

Activity Report 2020

In 2020 Civil Society Europe General Assembly adopted a work programme with the following objectives:

- putting on the EU agenda at the highest level the defense and promotion of civic space and the adoption of a comprehensive EU strategy.
- contributing to change the culture of the EU institutions as regards civil dialogue and interaction with civil society organisations, as well as the recognition of their role
- monitoring the use of the EU funding regulations and the adoption of the new multiannual financial framework and its impact on civil society.
- fostering cooperation and understanding among not-for-profit associations and NGOs and the development of coordinated positions and campaigns on transversal and common issues.

CSE implemented activities in the following areas:

- Protecting and enabling civic space
- Supporting civil society as a follow up of the global Pandemic
- Recognition of civil society organisations

CSE Europe also worked towards its internal development

1. Protecting and enabling Civic Space

1.1 Contributing to the Rule of Law Review

Civil Society Europe worked together with its civic space working group in order to prepare a joint contribution to the rule of law process and advocate for a specific section on civic space within the European Commission annual review .

In this context the following actions were undertaken:

February:

- A Meeting of the civic space working Group
- Participation at the DG International Cooperation Meeting with Mr Voulé, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (18/02)

March:

- Preparation of a document on **Strengthening rule of law through supporting civic space – promotion, prevention and response** was submitted to the European Commission.
- As a follow up CSE organised also a **meeting with the Cabinet of Commissioner Reynders** (16 March)

April:

- participation at Webinar with Commissioner Reynders with Civil Society organised by the EP Green Group (07/04)

May:

- CSE published a [joint contribution to the Rule of law Report](#)

In June:

- Organisation of a **meeting with Michael Simecka - EP rapporteur** on a rule of law framework (17 June) with CSE members
- Preparation of joint amendments (to rapporteur for preliminary draft and shadows for amendments).
- CSE and civic working group members were invited to a **meeting with Niovi Ringou**, head of unit on rule of law **DG JUST** as a follow up to the contribution to the consultation

October:

Civil society Europe has issued a [joint reaction](#) with the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law and Philanthropy Advocacy on the 2020 Annual Rule of Law Report

November:

- [Presentation](#) at the European Foundation Centre rule of law policy webinar: Human Rights, civic space and the rule of law in the EU to discuss follow up to civil society contribution (24/11)

December:

- Tere Badia from CSE Steering Committee spoke at the policy debate and civic pride awards presentation of the [Civic Space Watch Report 2020 - stories from the lockdown](#) (08/12)

- Presentation at the [workshop on Protecting freedom of peaceful assembly: A political participation tool also during COVID19](#) (02/12)

Results of CSE action:

- Increased coordination with CSE members and other civil society organisations on issues relating to the rule of law and civic space
- Start of a continuous dialogue with DG JUST at the European Commission
- Civic space included as part of democratic checks and balances for the rule of law in EC consultation and report
- Reinforcement of reference to civic space and dialogue with civil society in EP final report on a rule of law framework

1.2 Contributing to the European Democracy Action Plan

Civil Society Europe through the civic space working Group contributed to the Democracy Action Plan in order to reinforce civil dialogue and civic space. In particular CSE called on the EU to initiate an inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue with European civil society and ensure meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society in the context of the Future of Europe Conference.

CSE took the following actions:

February:

Participation to the SLAPP seminar in Amsterdam organised by Greenpeace

May:

- Contribution to joint policy paper [Ending Gag Lawsuits in Europe Protecting Democracy and Fundamental Rights](#)

September:

- Contribution to the joint Contribution to the consultation coordinated by the European Partnership for Democracy: [A Comprehensive Plan to innovate Democracy in Europe](#) by co-drafting the chapter on civic space and active citizenship
- Publication of the [Civil Society Europe Statement on the Commission democracy Action Plan](#)

December:

- contribution to [Joint legal proposal on anti-SLAPP Law](#)

Result of CSE action:

- Establishment and reinforcement of links with CSOs active in the area of democracy and media freedom
- Measures against SLAPPs are part of the EU Democracy Action Plan
- Insertion on a chapter on democracy and civic participation quite disappointing, but that has the merit to exist

1.3 Ensuring respect of Fundamental Rights

- ❖ CSE responded to the EC consultation on the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence
- ❖ CSE contributed to the Anti Money Laundering Action Plan by the European Commission in cooperation with other stakeholders

June:

- [Contribution to EC White Paper on Artificial Intelligence - a European Approach](#)

July:

- Meeting with DG FISMA unit on financial crime (with NPO coalition) to discuss contribution to EC Consultation on the EU Action Plan on the fight against Money laundering and terrorism financing

August:

- [Joint contribution](#) to the Commission consultation on the EU Action Plan on the fight against Money laundering and terrorism financing

December:

- [Joint \(NPO coalition\) Input for the European Commission \(EC\) Supranational Risk Assessment advising on a different risk rating for NPOs with regard to Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing \)threat and vulnerability](#)

Result of CSE action:

- Better awareness by EC of fundamental rights implications of AML and CT policies
- Highlighting further attention to FR implications of the EU policies aiming at the development of Artificial Intelligence

2. Supporting Civil Society Post Covid 19

2.1 The European Recovery Package and civil society

Civil Society Europe facilitated the exchange among civil society organisations on the preparation of a coordinated advocacy position to support civil society post covid 19 and sought to ensure the participation of civil society in the preparation of the European Recovery Package and the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The following actions were taken:

April:

- Publication of actions and statements by CSE members to address the consequences of the pandemic on CSE website and dissemination to decision-makers: [Covid 19: Civil Society at the Forefront](#)

May:

- CSE open plenary meeting: [Impact of Covid 19 on CSOs: what can we do together?](#)

June:

- Civil Society Europe has facilitated and signed together with 52 Platforms of civil society organisations [a letter to the Presidents of the European Institutions on Europe's recovery Plan and civil society](#)

August:

- [letter to the EU institutions Presidents on the EU negotiations on the Recovery Plan and MFF](#)

September:

- Meeting with the Director of the Task Force I on the Resilience and Recovery Plans on 17 September
- A [model letter](#) for CSE members urging national organisations to contact their ministries urgently to be involved in the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans
- [Comments to the European Commission Guidance Note](#) to member States

October:

- Establishment of the CSE Task force on the participation of civil society in the NRRPs with meetings on 16 October, 29 October, 17 November, 25 November, and 9 December.

November

- Presentation at EEB Green Budget Working Group of CSE work
- Amendments to EP report on the Recovery and Resilience Facility ?

- [Guidance Note to National civil society organisations](#)

December:

- [Survey](#) to national civil society organisations on their participation in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans and interviews
- Presentation of main findings at joint meeting with EEB with the Director of the EC Task Force Recover II (17 December)
- Publication of a report together with ECNL on the [participation of civil society organisations in the preparation of the EU National Recovery and Resilience Plans](#)

Result of CSE action:

- CSE managed to bring to the attention of decision -makers at EU level the need to include further civil society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. It also managed to support through its members the work of national organisations.

2.2 Promoting a Civil Society proof EU budget

June:

- Meeting with CSOs on CERV (08/06) to campaign for increase of the budget and follow up actions with EU decision-makers

September:

- Meeting with the Cabinet of the Budget Commissioner, Mr Hahn on September 1st

August:

- [letter to the EU institutions Presidents on the EU negotiations on the Recovery Plan and MFF](#)

Results of CSE action:

- Ensuring the participation of civil society in the MFF
- Brought to the attention of EU institutions the need for further participation of civil society
- Contributed to increase of CERV funding

3. Recognition of civil society organisations

3.1 Conference on the Future of Europe

- ❖ CSE Contributed to the establishment of the Conference on the Future of Europe decision-making process and follow up decisions as regards the participation by civil society.
- ❖ CSE established a Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe open to all pan European organisations willing to contribute to the Conference on the basis of EU values.

January:

- [Contribution to the EP resolution on the conference on the future of Europe](#) and campaigned for an amendment to include representatives from civil society in the conference plenary

February:

- [Debate at CSE extraordinary general assembly](#) with key EP main decision makers: Guy Verhofstadt, Paulo Rangel, Gabriele Bischoff, Daniel Freund and Martin Scholz
- Letter to EC Vice President Jourova (17/02)
- Meeting of CSE delegation with Vice President Suica Cabinet advisor on the Conference on the Future of Europe (21/02)

October:

- Meeting with Domenec Ruiz Devesa (AFCD MEP) on the participation of civil society in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe

December:

- CSE plenary to adopt the joint declaration and call for signature for establishing a civil society Convention on the Future of Europe (7/12)

Result of CSE action:

- Further recognition of the role of civil society in the conference on the future of Europe
- Further recognition of the role of CSE and need for joint action by further civil society organisations

3.2 Civil Dialogue

- ❖ CSE advocated for a legal proposal for an inter institutional framework agreement based on article 11, 2 of the EU treaties on civil dialogue
- ❖ CSE engaged with EP decision-makers on an EP proposal for a European Association Statute

- ❖ CSE explored key challenges for civil society for participation in democracy and trust and distrust in governance within the Horizon 2020 Entrust Project, aiming at gathering further knowledge on the dynamic relationship between trust and distrust, in order to promote new forms of enlightened trust in democratic governance in Europe.
- ❖ CSE highlighted key issues related to the lack of democratic governance in the nomination process for the civil society members of the European Economic and Social Committee in several countries and sent its opinion to the European Commission and to the Council responsible for the final appointment.

June:

- CSE organised and moderated the [Launch of the Entrust Project](#) with a high level panel of speakers (DG Research Director General Paquet, EP Vice President Katarina Barley, MEPs Sergey Lagodinsky, Domenec Ruiz Devesa and Anna Donath)

July:

- [Open letter to the Vice President of the European Commission in charge of Interinstitutional Relations, Mr Maroš Šefčovič](#) bringing forward concerns on the proposed nominations by Member States of some members of the European Economic and Social Committee for the period 2020 – 2025, falling into the EESC Group III membership

October:

- [Response to the EC consultation on European Citizenship](#)
- [European Policy Brief on the theoretical and normative underpinnings of trust and distrust in governance](#) as part of the Entrust Project
- [Open letter to German Presidency, and European Commission on the process of nomination of civil society representatives within Group III](#)
- Speech of EEB Director in EESC Inaugural plenary session referring to CSE letter and review (29/10)
- Meetings of CSE civil dialogue task force to promote an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue: 2/10 and 22/10

November:

- Organisation of the [Round Table discussion on trust and distrust in governance: the role of media, science and civil society](#) within Entrust project

Result of CSE action:

- Increased discussions within the Council and Commission on the nomination of EESC representatives
- Commissioner proposed meeting with CSE to discuss report on the nomination process
- Highlighting the importance of civil society participation in decision-making within debates with policy makers and academics
- Further recognition of the role of CSE by decision-makers
- Reinforcing links with further civil society organisations

4. Internal Development

- ❖ CSE organised 2 plenary meetings, one extraordinary general assembly with a high level event and an annual general assembly
- ❖ CSE held several meetings of working groups and task forces on civic space, civil dialogue and the European recovery package chaired by the members of the Steering Group.
- ❖ CSE worked on fundraising
- ❖ Development of a newsletter for members

Results:

- Diversification of CSE funding (core funding for a year - renewal in progress) from OSIFE (Open Society Foundation) for a year and from ICNL (grant for report on the participation of Civil society organisations in the NRRPs)
- Outreach towards other civil society organisations in the framework of its work on participation of civil society post covid 19 and the establishment of a civil society convention on the future of Europe
- Improved communication through website and newsletter