

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President-elect of the European Commission

Subject: **citizens and civil society organisations in the next mandate of the European Commission**

Brussels, 25 July 2019

Dear President von der Leyen,

I am writing to you on behalf of Civil Society Europe, which represents civil society organisations working in the areas of social rights, culture, education, youth, non-discrimination, international cooperation, environment, civic participation, volunteering, citizenship, and transparency. We work to protect and expand the space where people organize and act for common interests, and we promote open, transparent, and regular dialogue between democratically elected policymakers and civil society organisations.

First of all we would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the European Commission. We commend your commitment to democracy, civic participation and listening to citizens in your Political Guidelines. At a time when basic civic rights are under attack across Europe and globally, **the European Union should lead by example by strengthening democracy and ensuring the conditions for organised civil society to flourish.**

Civil society organisations play a central role in the defense and promotion of the values enshrined in Article 2 of the EU Treaty, which include respect for human dignity, human rights, equality, democracy and the rule of law. In addition, civil society organisations empower people within their diversity to speak up, making their “right to participate in the democratic life of the Union” a reality, as enshrined in Article 10. Civil society organisations also provide people with opportunities to “make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action” and to participate in an open, transparent and regular dialogue with the institutions (Article 11).

We call on you to introduce the following measures, essential for supporting and further developing civic space in Europe:

1.- Actively involve and promote the participation of civil society organisations in EU policy-making by:

- **Including in your mandate an open, regular, transparent, accessible and inclusive dialogue with civil society**, and ensuring that top EU decision makers involve civil society organisations also in informal and direct conversations;
- Including the **protection and promotion of civil society in the mandate of the Vice-President** in charge of the rule of law and fundamental rights;
- Include in the **mandate of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy** the global support, promotion and development of a **thriving, and independent civil society**;
- Ensuring a **focal point for civil society within each Directorate General**, to facilitate dialogue and information sharing between the different DGs and civil society organisations;
- **Involving as key partners civil society representatives in the preparation and agenda development of the Conference on the Future of Europe from 2020 to 2022**. Organised civil society plays an important role in educating and informing citizens about Europe, and can ensure that this important conference does not end up as a top-down interinstitutional event.
- Ensuring a **fully transparent decision making process** in line with the European Ombudsman recommendations
- Specifically on the rule of law, civil society organisations **should be part of a regular, meaningful and structured dialogue with the EU institutions**.

2.- Actively protect civil society organisations, by:

- **Expanding the scope of the rule of law mechanism, so that civil society organisations are protected and enabled to become a partner** in identifying violations, promoting democracy and fundamental rights and raising awareness to rights of redress and litigation. The revision of the mechanism should also include **a rapid response mechanism within the European Commission as well as an EU Coordinator on the rule of law and civic space** to ensure monitoring, verification and analysis. Such mechanisms should be deployed in a fair and homogeneous way across all Member states and all sectors;
- **Including measures to promote and enable civic space, including through adequate EU funding to civil society organisations within the different programmes well beyond the Rights and Values fund**. Such transparent and accessible EU funding is all the more crucial at a time when some national governments are reducing the space for civil society, often by making it harder for civil society organisations to raise funds.

3. - Prevent new legislation from further restricting Europe's civic space by
- **Including in all EU impact assessments** the impact of the new legislation on **the freedom of Association, Assembly and Expression**

We would be honoured to meet with you and your team at your earliest convenience to discuss more in detail these proposals.

Best regards,



Jean Marc Roirant
President Civil Society Europe

