

## Report of Activities 2017

2017 was the first full year of operation of Civil Society Europe, as the Coordination of Civil Society Organisations at EU level. CSE worked to develop and support links among civil society organisations on issues of common interests.

CSE work programme for 2017 as approved by the General Assembly was developed around 3 main priorities: Civic space, civil dialogue and funding space.

Here are the main actions undertaken during the year according to the following priorities.

### 1. Civic Space

The work was carried out by the working group on civic space and fundamental rights led by Niccolò Mllanese. The working group included CSE members and non members active on these issues and met 4 times during the year:

#### EU Mechanism for monitoring of the rule of law, democracy, and fundamental rights

- Contribution to the discussions following EP proposal for EU mechanism for the monitoring of the rule of law democracy and fundamental rights with a short position on the civic space dimension and with the public exchange at the General Assembly in April with First Vice President Frans Timmermans



### Enabling civic space in Europe

- Input into the preparation of the Fundamental Rights Agency Report on civic space “Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU” by participating actively to the expert group in Vienna and by suggesting changes to the draft.
- Launch and dissemination of a second survey on Civic Space in Europe available in 3 languages
- Dissemination of the 2016 Civic Space survey in various meetings and conferences including the NGO Forum in Estonia and a meeting with Italian Human rights NGOs in Italy, and at the Norway House in the framework of the EU Regions week
- Meetings with the Chair of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, Danuta Hübner.
- Contribution with amendments to the EP draft report on fundamental rights in the EU, to be adopted in 2018.
- Letter to First Vice President Timmermans on an overall strategy on promoting civic spaces and democracy (November)

### *Hungary*

- Fact sheet on Civic space in Hungary disseminated to all members of the EP civil liberties committee and the European Commission
- Statement of support to Hungarian Civil Society Organisations signed by over 500 organisations and widely disseminated with letters to EU institutions Presidents and to the Hungarian Prime Minister
- CSOs demonstration in front of the Hungarian Permanent Representation after the adoption of the NGO law on 13 June
- Letter to EPP President before the vote on EP motion for resolution on Hungary



#### *Slovenia*

- Co-signature and dissemination of letter to Slovenian Prime Minister on ongoing pressure on civil society

#### *Romania*

- Statement about draft law on Associations and Foundations in Romania and dissemination to EU institutions (December)

#### Civic space beyond the EU

- Coordination the working group members input into the preparation of the EP report on shrinking civic space in developing countries and was able to secure a speaker to the public hearing organised by DEVE Committee.
- Open letter to EU Representative Mogherini on the situation of civic freedoms in Turkey before the EU High Level dialogue with Turkey (July)
- Co-signature of recommendations addressed to Commissioner Malmström in the framework of the mid-term Evaluation of the European Union's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) to promote civic space (December).

#### Anti Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism Financing

- Close work and common meetings with the EU FATF NPO network to input into the EC Supra National Risk Assessment of Anti Money Laundering and terrorism financing and co-organised CSOs meetings and common position.

#### A Statute for European Associations

- Exchange of information on actions carried out by CSOs to promote a Statute for European Associations and exploring options for further legal recognition of CSOs and removing transnational obstacles for cooperation
- Preparation of a survey to CSOs on transnational obstacles for cooperation within the EU

## **2. Civil Dialogue**

This work has been coordinated by the CSO recognition working Group led by Gabriella Civico.

#### Report on Civil Dialogue

The working group met twice in 2017 and worked mainly on the finalisation of the survey on civil dialogue mechanisms at EU level among CSOs, and the preparation of recommendations targeting the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. A Trainee, Ben Lowings was also recruited to help with this work.

Letters were also addressed to all EC Directors General to understand how they are organising Civil dialogue within their DGs and to identify contact persons in charge of the dialogue. Also permanent representations were contacted to know more about the legal framework and practice concerning consultation of national civil society on EU issues. Finally a letter was addressed to the European Parliament as a follow up of discussions with one of the EP Vice Presidents in charge of information to citizens and a meeting with a member of the AFCE Committee on an issue regarding the implementation of provisions on structured dialogue. An analysis of the answers received is on-going.

Using also the results of this work, CSE participated to the European Ombudsman consultation on transparency of decision-making processes within the Council legislative work.

#### Recognition of CSOs

The working group also started to work on an infographics relating to the role of civil society on the basis of the review of literature material.

#### Transparency

CSE also contributed to the ongoing discussions on the review of the EU Transparency register with its own contribution in April 2017. It also initiated a letter with Alter EU, and Transparency International on the transparency of the negotiations and participated to the different consultation meetings organised by the EP co-rapporteurs.

#### Brexit

A task force on Brexit has also been established and led by Assya Kavrakova. The task force has met 3 times in 2017 to exchange information on the work of different organisations and identify common issues of concerns linked to citizen's rights.

A first outcome has been the organisation of a round table conference at Bozar with around 200 participants presenting the perspective of CSOs to the Brexit EU negotiators and to the representatives of the different UK devolved governments.

#### Rome Treaty Anniversary

CSE facilitated an exchange among CSE members on the organisations of the CSOs initiatives and facilitated links with the CSO coalition organising a demonstration and parallel events in Rome at the occasion of the 60th Rome Treaty anniversary. As a result several CSE members and SDG watch Europe organised a delegation for the event in Rome in March. CSE organised a round table debate on the CSOs perspective on the scenarios on the future of Europe at la Sapienza University.





#### EESC NGO Club

CSE has also hosted the meetings of the European Economic and Social Committee NGO Club which includes members of the EESC which come from civil society and has the objective of promoting civic space and civil dialogue. The EESC NGO club is chaired by CSE President.

### **3. Funding**

This has been a very active area of CSE work which has involved most of CSE members and several other organisations. The work has been coordinated by the working group on financial issues led by Thomas Heckeberg, which has met 3 times in 2017 as a separate working group.

#### EU financial Regulations

A common position and proposals for amendments were agreed on the review of the EU financial regulations. Some of those amendments have been included in the trilogue negotiations. A meeting with the main EP rapporteur, Ms Grässle, several meetings with the European Commission responsible Head of Unit and assistants, a meeting with the Estonian President and with some permanent representations. CSE also prepared a specific document on good practices in the valuing of volunteer work as eligible co-funding.

#### EU Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020

CSE also started discussions on the CSOs perspective on the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework with a brainstorming meeting and with the preparation of a first draft

document to be presented to the EP co-rapporteurs and focusing on the perspective of CSOs funding.

CSE also co-coordinated a few meetings of the European for Citizens Task Force together with the CEMR involving the different beneficiaries of the programme in order to develop a common strategy to ensure a future for the programme.

#### Financing of NGOs by the EU budget



Most of the work has been devoted to coordinating CSOs input and response into the EP draft own initiative report on the financing of NGOs by the EU budget. The following has been achieved in 2017:

- Contribution to the organisations and speakers of a EP hearing in advance of the Budgetary Control Committee draft report and coordination of CSOs presentations
- Common document with proposals for changes to the CONT study
- Preparation of amendments and meetings with rapporteur and shadows leading to postponement of the report
- Coordination of successful CSOs campaign to reject the amendments presented by the former CONT rapporteur to the Giegold's report on the transparency and accountability of EU institutions relating to NGO funding
- Preparation of an internal draft document on the need of NGO funding





- Expertise to the EESC opinion on the financing of Civil society organisations by the EU and contribution to the organisations of a hearing with high participation, and adopted in October
- Meeting with the European Court of Auditors Director in charge of the preparation of the Special report on the “Transparency of NGO funding” (November) in advance of the adoption of the terms of reference
- Organisation of a high level meeting on a strategy on civil society response on NGOs attacks and strategy paper and nomination of a task force (meeting in December)

#### 4. European Civic Academy



CSE organised a European Civic Academy in Brussels. This year's edition was organised as an interactive workshop between CSOs and academics involved in civil society or civic space studies. The meeting and the different workshops allowed CSOs to exchange with researchers on current research, methodology, and to develop joint discussions on future research priorities. A full report will be available soon. Also the ECA allowed to establish links with the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities and start working together on a common approach to the next research framework programme to also enhance democracy and civic space as well as further involvement of CSOs in research.

## **5. Communication**

With limited human resources, CSE continued to operate an own website with an overall 19 344 views in 2017 and a twitter account which has reached 800 followers from CSOs activists and organisations at EU and national levels, EU institutions, media and think tanks.

CSE has established a communication working group gathering CSOs communication officers which has already met twice in 2017 to favour exchanges, but also work to promote a positive image of CSOs.

## **6. Governance and membership**

CSE renewed its Steering Committee at the end of April 2017. The new Steering Committee has met 3 times in 2017. Unfortunately one of the members had to resign and will be replaced at this extraordinary General Assembly.

CSE welcomed a new member Eurodiaconia and received interest from a few other organisations. CSE has also consolidated cooperation with a number of networks.