



ANNUAL REPORT

July 2023 - July 2024



Rue de la Charité 22 (box 7)
1210 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode
Tel +32 2 721 40 69
civilsocietyeurope.eu
contact@civilsocietyeurope.eu

EDITOR

Carla Pimentel Gonzales

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Lila Sylviti | sayiteasy.eu



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A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



The past year has been a pivotal time for Civil Society Europe (CSE), consolidating our work and achievements, while opening new avenues of action in an ever-challenging context at the European level. Together with long-standing and new allies, we have contributed to drawing further attention to the indispensable role of civil society in our democracy, the challenges we face and the actions needed to protect civic participation.

In a significant milestone, we have co-led the Civil Society for EU campaign with Social Platform, garnering support from numerous organisations both at the EU and national level, drawing the interest of the EU party leaders and lead candidates in the European Parliament elections, and resulting in 480 candidates signing our pledge.

At the same time, we have continued to work actively to develop the key ask of the campaign: the development of a coherent civil society strategy and its building blocks: a civil dialogue agreement among the three main EU institutions, a civil society pillar in a stronger rule of law and fundamental rights framework, protection for civil society and activists defending human rights, and support for civil society organisations.

In particular, we have developed a joint civil society contribution to the Rule of Law report with country-specific recommendations and provided guidance to civil society organisations (CSOs) at the EU and national level to monitor progress in Member States and ensure greater awareness of the civic space findings. We have worked together with human rights organisations and defenders on the ground to identify protection gaps at the EU level aiming to set the ground for a protection mechanism.

Furthermore, we have delved into the extent to which EU funding supports civil society and the involvement of CSOs in the development, implementation and monitoring, notably, regarding the Recovery package and the Ukraine Facility.

Our work through the Entrust Project, a multiannual Horizon 2020 project on trust and distrust in governance, has led to a full analysis of the relations between civil society organisations and the EU, a wiki site on civil society activism and a train-the-trainer module for EU institution staff at EU level on civil dialogue. Moreover, we have contributed actively to the discussions in the European Parliament on the proposal for a directive for a European Cross Border Association, which could open important avenues for cross-border cooperation in Europe of not-for-profit associations.

We have also put civil dialogue into practice through the presentation of the Civil Society State of the Union report, developed bottom-up with almost 50 CSOs as a follow-up of the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and ahead of the State of the European Union speech as a contribution to the Commission's work programme. The coordination of civil society work on the Defence of Democracy Package has been another important aspect of our work. This has contributed to the recommendation on the role of citizens and civil society in public decision-making while raising awareness of the undue consequences the European Commission's proposal on a foreign interference directive would have on civic space both in Europe and globally. Moreover,

together with other partners such as grant-giving foundations and other philanthropic organisations, we have highlighted unclarity in the anti-money laundering draft package and proposed solutions to avoid over-regulation and undue impact on nonprofit entities.

All of this work has been possible through the exemplary leadership from our Board, the increased involvement from members and other partners through our different working groups, task forces, and coalitions, as well as the support of our committed staff members, continuing and new. Together, we have not only achieved significant milestones but also set a clear direction for the future with our new strategic action plan extending to 2029 that will enable us to further continue our mission of coordination of civil society organizations at the EU level.

Gabriella Civico

President of Civil Society Europe

WHO

WE ARE

We are the voice of EU civil society

Civil Society Europe (CSE) is the coordination of civil society organisations at the European (EU) level, representing 22 European networks and federations of civil society organisations (CSOs). Through its membership, CSE reaches out to millions of people who are active in or supported by not-for-profit organisations and CSOs across the EU.

Established in 2014, CSE has carved out a unique space as the most representative organisation gathering CSOs interested in strengthening the role of civil society and civic space at the EU level. It is recognised as the point of reference for EU institutions on all matters regarding civic space and civil society involvement in policy-making, which is defined by the term 'civil dialogue'.

OUR

MISSION

Civil Society Europe's (CSE) mission is to contribute to EU and national institutions' recognition of the essential role and value of independent and plural civil society organisations (CSOs) in building and nurturing a democratic society based on fundamental rights.

We strive to create the conditions for the development of a strong and independent civil society voice and an effective, open, and structured civil dialogue at the EU level, as well as a thriving and enabling civic space across the European Union.

We call for:

- **A thriving civic space for civil society**, based on fundamental rights, at all relevant levels
- **The renewal of European democracy** by promoting further transparency, accountability and the participation of CSOs in EU decision-making processes
- **The recognition by policy-makers of CSOs' role** in bridging the gap between people and institutions and providing innovative solutions to societal needs
- **An enabling environment for exchanges** among CSOs and movements across the EU

OUR

MEMBERS

SAY

Assya Kavrakova

**Executive Director
European Citizen
Action Service
(ECAS)**

“Civil Society Europe is indispensable in promoting the added value of European civil society associations and defending their interests at the EU level when it comes to regulatory frameworks, budgetary issues, and smear campaigns. Moreover, the organisation consolidates the expertise and the capacities of those of us working on similar issues to ensure visibility and more meaningful impact – the Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe is a typical example of it”.

Laura de Bonfils

**Secretary General
Social Platform**

“As a long-time member and partner, we recognise Civil Society Europe’s important role to help safeguard civil society’s voice in today’s challenging environment. Through our joint campaign, Civil Society for EU, we have successfully raised awareness of the need to protect civic space and foster civil dialogue delivered strong, united demands ahead of the EU elections.”

Nick Aoissa

**Director
Transparency
International EU**

“CSE provides an expertise and network within the European civil society ecosystem that is instrumental in allowing us to advocate for the protection of civic space more effectively.”

Brikena Xhomaqi

**Director
Lifelong Learning
Platform (LLP)
European Civil
Society for
Education**

“Through its working group on funding and the expertise of its members, CSE plays a key role in strengthening the voice of civil society to safeguard and improve funding mechanisms for a better EU civic space”.

THE YEAR IN HIGHLIGHTS

From July 2023 to July 2024, Civil Society Europe gathered and coordinated wide coalitions of civil society organisations on key EU policies and legislations affecting civil society.

Our main takeaways are:

The launch of the Civil Society State of the Union report for a more democratic and socially and environmentally just EU.

The Joint Civil Society Contribution on Civic Space to the 2024 Rule of Law Report.

The Civil Society for EU Elections campaign calling for an enabling civic space and strengthened civil dialogue.

An integrated policy paper on how to foster trust between citizens and the institutions at the EU level, a wiki site on civic participation and a **training module for institutions on civil dialogue** as part of the EnTrust project.

A common and visible civil society position on the **Defence of Democracy package**.

A Joint contribution to the decision-making process on the proposal for **European Cross-Border Associations**.

Gathering of evidence and defining elements for an **EU ecosystem for the protection of human rights defenders and civil society in the EU**.

Learn more about our work and impact: www.civilsocietyeurope.eu

A GLIMPSE INTO OUR WORK

'CIVIL SOCIETY

FOR EU'

ELECTIONS

CAMPAIGN



**Civil
Society
for EU**



Civil Society Europe (CSE) continued implementing the Elections campaign [Civil Society for EU \(CS4EU\)](#), launched in 2023 along with one of its members, the Social Platform. Over 250 civil society organisations from all over Europe endorsed the campaign [manifesto for better civic space and civil dialogue](#), calling on the European institutions and political leaders to improve the recognition, support and engagement of civil society in the EU during the new mandate, notably by adopting a European Civil Society Strategy and an inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue.

The campaign key asks have been discussed with the party leaders of the main European political parties, including through a [dedicated online event](#). Moreover, CSE reached out to hundreds of candidates for the 2024 EP elections asking them to commit to supporting civil society all over Europe by signing the [campaign pledge](#). Overall, 480+ candidates signed the pledge, among which 100+ were elected as MEPs.

The CS4EU coalition met 6 times between July 2023 and July 2024.

CIVIL SOCIETY STATE OF THE UNION



Civil Society Europe (CSE) led a coalition of associations that followed the Conference on the Future of Europe through a dedicated working group and several subgroups led by members active in different policy areas. The outcome of this bottom-up work was the [Civil Society State of the Union](#) (CSSOTEU), a report outlining the main directions of reform for a more democratic and socially and environmentally just EU.

The report, drafted by almost 50 civil society organisations, was launched in September 2023, days before Von der Leyen's State of the European Union speech. Based on the CSSOTEU, CSE took part in the European Parliament's process to call for Treaty revision: we proposed amendments and together with 16 other civil society organisations we published an [open letter](#) in November 2023 requesting the European Parliament to adopt the report calling for Treaty reform, and for the European Council to launch a Convention to reform the EU Treaties. Moreover, in the first half of 2024, we analysed the different proposals of CSSOTEU to identify which ones needed Treaty reform, and which ones could be implemented with policy initiatives under the current Treaty framework.

CIVIC SPACE AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

This was a busy year for Civil Society Europe's (CSE) efforts to promote civic space and fundamental rights. Our key areas of focus included contributing to the Rule of Law Cycle and annual reports, advancing a protection mechanism for human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society in Europe, as well as safeguarding fundamental rights in the EU's anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) measures.

Rule of Law

CSE Working Group on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights continued working actively to promote an enabling civic space in the EU. In December CSE published a [guidance note](#) to help national civil society organisations (CSOs) across the EU participate in the Annual Rule of Law Reports. CSE further engaged with human rights and media organisations, to promote further transparency, accountability and visibility of the annual Rule of Law cycle, through a joint letter to Commissioner Reynders, which was followed by a meeting with his Cabinet in December 2023. Moreover, CSE contributed to the European Commission's (EC) Annual Rule of Law Report through a



joint civil society contribution highlighting key horizontal trends in challenges to civic space and proposals for country-specific recommendations. The findings were discussed in early May with the Commission.

In November 2023, CSE's President Gabriella Civico intervened at the event organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the ECon the follow-up to the 2022 Charter report on civic space. CSE contributed actively to the work of the EESC Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Working Group by intervening at hearings, high-level events and plenaries, as well as to relevant opinions.

Protection mechanism for HRDs and CSOs

In April 2024, CSE and the European Civic Forum co-hosted a two-day roundtable event on a protection mechanism for human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society in Europe. The event gathered HRDs and representatives of CSOs from different countries and included a breakfast briefing with policymakers hosted by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU at EFTA House.

Fundamental rights in Anti-money laundering

During this period, CSE also engaged with the EC, the EP and the Council of the EU on the protection of fundamental rights in the EU's anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) measures. CSE —together with the Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), the European Center for Nonprofit Law, the Human Security Collective and the European Fundraising Association— developed [joint arguments](#) for the exclusion of public benefit crowdfunding platforms and service providers from the category of obliged entities under the EU AML/CFT Regulation. This was followed by an [urgent call](#) to clarify the AML/CFT beneficial ownership policy for public benefit foundations and non-profits.

DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

During this period, Civil Society Europe (CSE) closely followed the European Commission's Defence of Democracy package, which regrettably missed the opportunity to address long-standing civil society concerns, such as the lack of a civil society strategy and an interinstitutional framework for civil dialogue.



CSE led a coalition following the package, particularly, the Directive on interest representation on behalf of third countries. In September 2023, this coalition contributed to the preparation of an impact assessment, highlighting the risks of an inadequate legal tool focused on foreign interference instead of on the harmonisation of transparency rules across the EU regarding civic space.

The proposed Directive raised serious concerns on the legal basis and the respect of fundamental rights, as underlined in a [press conference](#) organised by CSE, the Good Lobby, the European Partnership for Democracy and Transparency International EU. CSE coordinated a [joint analysis](#), published in April 2024, of the risks of the Directive and worked to raise awareness on the topic in other sectors, such as academia (see the [joint letter CSE-EUA](#)), as was shown by the [event on the Directive](#) in April 2024 co-organised by CSE and the European Parliament (EP) groups Renew Europe and Greens/EFA, with the presence of the former rapporteur for the file (Pablo Arias Echeverría, EPP, Spain). While the EP did not come to any conclusions before the European elections, several Member States in the June 2024 General Affairs Council raised concerns over the impact of the Directive on civil society and on their national transparency register, which can be attributed to the work of the CSE-led coalition.



TOWARDS A EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER ASSOCIATION

In September 2023, the European Commission presented a proposal for a Directive establishing the European Cross-Border Associations (ECBAs). As analysed in our briefing and the joint response of the European non-profit sector, this Directive would recognise for the first time non-profit organisations at the European level and would allow associations having members in at least two Member States to be recognised and pursue activities in the whole EU.

During this period, CSE led a coalition that supported the Directive while proposing amendments to better align it with the reality of the associations already operating at the EU level. The bulk of our amendments was included in the European Parliament's final position, while the Council is in the early stages of examining the Directive. The benefits of the Directive were also showcased in the event 'A single market for the public good', organised together with Philea in November 2023.

TRUST AND DISTRUST IN GOVERNANCE



The past year has seen the accomplishment of the 4-year Horizon Europe project 'Enlightened Trust in Governance' ([EnTrust](#)), which studied the relations of trust and distrust between citizens and institutions.

Among CSE's key outputs, we can highlight: a [report](#) analysing the relations of trust and distrust between European civil society organisations and the EU institutions; an [integrated policy paper](#) on how to foster trust between citizens and the institutions at the EU level; an [introductory training manual on civil dialogue](#) for EU public officials; a [series of documentary videos](#) highlighting the various research outcomes; a [wiki site](#) for CSOs and social movements on how to do activism towards the EU institutions. Finally, in January 2024, CSE organised a successful project's [final conference](#) at the European Parliament, which presented the main outcomes and saw the awarding ceremony of the [EnTrust Creative youth contest](#).

SUPPORTING (CIVIL SOCIETY IN) UKRAINE

In December 2023, Civil Society Europe (CSE) published a [position paper](#) on involving civil society organisations (CSOs) in the reconstruction of Ukraine, including the Ukraine Facility developed through meetings and exchanges with CSOs in Ukraine and at the EU level. We called on EU institutions, EU Member States and the Ukrainian government on the need to involve CSOs across the EU and Ukraine in the recovery, reconstruction and modernisation of Ukraine to achieve a strong, democratic, resilient, equitable, inclusive, accessible and sustainable Ukraine within the EU. Moreover, in early January 2024, CSE contributed to a joint written feedback on the Ukrainian government's draft Ukraine Plan related to the Ukraine Facility.



THE FUTURE OF EU FUNDING

Civil Society Europe (CSE) followed the discussion on the mid-term review of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and organised an online workshop with EU and national civil society organisations (CSOs) in December 2023. In the meantime, our Working Group on Funding started to work on a common position for the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the future of the different EU programmes. During this period, we also followed the developments of a study by the European Court of Auditors on the EU funding for NGOs.



ACCOUNTABILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

This year, Civil Society Europe (CSE) finalised its Code of Conduct to ensure accountability in providing an inclusive, professional, and safe environment for governance, staff, members, and all actors involved in CSE activities. The document was developed based on a review of members' codes of conduct and feedback from an accountability training in December 2022, as well as input from the 2023 General Assembly and 2024 board meetings, ensuring a stronger victim/survivor-centred approach. It was approved at the Annual General Meeting in June 2024.

OUR MEMBERS

Civil Society Europe gathers 22 platforms and networks of civil society organisations among the most representative CSOs active at the EU level in a wide variety of areas.





OUR GOVERNANCE

* From July 2023 to July 2024, the Working Group (WG) on the Civil Society State of the Union met on 22nd September 2023 and 23rd January 2024. The WG on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights met on 20th October and 14th July 2023, with additional meetings on 18th January, 14th March, 7th May, and 3rd June 2024. The WG on Funding convened on 15th January and 10th July 2024, while the WG on Communication met on 12th December 2023. The National Recovery and Resilience Plans Task Force met on 18th December 2023.

Our internal structure

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1 delegate for each member organisation



*Meets annually and adopts
a work programme, budget and accounts*



Elects every 2 years



BOARD

composed of 9 members



*Elects a President, 2 Vice-Presidents
and a Treasurer among its members*



Oversees

WORKING GROUPS*

- ▶ WG on the Civil Society State of the Union, chaired by Judit Lantai (JEF Europe) and Gabriella Civico (CEV)
- ▶ WG on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights, chaired by Giada Negri (ECF)
- ▶ WG on Funding, chaired by Brikena Xhomaqi (LLL P)
- ▶ WG on Communication
- ▶ National Recovery and Resilience Plans task force

OUR BOARD

From July 2023 to July 2024, the Board met on 23rd October and 12th December 2023. Additionally, there were three more meetings held until July 2024 to discuss key initiatives and ensure effective governance. Each session provided valuable opportunities for in-depth discussions and decision-making to support CSE's goals.



**GABRIELLA
CIVICO**

CSE President

Centre for
European
Volunteering



**PATRIZIA
HEIDEGGER**

CSE Vice-
President

Green 10



JUDIT LANTAI

CSE Vice-
President

Young European
Federalists



**GIUSEPPINA
TUCCI**

CSE Treasurer
Lifelong
Learning
Platform



**NICHOLAS
AIOSSA**

Transparency
International
EU



**LAURA DE
BONFILS**

Social Platform



MARTINA CORTI

SOLIDAR



**ALEXANDRINA
NAJMOWICZ**

European Civic
Forum



**PIOTR
SADOWSKI**

Volonteuropo

OUR SECRETARIAT



**CARLOTTA
BESOZZI**

Director



**NASTASSIA
MAES**

Policy &
Membership
Engagement
Officer



MATTEO VESPA

Policy & Project
Officer

(As of September
2023)



CARLA PIMENTEL

Communications
& Events Officer

(As of October
2023)



**RICCARDO
ROSSELLA**

Coalition &
Campaign Officer

(Employed by Social
Platform)



HAMYL ALI

Administration
& Membership
Officer

(As of July 2024)

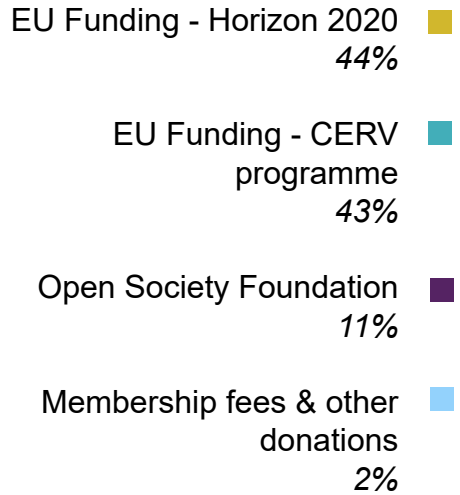
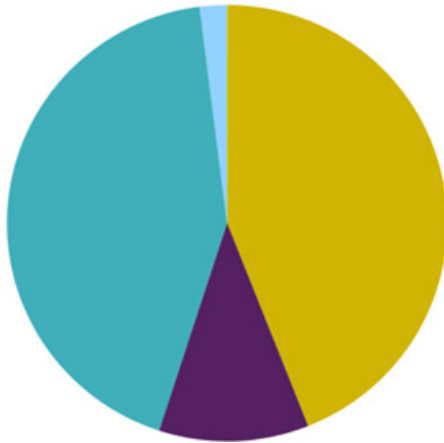
FINANCES

Civil Society Europe (CSE)'s accounts were approved unanimously during the General Assembly in June 2024, after being reviewed by an independent auditor. In 2023, we received 292.776,24€ and we spent 292.749,31 €.

Our income was constituted by funding from the European Union's Citizens Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme (operational grant), Horizon 2020 (for the EnTrust Project) and the Open Society Foundation, as well as membership fees from our 22 members.

All our funding was spent on advocacy work, awareness-raising activities, and campaigns, including the organisation of events, publications and position papers, capacity building and exchanges among civil society organizations, as well as research and related dissemination activities.

INCOME 2023



EXPENSES 2023

