

Das Magazin des EU-Umweltbüros



Civil Society Strategy – Europas Zivilgesellschaft im Wandel



Liebe Leser:innen,

Eine starke Zivilgesellschaft braucht Raum, Schutz und eine starke Stimme in Europa!

Eine lebendige Demokratie braucht mehr als Wahlen und Institutionen. Sie braucht Menschen und Organisationen, die sich einmischen, Interessen vertreten, Missstände sichtbar machen und an politischen Lösungen mitarbeiten. Zivilgesellschaft ist damit keine Ergänzung zur Demokratie – sie ist ein wesentlicher Teil ihrer Infrastruktur.

Mit der europäischen Civil Society Strategy rückt diese Rolle stärker in den Fokus. Das ist dringend notwendig. Denn zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen stehen in vielen Teilen Europas zunehmend unter Druck: Handlungsspielräume werden enger, Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten eingeschränkt und finanzielle Grundlagen unsicherer, wenn nicht sogar entzogen. Gerade in Zeiten multipler Krisen müssen demokratische Freiräume geschützt und verlässliche Rahmenbedingungen für zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement geschaffen werden. Genau diese Herausforderungen bilden einen Schwerpunkt dieser Ausgabe.

Für die Umweltbewegung ist das von besonderer Bedeutung. Ob beim European Green Deal, beim Schutz der Natur oder bei konkreten Gesetzgebungsverfahren: NGOs bringen Expertise ein, schaffen Öffentlichkeit und geben Umwelt- und Zukunftsinteressen eine Stimme. Die geplanten Beiträge zeigen deshalb auch, wie zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement europäische Klima- und Umweltpolitik mitgestaltet und politische Veränderungen anstoßen kann.

In dieser Ausgabe beleuchten wir die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven – mit Beiträgen unter anderem aus dem Europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschuss, von Civil Society Europe, der Civil Society Alliance Austria, dem European Environmental Bureau, BirdLife Europe, ARCHE NOAH und Philea.

Denn ein demokratisches und nachhaltiges Europa braucht eine Zivilgesellschaft, die nicht nur gehört wird, sondern mitgestalten kann. Oder wie formulierte es die neu gekürte Gewinnerin des Goldenen Löwen in Venedig, May el-Toukhy: „Es braucht Mitgefühl, Gemeinschaft und Mut!“

Viel Spaß beim Lesen!

Bernhard Zlanabitznig
Redaktion EUropainfo

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The EESC's take on the EU Civil Society Strategy – Europe's Civil Society in Transition

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the EU body representing organised

*By Christa Schweng, Cinzia Del Rio,
Pietro Vittoria Barbieri*

Established by the Treaty of Rome as the advisory body representing organised civil society, the EESC has long played a central role in promoting civil dialogue at European level and has consistently called for the adoption of a comprehensive Civil Society Strategy. It therefore welcomed the European Commission's adoption of the EU Strategy for Civil Society and its commitment to establishing a Civil Society Platform. This initiative comes at a particularly important time, as demo-

civil society, welcomes the EU Civil Society Strategy as a timely initiative to strengthen civic space, promote civil dialogue and enhance democratic resilience. While recognising its added value and inclusive approach, the EESC calls for clearer benchmarks, stronger interinstitutional cooperation through an interinstitutional agreement, and an ambitious implementation of the Civil Society Strategy.

Why Europe Needs a Civil Society Strategy

cracy is under increasing pressure and civic space is shrinking in several Member States, across the European Union and around the world.

The EESC has consistently underlined that strong civil societies are indispensable for healthy democracies, social cohesion and democratic resilience. To this end, it has adopted several opinions aimed at strengthening civic space, including opinions on the financing of civil society and on a statute for cross-border associations, designed to enable civil society organisations (CSOs) to operate across borders more effectively. In that respect, the EESC considers the parallel advancement of the European Democracy Shield and the EU Civil Society Strategy to be both timely and necessary, since strengthening the capacity of civil society also means strengthening Europe's democratic fabric.

The Committee would have welcomed the inclusion of an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue

Ahead of the adoption of the Strategy, the EESC set out its recommendations in a formal opinion addressed to the European Commission. The EESC welcomes the fact that several of the Strategy's actions are designed to complement existing institutional mechanisms, in particular the EESC's own role in bringing the voice of organised civil society into the European policy-making process. The Committee particularly welcomes the

Commission's commitment to engage in dialogue with the other EU institutions and to work more closely with them to strengthen their respective engagement with CSOs. It also sees clear added value in the Strategy's aim of promoting more coherent and structured practices for civil dialogue, notably through the establishment of ten guiding principles, which broadly reflect the characteristics and standards that the EESC itself has advocated.

At the same time, the EESC considers that the Strategy could and should have gone further. In particular, the Committee would have welcomed the inclusion of an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue, facilitated by the EESC, as the most effective means of ensuring consistent, transparent and meaningful engagement with civil society across all EU institutions. It also regrets that the Strategy does not define sufficiently clear objectives, indicators and benchmarks for the Member States and for the EU institutions in relation to civic space and civil dialogue at national and EU level. In the Committee's view, this remains essential if the Strategy is to be implemented effectively and if progress is to be measured in a credible and comparable way across the Union. The EESC would also have welcomed stronger interinstitutional cooperation and more structured and inclusive exchanges on its own opinions and recommendations, which would further reinforce the contribution of organised civil society to the EU legislative and policymaking process.

Nevertheless, the Committee regards the Strategy as an important step forward and remains fully committed to making it a success. It will continue to advocate the improvements it considers necessary, while actively supporting the Strategy's implementation in practice. In this context, the EESC is pleased to take part in the Steering Committee of the Civil

Society Platform, launched during EESC Civil Society Week in March 2026, and to co-host the Platform's first Annual Summit. With the Civil Society Platform expected to become operational by the end of 2026, the Committee is determined to help ensure that it becomes a living and effective instrument — one capable not only of supporting civil society organisations across Europe, but also of strengthening participatory democracy throughout the European Union.

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1 Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Articles 300–304, OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, pp. 47–48.

2 Eg. European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion "Communicating and raising awareness about the EU's fundamental rights and rule of law values", OJ C 290, 29.7.2022, p. 115.

3 European Commission, Communication on a EU Civil Society Strategy, COM(2025) 790 final

4 EESC opinion, Financing of CSOs by the EU OJ C 81, 2.3.2018, p. 9–15

5 EESC opinion, European cross-border associations, OJ, 26.3.2024, p.

6 European Commission, Joint Communication on a European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies, JOIN(2025) 791 final

7 EESC opinion, EU strategy to support, protect and empower civil society, OJ C, C/2025/5160, 28.10.2025.

Making the EU Strategy for Civil Society Count



Civil society is not an accessory to European democracy. It is one of the ways democracy works in practice. For years, organisations across Europe have called for a coherent EU framework to support, protect and engage civil society. Now that the EU Strategy for Civil Society is in place, the real test begins: turning political commitments into lasting change.

By Gabriella Civico

For many years, European civil society has been asking an important question: if the European Union is serious about protecting democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law, how will it protect the organisations and people who help make these values a reality?

In 2022, more than 340 civil society organisations supported a call for such a strategy to be included in the European Commission's work programme. The European Parliament echoed the call in its 2022 resolution on shrinking civic space, and in 2024 another letter to the Commission President gathered support from more than 400 organisations. The inclusion of the Strategy in the Commission's 2025 Work Programme was therefore a significant milestone – and the result of sustained advocacy by civil society itself.

This long and sustained campaign was not about creating another EU initiative for

its own sake. It responded to real changes in the environment in which civil society operates.

Across Europe, organisations have been facing increasing legal and administrative restrictions, public attacks and smear campaigns, funding pressures and growing attempts to undermine their legitimacy. Those working on human rights, democracy, equality, migration, environmental protection, women's rights or the rights of marginalised groups have often been particularly exposed. At the same time, access to predictable and independent funding has become more difficult, while burdensome administrative requirements can weigh especially heavily on smaller and grassroots organisations.

These pressures matter even more because civil society is not simply another stakeholder group. Civil society organisations connect citizens with policymakers. They give people a voice in public life, defend fundamental rights, bring exper-

tise into policymaking and hold those in power to account. In a European Union facing polarisation, disinformation and declining trust in democratic institutions, this role is becoming more important, not less.

This is why the EU Civil Society Strategy matters.

The Strategy, adopted in November 2025, is an important step because it recognises the need for a longer-term and more comprehensive European approach. It is structured around three core pillars: engagement, support and an enabling environment, and funding – providing a framework to address the different conditions needed for civil society to thrive. Within these pillars, the Strategy creates opportunities to strengthen civil dialogue and create a more supportive environment for civil society actors. But adopting the Strategy is not the finish line. It is the point at which the most important work starts.

Recognition is not enough when organisations or human rights defenders come under pressure.

The success of the Strategy will now be measured by what happens in practice, moving away from fragmented and ad hoc measures towards a coherent, long-term approach.

The first test is funding. The next EU long-term budget (MFF) will show whether political recognition is matched by financial support. With the European Parliament supporting an AgoraEU envelope of €10.72 billion, the direction is positive, but the final outcome remains to be secured in the next months of negotiations. Furthermore, European funding for civil society should not be limited to AgoraEU and additional financial resources need to be made available through the relevant

sectoral programmes. Civil society needs predictable, accessible funding that protects its independence and reflects the investment needed for democratic resilience.

The second test is protection. Recognition is not enough when organisations or human rights defenders come under pressure. The EU needs the capacity to identify restrictions on civic space early and respond to them. The Strategy's planned monitoring and knowledge infrastructure can be useful, but it will only matter if information leads to action. Civil society's expertise should be part of this work, and organisations and individuals facing serious threats need access to timely financial, legal and psychosocial support.

The third test is meaningful participation. The soon-to-be-launched Civil Society Platform will be a key space to demonstrate the value of engaging with civil society early, inclusively and throughout the actual full policy cycle, while the 10 guiding principles for dialogue can help establish a common standard for engagement if implemented consistently.

There is also a test of coherence. A strategy designed to strengthen civic space

cannot operate in isolation from other EU policies. Legislation and funding rules in areas such as anti-money laundering, foreign funding or migration can affect the ability of civil society organisations to operate. The EU therefore needs to look at the impact of its policies on civic space as a whole, rather than treating the Strategy as a separate policy file.

Finally, the Strategy needs to reach all levels from local to international. A European civic space is only meaningful if civil society can operate and cooperate across borders. Removing legal and administrative barriers to cross-border activity - such as by adopting the European Cross-Border Association Directive (ECBA) - and introducing a legal status for full-time volunteers is important. Supporting cooperation between organisations and ensuring that national developments are reflected in European monitoring is also essential.

For years, civil society asked the EU to recognise that a strong civic space is essential to a strong democracy. That recognition has now arrived. The task is to make it real.

The coming years will tell us whether the Strategy will live up to its potential and become a meaningful framework that improves the conditions in which civil society operates. That choice will depend not only on the European Commission, but on the European Parliament, Member States and whether civil society remains meaningfully involved in shaping what comes next.

Europe needs a civil society that can thrive, not simply survive. The Strategy gives us an opportunity to make that possible: implementation is what will determine whether we seize it.



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By Judith Mehofer and Stefan Wallner

Where Democracy Takes Root

Civil society is one of the foundations of a vibrant democracy. Alongside independent media, courts, science and other democratic actors, NGOs and voluntary organisations create spaces where people participate, take responsibility and shape society together. In Austria, the scale is considerable: 48.2 percent of people aged 15 and over volunteer; around 3.7 million people contribute some 470 million hours. Around 6 percent of the employed population works in non-profit organisations, which together with volunteers contribute approximately 22 billion euros to Austria's GDP. Civil society is therefore a significant social and economic force.

Its democratic value, however, goes far beyond these numbers. Across civil society, people care for those in need, save lives, offer comfort, protect animals, fill sandbags during floods, organise emergency transport, tutor young people and campaign for climate action. They give their time, take responsibility and work alongside people they might otherwise never encounter. These actions do more than meet immediate needs. They bring different people and perspectives together, build trust and require people to find solutions collectively. By listening to different opinions and considering perspectives other than our own, we learn that compromise is not a weakness, but a way of moving forward together. Civil society creates spaces where cooperation and compromise are not abstract ideals but everyday practice. These capacities become particularly important in times of growing uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

Between Crisis Response and Growing Pressure

And uncertainty has become a defining feature of recent years. Pandemics, wars, inflation and climate-related disasters have created a sense of one crisis following another. Civil society is often among the first to respond, mobilising people and expertise, providing rapid support and developing solutions. At the same time, the environment in which it operates is becoming more difficult. Trust is eroding on several levels: trust in one

Eroding Certainties: Civil Society Navigating Change

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Vibrant democracies depend on strong institutional foundations and an ecosystem in which independent media, courts, science and civil

society all play an essential role. NGOs, associations and voluntary engagement create spaces for participation, trust and cooperation. They nurture a caring society. But a changing environment requires us to critically examine our own organisations: Do our strategies, structures and ways of working still support our mission and enable us to tackle today's challenges, or are we just scaling our institutions and activities? And where do we need to adapt to remain relevant and effective in shaping our shared future?

another – that we can count on each other and work together when it matters; trust in democratic institutions and their ability to balance competing interests and find workable solutions through compromise; and trust in the future – the belief that progress is possible and that the next generation can look forward to better opportunities. These dynamics are amplified by social media and polarised rhetoric. Algorithms reward outrage and simplification. Differences increasingly appear as irreconcilable divides, while compromise is portrayed as weakness rather than a democratic strength.

In this environment, civil society's capacity to turn disagreement into cooperation and challenges into action becomes ever more important. But are we still able to deliver?

A Democratic Ecosystem Under Pressure

The institutions that sustain vibrant democracies are increasingly under pressure. Across Europe and beyond, not only political institutions but also courts, independent media, science and civil society are being questioned, delegitimised or weakened. This is not a side effect of political conflict. Undermining institutions that provide checks and balances, independent information and public scrutiny is a deliberate strategy to concentrate power and silence critics. As part of this democratic ecosystem, civil society is targeted too. NGOs face political attacks, restrictions on funding and attempts to undermine their legitimacy. Independent media and science experience similar pressures. When these actors are weakened, societies lose important spaces for critical debate, knowledge, participation and accountability.

Democratic actors therefore have a shared interest in protecting the conditions that allow them to fulfil their roles. This requires stronger connections across sectors and recognition that defending democratic infrastructure cannot be left to any one institution or actor alone.

Are We Fit for the Future?

To remain relevant and equipped for the future, NGOs need to critically examine themselves. Many were founded to challenge the status quo and to address

problems that others were unwilling or unable to tackle.

Fighting poverty, defending women's and minority rights, saving the planet – full of purpose and ambition. And the willingness to take risks. Professionalisation and growth have made us stronger but also more complex. There is a risk that maintaining structures and processes takes up more space than creating change and responding to the challenges of our time. We therefore need to ask uncomfortable questions: Does our organisation still serve our mission and the funders' expectations (public and private)? Are we responding quickly enough to social and political change? Are we measuring success by organisational stability, by measurable outcomes, or by the impact we create in society? And are we willing to change established approaches, take risks and challenge ourselves?

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This also means looking beyond our own organisations. We need new alliances with other organisations and sectors, media, science, business and political actors, including those with whom we do not always agree. And these alliances cannot stop at national borders. Many of today's challenges – from climate change and migration to democratic backsliding and geopolitical instability – are European and can be addressed more effectively through cooperation, or even better by cooptation. As part of Europe's democratic fabric, civil society should have a meaningful role in shaping its future. This requires active engagement in European debates, cross-border cooperation and opportunities to bring civil society's expertise and experience into decision-making. Stronger networks can also foster solidarity and resilience when

the democratic ecosystem comes under pressure. But it is not about debating change and analysing challenges. It is about acting, about becoming relevant again to the growing number of people who feel left behind. It is up to us to nurture empathy, cooperation and respect in order to counter those who constantly offer seductive but simplistic answers and fuel anger.

Staying within familiar networks, whether organisational, sectoral or national, makes us increasingly irrelevant. Our history and public trust are important assets, but they do not guarantee future relevance. To remain relevant actors in shaping society and our shared future, we need to preserve what works, question what does not and have the courage to reinvent ourselves where necessary.

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Civil lessons learnt during Orbán's rule



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On 12 April 2026, the parliamentary elections in Hungary ended the 16-year uninterrupted rule of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Just one month later, I was called to speak live on the principal state radio. When I arrived, the radio host told me: “I remember that earlier [i.e., before Orbán came to power] you were a regular guest at our radio. I am happy that you can come here again.”

By András Lukács

During Orbán's years in office, the overwhelming majority of the independent media was marginalised by the government and people close to it through the capture of key media outlets and the overwhelming dominance of massively financed government propaganda. At the same time, civil society organisations (CSOs) which did not fully support the government's position and measures were practically banned from the pro-government media. The remaining independent media were regularly harassed and often lacked the necessary financial resources.¹

The Clean Air Action Group (CAAG), a national environmental organisation founded in 1988, was one of the most critical CSOs of the Orbán regime's policies. As a result, CAAG could not appear in about 80 % of the media (or, in the rare cases when it did appear, it was portrayed as a harmful association). Nevertheless, according to a 2020 survey, CAAG was the 10th most popular in online appearances

(media, social media, blogs, etc.) among the roughly 60 thousand Hungarian CSOs.² This was made possible by several highly qualified and committed communications experts who helped us at low cost or often even pro bono to reach the independent media. Naturally, they could not have supported us without the high-quality professional materials we provided for media use.

The Clean Air Action Group (CAAG) was one of the most critical CSOs of the Orbán regime's policies.

Before 2010, more than half of our budget came from the government and state-owned companies such as Hungarian Railways. This funding also helped us obtain international grants, which often required pre- and/or co-financing. However, after 2010, virtually all national funding to CAAG stopped, apart from donations from individual citizens, which accounted for only about 5 % of our revenues. Thus, during all these years, CAAG as well as many other independent CSOs became heavily reliant on international support from institutions such as the European Commission, the German EUKI Program, and the European Climate Foundation. Our international networks were essential in securing these grants. However, this funding was barely enough to sustain our activities, and completely insufficient to meaningfully counter the destructive government policies. This was true not only for CSOs, but also for the remaining independent media: we often felt like a firefighter trying to extinguish a forest fire with a glass of water.

A few weeks ago, we contacted our Finance Ministry and asked for an appointment. We informed them that between 1991 and 2016, each year we had prepared concrete proposals for the following year's state budget and tax system and had regularly discussed these proposals with the Ministry's experts – until 2010. Within one week after sending them our request, we were invited to a high-level meeting in the Ministry's luxurious building and had a fruitful discussion.

This contrasted sharply with our experience during Orbán's rule, when it was

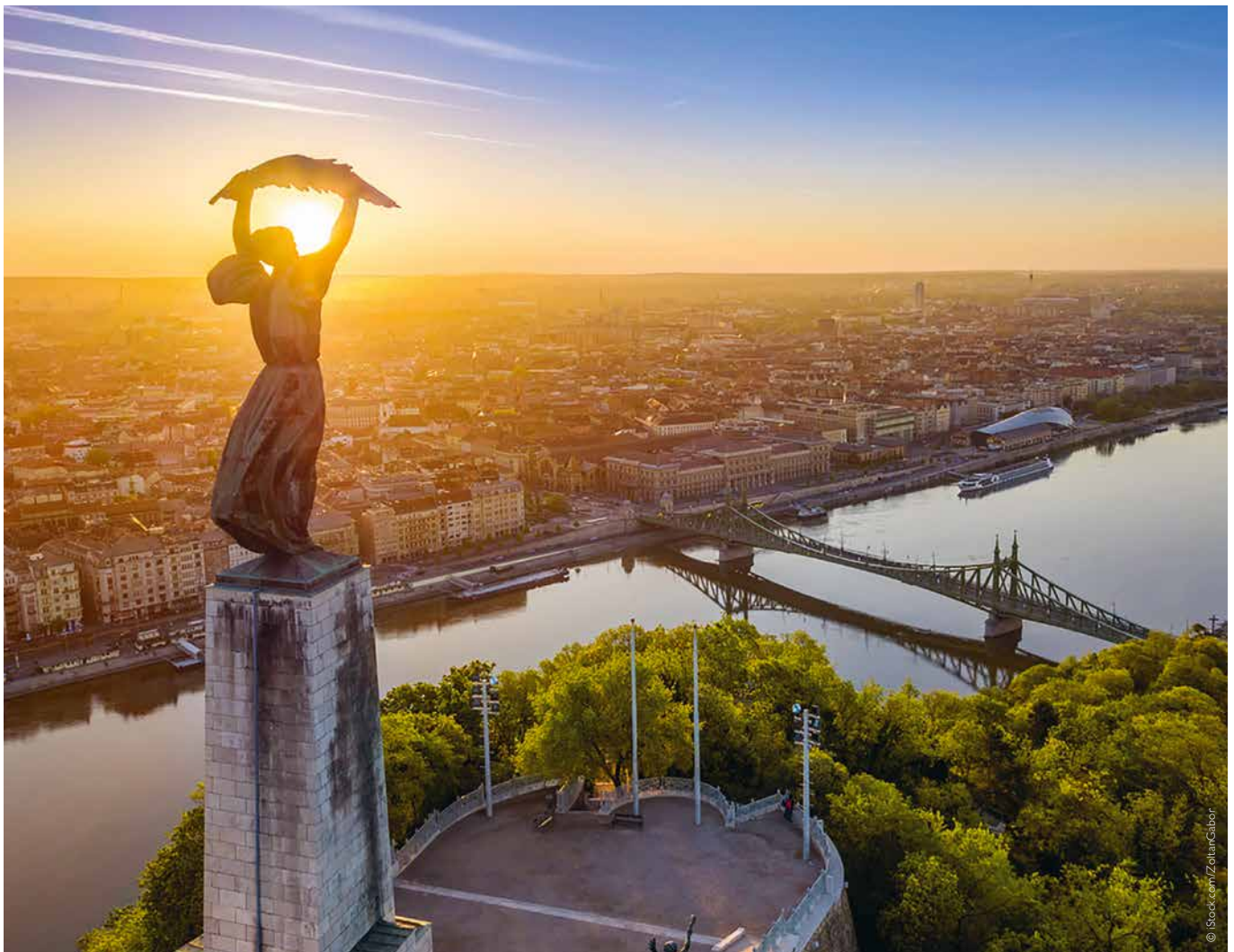
To fight an illiberal regime effectively with extremely limited resources, we had to concentrate our forces to attack its weakest point: EU funding.

practically prohibited for government staff (including those in the ministry responsible for the environment) to have official meetings with representatives of our organisation. We then decided to focus our efforts on those institutions where, at least in principle, our work could have at least some impact: the European Commission, the European Parliament, the governments of some other countries, and Hungarian municipalities (mainly those led by representatives of opposition parties).

Restrictions on access to media, government officials, and decision-makers had enormous and often irreparable consequences for Hungary. For example, while the household burning of waste – which emits extremely toxic fumes – has been extremely widespread, the possibilities to raise awareness about it and pressure decision-makers to take action became

severely limited. This has greatly contributed to the fact that Hungary had the fourth highest Covid death rate per million inhabitants in the world.³ (The level of air pollution positively correlates with the number of Covid deaths.⁴)

To fight an illiberal regime effectively with extremely limited resources, we had to concentrate our forces to attack its weakest point: EU funding. Therefore, we developed projects on this issue⁵ and published numerous policy papers and articles⁶ highlighting the misuse of EU funds in Hungary and arguing for their suspension. We had a lot of meetings on the topic with European Commission officials, Members of the European Parliament, and the ambassadors of almost all net donor countries to EU funding. We do not know how much our efforts contributed to the eventual suspension of a substantial share of EU funding to Hungary, but





identify the weakest point of the regime and focus your efforts there. Most importantly, while risks must be considered carefully, don't let fear guide your actions. When a friendly businessman asked me whether I feared retaliation from the government because of our activities, I replied: "I am more afraid of what will happen to our society if we keep silent."

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we considered it an enormous achievement that substantially contributed to the fall of the Orbán regime. As a Hungarian economist recently wrote, "it is likely that, had EU funds not been frozen, it is by no means certain that Tisza would have won the April election, let alone by such a huge margin."⁷

However, this success came with a bitter taste for us. Independent Hungarian CSOs, especially anticorruption and civil liberties organisations, made an invaluable contribution to disclosing the corrupt practices of the Orbán regime; their work also enabled us to advocate for the suspension of EU funding at the European level. However, none agreed to join us in our efforts in asking for the suspension of EU funds. Some declined our request without explanation; others clearly stated that such involvement would entail a great risk to their organisation. In fact, we experienced a level of fear in Hungary that, in our experience, exceeded that of the final years of Communist rule. I

am not asserting at all that this fear was unfounded; there have been innumerable cases of the merciless vengeance of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán against his critics. For example, one could have his or her whole life's work destroyed⁸ or lose one's job without getting a meaningful new job (the photo above shows László Póré, the former editor-in-chief of *Dunántúli Napló*, a very reliable, high-quality regional daily newspaper, who started to make his living as a street vendor selling sausages after Lőrinc Mészáros, a friend of Orbán, bought the newspaper and transformed it into a propaganda mouthpiece⁹). Nevertheless, the refusal by CSOs was all the more regrettable because if we had joined forces, political change might have happened years ago.

To summarise, the main conclusions from the Hungarian experience on combatting an illiberal regime by a CSO are the following: use the media as much as possible; build strong alliances at home and abroad; maintain high professional standards;

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1 There have been countless reports on the topic, for example: International Press Institute, 2019 <https://ipi.media/new-report-hungary-dismantles-media-freedom-and-pluralism/>

2 <https://bpdigital.hu/legjobb-civil-szervezetek/>

3 The Global Economy https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/covid_deaths_per_million/

4 Science. Air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadvabd4049>

5 CAAG <https://www.levego.hu/en/campaigns/eu-tamogatas/>

6 For example, CAAG https://www.levego.hu/sites/default/files/eu-budget_democracy_hungary_2015sept15-honlapra.pdf and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung <https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/11/05/tragic-consequences-eu-funding-environment-hungary>

7 Telex <https://telex.hu/neverték/2026/07/27/erdemes-egy-alkoholistat-tovabb-itatni-eu-penzek-kohezios-forrasok-magyarorszag-eroforras-atok-nuno-palma>

8 For example, see the video by the Hungarian Anti-Corruption Association <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGRQJRWpbls>

9 Photo by courtesy of Szabad Pécs <https://szabadpecs.hu/2017/05/nyolc-lapot-igazgatott-a-naplo-foszerkesztoje-volt-most-kolbaszt-arul-a-parkoloban/>



Demokratie braucht Gegenmacht: Wie Zivilgesellschaft Europas Umwelt- und Klimapolitik trägt



Die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft in Europa verändert sich rasant. Zwischen Klimakrise, Hitzewellen, Biodiversitätsverlust, politischer Polarisierung und Angriffen auf demokratische Prozesse und Akteure wird deutlich: Ohne starke, unabhängige und gut ausgestattete Umweltorganisationen können Europas Klima- und Umweltziele weder verteidigt noch weiterentwickelt werden.

Von Patrizia Heidegger

Die europäische Zivilgesellschaft steht an einem Wendepunkt. Während Europa mit Klimakrise, Biodiversitätsverlust, geopolitischen Spannungen und demokratischen Herausforderungen ringt, wächst die Bedeutung einer starken, unabhängigen und strategisch handlungsfähigen Zivilgesellschaft. Für Umweltorganisationen gilt dies in besonderem Maße: Sie sind zentrale Akteure, um gemeinsame euro-

päische Ziele zum Klima- und Umweltschutz zu stärken, weiterzuentwickeln und in den Mitgliedstaaten zu verankern. Hitzewellen und Dürren auf der einen Seite, wiederkehrende Energiekrisen aufgrund unserer Abhängigkeit von fossilen Brennstoffen auf der anderen machen klar: Klima- und Umweltschutz sind die Grundlage einer positiven Zukunft, von Sicherheit, Resilienz, wirtschaftlicher Entwicklung und nicht zuletzt von Gesundheit und Lebensqualität.

In den vergangenen Jahren hat der EEB immer wieder darauf hingewiesen, dass der politische Raum für zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement schrumpft. Angriffe auf Umweltorganisationen, Desinformation und Fake News zu Klima- und Umweltfragen und Versuche, unsere Legitimität infrage zu stellen, haben zugenommen. In vielen Ländern Europas und weltweit ist das bereits lange Realität. Besonders sichtbar wurde dies zuletzt im Europäischen Parlament. Dort

versuchen Teile der Europäischen Volkspartei, unterstützt von der extremen Rechten, wiederholt die Rolle und die Finanzierung von Umweltorganisationen zu diskreditieren. Solche Angriffe beschädigen nicht nur den Ruf einzelner Organisationen, sondern untergraben das Vertrauen in demokratische Prozesse insgesamt. Eine lebendige Demokratie braucht kritische Stimmen – nicht nur wirtschaftliche Interessenvertretung. Die Vertretung öffentlicher Interessen und des Gemeinwohls ohne Profitabsicht braucht politischen Raum, Respekt und institutionelle Anerkennung.

Eine lebendige Demokratie braucht kritische Stimmen – nicht nur wirtschaftliche Interessen- vertretung.

Vor diesem Hintergrund ist die neue EU-Strategie für die Zivilgesellschaft, herausgebracht von der Europäischen Kommission im letzten Dezember, ein wichtiger Schritt. Sie ist eine Antwort auf die wachsenden Sorgen vieler Organisationen in Europa, die seit Jahren auf die Verengung des zivilgesellschaftlichen Handlungsspielraums aufmerksam machen. Die Strategie erkennt an, dass Zivilgesellschaft ein Grundpfeiler europäischer Demokratie ist. Doch Anerkennung allein reicht nicht: Die Strategie muss nun mit klaren Maßnahmen zur Stärkung demokratischer Prozesse und guter Regierungsführung unterlegt werden. Dazu gehören transparente Verfahren, offene Beteiligungsprozesse und die Sicherstellung, dass gemeinwohlorientierte Organisationen ihre Rolle als unabhängige Watchdogs wahrnehmen können.

Gerade im Bereich Umwelt- und Klimapolitik zeigt sich, wie wichtig gute Gover-

nance ist. In den letzten Jahren wurden öffentliche Konsultationen verkürzt oder ganz gestrichen, Folgenabschätzungen abgeschwächt und Gesetzgebungsverfahren im Schnellverfahren durchgesetzt. Diese Formen des Fast Trackings führen zu Politik, die weniger evidenzbasiert ist und stärker von kurzfristigen wirtschaftlichen Interessen geprägt wird. Wenn demokratische Beteiligung zurückgedrängt wird, steigt die Bedeutung der Zivilgesellschaft als Kontrollinstanz. Umweltorganisationen sind oft die einzigen Akteure, die unabhängig prüfen, ob politische Entscheidungen wissenschaftlich fundiert sind, ob sie langfristige Risiken berücksichtigen und ob sie dem öffentlichen Interesse dienen.

Warum ist das so wichtig? Weil gemeinwohlorientierte Advocacy-Arbeit ein notwendiges Gegengewicht zu kommerziellen Lobbyinteressen darstellt. Unser Mitglied Corporate Europe Observatory zeigt regelmäßig, wie stark die Einflussnahme wirtschaftlicher Akteure in Brüssel ist: Allein im Bereich Energie und Industriepolitik übersteigt die Zahl der registrierten Lobbyisten aus der Wirtschaft jene der Umwelt- und Sozialorganisationen um ein Vielfaches. Beim Antwerp Summit, einem großangelegten Treffen einflussreicher Industriezweige mit der Führung der Europäischen Kommission, wurde bereits 2024 deutlich, wie massiv die Deregulierungsagenda unter dieser Europäischen Kommission vorangetrieben wird – oft mit direktem Zugang zu Spitzenpolitikerinnen und Spitzenpolitikern, während zivilgesellschaftliche Stimmen um Gehör kämpfen. Das EEB und die Green 10 konnten zwar im Juli ein wichtiges Treffen mit Kommissionspräsidentin Ursula von der Leyen erreichen, doch insgesamt bleibt die politische Führung Europas zurückhaltend, wenn es darum geht, die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft systematisch zu stärken und Gemeinwohlinteressen mehr Gewicht zu verleihen.

Dabei zeigt die öffentliche Resonanz, wie wichtig unabhängige Umweltorganisationen sind. Mehr als 600.000 Menschen haben die Petition „Hands off Nature“ unterzeichnet und sich gegen die Deregulierung der europäischen Naturschutzpolitik ausgesprochen. Diese und andere Mobilisierungen beweisen, dass

Umweltorganisationen nicht nur Expertise einbringen, sondern auch demokratische Teilhabe ermöglichen und damit ein Gegengewicht zu Polarisierung und Desinformation schaffen.

Die Angriffe auf Umweltstandards, die Deregulierungsagenda und die Verengung des zivilgesellschaftlichen Handlungsspielraums sind eng miteinander verknüpft. Wenn Umweltstandards geschwächt werden, wenn Klimaschutz als Belastung statt als Chance dargestellt wird, dann geraten auch jene unter Druck, die diese Politik kritisch begleiten. Eine starke Zivilgesellschaft ist daher nicht nur ein demokratisches Prinzip, sondern eine Voraussetzung für wirksame Klima- und Umweltpolitik.

Europa steht vor einer entscheidenden Phase. Klima- und Umweltschutz brauchen politischen Aufwind – und dafür braucht es Organisationen, die unabhängig, kritisch und gemeinwohlorientiert arbeiten können. Die Strategie für die Zivilgesellschaft bietet dafür einen Rahmen. Jetzt müssen die Mitgliedstaaten und die EU-Institutionen ihn mit Leben füllen: durch transparente Verfahren, durch die Wiederherstellung evidenzbasierter Politikprozesse und durch die Anerkennung, dass gemeinwohlorientierte Advocacy-Arbeit ein unverzichtbarer Bestandteil europäischer Demokratie ist.

Nur wenn Zivilgesellschaft, Politik und Wissenschaft gemeinsam handeln, kann Europa die ökologischen und demokratischen Herausforderungen der kommenden Jahre bewältigen. Die Umweltbewegung ist bereit dazu – sie braucht dafür den politischen Raum und die demokratischen Strukturen, die eine lebendige Demokratie voraussetzt.

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From campaign to legislation: People still have the power



© BirdLife Europe

When Europe's environment ministers nearly let its first nature restoration law die, over a million citizens, thousands of scientists and 200 NGOs made sure they couldn't. When a wetland on the Adriatic faced destruction, birdwatchers turned a flamingo colony into a cause that crossed borders. Two campaigns, two scales, one lesson for EU advocacy – mobilisation does not simply accompany policy from the sidelines. Built well, planned or not, it can rewrite the outcome entirely.

By Honey Kohan

Brussels runs on the assumption that policy is made by experts, in rooms, with footnotes, and that civil society is invited to comment, occasionally to consult, rarely to decide. But two recent campaigns show what happens when that assumption breaks down, when enough people, in enough places, refuse to let a decision be made without them.

The first is the fight to secure the EU Nature Restoration Law, built by design over years by a coordinated coalition, while the second began as something much smaller and far less planned. A handful of locals and conservationists objected to a development plan, and what followed grew almost entirely on its own momentum, first into a national moment, then a diaspora one, designed by no one but carried forward by everyone who joined along the way. One successfully shaped the outcome, and the other is still ongoing,

but they both say something about what mobilisation actually needs to succeed, whether it starts with a five-year strategy or a handful of furious birdwatchers.

The file that was supposed to die in silence

The Nature Restoration Law was, on paper, exactly the kind of file that dies quietly. 80 % of Europe's habitats remain in poor condition, the legacy of decades of intensive land use, and the law set out to reverse that decline with the first legally binding targets of their kind: restoring at least 20 % of the EU's land and sea by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050, returning 25,000 kilometres of rivers to free-flowing condition, reversing the decline of pollinators, and growing urban green space. It was scientifically uncontroversial and politically radioactive, embraced by agribusiness lobbies as an attack on farmers and targeted by parts of the European Parliament, first for outright rejection, then for death by a thousand amendments.

What changed the outcome was not a better position paper. It was scale, built by the #RestoreNature coalition, over 200 NGOs led by BirdLife Europe, ClientEarth, the European Environmental Bureau and WWF EU, into a mobilisation that MEPs could not treat as background noise. More than a million signatures and messages from citizens, hundreds of scientists and businesses on record in support, coordinated actions in Brussels and Strasbourg, and a steady drumbeat of local stories, a restored river here, a returning species there, made the law's abstract targets feel like something people's own towns had a stake in.

The campaign did more than just lobby institutions from outside; it changed what those institutions could safely ignore. Every milestone, a new signature threshold, an open letter signed by hundreds of scientists, landed in front of undecided MEPs at the moment it would count most, and by the time the law reached

its final, knife-edge votes, first in Parliament, then in Council, where Austria's last-minute change of position tipped the balance, the pressure held. Decision-makers who had intended to vote it down faced constituents, scientists and businesses who had made unmistakably clear that gutting the law would carry a political cost, not just an environmental one. It passed in June 2024, the first law dedicated to nature in Europe since the Birds and Habitats Directives.

The lesson from #RestoreNature is that technical files do not protect themselves, and somebody has to make the stakes visible well before the vote, not scramble to do it the week of. A campaign that only mobilises once a bad outcome looks likely has already lost the argument over timing.

The lagoon they hoped no one would notice

The second case is smaller in scale but sharper in what it reveals about how

mobilisation works. On Albania's Adriatic coast, the Narta lagoon is one of the last major wetlands on the East Atlantic Flyway, a stopover for tens of thousands of migratory birds, among them one of the largest flamingo colonies in Europe, and plans for large-scale coastal development threatened to fragment and drain the very habitat that made the lagoon function as a wetland at all.

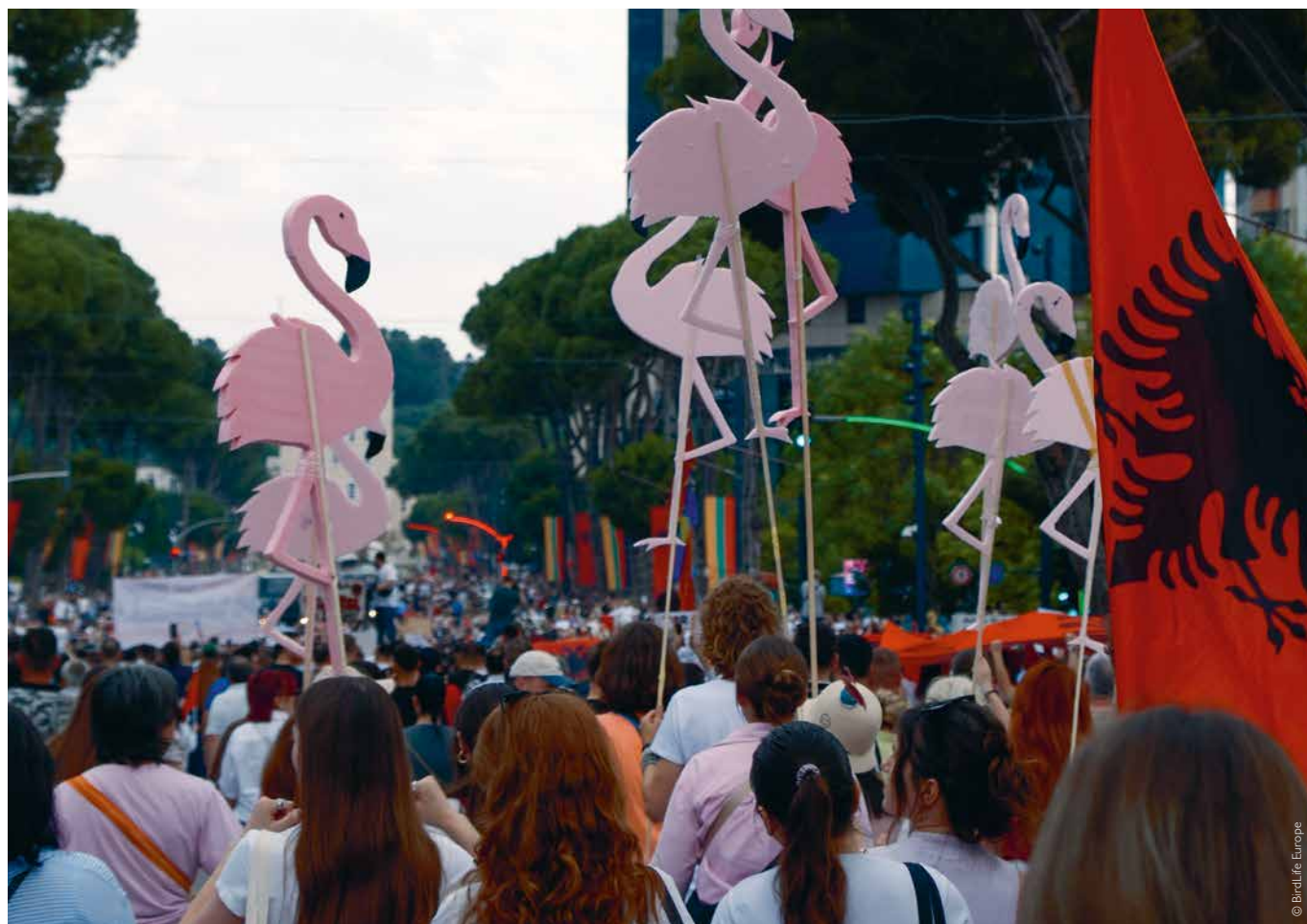
What followed became known locally as the "Flamingo Revolution", and it started small, with a handful of locals and conservationists working with BirdLife's Albanian Partner PPNEA raising the alarm about what the development would mean for nesting sites and feeding grounds. There was no coalition behind it at first, no co-ordinated launch. It began as people who knew the lagoon best refusing to watch it disappear.

What sharpened the objection was what people found once they started looking. The works were moving ahead without

80% of Europe's habitats remain in poor condition

the environmental permits Albanian law itself requires, meant to happen without much fuss, before anyone could challenge them in court. That turned a local planning dispute into a question of principle, not only what stood to be lost, but whether a government could simply ignore its own laws so long as nobody was watching.

The objection spread on its own, first across Albania, then through the diaspora abroad, who took pride in a coastline they feared could vanish before most people even knew it was at risk. A dispute that would once have stayed local became something people an ocean away felt was theirs to defend.



When Civil Society Changes EU Policy

The campaign's power came from specificity. Nobody rallied around a concept called biodiversity; they rallied around a place, a lagoon, a colony, a named and countable population of birds whose presence or absence could be tracked season to season, photographed, shared, and missed if it vanished.

What made the moment travel was the same instinct that had made it start in the first place. Self-organised people inside and outside of Albania did in weeks what an organised campaign might have taken months to build, without anyone drafting a strategy document.

That momentum has not stopped. The 'Flamingo Revolution' is still active, still contesting works that continue in fits and starts, and still insisting that a government hoping to finish unnoticed will instead be watched every step of the way.

Two fights, one playbook

Set side by side, #RestoreNature and the Vjosa-Narta protests could not have started more differently. One was engineered from year one by a coalition built for the purpose, while the other began as a handful of people who could not stay quiet and grew into a mass mobilisation nobody had planned.

They made the abstract concrete, turning restoration targets into rivers and towns, and a wetland into a named colony of birds.

They built coalitions that widened well beyond the people who started them, by design or by instinct. Scientists, businesses and citizens stood together for #RestoreNature. Diaspora networks did the same for Narta, without anyone recruiting them.

Neither let the decision get made quietly. #RestoreNature applied pressure for years, timed deliberately to land before each vote, while Vjosa-Narta's pressure was not timed at all, arriving faster than the development plans could move past it.

None of this replaces policy expertise. Somebody still has to draft the amendment, negotiate the trilogue, write the legal text that survives a court challenge. But policy expertise without public pressure is a plan without an engine, sound in design, going nowhere. The Nature Restoration Law passed into law, and the Narta lagoon still exists today, because enough people continue to make clear that they are paying attention, and that ignoring them would cost more than accommodating them.

That is a lesson worth sitting with as Brussels enters a period defined by simplification packages that quietly reopen settled protections one clause at a time. Deregulation rarely announces itself as deregulation; it arrives labelled as efficiency, competitiveness, red tape reduction, language designed to sound uncontroversial in a committee room. The campaigns that stop it refuse to let it stay there, dragging it into daylight, giving it a face, a place, a bird with a name. That is not a nice-to-have for civil society navigating this moment. It is the whole strategy.

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Street protest in Tirana PPNEA BirdLife Europe,

Werden Sie in Brüssel gehört?



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Von Paul Grabenberger

Von der organisierten Zivilgesellschaft zur EU-Gesetzgebung

Wer in Brüssel mitreden darf, entscheidet mit darüber, wie Europa aussieht. Während Wirtschaftsverbände über starke Ressourcen verfügen, geraten NGOs und zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen zunehmend unter Druck. Warum ihre Präsenz für ausgewogene EU-Gesetzgebung, Demokratie und das Ge-



meinwohl unverzichtbar ist und weshalb diese Entwicklung weit über die Zukunft einzelner Organisationen hinausgeht, zeigt dieser Blick hinter die Kulissen der EU-Politik.

Vom Dialog zum Misstrauen: Der Wandel des politischen Klimas in Brüssel

Als ich vor fünf Jahren nach Brüssel kam, herrschte eine vergleichsweise konstruktive Atmosphäre zwischen EU-Institutionen und Zivilgesellschaft. Gemeinnützige Vereine, Nichtregierungsorganisationen und andere Non-Profits wurden regelmäßig konsultiert, ihre Expertise war gefragt, und der Gedanke, dass sich Bürger:innen organisieren und damit Teil der europäischen Demokratie sind, wurde kaum infrage gestellt. Im Gegenteil: Mit der „Conference on the Future of Europe“ setzte die EU eines der größten Beteiligungsprojekte ihrer Geschichte um.

Heute hat sich das politische Klima spürbar verändert. Für NGOs wird es schwieriger, Gesprächstermine bei EU-Kommission, EU-Parlament oder Mitgliedsstaatenvertretungen zu erhalten. In vielen politischen Kreisen ist das Misstrauen gewachsen. Umwelt-, Verbraucher- oder Menschenrechtsorganisationen sehen sich zunehmend dem Vorwurf ausgesetzt, wirtschaftliche Entwicklung zu behindern oder politische Prozesse unangemessen zu beeinflussen.

Brüsseler Realität: Politik braucht externes Fachwissen

Die Europäische Union ist ein komplexes politisches System. Ein einzelner Bericht im Europäischen Parlament kann Auswirkungen auf Landwirt:innen in Österreich, Verbraucher:innen in Spanien, Unternehmen in Deutschland oder Naturschutzgebiete in Finnland haben. Entscheidungen

entstehen deshalb nicht allein innerhalb der Institutionen, sondern im Austausch mit Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft, Regionen, Sozialpartnern und der organisierten Zivilgesellschaft.

Genau deshalb ist Interessenvertretung ein unverzichtbarer Bestandteil moderner Gesetzgebung. Da EU-Abgeordnete weder Expert:innen für sämtliche Politikbereiche sein noch regelmäßig mit allen betroffenen Gruppen in Europa sprechen können, sind sie auf externe Expertise angewiesen. Um fundierte Entscheidungen treffen zu können, müssen sie unterschiedliche Perspektiven kennenlernen und gegeneinander abwägen.

Während Unternehmen und Wirtschaftsverbände legitimerweise die Interessen einzelner Branchen oder Wirtschaftssektoren vertreten, bringen

NGOs häufig jene gesellschaftlichen und wirtschaftlichen Interessen ein, die sonst weniger stark organisiert sind. Dazu gehören Umwelt- und Naturschutz, Gesundheit, Verbraucher:inneninteressen, Ernährungssicherheit, die Resilienz von Landwirtschaft und Ernährungssystemen sowie die Anliegen zukünftiger Generationen. Gleichzeitig bündeln NGOs Erfahrungen aus den Mitgliedstaaten, bringen Praxiswissen in politische Debatten ein und übernehmen damit eine wichtige Brückenfunktion zwischen Praxis und Politik.

Vom Protest zur Gesetzgebung

Viele politische Fortschritte begannen nicht in Ministerien oder Generaldirektionen. Ob Saatgutrecht, Verbraucher:innenschutz oder Naturschutz: Häufig gingen jahrelange Aktivitäten zivilgesellschaftlicher Organisationen den Gesetzesinitiativen voraus. Der Weg nach Brüssel beginnt oft mit lokalen Initiativen, engagierten Bürger:innen und Organisationen, die Probleme sichtbar machen und Menschen für politischen Wandel mobilisieren. Erfolgreiche NGOs bündeln dieses Wissen, entwickeln konkrete Lösungen und übersetzen komplexe politische Prozesse und Entscheidungen für die Öffentlichkeit. Genau darin liegt ihre demokratische Stärke.

Wenn Engagement Wirkung zeigt: Das Beispiel Saatgut und Biodiversität

Aus meiner Arbeit im Bereich Landwirtschaft und Saatgutrecht wird besonders deutlich, welchen Unterschied zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen machen können.

Vor zwanzig Jahren galten so wesentliche Themen wie die Erhaltung der Kulturpflanzenvielfalt, die Anpassungsfähigkeit unserer Ernährungssysteme oder Biodiversität als politische Nischenthemen. Heute gehören sie zur Kernagenda europäischer Debatten über Landwirtschaft, Ernährungssicherheit und Klimaanpassung.

Organisationen wie ARCHE NOAH, wissenschaftliche Netzwerke und viele engagierte Bürger:innen haben über Jahre Informationen gesammelt, politische Vorschläge entwickelt und den Dialog mit Institutionen gesucht. Viele Themen, die heute als selbstverständlich erscheinen,

Trotz der Rückendeckung des Europäischen Parlaments für NGOs im April 2026 bleibt der politische Druck auf die Zivilgesellschaft bestehen.

wären ohne die kontinuierliche Arbeit gemeinnütziger Akteur:innen nie auf die politische Tagesordnung gelangt.

Brüssel wird nicht lobbyfrei

Die entscheidende Frage lautet daher nicht, ob Lobbying stattfindet, sondern welche Stimmen gehört werden.

Wirtschaftsverbände verfügen über erhebliche finanzielle Ressourcen, gut ausgestattete Büros in Brüssel und spezialisierte Teams für politische Interessenvertretung. Wenn Umwelt-, Verbraucher- oder Menschenrechtsorganisationen aus dem politischen Prozess verdrängt werden, entsteht kein lobbyfreier Raum. Es entsteht ein Ungleichgewicht. Die Interessen großer wirtschaftlicher Akteure bleiben präsent, während andere Perspektiven an Gewicht verlieren. Ohne die Vorarbeit von NGOs wäre europäische Gesetzgebung weniger ausgewogen und weniger praxisnah.

Die Gegenoffensive gegen die Zivilgesellschaft

Gleichzeitig erlebt die europäische Zivilgesellschaft eine koordinierte politische Gegenbewegung.

In den vergangenen Jahren wurden Umwelt- und Bürgerrechtsorganisationen wiederholt beschuldigt, mit EU-Fördergeldern unzulässigen Einfluss auf die Politik auszuüben. Gleichzeitig wurden

Förderprogramme gekürzt und die öffentliche Finanzierung von NGOs zunehmend infrage gestellt. Dahinter steht vielfach der Versuch, die Legitimität zivilgesellschaftlicher Akteur:innen grundsätzlich infrage zu stellen.

Natürlich müssen NGOs transparent arbeiten, Rechenschaft über ihre Finanzierung ablegen und hohe Standards einhalten. Das ist richtig und notwendig. Die entscheidende demokratische Frage lautet jedoch nicht, ob NGOs Einfluss auf Politik nehmen dürfen. Die Frage lautet vielmehr, ob der politische Raum nur jenen offenstehen soll, die über große finanzielle Ressourcen verfügen.

Europa braucht Zivilgesellschaft

Trotz der Rückendeckung des Europäischen Parlaments für NGOs im April 2026 bleibt der politische Druck auf die Zivilgesellschaft bestehen. Die Auseinandersetzung ist längst nicht beendet.

Gerade deshalb braucht Europa starke, professionelle und glaubwürdige zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen. Sie vertreten gesellschaftliche Interessen, die sich oft nicht in Marktpreisen ausdrücken lassen, und erinnern politische Entscheidungsträger:innen daran, dass langfristige Gemeinwohlinteressen ebenso wichtig sind wie die Interessen der jeweils einflussreichsten Akteur:innen. Wer Europa verändern will, muss dort mitreden, wo Entscheidungen getroffen werden. Brüssel lebt von den Stimmen derjenigen, die sich für das Gemeinwohl einsetzen. Gerade jetzt ist es wichtiger denn je, präsent zu sein und Europa aktiv mitzugestalten.

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By Hanna Surmatz

Recent EU level action to strengthen these safeguards, including the new EU Civil Society Strategy, are very welcome. What complementary role can philanthropy and its infrastructure play in this at a time when some policymakers consider philanthropic organisations that support democracy and civic space as undesired actors and put restrictions on them?

Philea is a values-based organisation with a vision for philanthropy to support a pluralistic, just and resilient society that centres people and planet. Many of our members and partners realise that actors aligned around this concern, from policymakers, civil society, philanthropy, business and academia, must beef up efforts to make sure that a pluralistic democracy remains the preferred vision. Especially given that those promoting illiberal and populist agendas are aligned, connected, well-funded – and gaining ground.

Areas for collective action and learning

The threats to pluralistic and rule of law-based approaches are also threats to the space of philanthropy. Through our members and partners, we are increasing our monitoring and analysis as well as engagement work with policymakers to promote an enabling space for philanthropy in the context of the wider civil society space. We are also connecting funders who work in this area and bridge them to other actors.

1. Making sense of changing environments

Guided by our Legal Affairs Committee, we are monitoring and analysing policy and regulatory trends at national, European and international level that impact on philanthropy. Together with our members and additional experts, we have invested in detailed profiles of the legal and fiscal landscape for philanthropy in 40 countries across Europe, as well as a comparative analysis.

We see that old and new barriers block the philanthropic and wider civil society spaces: barriers to cross-border philanthropy, foreign funding restrictions, cutting of incentives and oversight reporting duties but also limitations to certain ways of working such as impact investing and

European philanthropy and civil society under pressure

 Civil society is a cornerstone of our pluralistic democracies and a tool for citizens and underrepresented groups and ideas to be heard. Yet across Europe and beyond, civil society faces restrictions via legal or administrative barriers, verbal or non-verbal attacks and public funding cuts while at the same time the safeguards of democratic structures, rule of law and fundamental rights appear under growing pressure.

political and advocacy engagement. Given the additional scrutiny of civil society and philanthropy, Philea is increasingly engaging on questions concerning the legitimate role of foundations in public policy debates, advocacy and democratic participation. Together with ECNL, we have published a joint guidebook on how to use EU law to defend civil society space, and we are working on research to analyse how the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights protects the foundation and philanthropy space.

Discussions among members have highlighted several areas where organisations are seeking practical support, which we are responding to with capacity strengthening and training activities, including using EU law to defend civic and philanthropic space, learning from impact investing practices, exploring co-granting and co-investment approaches and navigating rapidly changing regulatory environments.

2. Learning from peers and sharing practice

Foundations are increasingly looking to learn from one another's responses to civic space challenges. In response to this, Philea creates spaces for our members to discuss best practices to tackle these challenges and how philanthropic organisations can help civil societies to counteract negative trends and develop resilience through sharing expertise, analyses, best practices and tools.

We are also collecting and disseminating practical examples from across the sector, including impact investing practice, public-philanthropic partnerships, enabling environment reforms and philanthropic responses to civic space challenges.

At Philea, we host dedicated thematic funder groups on democracy, equality and climate issues as well as geographical funder groups. A growing community of democracy funders is exploring how philanthropy can support democratic resilience. This network provides opportunities for discussion, peer learning and collaboration for organisations wishing to deepen their engagement in this area. Many Philea members are also involved in Civitates, a pooled fund to support an independent civil society.

3. Building dialogue and influencing policy frameworks

Through dialogue with members, civil society partners and policymakers, several priorities consistently emerge as important for a healthy philanthropic and civic ecosystem. We collaborate closely with other CSOs and their umbrella networks as well as with policymakers to move towards the vision of a pluralistic society that works for people and planet, which includes a strong, vibrant philanthropy and wider civil society and social economy.

Our European Philanthropy Manifesto calls on policymakers in Europe to empower philanthropy via enabling frameworks at national, EU and international levels; to enable cross-border philanthropy; to engage in a more strategic dialogue with philanthropy; and to partner with philanthropy for the public good. Each December, EuroPhilantopics represents our key engagement moment for our members with EU policymakers. Participants jointly discuss respective strategies around addressing societal issues, creating enabling frameworks for action and collaboration.

We are pleased to see that many of our policy asks, including the call for a more structured public/philanthropy donor dialogue on civic space, are being picked up by the new EU Civil Society Strategy. Philea engages around this strategy and actively participates in the broader ecosystem surrounding it with a view to helping shape discussions on civic space and democracy at European level and promoting the Manifesto asks.

4. Connecting European and global efforts

We also engage in global work: we co-chair the Enabling Environment Working Group of our global partner WINGS. This work contributes to global efforts to strengthen enabling environments for philanthropy and civil society and includes the development of guidance, knowledge products and international case studies. Philea also represents the philanthropy sector towards the global Financial Action Task Force.

How to engage?

There are several ways organisations can contribute to and learn from this work:

Foundations are increasingly looking to learn from one another's responses to civic space challenges.

share experiences and evidence from your national context; participate in our Legal Affairs Committee, peer learning and thematic networks; contribute examples of responses to civic space challenges; engage in dialogue with policymakers and other sectors; and collaborate on research, analysis and capacity-building initiatives.

What we are learning from partners across Europe is that challenges to civic space, democratic participation and the enabling environment for philanthropy are deeply interconnected. No single actor can address them alone. Foundations, civil society organisations, policymakers, researchers and businesses all bring different perspectives and tools. The task ahead is not simply to defend existing space, but to strengthen the conditions that allow diverse voices, ideas and initiatives to contribute to democratic societies. We hope these observations and examples provide a basis for further dialogue, learning and collaboration.

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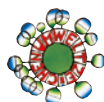
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1.200 Exemplare

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 Bundesministerium
Land- und Forstwirtschaft,
Klima- und Umweltschutz,
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Liebe Briefträger:innen!
Falls verzogen, bitte mit
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Prinz-Eugen-Straße 72/1.5
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