women, LGBTQI+ people, racialised groups, people with disabilities, children, older persons, and survivors of violence. Yet, despite its impact, the CERV budget remains less than 0.2% of the total MFF — providing wholly insufficient means given the scope of issues to be addressed in supporting the foundations of European democracy.

2. Increasing support to civil society means investing in democratic resilience.

Despite its successes, CERV remains severely underfunded, leaving up to 92% of aligned initiatives without financial support.¹² A 2023 survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that 75.4% of CSOs working on fundamental rights and democracy fear that funding shortages threaten their work.³ The recent freeze on USAID contributions⁴ and the reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule further highlights the urgent need for MFF discussions to decisively address the funding needs for democracy resilience-building and human rights protection.

3. New challenges require new tools and expanded resources.

Increased investment is crucial for advancing civic and democratic education and critical thinking, fostering right-based narratives and policies, enabling multi-stakeholder collaborations, ensuring broad-based democratic participation and providing essential support to human rights defenders and civil society under attack. Furthermore, as equality in the access to fundamental rights is increasingly attacked, there is a growing need of support for those who act to protect marginalised and excluded groups, and gender equality, as well as to ensure their voices are heard in policy-making. Addressing these challenges requires not only strong policy decisions but also the necessary budgetary commitments for effective support.

4. Opponents of European democracy and fundamental rights — both within and beyond EU borders — are investing unprecedented resources to attack civil society and democracy.

Authoritarian regimes and radicalised groups are using vast financial and technological means in spreading disinformation, fuelling polarisation, and shaping anti-rights narratives and policies that undermine dignity and fundamental rights — targeting in particular racialised groups, migrants, refugees, women and LGBTI+ people. At the same time, from inside the political sphere, far-right forces but also part of the representatives of mainstream parties are actively delegitimising and attacking funding for democratic CSOs, including the CERV programme itself. By proactively investing in robust support for democratic resilience, the EU can strengthen European democracy and counteract those seeking to undermine it.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2024%3A456%3AFIN>

² https://www.cerv.at/dam/jcr:dffbc544-1381-4b0f-a3a7-bb4f4560a473/CERV_Presentation_Results_2021-%202.pdf

³ [report-key-findings-fra-civic-space-consultation-covering-2023.pdf](#)

⁴ [Global Aid Freeze Tracker](#)

Our call to action: make a historic commitment to democracy!

To strengthen democracy and rights for all, we need to put our money where our mouth is. In 2020, the European Parliament and European Council played a key role in championing the CERV by nearly tripling the CERV budget compared to the initial proposal by the European Commission. Now the challenges are broader and greater — and so must be our collective response from the European institutions and civic actors. Allocating 0.5% of the MFF to the CERV - as a stand-alone programme managed by the European Commission - would send a strong signal about the EU's commitment to defending democracy and would be an invaluable investment in our shared future.

This investment must be accompanied by:

- A strong and structural support for civil society and its participation in policymaking in all relevant thematic programmes;
- Strategic dialogue among public institutions, philanthropy groups, and civil society on how to meet the needs of civil society actors that defend fundamental rights;
- A robust legal and tax framework for financial tools that support the sustainable funding of organised civil society, at the EU and national levels, including matching funds for the CERV grants;
- A strong stance against attacks on CSOs and their funding in the EU.

Europe's democracy is only as strong as its commitment to equality and fundamental rights. If we fail to protect and invest in those fighting for fundamental rights, social justice, and inclusion, in coherence with the European treaty provisions, we risk undermining the very essence of democracy itself. Now is the time to act decisively to ensure that democracy in Europe remains not just a system of governance, but a true reflection of equality and dignity for all.

Yours sincerely,

European and international organisations

1. European Civic Forum
2. AGE Platform Europe
3. All Digital
4. Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN)
5. Centre for European Volunteering
6. Civil Liberties Union for Europe
7. DYPALL Network
8. ENAR - European Network Against Racism
9. End Female Genital Mutilation European Network
10. EPA - European Parents' Association
11. Eurochild
12. European Association for Local Democracy - ALDA
13. European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting
14. EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING
15. European Public Health Alliance
16. European Youth Forum
17. Fédération Européenne des Retraités et personnes Âgées (FERPA)
18. International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network (IPPF EN)

19. Lifelong Learning Platform - European Civil Society for Education
20. RECLAIM
21. Res Publica Foundation - Visegrad Insight
22. SOLIDAR
23. Transparency International EU
24. Union of European Federalists
25. Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)
26. The Good Lobby

Austria

27. Bündnis für Gemeinnützigkeit - Civil Society Alliance Austria
28. Association of Austrian Autonomous Women's Shelters
29. ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH / European Capital of Democracy

Belgium

30. Pour la solidarité
31. Professional Women International Brussels
32. Stand Up for Europe

Bosnia and Herzegovina

33. Centar za promociju civilnog drustva
34. Center for Civic Cooperation

Bulgaria

35. Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
36. Bulgarian center for not-for-profit law
37. European Institute Foundation
38. Infinite Opportunities Association
39. Sofia Platform Foundation
40. Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities

Croatia

41. Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity
42. Human Rights House Zagreb
43. CESI - Center for Education, Counselling and Research
44. Lota's Box

Czech Republic

45. Network for the Protection of Democracy
46. Glopolis
47. SPIRALIS
48. APLA Severní Čechy, z.s.
49. CeHuPo - Centrum Humanitární Pomoci, z.s.
50. Czech Women's Lobby
51. FoRS - Czech Forum for Development Cooperation
52. Green Circle

53. GUG.cz, z.s.
54. Jezevec z.s.
55. Karlovarsko pro demokracii
56. Kouči pro Vás z.s.
57. Letokruh z.u.
58. Lumpeco
59. Open society p.b.a.; Institute H21
60. Péče bez překážek, z. s.
61. Platform for social housing
62. Platforma pro občanská shromáždění
63. Prague Pride z.s.
64. Spolek Epigram
65. *Spolu na Sušicku, z.s. (Together in Sušicko, z.s.)*
66. Středisko ekologické výchovy SEVER /Centre For Environmental Education SEVER
67. Transparency International Czech Republic
68. TUDYTAM, z.s.
69. Ukrajinska iniciativa jizni Moravy

Denmark

70. Acter Global
71. Crossing Borders
72. Danish Family Planning Association
73. Mino Danmark
74. NOAH, Friends of the Earth Denmark

Estonia

75. Estonian Human Rights Centre
76. Network of Estonian Non-Profit Organizations

Finland

77. SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health

France

78. Le Mouvement associatif
79. LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme)
80. LIGUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT
81. Maison de l'Europe de Paris
82. Mouvement européen France-Vaucluse
83. VoxPublic

Germany

84. Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement
85. Maecenata Foundation

Greece

86. European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation "EGTC Amphictyony"

87. Greek Forum of Refugees
88. Union of Women Association of Heraklion

Hungary

89. Ökotárs-Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation
90. "I'd like to teach" Movement (Tanítanék Mozgalom)
91. Alternative Communities Association
92. Autonomia Foundation
93. Civil Kozoktatasi Platform (CKP)
94. Dialogue for Communities Association
95. Emberség Erejével Alapítvány - Power of Humanity Foundation
96. EMMA Association
97. Energiaklub Climate Policy Institute
98. European House Budapest
99. Human Platform Association
100. Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
101. Hungarian Helsinki Committee
102. Hungarian Europe Society
103. Közélet Iskolája / The School of Public Life
104. Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség (Hungarian Women's Lobby)
105. Motivation Educational Association
106. NIOK Alapítvány
107. PILnet
108. Power of Humanity Foundation (Emberség Erejével Alapítvány)
109. Szülői Hang
110. Uccu Roma Informal Education Foundation

Ireland

111. Comhlámh
112. Irish Council for Civil Liberties
113. Redial Partnership CLG
114. The Wheel

Italy

115. ARCI
116. European Movement Italy
117. Solidarietà e Cooperazione - CIPSI ETS
118. ANCI Lazio
119. Associazione ADL Zavidovici
120. Associazione Luciano Lama ODV
121. Biosphaera s.c.s.
122. Europiamo ETS
123. Federazione trentina della cooperazione

Latvia

124. Civic Alliance - Latvia
125. "Sievietēm 50+"
126. Ar pasaules pieredzi Latvijā

- 127. Donum Animus
- 128. Eiropas Kustība Latvijā / European Movement - Latvia

Lithuania

- 129. Open Lithuania Foundation
- 130. Nemunėio Radviliškio bendruomenė
- 131. Alytaus krašto asmenų su negalia draugija
- 132. Butrimonių bendruomenės centras
- 133. Center for Equality Advancement
- 134. Gilės sodas NGO
- 135. House of Diversity education
- 136. Klausos negalios šeimų bendrija Aidas
- 137. Lietuvos agentūros "SOS vaikai" Panevėžio skyrius
- 138. Lietuvos triračių sporto asociacija
- 139. Lithuanian frame Running sport association
- 140. Lithuanian Gay League
- 141. Lithuanian Young Falcon Union
- 142. LPF Atgaivos sala
- 143. Mažeikių sutrikusios psichikos žmonių globos bendrija "Gyvenimo spalvos"
- 144. Neįgalųjų sportininkų asociacija
- 145. NGO Education, Health and Social Innovation Center (Svietimo, sveikatos ir socialiniu inovaciju centras)
- 146. onkologiniu ligoniu asociacija Viltie kelias
- 147. Public Institution 'Eik' Center
- 148. Senjorų pasaulis
- 149. Stebėk teises
- 150. TAURAGĖ WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND INFORMATION CENTER (TMUIC)
- 151. Telsiu kriziu centras
- 152. Village community "Berteškiai"
- 153. Visaginas University of the Third Age
- 154. VšĮ „Unikalus šokis“
- 155. VšĮ Pabėgėlių Taryba
- 156. VšĮ Prirašytos rankos (Inscribed Hands)
- 157. VšĮ VAIKŲ LINIJA

Netherlands

- 158. Hivos
- 159. Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Poland

- 160. National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)
- 161. Stefan Batory Foundation
- 162. Polish Robert Schuman Foundation
- 163. Atlas Nienawiści
- 164. Bridges of Perspectives Cooperative
- 165. Central Roma Council
- 166. Centrum Rozwoju Inicjatyw Społecznych CRIS

167. Coalition Living Earth
168. Equality Factory Association
169. Federacja Znaki Równości
170. Forests and Citizens Foundation
171. Foundation Humanity in Action Poland
172. Free Courts Foundation
173. Fundacja "Pro Aperte"
174. Fundacja Artonomia
175. Fundacja Czas Kobiet
176. Fundacja Diabeciaki
177. Fundacja Dom tam gdzie Ty
178. Fundacja Inicjatywa Dom Otwarty
179. Fundacja Interakcja
180. Fundacja Koper Pomaga Copernicus Group
181. Fundacja Kultura Liberalna
182. FUNDACJA MALINOWY GEST
183. Fundacja Matecznik
184. Fundacja NieOdkładalni
185. Fundacja Po Mojemu w Krakowie
186. Fundacja Równość.org.pl
187. Fundacja Rozwoju Demolracji Lokalnej im. Jerzego Regulskiego
188. Fundacja Transgresja
189. Fundacja W Stronę Dialogu (Foundation Towards Dialogue)
190. Fundacja Widzialne
191. Fundacja Wolności
192. Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi
193. Green REV Institute
194. Habitat for Humanity Poland
195. Homo Faber Association
196. Information Society Development Foundation
197. Inicjatywa "Nasz Rzecznik"/ "Our Ombudsman" Initiative
198. Institute for Sustainable Development Foundation
199. Institute for Sustainable Development Foundation
200. Jewish Association Czulent
201. Kampania Przeciw Homofobii / Campaign Against Homophobia
202. Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (Club of Catholic Intelligentsia)
203. Love Does Not Exclude Association
204. Marsz Równości Bydgoszcz
205. Migration Consortium
206. Mind & Gravity Foundation
207. My, Rodzice (We The Parents) - stowarzyszenie matek, ojców i sojuszników osób

LGBTQIA

208. Nauka dla Przyrody (Science for Nature)
209. Neutral Language Council (Pronounce.page)
210. niebinarnosc.pl
211. Ocalenie Foundation
212. Open Republic Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia
213. Panoptykon Foundation
214. Polish Association of the Deaf - Łódź Division
215. Polish Donors Forum
216. Polish Migration Forum Foundation

217. Polska Akcja Humanitarna
218. Polski Klub Ekologiczny Okręg Mazowiecki
219. Queerowy Maj
220. Queerpol Fondation
221. SOK Foundation (Fundacja Samodzielność od Kuchni)
222. Stowarzyszenie Egala
223. Stowarzyszenie Grupa Stonewall
224. Stowarzyszenie Inicjatywa Obywatelska Pro Civium
225. Stowarzyszenie Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom
226. Stowarzyszenie Mudita
227. Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Dzieci i Dorosłych z Mózgowym Porażeniem Dziecięcym "ŻURAWINKA"
228. Stowarzyszenie na rzecz imigranckich rodzin osób z niepełnosprawnościami "PATCHWORK"
229. Stowarzyszenie Tęczowe Opole
230. Stowarzyszenie Tęczówka / Tęczówka Association
231. The Association for "Our Ombudsman" Initiative
232. The KARTA Center Foundation
233. To Proste Foundation
234. Tychy Osiedle Q
235. Visegrad Insight
236. We are Together Association
237. Workshop for All Beings
238. Zielone Mazowsze

Portugal

239. Academia Cidadã

Romania

240. Fundația pentru Dezvoltarea Societății Civile
241. Apulum Forum Association
242. Asociația eLiberare
243. Association for Social Integration and Environmental protection Feedback Brasov
244. Association of Ecotourism in Romania
245. Átlátszó Erdély
246. Brașov Community Foundation
247. Center for Public Innovation (Romania)
248. Center for the Study of Democracy
249. Centre for Legal Resources
250. Centrul pentru Studiul Comparat al Migrației
251. Civic Radauti Association
252. CIVICA Association
253. E-Romnja Association
254. Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Copil - FONPC
255. Fundația Comunitară București
256. Fundația Comunitară Buzău
257. Fundația Comunitară Cluj
258. Fundatia Comunitara Galati
259. Fundatia Comunitara Iasi

- 260. Fundatia Comunitara Oradea
- 261. Fundatia Comunitara Sibiu
- 262. Fundatia Comunitara Tara Fagarasului
- 263. Fundația Comunitară Timișoara/Timișoara Community Foundation
- 264. FUNDATIA COMUNITARA VALCEA (VALCEA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION)
- 265. Intercultural Institute Timisoara
- 266. Migrant Integration Center Brasov, Romania
- 267. Mioritics Association
- 268. MozaiQ LGBT Association
- 269. Mures Community Foundation
- 270. Novapolis Association - Center of Analysis and Initiatives for Development
- 271. Odorheiu Secuiesc Community Foundation
- 272. Organizația Umanitară CONCORDIA
- 273. Prahova Community Foundation
- 274. Resource Center for Roma Communities Foundation
- 275. Respiro Human Rights Research Centre
- 276. Romanian Federation Of Community Foundations
- 277. Save the Children Romania
- 278. Society for Feminist Analyses
- 279. The Ecotourism Association Tara Dornelor (AETD)
- 280. The Federation of Nongovernmental Organisations for Social Services-FONSS

Slovakia

- 281. Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry (Center for the research of ethnicity and culture)
- 282. Ekopolis Foundation
- 283. Iniciatíva Inakosť
- 284. Kompromis - Kompromisszum
- 285. MEMO 98
- 286. Možnosť voľby/Freedom of Choice
- 287. Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia
- 288. People in Peril
- 289. Volunteer Center Banska Bystrica

Slovenia

- 290. CNVOS - Centre for information service, co-operation and development of NGOs
- 291. ADRA Slovenija
- 292. Alpe Adria Green, International organisation of protection of Environmental and nature
- 293. Association Legebitra
- 294. Celiac Slovenija - društvo bolnikov s celiakijo (Celiac Slovenia - Celiac Disease Patients Association)
- 295. Center za trajnostni razvoj podeželja Kranj
- 296. Danes je nov dan, Inštitut za druga vprašanja
- 297. Društvo prijateljev mladine občin Postojna in Pivka
- 298. Društvo Svit Koper
- 299. Društvo za razvijanje prostovoljnega dela Novo mesto
- 300. Društvo za strpne odnose Eksena
- 301. Državljan D / Citizen D

- 302. Forum za enakopraven razvoj
- 303. Global Water Partnership Slovenia
- 304. Institute Meta's list
- 305. Ljubljanska kolesarska mreža
- 306. Local development foundation for Pomurje region
- 307. Maribor Cycling Network
- 308. Mesto žensk, Društvo za promocijo žensk v kulturi
- 309. Morigenos – Slovenian Marine Mammal Society
- 310. Muzej norosti, Trate
- 311. Planet to the 3rd Power, Institute for Interdisciplinary Sustainable Development
- 312. Slovene Philanthropy
- 313. Slovenian Third Age University
- 314. Transparency International Slovenia
- 315. VARNA POT zavod za pomoč žrtvam prometnih nesreč, preventivo, vzgojo in izobraževanje
- 316. Zavod Aspira
- 317. Zavod Etnika
- 318. Zavod Igrivi svet
- 319. Zavod PIP
- 320. Zavod Radio Študent
- 321. Zavod ZON.si
- 322. Združenje ONA VE
- 323. Zveza društev Mladinski center Postojna (Youth Center Postojna)

Spain

- 324. NOVACT
- 325. ASOCIACION CULTURAL BAIZARA
- 326. Asociación Mundus - Un mundo a tus pies
- 327. Districte 11 - City to City
- 328. Fundación Platoniq
- 329. Irídia - Human Rights Defence Centre

Candidate countries to the EU

- 330. Center for European Policy Studies on Regional and Local Development - Albania
- 331. Partners Albania for Change and Development - Albania
- 332. Urban Research Institute – Albania
- 333. Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) - Kosovo
- 334. Reproductive Health Training Center - Moldova
- 335. Macedonian Center for International Cooperation – North Macedonia
- 336. Civic Initiatives - Serbia
- 337. Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization - Serbia
- 338. Initiative for Development and Cooperation – Serbia
- 339. Association of Ukrainian Civic Initiatives - Ukraine
- 340. NGO LDAM - Local democracy agency of Mariupol - Ukraine

Ministries and local authorities

- 1. Roskovec Municipality (Albania)
- 2. City of Vimercate - COMUNE DI VIMERCATE (Italy)

3. RISORSE PER ROMA SPA/CITY OF ROME (Italy)
4. Ministry of Culture in Latvia
5. Cimişlia City Hall (Moldova)
6. Chernihiv City Council (Ukraine)
7. Odesa Rayon Council (Ukraine)
8. Slavutych Town Council (Ukraine)
9. The Executive Committee of Zelenodolsk City Council (Ukraine)