

DEMOCRACY SOLIDARITY RIGHTS FOR ALL!

There is another way.



About this document	3
There is another way: To earn people’s trust, we must build a future different from the past	5
European Civic Forum	
Civil Society for EU - 2024 Election Manifesto	9
Civil Society for EU Coalition	
About European Civic Forum	20

Table of Contents


About this document

This document was compiled by the European Civic Forum (ECF). It is made up of two sections which together comprise ECF's 2024 European election manifesto.

The first section is ECF's foreword "To earn people's trust, we must build a future different from the past". It outlines the challenges Europe has been facing over the last five years, how anti-democratic forces seek to capitalise on this, and why there is another way forward: listening to and delivering on people's needs. To do this, the EU institutions must recognise Civil Society as a key partner in these efforts.

The second part of this document is the Civil Society for EU manifesto, created collaboratively by a coalition of EU networks, including ECF. The manifesto, backed by more than 180 civil society organisations and counting, sets out our demands for how the EU can truly recognise and promote the role of civil society: by introducing a Civil Society Strategy and a Civil Dialogue agreement.





**TO EARN PEOPLE'S
TRUST
WE MUST
BUILD A FUTURE
DIFFERENT
FROM THE PAST**

European Civic Forum, December 2023

Over the last five years, people in Europe and around the world have faced a series of crises. Life has become more difficult, and many are left with deep fears for their futures. Anti-democratic forces seek to exploit these anxieties and divide our societies.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER WAY.

By listening to people's concerns and delivering on their needs, our representatives can build a different future and regain trust.

Peace, justice, and human, social and environmental security should be the core principles and values guiding EU policies. Civil society organisations work towards these goals every day, often stretching way beyond their means to assist those in need. To build a future different from the past, they must be recognised as key partners.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed our interconnected personal, collective, and systemic vulnerabilities.

It showed us that unequal societies go hand in hand with human suffering, fragile economies and malfunctioning democracies.

Beyond the disaster of a public health crisis, the pandemic shined a spotlight on the limits of our global economic system, which is the root cause of environmental destruction and climate change, social insecurity, and erosion of trust in democracy. Europe's postwar model of social and labour protection and wealth redistribution has all but faded away. The dominance of finance in economic development, combined with economic globalisation, has progressively stripped away the power of state institutions to properly enact social policies and provide services for the common good.

The climate crisis has become a major threat to our societies,

often hitting first and hardest those who contribute little to global warming, loss of biodiversity or pollution. The neglect of this issue by the world's politicians over so many years has brought us to this dangerous point and without bold and brave solutions this crisis will only sweep everything away.

War, occupation, and war crimes in Ukraine and in the Middle East, along with so many other long-lasting violent conflicts around the world, have caused enormous destruction and human suffering and led to the large-scale displacement of populations. The EU's promise to be a relevant actor on the world stage working for justice and peace falls short of expectations.

It is all the more worrying to see that many member states concentrate on building "fortress Europe", that would allow them to live in safety.

When not properly addressed, these crises feed a climate of fear and anxiety, exacerbated over the last few years by increasing inequality and the rising cost of living. For the many people in the EU who are facing poverty, precarity, exclusion, and discrimination, it adds to the feeling that the democratic system is simply not delivering.

To earn people's trust we must build a future different from the past

Neglecting the grievances of large parts of the population paves the way for anti-democratic forces to widen divisions in our societies. As in other dark periods of history, they propose to split societies along nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexuality, along with narratives and political offers that suggest some are more entitled than others to enjoy effective access to social and economic rights and collective protections. This forces people into a competition for the rights and dignity that they are all entitled to, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER WAY.

By addressing these challenges from within, our representatives can rebuild trust in democracy and make the future better than the past.

That means prioritising policies for internal cohesion and resilience, equality, civil liberties and participation, in European and national policymaking, in line with Articles 2, 3 and 11 of the EU treaties and the Charter on Fundamental Rights.

Tackling these challenges in Europe requires **global systemic answers** and a new impetus for **multilateralism** and **solidarity**, including emancipation from **colonial legacy** and an acknowledgement of the historic and current social responsibilities of corporations and rich countries.

Peace, justice, and human, social and environmental security should be the core principles and values guiding EU policies and actions

inside and outside our borders. Creating a sense of security means ensuring the universality and primacy of effective access to rights and freedoms (civil, political, humanitarian, social, economic, environmental, and cultural) that are fundamental to human life.

Civil society organisations are vital actors working towards these goals.

Daily, and more so in times of crisis, they mobilise their means and know-how, stretching way beyond their usual capacities, to assist those in need. Everywhere, they are on the front line to witness the precarious situations people suffer from, working to mitigate the dire costs of a crisis, or to plug the holes left by institutional policies (or lack thereof), especially for the vulnerable parts of our societies.

At the same time, they fight for those gaps to be filled, through the advancement of rights, social inclusion and equality. They galvanise people to participate in community and democratic life. They work to preserve and enlarge the space for civil society to express views, take action and hold authorities to account, which is necessary for truly democratic, cohesive, and resilient societies. As institutions should be, they are also more and more connected across borders to protect democratic values from destructive pressures, and regressive forces.

While their role and impact are clear to see, they are not always recognised. Civil society organisations must be considered by institutions as key partners in building a different future and restoring trust in democracy.

Their capacity to act freely during and beyond crisis must be protected and strengthened by the local, national, and European institutions. Their knowledge and practices are needed to make Europe resilient and ready to face the future.

Alongside the Civil Society for EU coalition, ECF urges the institutions to rise to the challenges of the times, and to recognise, support and cooperate with the civic actors whose work and values are devoted to building democratic and resilient societies! 🇪🇺

2024 EU Elections Manifesto

For better civic space
and civil dialogue

Coordinated by **Social Platform** and **Civil Society Europe**
Contacts platform@socialplatform.org ; info@civilsocietyeurope.eu



Civil society is an essential part of **healthy democracies**.

We play a key role in promoting and protecting the rule of law and **fundamental rights**.

We provide **crucial and empowering services** that enable people and societies to be more resilient in times of crisis, and more inclusive overall.

We provide **a platform for people** - especially marginalised groups - to connect with policy makers and participate in decisions that affect them.

Yet, **civic space** - the political, legislative, social and economic environment that enables people and civil society actors to play their role in shaping our societies - is shrinking all over the world, with **growing restrictions at all levels**. The EU and its Member States are no exception to this trend.

Moreover, **civil dialogue** - the essential exchange between civil society and policy-makers - is not sufficiently open, transparent or regular, leading to a democratic deficit which means that many people living in the EU are uncatered for.

We envisage a European Union where civic space is strengthened and civil dialogue is valued and encouraged, so that we as civil society - including the philanthropy sector - can continue to exercise our vital role in achieving positive social outcomes and increased wellbeing for all.

We call on European political parties and groups to make civic space and civil dialogue central topics in the 2024 European elections, and on the future European Parliament and European Commission to take concrete steps during the next five years to better recognise, protect and engage civil society at all levels.



A European Civil Society Strategy

While some encouraging measures have been taken at European level in support of civic actors, these will have limited impact in countering the shrinking space trend if there is no comprehensive EU strategy dedicated to civil society.

To fill the gaps in existing policies and to mainstream positive practices, we call on the EU institutions to develop a **Civil Society Strategy aimed at strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders** and at protecting them from attacks and smear campaigns, with the following **key areas:**



A EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY

A safe and enabling environment for civil society

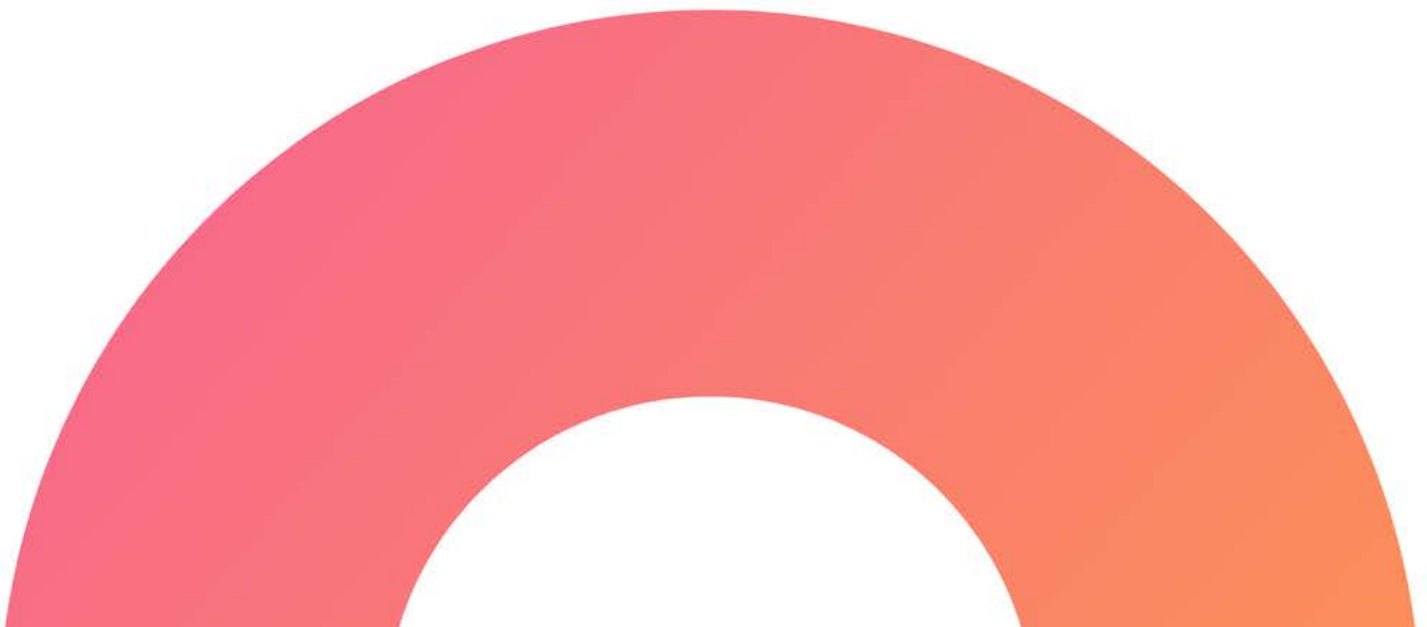
- **An open, safe, accessible and enabling regulatory and political environment** is a prerequisite for civil society to thrive and meaningfully play its fundamental role. All restrictions to civic space and barriers to action must be removed, and freedom of association, assembly and expression must be guaranteed at any time in all civic matters, as enshrined in EU and international law.
- We call on decision makers and institutions at EU and national level to commit to the formal recognition of the role, value, and specificity of civil society, and to speak up to promote them. They should also commit to protect and support CSOs through different regulatory and policy measures, as well as ensure that all policies impacting the civil society sector are in line with EU fundamental rights.
- As societal challenges have an increasingly European or even global dimension, it is critical to enable full transnational cooperation among CSOs. Existing obstacles to civil society cross-border activities - e.g. legal and fiscal uncertainties - should be addressed.



A EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY

An **EU mechanism to protect civil society, activists and defenders**

- Civil society staff and volunteers, human rights and environmental activists and defenders, as well as the communities they represent, **must be protected from all forms of discrimination on any ground, and from judicial or other forms of harassment, violence or ill-treatment.** Special attention should be placed on minorities, marginalised groups and those who defend them, who are more frequently under attack.
- We call on the EU to develop a mechanism that allows CSOs, activists and defenders to report on an ongoing basis all forms of attacks, threats, smear campaigns and limitations of civic space, and to address such reports in a timely manner. This mechanism should include an early warning system to help prevent such threats from arising.





A EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY

Adequate funding

- As civil society actors we need proper human, material and financial resources to carry out our role effectively. **Access to multi-annual, consistent, and flexible structural funding for CSOs should be guaranteed** to respond to operational needs and ensure stability, long-term planning and independence.
- Civil society should be involved from the beginning in the design of funding policies and programmes, including the definition of thematic priorities and accessibility criteria. A structured mechanism should be put in place to ensure adequate and regular dialogue and information flow between civil society and public donors on the implementation of funding programmes.
- **Overall accessibility to funding should be increased**, especially for small-size, grassroots and volunteer-run organisations, by simplifying administrative procedures and reducing the overall bureaucratic burden. CSOs should also be guaranteed increased access to core funding in the shape of grants, to carry out their policy and advocacy work on behalf of the groups and communities they represent.
- EU and national policies should remove regulatory and fiscal obstacles to access funding and donations, including across borders, and facilitate cross-border philanthropy.



A civil dialogue agreement

Civil dialogue should be organised on an equal footing to social dialogue along the entire policy-making cycle and treated as distinct and complementary to forms of citizen engagement.

We call on the EU institutions to conclude a civil dialogue agreement, **recognising civil dialogue as an essential element of European participatory democracy**. This agreement should be developed in cooperation with civil society, to ensure it fully reflects its needs.

It should aim to harmonise standards for civil dialogue across EU institutions and Member States, so that every opportunity for civil dialogue leads to quality engagement. It should also provide space for cross-sectoral dialogue on transversal developments and strategic priorities.

- CSOs in all their diversity need to be given a real seat at the table to contribute meaningfully to all steps of policy-making - at both EU and national level - on behalf of the groups and communities they represent, going beyond box ticking exercises and consultations. CSOs should be involved as key strategic partners in the co-creation of policies, programme development, policy debates and agenda-setting exercises, among others.
- Openness and transparency of EU and national policy processes should be increased, ensuring effective access to decision-makers and to documents - including legislative preparatory works - and making all relevant information available in an accessible, clear and timely manner.



- The mandate of the Vice President of both the European Parliament and the European Commission in charge of dialogue with civil society needs to be confirmed and further strengthened. It should be developed to ensure a more structured civil dialogue, as well as to assess overall coherence of EU policies impacting on civil society, with the aim of supporting a thriving civic space. The mandate should also include proactive support for civic actors under pressure.
- Permanent civil dialogue structures should be created at the appropriate level in each relevant Member State and EU institution - including the European Council - ensuring overall consistency and coordination within and among institutions. CSOs taking part in such structures should receive adequate support in terms of funding and resources to ensure the operational capacity to meaningfully participate in such dialogues.



About the manifesto proponents

Civil Society for EU is a broad and diverse coalition of civil society and philanthropy organisations at the EU and national level, working in fields such as human rights, social policies, international cooperation, democracy support, environment, health, youth, children, women and girls, and the representation of marginalised groups.

We collectively represent millions of people living in the EU and are independent of any political party.

For all matters regarding the manifesto and campaign, please contact Social Platform and Civil Society Europe at:
platform@socialplatform.org or **info@civilsocietyeurope.eu**



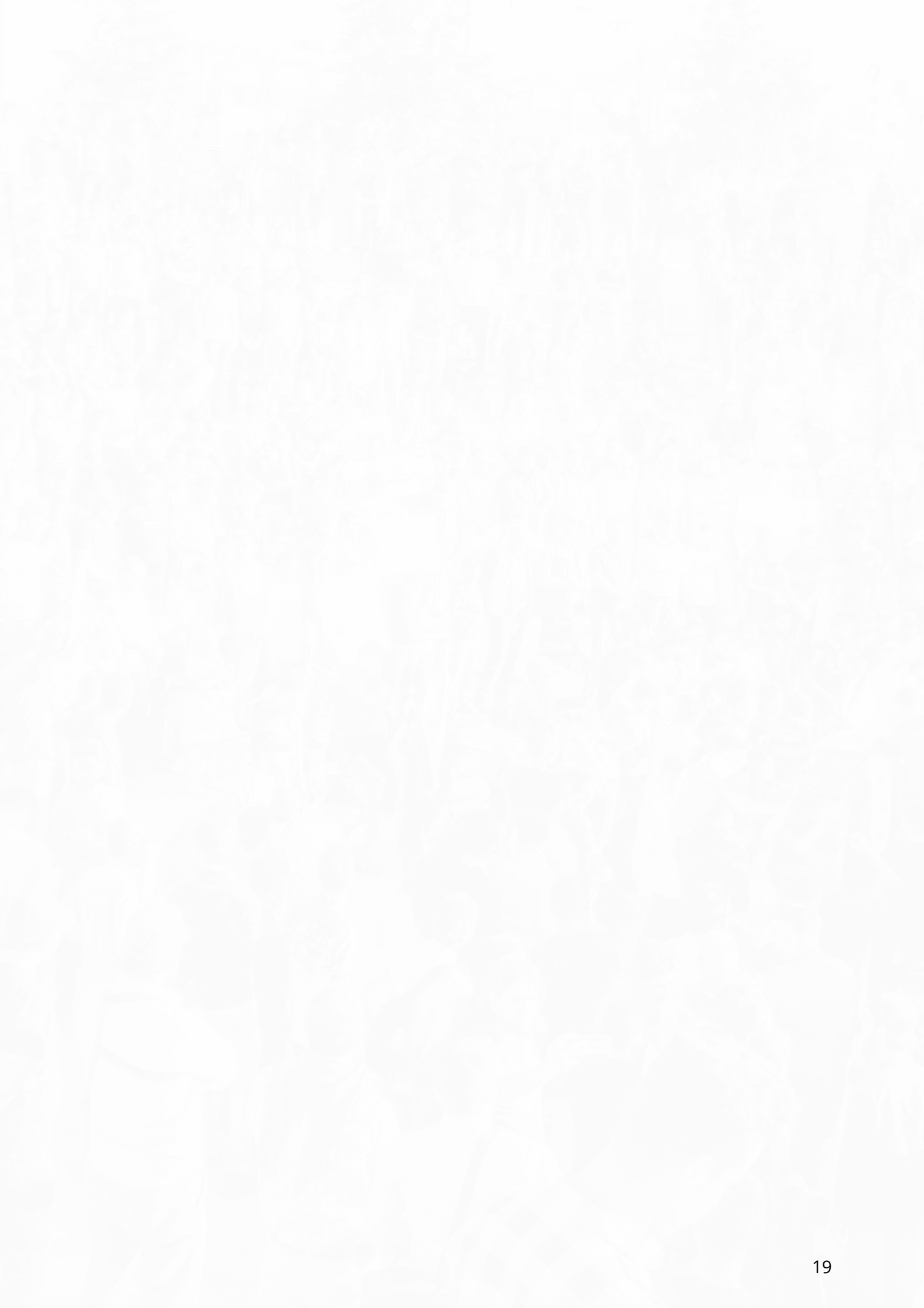
We are funded by:



Co-funded by
the European Union



Views and opinions expressed are those of the manifesto proponents only and do not necessarily reflect those of the donors. The sole responsibility for the content lies with the authors.



About the European Civic Forum

European Civic Forum (ECF) is a pan-European network of more than 100 associations and NGOs across 29 European countries. Founded in 2005 by our member organisations, we have spent nearly two decades working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity and democracy in Europe.

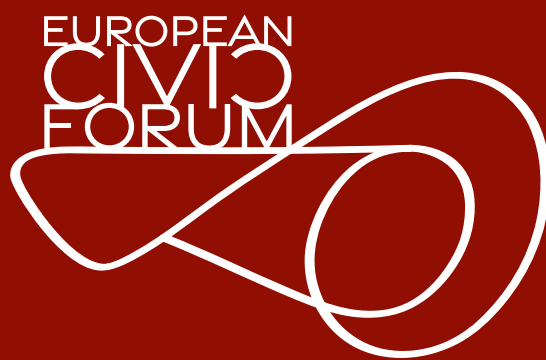
[Learn more about ECF!](#)



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or [name of the granting authority]. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.





CIVIC-FORUM.EU

CIVICSPACEWATCH.EU



Co-funded by
the European Union