

High-Level Conference on 'RebuildUkraine' & Civil Dialogue

9:30 - 11:00 **Opening session** with opening remarks by Jean Marc Roirant, President of CSE

Rebuilding Ukraine: Enabling Civil Society Participation

How can Ukrainian and EU civil society be supported in the process for peace building, reconciliation, reconstruction, and the rebuilding of democracy in Ukraine?

High-level panel debate with:

- Ukrainian civil society representatives
 - Natalia Gozak, Director of the Centre for Environmental Initiatives "Ecoaction", an environmental civil society organisation in Ukraine that has taken a leading role in coordinating Ukrainian environmental NGOs and wider civil society on the topic of reconstruction
 - Andriy Andrushevych, Senior Policy Expert at Resource & Analysis Center "Society and Environment", an environmental think tank organisation in Ukraine
- Antonella Valmorbida, Secretary General of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and President of the European Partnership for Democracy
- Mathieu Briens, Deputy Head of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
- Hubert Duhot, Policy Assistant to the Deputy-Director of DG NEAR & Head of Support Group for Ukraine (Katarína Matherňová), European Commission

Moderated by: Patrizia Heidegger, Deputy Secretary General and Director for Global Policies and Sustainability of the EEB (Green 10)

Reactions from the audience and Q&A: Environmental People Law, CEE Bankwatch Network & others

11:30 - 13:00 **Second session: A Roadmap to Civil Dialogue**

Introduction by: Alva Finn, Secretary General of Social Platform

Interactive workshops:

1. Fostering and structuring civil dialogue:
 - Organising transversal dialogue with EU institutions
 - Participatory lists (experience of CoE and UN)
 - Guidelines on sectoral dialogue beyond consultation
 - Minimum benchmarks for participation

Chaired and moderated by: Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, MEP and Member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee

2. Supporting CSOs' engagement:
 - Analysing EU funding practices: good practices and challenges in enhancing participation
 - What is the place of civil society in the design and monitoring of EU funds?

Chaired and moderated by: Maria Teresa Fábregas, Director of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force II, Secretariat-General of the European Commission

13:00 - 13:15 *Summary and conclusions by* Judit Lantai, Secretary General of the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

Co-organised by



&



On 29 November 2022, Civil Society Europe (CSE) and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) organised a **High-Level Conference on ‘RebuildUkraine’ and Civil Dialogue**. The conference took place in a hybrid format, with speakers and participants joining in person in Brussels at the EEB’s headquarters and online. Overall, it gathered 80 people from civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU institutions.

1. Rebuilding Ukraine: Enabling Civil Society Participation

Jean Marc Roirant, President of CSE, launched the conference with some opening remarks, after which the **first session**, on ‘RebuildUkraine’, began. ‘RebuildUkraine’ is the reconstruction platform proposed by the European Commission in May 2022. Through a high-level panel debate moderated by Patrizia Heidegger, Deputy Secretary General and Director for Global Policies and Sustainability of the EEB (Green 10), five speakers representing Ukrainian and EU CSOs and the EU institutions discussed **how Ukrainian and EU civil society can be supported in the process for peace building, reconciliation, reconstruction, and the rebuilding of democracy in Ukraine**. The discussion built on CSE and the EEB’s [joint statement urging the European Commission to guarantee a meaningful role for civil society in ‘RebuildUkraine’](#); the statement, published on 5 July 2022, gathered support from 160 EU and Ukrainian CSOs.



The **representatives of Ukrainian and EU CSOs**—Natalia Gozak, Andriy Andrushevych and Antonella Valmorbida—spoke about the immensely important role of civil society in Ukraine, especially since 2014. Ukrainian civil society is fulfilling urgent needs, for instance by providing humanitarian aid, helping internally displaced persons, monitoring war crimes and helping the Ukrainian government, Parliament and local authorities, while also thinking about Ukraine’s future in the medium- to long-term, including as regards the environment. Moreover, many CSOs helped the Ukrainian government guarantee Ukraine’s accession to EU candidate country status and are continuing to help the government’s pro-EU efforts, a point supported by the representatives of the EU institutions. However, the civic space in Ukraine is shrinking, with insufficient public fora, loss of CSOs’ staff and capacities (including watchdog capacity), lack of access to information and the loss of other instruments in CSOs’ toolbox. Meanwhile, natural resources in Ukraine are being increasingly exploited to compensate for the damages caused by Russia’s war against Ukraine.

The civil society representatives stated that the EU institutions need to support in a flexible and long-term manner civil society in Ukraine so that the latter can do its job. Moreover, the EU institutions and the Ukrainian government need to treat CSOs as partners,

and CSOs, mayors and other sub-governmental bodies must be included in the (planning of the) reconstruction. The EU, as one of Ukraine's key external partners, should use conditionalities in its support for Ukraine's reconstruction, with a focus on transparency, sustainability and accountability. For instance, the EU could define conditions like higher energy efficiency standards for building, the transition to decentralised renewable energies, and support to small farmers to increase their resilience in the face of the existing food crisis. Rebuilding Ukraine's democracy, including by supporting existing local democracy agencies throughout the country and local authorities, will also be a key and difficult task.

The **representatives of the EU institutions**—Mathieu Briens and Hubert Duhot—highlighted all Ukrainians' strength and resilience since the start of Russia's war, with one of them also drawing attention to Ukrainian civil society's impressive work. They noted that the EU is fully committed to supporting Ukraine, and that the EU's 27 Member States have shown remarkable unity, which needs to continue.

The EU's priority is to provide maximal support to Ukraine, including by: continuing to provide billions of euros and military assistance to Ukraine so that it wins the war and Russia is isolated; helping with reconstruction now, and not only after the war, for instance by providing generators and other forms of assistance, keeping in mind that Ukraine's reconstruction needs to be as sustainable as possible but there are urgent needs that need to be met now; and addressing the war's global consequences and encouraging other international partners to support Ukraine. Moreover, Ukraine's reconstruction and Ukraine's accession to the EU are linked, which means that Ukraine's reconstruction needs to adhere to EU values, including green and digital transition. Conditionality is essential.

In addition, the EU wants to ensure that Ukraine has ownership of its reconstruction process. The European Commission (EC) fully supports Ukraine, including civil society, and suggests creating a Secretariat for Ukraine's reconstruction or another structure within which there would be coordination with civil society. CSOs will also have a role in the EU's enlargement, including through civil dialogue with institutions. Based on previous experience in other Eastern Partnership countries, the EC advises CSOs to have an internal, coordinated strategy to collaborate with local and regional governments in Ukraine and other actors. Lastly, the EC noted that local authorities in Ukraine have an important role too due to their knowledge of the situation on the ground, and that expertise from other regions in the world will be used to help rebuild Ukraine.

After the initial remarks by the five speakers, **representatives of various CSOs**, including Environmental People Law and CEE Bankwatch Network, **shared their reactions and questions**. They noted that the Ukrainian Parliament needs to make sure that Ukraine's reconstruction will be green and sustainable, including by unblocking the necessary reforms put forward by civil society. Also, the technical capacities of Ukraine's ecological institutions



need to be improved, as well as small Ukrainian CSOs' access to funding. One representative suggested holding regular meetings between CSOs and the EC's DG NEAR, Support Group for Ukraine and other relevant EU institutional bodies, to ensure that perspectives from people on the ground in Ukraine are listened to; this idea was considered positively by the EC Support Group for Ukraine's representative, who also noted that the EU Delegation to Ukraine is still

open and dialogue on the ground is possible. Another civil society representative stated that the meaningful participation and involvement of marginalised communities, including persons with disabilities, in Ukraine's reconstruction needs to be explicitly mentioned going forward, otherwise these communities will continue to be marginalised.

Patrizia Heidegger **ended the first session by highlighting four key points:**

1. Everyone, including the EU institutions, recognises the role that Ukrainian civil society has been playing for many, many years;
2. Now, the question is how to ensure that civil society has a fixed role within the process of Ukraine's reconstruction;
3. Have to keep in mind that Ukraine is under martial law and that this creates limits, but that it is also key to still listen to Ukrainian civil society' calls, including on existing and upcoming Ukrainian laws;
4. Civil society in Ukraine struggles with access to funding, especially funding from big donors, and this needs to be addressed.

2. A Roadmap to Civil Dialogue

Alva Finn, Secretary General of Social Platform, launched the **second session**, dedicated to **developing a roadmap to strengthen civil dialogue at the EU level**, by introducing the session's two interactive workshops. Civil dialogue refers to the dialogue between civil society organisations (CSOs) and the EU. Why is it so important? Civil society, including CSOs, plays a fundamental role in terms of citizens' participation in democracy and the defence of the public interest. There is a need to establish a structured, regular and inclusive dialogue between civil society, EU institutions and EU Member States on all key issues concerning the Union's present and future.

Ms. Finn noted that civil dialogue was weak and had worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic despite the huge solidarity work that CSOs do. Civil dialogue is very undervalued and unstructured, especially compared to social dialogue and direct dialogue with citizens (ex: the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) (CoFoE) and the [newly created Citizens' Panels](#)). Moreover, civil dialogue tends to be a tick box exercise (ex: [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#)) rather than a format for meaningful engagement allowing citizens to engage in EU policymaking in a more long-term manner. This is despite CSOs' enormous value and the representativeness (and diversity) that CSOs can give to EU policymaking; indeed, civil dialogue leads to better policies. Ms. Finn concluded by saying that civil society wants to make sure that everyone in the EU institutions agrees on the value of civil dialogue and treats their relationship with civil society with the same care and support as with other partners.



Next, participants exchanged ideas and questions during two interactive workshops that built on [CSE's previous work on civil dialogue](#), including [a letter sent to European Parliament President Roberta Metsola in January 2022](#) as well as CSE and the European Civic Forum's [call signed by more than 300 organisations for an EU Civil Society Strategy in the EC's 2023 work programme](#). The **first workshop**, moderated by MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, **was dedicated to fostering and structuring participation in civil dialogue**. The **second one**, moderated by Maria Teresa Fábregas, Director of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force II in the EC's Secretariat-General, **focused on supporting CSOs' engagement in the design and monitoring of EU funds at the EU level**.

Workshop 1: Fostering and structuring participation in civil dialogue

In her introductory remarks, MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield explained that among her many duties at the European Parliament (EP), she is a rapporteur on the situation in Hungary. In this role, she has established the practice of having an hour-long meeting every two weeks with NGOs based in Brussels and Hungary to share information, tips and develop strategies. The MEP stated that "[she] could not do this job without civil society, [and neither could a lot of people] in the European Parliament." Despite this, some EP political parties had to really fight for the involvement of civil society in the CoFoE. In fact, some MEPs still think that representative democracy is all that is needed and that there is no need for better civil dialogue with CSOs.

MEP Delbos-Corfield identified two key problems:

1. Civil society is being used a lot; for instance, reports produced by civil society are read and used a lot, including for the EC's annual rule of law report, and yet, CSOs get no reward nor protection for this;
→ An example of why CSOs need protection: after the first EC rule of law report, some CSOs in Hungary were raided for having contributed to the report;
2. The EU needs to develop tools to intervene in a quick way, so that the EC can no longer use 'crisis mode' and the need for a quick response as a justification for not consulting the EP, civil society and other actors.

During the workshop, participants and the MEP made **several proposals to foster and structure participation in civil dialogue**, including that CSOs should actively reach to EU institutions and organise regular meetings. For instance, CSOs could ask to organise a Civic Day at the EP, so that MEPs and EP staff could meet multiple CSOs in one day; political parties could provide some funding for such an initiative. CSOs could also publicly label MEPs based on how much they work with civil society and encourage the EP to invite CSOs as speakers to EP hearings. Moreover, CSOs could include in their campaigns about the upcoming EP elections (in 2024) a request for the EC to create a Commissioner for Civil Society supported by relevant resources in EC services. In general, CSOs need to continue fighting for a specific legal status for associations and they should make sure that the EU institutions truly understand what CSOs are and do. One way to boost civil dialogue would be to use as inspiration the European Year of Youth (2022), during which all Commissioners committed to meeting with representatives of the European Youth Forum and different youth organisations; there was a cross-sectoral awareness of the importance of dealing with young people. There should be a similar cross-sectoral awareness of the importance of civil dialogue, especially since civil society is present in all sectors.

Workshop 2: Supporting civil society organisations' engagement

In her introductory remarks, Maria Teresa Fábregas, Director of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force II in the EC's Secretariat-General, explained that the goal of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is to build sustainable societies, including a green and digital transition, and each EU Member State had to draft its own plan. For the EC, it is important to consult stakeholders, including CSOs and social partners, to draft national plans, which is why it made this a requirement. However, the requirement's implementation varied greatly across Member States, with some organising structures for such consultation, others posting draft plans and asking for comments, and some not consulting CSOs at all.

Ms. Fábregas noted that in 2023, and as announced in the EC's 2023 Work Programme, there is a proposal to strengthen social dialogue. Moreover, the EC is always open to discussing

with CSOs and to receiving reports, information and constructive criticism from civil society. Echoing what MEP Delbos-Corfield stated earlier, Ms. Fábregas stated that “the EC cannot do the job without [civil society]” and that CSOs are essential to monitor what happens in Member States.



During the workshop, participants and Ms. Fábregas made **several proposals to support CSOs’ engagement**, notably as regards the implementation and monitoring of funding for CSOs, that CSOs should be allowed to meaningfully participate in policymaking and decision-making and that EU institutions and Member States should all treat CSOs as valued partners. Furthermore, a greater diversity of CSOs should be allowed to participate, to avoid the tendency of always having the same

CSOs involved in processes and events. Regarding this point, a solution could be to have more informal talks with a wider scope of civil society actors. Also, CSOs should reach out (more) to the EC, since the latter is not always aware of everything that is happening on the ground. It is also important to reduce the divide between various actors, so that CSOs are not left behind businesses and other more established actors.

3. Summary and conclusions

Judit Lantai, Secretary General of the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe), summarised the **main takeaways from the two sessions**:

- There is a need for a civil dialogue that includes everyone; there are advantages and disadvantages to having a structured civil dialogue but having a structure means that at least civil society organisations (CSOs) have a seat at the table; there is also a need for a long-term approach when it comes to civil dialogue.
- It is very relevant to engage with Ukraine and other third countries, especially with CSOs from these countries; however, this is currently very difficult to do and future EU laws could make it even more difficult; all this should be kept in mind, given that EU-Ukraine engagement, including at the civil society level, provides connecting points that are essential for Ukraine’s reconstruction and accession to the EU.
- There are some good practices, as demonstrated by the civil dialogue, checks and balances, and/or monitoring that exist in some areas; however, there are lots of

hurdles and not all EU countries have the same approach; ex: in Hungary, monitoring committees, including for structural funds, do exist, but the NGOs involved in them are government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) that do not actually represent civil society, which shows that having structures does not fix everything if there are not sound procedures to ensure openness, transparency and CSOs' independence. Solutions could include internal coordination among civil society, rotations and ensuring the participation of the most vulnerable groups.

- Both the EP and the EC recognise that for them, civil society's work is very important; yet, there is not enough protection, support and reward for civil society, which needs to change.
- Some legislative proposals would help CSOs (for instance, the European statute on associations). Also, we need to deal with the issue of intergovernmentalism, as this strongly limits CSOs' access at all levels to decision-making and policymaking processes.

Carlotta Besozzi, Civil Society Europe's Coordinator, concluded by stating that the conference had been a necessary event, and that this shows that civil society organisations need to proactively continue creating such spaces for dialogue, to make up for the lack of institutional structures for dialogue. CSOs are very important due to the work that they do on the ground, their watchdog role, and also the feedback that they provide to improve existing working methods and processes.