

**Dear President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen**

**Dear President of the European Council, Charles Michel**

**Dear Members of the European Parliament**

**Dear Members of the Governments of EU Member States**

**CC: Vera Jurova, European Commission Vice-President on Values and Transparency**

**The Croatian Presidency of the EU Council**

**The forthcoming German Presidency of the EU council**

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission presented a strategy of overcoming negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing the future for next generations (2020/98). It also presented a draft 7-year budget for the EU, which is intended to be an essential tool in achieving goals stated in the strategy (2020/442).

We appreciate that the strategy mentions the civil society as an important partner in facing the many challenges brought to our societies by the pandemic. However, we are deeply disappointed that civil society's role is not adequately reflected in the draft budget. This mismatch is clearly manifested by a proposal to cut the volume of the Rights and Values Programme by over 20 per cent compared to the already very low figure proposed by the Commission in 2018. The Programme was intended to support projects implemented by civil society organisations promoting and protecting common European values of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. It will not be effective without adequate financial resources.

We would like to remind you that the civil society is an element of democracy's critical infrastructure. CSOs serve their communities by safeguarding common European values enshrined in the Article 2 of the Treaty, and play key role in fostering European integration. With the outbreak of the pandemic, CSOs have proved their effectiveness and commitment to serving our societies and protecting foundational European values and norms. They have been active in supporting communities to better cope with the pandemic, including by providing social services to people at risk, such as the elderly, patients, people in quarantine, minorities, migrants and refugees. They launched projects boosting capacity of public healthcare institutions through support for medical workers, fundraising for hospitals, arranging medical equipment or running information campaigns about the pandemic. CSOs closely monitor the situation of human and civil rights during the lockdown and intervene when common European values are challenged. Their work will continue to be necessary to easing hardship caused by the pandemic to vulnerable social groups, to maintain social cohesion and solidarity, as well as to invigorate political legitimacy of the European project in the years after the pandemic.

Civil society organisations undertake all these activities while facing enormous financial constraints. Sources of funding for CSOs are becoming increasingly scarce – a process which accelerated with the outbreak of the pandemic.

We regret that the draft budget fails to acknowledge CSOs' contribution to European societies. We also regret that the proposal ignores long-standing calls of hundreds of organisations from across the EU, and other actors (including the European Parliament and the European

Economic and Social Committee) to increase support for CSOs. We are afraid that cutting the funds for the civil society will only aggravate the social and political problems that the EU will be facing in the coming years. It will also send a wrong signal about the EU's commitment to its values and citizens' rights.

We encourage you to rectify what appears to be a significant political mistake potentially affecting millions of European citizens. We call on you to significantly increase the budget of the Rights and Values fund, optimally to the level demanded by the European Parliament, i.e. to 1.83 billion EUR (current prices).

We will liaise with European and national institutions in order to make sure that the final Multiannual Financial Framework provides necessary means to civic organisations, which promote and protect common European rights and values on local, national and European levels.

We are looking forward to receiving a response to our concern. We are at your disposal for any clarification and constructive dialogue on this matter.

**Signatory organisations** (See the list [here](#)).