

EUROPEAN CIVIC ACADEMY

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REBUILDING TRUST IN DEMOCRACY

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVIL
SOCIETY AND
INSTITUTIONS:
LOST IN TRANSLATION?

2 JUNE ONLINE
15:00-18:00 CEST

ORGANISED BY:



WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



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ABOUT

The **European Civic Academy** was launched by the European Civic Forum in 2016 to connect and build bridges between civil society and academic agendas, to provide space for civil society actors to discuss with academics and identify priorities and possibilities for collaborations related to the role of CSOs in enhancing civic and democratic spaces in Europe. The objectives of the European Civic Academy are three fold: (1) mapping civil society needs in terms of research priorities; (2) enable civic actors to gain knowledge about existing research, methodology and approaches to inspire a strengthening and a renewal action framework; (3) increase awareness among academic researchers about civil society needs and priorities and identify collaborative opportunities for future research.

Three sessions have been organised so far: in 2016 in La Rochelle (France); in 2017 in Brussels; in 2019 in Slubice (Poland). It allowed exchanges, but not yet the building of a strong linkage between the civic actors and the academic world. The editions to come shall benefit from the cooperation process that has developed between ECF, Civil Society Europe, Solidar and the Collegium Polonicum Foundation.

During this fourth edition of the European Civic Academy, we will bring together leading academics and civic actors to discuss obstacles and ways forward for civic organisations and social movements in the current context, characterised by growing distrust in democracy and divisions inside our societies. **Read the working paper for the event [here](#). Read the Key Takeaways from the March 2021 session [here](#).**

SESSION 2: DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONS: LOST IN TRANSLATION?

2 JUNE, 15:00-18:15 CET, ZOOM

In many countries and at the European level, **dialogue between institutions and civil society is often weak when not absent**. Governments and institutions often praise consultation with individuals through online processes at the detriment of dialogue with the collective approaches brought by organisations and movements. The role expected from organised civil society is often restricted to service delivery. In some countries, Governments are even establishing “their” NGOs in order to side-line independent ones.

For policymakers to protect the common good, **there is a need to ensure the proper functioning of civil dialogue at the central and local level**. The management of the COVID-19 crisis by institutions could be an opportunity for change. Close cooperation and dialogue often developed with local authorities, concerning mostly local actions, is a promising example, but often not replicated at the national level.

- Being an intermediary body between citizens and institutions, **how can organised civil society contribute to rebuilding trust in democracy and institutions?** What can we learn from the situations where public authorities and civil society's dialogue seems to work? How can we ensure that rebuilding trust also takes a European dimension? How can the Conference for the Future of Europe involve civil society to close the gap between citizens' demands and policy outcomes?
- **What are the tools and means to bring people's voices to the institutions when civil dialogue channels are not functioning?** How can civil society reclaim a political voice without being dismissed as a partisan actor? What are the lessons to be learned from civic activism that created political platforms?

PROGRAMME

Session 2: Dialogue between civil society and institutions: lost in translation?

02 June, 15:00–18:00 CEST, Zoom

- 15:00 **Welcome:** Presentation of European Civic Forum & Civil Society Europe study on civil dialogue.
- 15:20 **Scene setting:** the role of civil society as a mediator and source of trust
Discussion with:
- **Prof. Dr. Christian Lahusen**, Professor of Comparative Cultural Sociology and Political Sociology in Europe, University of Siegen
 - **Patrizia Heidegger**, Civil Society Europe.
- Moderated** by **Dr. Frank Heuberger**, National Network for Civil Society, Germany.
- 15:50 **Break-out groups***
- 17:10 **Coffee Break**
- 17:20 **Closing Session**
- Reactions and Q&A Session with:
- **Julien Mousnier**, Head of Unit Citizens, Equality, Democracy and Rules of Law, Secretariat General, European Commission.
 - **Mikael Leyi**, Secretary General, SOLIDAR.
 - **Professor Kalypso Nicolaidis**, Chair of the School of Transnational Governance, Professor of International Affairs, European University Institute.
- Moderated** by **Iverna Mc Gowan**, Secretary General & Director, Europe Centre for Democracy and Technology.
- 18:15 **END**

* BREAKOUT TOPICS

15:50-17:10 CEST

Format

Each group is hosted by one academic that presents the findings of its research (20 minutes) and then moderates a session of Q&A with the activists in the audience to discuss how the research reflects (or not) their reality on the ground.

- 1 **Civil society at European level: a common notion and a contested space**
Host: **Dr. Rupert Graf Strachwitz**, Director, Maecenata Institute for Philanthropy and Civil Society, Berlin.

What are the challenges to understanding civil society as a concept at European level? How to address the issues of its involvement in European policy making and a contested civic space?

- 2 **Civil society in the European decision-making: what are the opportunities and challenges in the Conference for the Future of Europe?**

Host: **Prof. Dr Carlo Ruzza** Political Sociology, University of Trento.

How has the role of civil society evolved in the narratives and frameworks of the European project? What are the drivers of the change in role? And how does the Conference for the Future of Europe reflect this evolution?

- 3 **Another politics is possible: how can cities and villages reinvent democracy?**

Host: **Elisabeth Dau**, Director of recherche at Mouvement Utopia & CommonsPolis.

Municipalism is a rising local governance trend relying on grassroots civic mobilisations and putting people and the common good at the centre of politics. What lessons can we learn and how can they be reproduced at bigger scale?

* BREAKOUT TOPICS (CONTINUED)

15:50–17:10 CEST

4 **Civil society's struggles in illiberal regimes: the case of Western Balkans**

Host: **Jelena Vasiljevic**, Researcher, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade & Member of BiEPAG - Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.

What is the potential of new forms of civic engagement in aggregating positive narratives that break the vicious circle of disillusionment with the transitional promise of democratisation and prosperity?

5 **Building civil society legitimacy: what are effective strategies and narratives?**

Host: **Saskia Brechenmacher**, Fellow, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

How can NGOs build their legitimacy to interact with their institutional and political counterparts? What lessons can be learnt from civil society under attack around the world?

ORGANISATIONS

The **European Civic Forum** is a pan European network that brings together over 100 associations and NGOs across 28 European countries: a great variety of civic organisations ranging from big federations of associations deeply rooted in local constituencies, national platforms of NGOs uniting hundreds of thousands of NGOs across different sectors, human rights advocacy and campaigning organisations, or smaller groups working at community level or engaging with the public on local issues around the democratic values of Equality, Solidarity and Inclusiveness.

Foundation for Collegium Polonicum strives to encourage various forms of citizens' activity, strengthening pro-social attitudes, development of an awareness and involvement amid civil society. The Foundation's mission is based on an active cooperation with the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland) and the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) (Germany). We aim to build the bridge of understanding and cooperation between NGOs, local governments, universities and the society.

Civil Society Europe (CSE) brings together 29 European networks of civil society organisations (CSO) working towards regenerating the European project around the shared values of Equality, Solidarity, Inclusiveness and Democracy. Our main objectives: to facilitate and enable horizontal and vertical dialogue between European civil society organisations and policymakers and help strengthening CSOs in their activities and relations with the institutions. The organisation was founded in December 2014 in Rome at the close of the European Year of citizens as an initiative of organisations that had worked together in the European Year of Citizens Alliance.

SOLIDAR Foundation is a European and worldwide network of Civil Society Organisations working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. With over 60 member organisations based in 29 countries (24 of which are EU countries), member organisations are national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working to advance in Europe and worldwide.

Please **REGISTER** for the event
by **Monday 31st May 2021**.

For more information, please contact:
contact@civic-forum.eu

www.civic-forum.eu | +33 1 80 05 19 12

