

EU Civil Society Strategy - What Next? -

Working conference

19 November 2024

CEU Budapest

Event organized by



Rationale and objectives

Although civil society matters fall outside the EU's competence, in response to signs of a shrinking civic space observed in an increasing number of Member States, **EU institutions have launched a number of important initiatives**, partly as a result of civic advocacy, during the 2019-24 mandate aimed at supporting an enabling environment for civil society. To name but a few:

- the mandate of Vice President Vera Jourova regarding civil society and civil space,
- the annual Rule of Law reports covering the state of civil society in the Member States,
- the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) funding programme launched with a significantly increased budget and new types of grants,
- the draft directive on European Cross-Border Associations nearing completion,
- the 2023 Council conclusion on the role of civil society in democratic societies – the first document of its kind.

Besides, amplifying the voice of civil society, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee have called in several resolutions for the establishment of an EU system of civil dialogue and the adoption of a comprehensive civil strategy.

At the same time, there are opposing and potentially dangerous legislative initiatives underway, too – most notably the draft 'Transparency in the Representation of Third Country Interests' Directive (Defence of Democracy package).

However, **much of the above is “unfinished business”**, that is, open policy dossiers that need to be followed up by the new institutions in the coming mandate. Civil society needs to remain vigilant and continue working together for a comprehensive, coherent and pro-active European civil society strategy serving to help defend organisations working for the public good across the continent.

Unsurprisingly, civil society matters are missing from the agenda of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council – however, we believe the attention focused on our country provides a good opportunity to discuss these with representatives of European networks, umbrellas and institutions, thus raising awareness of the importance of these issues and of the fact that **a strong civil society is an essential part of EU democracy**.

Tentative agenda

Venue:

CEU, 1051 Budapest, Nádor u. 15.
co-working room

[Register here](#)

9.00-9.30 Arrival, registration

9.30-10.00 Opening and welcome

10.00-11.30 Current situation and outlooks

Short presentations and Q&A moderated by Ökotárs:

- Advocacy for an EU Civil Society Strategy and Civil Dialogue Agreement - Riccardo Rossella (Civil Society Europe)
- Commission mandate and open policy dossiers - Giada Negri (European Civic Forum);
- Funding civil society: cooperation for an improved CERV programme - Hanna Surmatz (Philea);
- Monitoring Action for Civil Space - Marianna Belalba (European Center for Nonprofit Law);
- The future of the Rule of Law reports - Balázs Dénes (Civil Liberties Europe);

11.30-12.00 Coffee break

12.00-12.30 Reflections by the European Commission

DG JUST (or the Representation in Budapest)

12.30-13.30 Brainstorming

In small groups on joint advocacy and next steps
moderated by Ökotárs and HCLU

13.30-14.30 Lunch break

14.30-15.00 Plenary

feedback from the small groups and agreement

15.00-15.45 Discussion with newly elected Hungarian MEPs

Moderated by HCLU

15.45-16.15 Closing presentation

Karolina Dreszer-Smalec (OFOP): CSOs' plans for the Polish
presidency

16.15-16.30 Conclusions and farewell

The event is open to representatives of Hungarian and Central European CSOs as well as European networks and umbrellas interested in working together for a thriving and safe civil space in the EU.

The event is organized by Ökotárs - the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU).

ABOUT THE CIVIL EU PRESIDENCY

We have launched the Civil EU Presidency in parallel with the 2024 Hungarian EU Presidency to amplify the voice of civil society on issues that are not properly covered by the Hungarian government.

We address the weakening of European democracies, the growing inequalities and the need for green transition. **Our goal is to present proposals for comprehensive strategies to national governments and EU institutions**, and make recommendations for the EU's priorities for the next 5 years for a democratic, inclusive and sustainable future.

Our events cover the following issues:

- Water resilience in the EU (12-13. Sep. 2024)
- The State of Forests in the EU (3-4. Oct. 2024)
- Just green transition in the EU (14-15. Oct. 2024)
- Women in public life (19. Oct. 2024)
- Roma strategies in EU countries (15. Nov. 2024)
- Civic space in the EU (19. Nov. 2024)
- Sustainable battery strategy (22. Nov. 2024)

 www.civilpresidency.hu/en/home