

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 EU 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. EPA - European Parents' Association
10. Eurochild
11. European Association for Local Democracy - ALDA
12. European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting
13. EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING
14. European Public Health Alliance
15. European Youth Forum
16. Fédération Européenne des Retraités et personnes Âgées (FERPA)
17. International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network (IPPF EN)
18. Lifelong Learning Platform - European Civil Society for Education

19. RECLAIM
20. Res Publica Foundation - Visegrad Insight
21. SOLIDAR
22. Transparency International EU
23. Union of European Federalists
24. Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

Austria

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

Belgium

28. Pour la solidarité
29. Professional Women International Brussels
30. Stand Up for Europe

Bosnia and Herzegovina

31. Centar za promociju civilnog drustva
32. Center for Civic Cooperation

Bulgaria

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

Croatia

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

Czech Republic

43. Network for the Protection of Democracy
44. Glopolis
45. SPIRALIS
46. APLA Severní Čechy, z.s.
47. Cehupo
48. CeHuPo - Centrum Humanitární Pomoci, z.s.
49. Centrum humanitární pomoci
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. Středisko ekologické výchovy SEVER /Centre For Environmental Education SEVER
66. Transparency International Czech Republic
67. TUDYTAM, z.s.
68. Ukrajinska iniciativa jizni Moravy

Denmark

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

Estonia

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

Finland

76. SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health

France

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

Germany

83. Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement
84. Maecenata Foundation

Greece

85. European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation "EGTC Amphictyony"
86. Greek Forum of Refugees

87. Union of Women Association of Heraklion

Hungary

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

Ireland

108. Comhlámh
109. Irish Council for Civil Liberties
110. Redial Partnership CLG
111. The Wheel

Italy

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

Latvia

121. Civic Alliance - Latvia
122. "Sievietēm 50+"
123. Ar pasaules pieredzi Latvijā
124. Donum Animus
125. Eiropas Kustība Latvijā / European Movement - Latvia

Lithuania

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

Netherlands

155. Hivos
156. Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Poland

157. National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)
158. Stefan Batory Foundation
159. Polish Robert Schuman Foundation
160. Atlas Nienawiści
161. Bridges of Perspectives Cooperative
162. Central Roma Council
163. Centrum Rozwoju Inicjatyw Społecznych CRIS
164. Coalition Living Earth
165. Equality Factory Association
166. Federacja Znaki Równości

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

LGBTQIA

205. Nauka dla Przyrody (Science for Nature)
206. Neutral Language Council (Pronounce.page)
207. niebinarnosc.pl
208. Ocalenie Foundation
209. Open Republic Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia
210. Panoptykon Foundation
211. Polish Association of the Deaf – Łódź Division
212. Polish Donors Forum
213. Polish Migration Forum Foundation
214. Polska Akcja Humanitarna
215. Polski Klub Ekologiczny Okręg Mazowiecki
216. Queerowy Maj

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

Portugal

- 236. Academia Cidadã

Romania

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

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

Slovakia

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

Slovenia

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

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

Spain

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

Candidate countries to the EU

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