



PARIS

DECLARATION

European Civil Society Forum

30 June 2022

THE PARIS DECLARATION

We, participants of the European Civil Society Forum, organised on 30 June 2022 in Paris, warmly welcome the conclusions adopted at the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and call for ambitious and immediate efforts to implement them.

We set down in this Declaration our vision for the future of Europe as well as civil society's role in its achievement, through the development of an open, transparent, structured and effective civil dialogue with the European Union institutions and Member States and our close involvement in the decision-making process leading to policy, legislative and Treaty reforms.

1 We are convinced that a socially and environmentally just EU is the precondition for achieving **an inclusive and sustainable European future for its citizens**. This requires a **reform of the EU's long-term economic objectives**, as infinite economic growth cannot be a viable goal in a world with finite resources. Instead, a sustainable model that tackles social, racial and gender inequalities and injustices, taking into account the complexity of their interactions, must be adopted. **Our economic activities must focus on delivering well-being and health, quality jobs and access to social services, while respecting the ecological limits of the planet.**

To this end, we call on EU institutions and Member States to:

- Establish an **adequate, binding and equitable minimum income across the EU**, including through banning youth-specific minimum income, for the purpose of, for instance, protecting women who are employed on a part-time basis or hold precarious positions more often than men.
- Provide **strong social protection across the EU, in accordance with the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**, including access to a guaranteed minimum wage, affordable social services, access to long-term care and health, childcare for all and education, quality housing for all, and prioritise the **eradication of extreme poverty**.
- **Address labour market inequalities, including youth-specific challenges**, by using a legal instrument, banning unpaid internships in the EU, implementing the reinforced Youth Guarantee, and providing quality jobs, all in close cooperation with youth organisations.
- **Introduce taxes on air transport, luxury goods and polluting emissions**, commit to **actively fighting tax evasion and corruption** and abolish tax deductions for polluting companies, in order to **recover revenues that states can invest in social policies**.

Furthermore, recognising that the challenges related to the environment and climate change are so important that they cannot be solved in isolation and without changing existing economic, fiscal and energy policies,

Emphasising that we need to increase our ambitions and accelerate our actions in the fight against climate change, in order to ensure that people have access to healthy and safe living spaces and sufficient resources,

Noting that public participation in environmental decision-making processes is essential to achieve these objectives, yet is limited in practice by the lack of transparency of decision-making bodies and by the complexity of the channels for challenging European environmental acts, which exist only through indirect access to the EU Court of Justice,

Recalling that the channels of contestation and participation also rely on the capacity of citizens and civil society organisations to occupy the civic space, by exercising their freedoms of assembly, expression and association, and their right of access to information,

We ask European institutions and Member States to:

- **Reform the EU's macroeconomic governance**, including the European Semester process, and including the establishment of new flexibility rules.
- **Adopt a Sustainability and Well-Being Pact** based on environmental, social, racial and gender justice goals.
- Systemically **base EU environment and climate policies on a solid prior analysis of existing inequalities**, to ensure that these policies achieve their environmental objectives and contribute to more equitable societies.
- **Protect environmental rights guaranteed by the Aarhus Convention**, as well as the freedoms of assembly, expression, association and the rights to access information, to demonstrate and to privacy.
- **Implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the development of environmental public policies**, at the local regional and national levels.

2 Since legitimacy and trust in our democracies rest above all else on politicians' capacity to respect the rights and dignity of everyone and to respond to the needs of all people in their diversity, it is **essential to involve civil society organisations in a systematic and concrete manner**. Since our organisations were established by and for the people living in the Union's territory, and since our employees and volunteers are active on the ground on a daily basis, **we are an essential link in identifying the real needs of the people**. Through the daily action of our employees and volunteers, we give tangible substance to the shared European values, **we bear witness to situations of precariousness and provide responses to them**, while at the same time alerting people to the inadequacies or impact of public policies, and we are **frequently the first to respond to societal emergencies**, as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine and their consequences have shown recently.

For all these reasons, we call for the adoption of a **European Strategy on Civil Society** to empower, engage with, support and protect civil society. This strategy should include:

- The conclusion of an **inter-institutional agreement on EU civil dialogue** for the implementation of Article 11 of the EU Treaties, in order to harmonise civil dialogue standards, procedures and mechanisms across EU institutions and Member States, and across sectoral and transversal dialogue.
- The **close involvement of civil society organisations** in the definition and determination of any **CoFoE follow-up** process, including a Convention for the revision of the Treaties.
- The development of **eligibility criteria** for civil society organisations participating in the **civil dialogue** that guarantee **equality, diversity, inclusiveness, legitimacy and representativeness**, including by enabling the participation of civil society organisations from non-EU countries that are impacted by European policies.
- Secure **funding** for the **participation of civil society in civil dialogue** at both the European and national levels, especially to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised groups have access to democratic processes.
- **Transparency** at all stages of the **decision-making processes of all EU institutions**, from the proposal of a policy or legislation to its final adoption, and the involvement of civil society.
- The **strengthening** of the **Rule of Law Annual Report** on the “enabling environment for civil society” by dedicating a **new pillar to civic space** that would include country specific recommendations.
- The undertaking of an **impact assessment of how European laws could impact the rule of law and civic space** and, where such instances are identified, the provision of a remedy. Also, the creation of an **EU Youth Test** – an impact assessment tool at EU level that would see all

policymaking through a youth lens, by consulting with youth experts and youth representatives, and analyse policies' impact on youth and propose mitigation measures to be implemented if a negative impact is identified.

- The creation of a **separate pillar** dedicated to civil society in the **EU Democracy Action Plan**.
- The promotion of a **favourable environment for civil society** through political, financial and legal support to civil society organisations.
- The development of a **European Statute for Non-Profit Organisations, Associations and Foundations**, which would give a real place to civil society organisations alongside for-profit and public actors and would promote their recognition, and the removal of barriers to cross-border cooperation and cross-border giving.
- The implementation of **operational long-term funding**, designed to support the functioning of civil society organisations and associations and to guarantee the protection of their structures, in order to prevent dependance on project-oriented funding, as well as transparent **access to structural and recovery funds**.
- The provision of **better knowledge and understanding of civil society organisations** and associations and **supporting research** on this subject at the European level.
- **Coordination with existing structures** that are key institutional actors for **participatory democracy activities**.

We also wish to highlight that:

- When reforming the EU Treaties, **a revision of Article 11, and in particular paragraph 2, should be a priority** in order to ensure the systematic inclusion of civil society in all stages of the decision-making processes of the EU institutions, and to give civil dialogue a status comparable to that of social dialogue.
- We call for a **Convention for the revision of the EU Treaties**, to strengthen European competences, overcome the national veto and allow the EU to respond quickly and effectively enough to citizens' requests and needs. This process should be open, participative and it must include civil society organisations.
- The EU should **complete the reform of EU electoral law**, following an initiative of the European Parliament, to enable, for instance, transnational electoral lists and grant the right to vote from the age of 16.

- The EU should also **upscale EU enlargement efforts** because Europe extends far beyond the EU and the values that Europe stands for need to be preserved more than ever in these dramatic times, in order to ensure a secure geopolitical landscape in Europe.

The establishment of an open, transparent, structured and effective civil dialogue between civil society organisations and EU institutions and Member States is an absolute necessity to improve and strengthen the EU's decision-making and policy-making process, and to enhance democracy and citizens' trust in governance.

The challenges we face are enormous. Only by working together can we make a difference. As civil society organisations, we are ready for change! Are you ready for dialogue?