



Our European Life Thematic Cluster Report Final Draft Recommendations - Europe in the World

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1. Introduction

The [Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe \(CSOCOFOE\)](#) is a coordination of 82 European networks and platforms with constituencies all over Europe, connecting millions of individuals engaged in many aspects of life, from education to culture, social inclusion, environmental environment, democracy, and transparency. We represent the Civil Society Component in the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (together with the European Movement). The CSOCOFOE has involved in a bottom up process civil society organisations across Europe around five thematic clusters. One of them “Our European Life” also covered issues around the role of the EU in the world.

In this cluster, co-chaired by CEV Centre for European Volunteering and Volonteuropé, our work and deliberations with the cluster members focused on rights and values in the European Union, European Identity, Freedom of Movement, Civic Space, Sport , Security, the EU’s role in the world, Migration Challenges and Opportunities. We took the European rights and values, and the importance of having a robust and unthreatened civic space in Europe, as a transversal frame and basis on which to reflect on the theme of “Our European Life”. We asked ourselves the following three questions: what is our European life? What should it be? And finally, how do we get there?

Framing the cluster discussions around a robustly functioning civic space and healthy democracy in the EU has been vital for us. Civic space is the political, legislative, social and



economic environment, which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act individually, and collectively as volunteers, activists and/or employees, to influence and shape their societies. Civic space enables people to pursue multiple, at times competing, points of view. Both in its advocacy-oriented and its action or service-oriented function, civil society contributes to making effective the access to civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights for many.

A vibrant and independent civil society, in an open civic space, is vital for a healthy democracy, strong social justice, and to safeguard the Rule of Law. These are European priorities to create a Union of values beyond solely economic interests, which allow us to promote rights and values, migration, the EU's role in the world, security and sport, amongst others.

An open, plural and dynamic civic space is a central feature of democratic societies because it allows citizens to engage politically beyond elections. It also encourages governments to be transparent and accountable, and listen to the voices, lived-experiences and knowledge of their citizens. Within the cluster, we facilitated a culture of active participation and citizenship, which we believe is vital to democratise the European project, especially in the context of the Conference of the Future of Europe, to ensure the European Union delivers for the good of the people and the planet.

As democracy and the rule of law in Europe are backsliding amidst weakening standards for human rights – including socio-economic rights – and with increasing restrictions on civic space in many European member states, the EU's role is even more crucial in rebuilding trust and confidence in democracy and the Rule of Law as suitable tools for addressing the wide range of people's needs, increasing cohesion in our societies, and protecting civic space. At the same time, civil society actors, such as those who were actively involved in the work of our cluster, are vital to acting and advocating for the common good, as well as for advocating for the implementation of, and improvements to, many European policies, including in areas tackled in this cluster. The ability of civil society and active citizens to come together, to bring forward recommendations that engage European policy-makers at local, national and European level is the basis for the following recommendations.

2. Europe in the world

The pandemic has once again shown that everyone's safety depends on how safe others are. Common security must therefore be the cornerstone of Europe's relationship with the world. Today's interconnected global challenges – namely, the rising of extreme poverty and inequality, the climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis, violent conflicts, the trend of autocratisation and shrinking civic space, and the ongoing pandemics – call for a new impetus to multilateralism and solidarity. Peace,



justice, the protection and practice of human rights and environmental security should be the core principles and values guiding the EU action in the world.

The area of foreign affairs and security remains the domain of the EU member states, with the EU institutions playing a marginal role. As a result, neither the Union as a whole nor its individual members are able to achieve their full potential on the international stage and as a consequence are losing their importance compared to other, often undemocratic, powers. Speaking with one voice is often impossible due to the principle of unanimity, which means that each member state can block any EU position or action in the area of foreign affairs and security, including sanctions for grave human rights violations, common defence initiatives and/or the accession of new members.

The EU should develop a genuine common foreign and security policy, allowing it to ensure the safety of Europeans while promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law and environmental protection in its neighbourhood and globally. Coupled with a genuine Defence Union, it should include an EU army overseen by the European Parliament and capable of conducting peacekeeping, humanitarian, and peacebuilding operations globally. This should be complemented by a common approach to development cooperation, supporting the sustainable growth and democratic integration of other countries and regions.

All actions in the area of foreign affairs and security should be co-decided by the European Parliament and the Council based on qualified majority, with no possibility to block them by a single member state.

The EU must be a driver for upholding democracy and human rights, and an actor of good governance, focusing on communitarian approaches and empowerment of civil society and local governments. The principles and values that should guide EU's role and responsibility in the world are:

1. Commitment to prevention and active diplomacy to end armed conflicts;
2. Redirection of funding allocated to military actors to better support stronger political,
3. diplomatic and developmental action to drive human security, climate transition and climate justice across the globe;
4. Commitment to the principle of Policy Coherence for Development;
5. Enhancement of migrants' welcoming and rights in the EU.

There is a need to acknowledge the historic and current social responsibilities of corporations and countries that benefit, and have benefited, from exploiting ecosystems and communities, as well as an emancipation from colonial legacy.

Furthermore, EU development policies should serve both European citizens, people living in Europe, and those outside the EU, through:



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Advocating for better and more effective climate policies and international agreement on those, which would be a win-win for everyone;

1. Prioritising a process of regional integration based on the principles of common security, human rights and the Rule of Law.
2. Overcoming the misconception of neighbourhood policy serving primarily as a defence against terrorism and a measure to reduce migration, in favour of a policy aimed at democratic, human and ecological development of neighbouring regions, as this is the only way to guarantee European security as well;
3. Reduction of climate change, conflict and poverty, both for the well-being of people and
4. communities living in third countries and because they are deep-rooted causes of forced migration;
5. Enhancement of safe and regular routes and procedures for access to the EU for migrants and forcibly displaced persons from other world regions, extending those already tested; and improving rescue operations across European land and waters.

We also believe that the EU should play a role in promoting democracy and human rights globally, by investing in education, health, climate, and other policies that strengthen democracy; as well as by robustly supporting civil society which plays a crucial role in delivering on all these policies in a socially-just manner. Furthermore, the EU should implement and engage in international cooperation by providing the highest support for the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with the aim of making the EU a nuclear weapons free zone. It should establish common European rules on the control of the production and sale of conventional arms, to prevent arms exports to countries at war, or which violate human rights, or in which dissenting voices (whether from political opposition or civil society) are not allowed to freely operate. The EU should properly practice the defence of human rights and human rights defenders in all aspects of its foreign and trade policies, including avoiding funding countries that do not respect them. In addition, by establishing a European day for the victims of colonialism, the EU would make a symbolic but very important gesture of reparation for the crimes committed by Europe in other parts of the world.

On the questions of the EU entering trade deals with partner countries, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the cluster recommendation is that there should be concrete commitment to suspend patents on vaccines, to allow mass vaccination in all countries of the world. There should be a suspension and renegotiation of trade treaties whenever they serve corporate interests at the expense of planetary boundaries and animal well-being, driving untenable social inequalities or propping up undemocratic and violent regimes, (for example, as Mercosur). It would also be vital for the EU to engage in reviewing the role and functioning of the World Trade Organisation, to bring most of its competences and functions under the aegis of the United Nations.

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