

## **Civil Society Europe Activity report 2019**

### **1. Introduction**

Civil Society Europe work during 2019 has focused on enabling civic space at European Union level, the promotion of civil dialogue, and improving the conditions for financial support for civil society.

In particular CSE has worked in the following areas:

- The reinforcement of civic space and the recognition of civil society within the European institutions and key decision makers after the European elections
- Monitoring proposed EU legislation and policies and their implementation from the perspective of civic space
- Implementation of the financial rules and follow up of civic space related provisions in the negotiations for the Multiannual Financial Framework
- The organisation of European Civic Academy bringing civil society activists from the national level and academics together to discuss challenges related to civic space

CSE work has been coordinated in particular through the following working groups: CSOs recognition, civic space and fundamental rights and financial issues chaired by the members of the Steering Committee.

### **2. Post European Elections work**

CSE activities in 2019 have been focused on the preparation of the period post elections 2019 with the establishment of the new European Parliament, the nomination of the new Commission with the aim of securing recognition of the importance of civil dialogue, and of promoting an enabling civic space as foundation of EU values and democracy.

CSE working groups on civic space and CSO's added value have worked on a document with concrete institutional solutions within the main institutions: in June 2019 the [roadmap on civil dialogue](#) has been adopted and disseminated to the main decision makers.

CSE has also sent a letter to President-elect Von der Leyen on 25 July 2019 in advance of the EP hearings of Commissioners asking for the implementation of main asks of the Roadmap and in particular the inclusion of an open, regular, transparent, accessible and inclusive dialogue with civil society and the protection and promotion of civil society in the mandate of the Vice-President in charge of Values and Transparency; 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.

CSE has also coordinated [a letter](#) with 150 European and national civil society networks which was sent to Vice President Jourova on 29 October calling her to implement her commitment for being the contact person for civic space in the Commission made at the EP hearing. As a result of the letter a CSE delegation has met with her cabinet and DG Justice on 10 December.

Part of these demands have been met as the mission letter for Commissioner Jourova has been changed in December and includes now among her competences dialogue with civil society.

Also the participation of civil society in the conference on the future of Europe has been included in the mission letter of Vice President Suica on Democracy and demography.

CSE also wrote to the EP President and to the EP Vice Presidents on 15 July calling for including in the mandate of the Vice President structured dialogue with civil society. The letter was responded by the EP President. However while Vice Presidents Barley and Karas are responsible for relations with citizens, their action is more focused on communication.

CSE also met on 10 September with [Vice Presidents Othmar Karas and Katarina Barley](#).



On 14 November CSE met with Vice President Klara Dobrev.

CSE has also finalised and disseminated an [infographic on the added value of civil society at EU level](#). The infographic was disseminated on twitter in various occasions and used for meetings with members of the European Parliament as well as with Commission officials.



CSE also followed up the [declaration on enabling civic space](#) prepared in cooperation with HRDN focusing on the recognition and promotion of civil society, securing an enabling space, monitoring, documenting and analysing civic space, protecting civil society from attacks, taking legal action to uphold the role of CSOs.

A workshop was organised in December within the civic space working group and a plan of action was agreed to follow up the 5 concrete demands on the paper.

Civil Society Europe also contributed to the preparation of the UN Human rights Office meeting on protecting civic space in the EU on 10 October.



CSE was also invited to present trends on shrinking civic space in Europe at an in camera meeting of the working group on rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy of the European Parliament, composed of members of the LIBE committee on 26 November in Strasbourg.

CSE is also now invited by the EU Presidencies at meetings with civil society linked to the preparation of the FREMP Council meetings.

CSE also had meetings with MEP Sylwia Spurek on 4 november, on 26 November with MEP Julia Donath and with MEP Michal Simecka on 4 December.



On 5 December, Civil Society Europe co-organised a panel discussion at the European Parliament on civic space with the European Civic Forum at the occasion of the presentation of the Civic Space Watch Report. The meeting was co-hosted by Vice President Hautala and LIBE Vice Chair Bartolo and was attended by the Chair of the LIBE Committee and several MEPs and with many civil society organisations present.

End of May CSE published its [response](#) prepared with the civic space working group to the European Commission consultation on the rule of law focusing on the contribution of civil society and the need to include civic space in the monitoring process. As a result, CSE was also involved in a number of events organised by partners and EU institutions and the EESC.

On 13 November CSE also organised an internal workshop on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation with the support of Greenpeace. The meeting revealed the need to follow up action with the European Commission to ensure that EU measures would include civil society organisations and activists in addition to the media.

### **3. Monitoring EU legislation and policies from civic space perspective**

Within that framework CSE has continued to monitor the implementation of EU legislation from the perspective of civic space.

In particular CSE has continued to work together with other partners such as the Foundations networks, European Foundation Centre and Dafne and the humanitarian organisations network VOICE on the implementation of EU legislation on anti money laundering and financing of terrorism. It participated in the EC Supra National Risk Assessment of civil society organisations and contributed to common positions and statements.

This contributed to a better understanding by the European Commission of the sector and a more positive rating of the civil society sector notably as regards money laundering. Several meetings with DG Justice and also a meeting with the cabinet of Ms Jourova as Commissioner for Justice was held on 19 July.

Moreover CSE has worked in partnership with the European Foundation Centre for identifying and promoting an EU framework for civil society organisations. CSE also organised in February in cooperation with de verenigde verenigingen, the Flemish Platform of civil society organisations an [expert workshop on a European Framework for civil society organisations](#). It also contributed and participated in discussions on relaunching a European statute for associations and foundations at the initiative of MEP Lagodinski and EP Vice President Beer in December.

CSE has also continued to monitor the proposal for an interinstitutional agreement on transparency together with Alter EU and Transparency International, and argued for a binding transparency register covering all EU institutions.

### **4. Implementation of the financial rules and follow up of civic space related provisions in the negotiations for the Multiannual Financial Framework**

CSE has continued to monitor and contribute to the decision making process on the future Multiannual Financial Framework and its implication on civil society organisations. Particular attention has been paid to the proposal for a Rights and Values Programme and promoting coordinated action towards the European institutions.

Furthermore CSE has also coordinated actions as a result of the presentation of the European Court of Auditors report on the Transparency of EU funds implemented through NGOs. A statement was sent to the members of the Budgetary control committee in advance of the presentation of the ECA report in February 2019.

### **5. The European Civic Academy and Research work**

CSE has organised on 28 and 29 March the third European Civic Academy in Slubice, Poland together with the national civil society platform in Poland as well as with academics, thanks also to funding support received from FOND Romania through Concord and the Solidar Foundation. The Academy has focused on the impact of populism on civil society in light of the European elections and Brexit. A [report](#) of the event, which gathered 80 participants, has been published.





CSE Coordinator also spoke last 15 October at a high level panel debate organised by UniLion, the network of universities and research centre liaison offices in Brussels on the SDGs responding to questions on civil society participation in Horizon Europe. Follow up meetings have been organised with the Secretary General for further cooperation.



CSE Coordinator also participated in September in a workshop organised by and at the University of Exeter on shrinking civic space and gathering academics working on civic space issues.

CSE coordinator also attended the EU Research and Innovation Days on 24-26 September and intervened on civil society participation.

Finally CSE has worked since February 2019 with the University of Siegen for the preparation of a grant within a Horizon 2020 call for Trust in Governance which was finally awarded in December.

## **6. Development of the network**



CSE moved in January 2019 to its new premises in rue du Congrès 13 in Brussels. The office, shared with the European Civic Forum, includes a meeting room for working groups and for the Steering Committee meetings.

A new CSE Steering Committee was elected by the General Assembly on 6 June. The meeting included an open session on civic space with the Finnish Presidency and the European Foundation Centre. The General Assembly was hosted by the Social Platform. Two new members were welcomed: the [Eurogroup for Animals](#) and the [European Patients Forum](#).

The annual meeting was preceded by a training for organisations registered in Belgium on the new companies code and implications for civil society organisations which was attended by 30 organisations.

The General Assembly also initiated discussions on a long term strategy for Civil Society Europe, which was further sent in consultation to members and finalised by the Steering Committee in December.

The Steering Committee met on 19 February, 8 July, 17 October and 10 December. In July it re-elected Jean Marc Roirant as President and Gabriella Civico as Treasurer.

CSE working group on CSO recognition chaired by Gabriella Civico had meetings on 14 June, 3 September and 26 November 2019.

The Civic space working group chaired by Brikena Xhomaqi met on 16 May, 5 September, 28 October, and 11 December 2019.