



Berlin Agenda

European Civil Society demands towards the European Elections 2019 and beyond

WE, CIVIC ACTORS, share the vision and believe that Europe is our common future, but another Europe is necessary, urgent and possible.

WE call upon citizens all across Europe to reclaim and practice together, by raising our voices and strengthening our alliances and common work, democracy, equality, solidarity and inclusion, which should be at the core of the debate on the future of Europe and our societies. We need an innovative and courageous plan for Europe in common. A Europe based on democracy and freedom, rights and equality, social and climate justice, solidarity and inclusiveness, peace and environmental sustainability.

This agenda was drawn up in the framework of the European Conference “Not without Us!”¹ on 21-22 March 2019 in Berlin organised by BBE - Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement with the support of the European Civic Forum as part of the European campaign “Make Europe Great for All - #MEGA”². The “**Berlin Agenda**” compiles positions, proposals and demands previously adopted and published by numerous civil society networks, associations, foundations and think tanks, listed under our core common issues: A truly **democratic Europe**, with a vital **Civic Space** and based upon the paradigms of **Sustainability and Social Equality**.

The Berlin Agenda is not intended to be a new position paper replacing existing ones; rather it aims to draw from existing manifestos and policy proposals in order to give more visibility and strength to civil society campaigns and initiatives in the light of the upcoming European Elections in May 2019 and beyond, showcasing civil society's vision for the future of Europe. It will serve as an open document to be worked on beyond the 2019 European Election. We will also, track the implementation of proposals, campaigns and initiatives.

¹ <https://megacampaign.eu/events/berlin-conference/>

² <https://megacampaign.eu/>



European Elections and beyond: what is at stake?

The winners and losers of the European promise

Out of the ashes of war, sixty years ago, Europe grew as a promise of peace, freedom, well-being and democracy. Today, many Europeans benefit from free movement, cheaper flights and no more roaming fees. EU workers are entitled to four weeks paid holidays a year. We can live, work or retire anywhere in the EU. The EU is meant to be a driver of economic progress. Yet, despite overall long-term economic growth, the European promise is challenged by rising and intolerable inequalities between the rich and the poor. A quarter of Europeans face poverty or social exclusion. The number of people “left-behind” is rising and the many that fear being left behind are anxious about their future and have lost trust in the political system.

The challenge to democracy when people fear for their future

The European project is built on advancements in rights and democracy, on victories against dictatorship and authoritarian regimes, on struggles to overcome colonialism, patriarchy and racism. But unifying the markets without upscaling rights and equality has been a great mistake and the price we risk paying for it is high. The growing audience for and electoral success of regressive populist agendas across Europe shows more than ever that current policies do not properly address people’s expectations. More and more people think that Europe is not an answer to their problems. Nationalism, xenophobia, and identity politics based on exclusion are becoming substitutes for a shared future.

There is no alternative but to change the course of policies

Positive, fragile but real winds seem to be back in the European Union’s sails, with recessions replaced by some economic growth and plans to increase investment.. The question is then: who is to benefit from these winds? The current model has led to fragmentation, social and inter-generational competition, tensions between creditor and debtor countries, fear and tensions between natives and migrants, competition between people facing poverty and precarious situations. The challenge is to bring more democracy, equality and solidarity for all in order to break the vicious circle of unjust policies and regressive populist responses.



Changing Europe from the bottom up: a democracy that gives voice to all

The socio-economic, environmental, institutional and political crises reveal the need for politics for the common good, based on the values we mentioned, to regain primacy over technocracy and particular economic and financial interests. In order to transform Europe and recapture lost voices, technical policy debates are insufficient: citizens need to have a say on European political life. Business as usual is not an option. A truly democratic society needs open and responsive institutions and a strong and recognized civil society. People power and informed citizens are key to the democratic functioning of our societies.

Civil society is crucial in order to organize and channel citizens' needs and aspirations as well as to represent their frustrations and grievances to institutions. Associations can be drivers in promoting and upholding European values but also in challenging the institutional and political frameworks to put the common good at the forefront of decision making. This requires recognition of associations' role and legitimacy to do so.

Create an open and enabling environment for civil society

At a time when civil society space is attacked everywhere in Europe and is in real danger in some countries, it is crucial to **publically support and recognize** the added value that **civil society** brings to European democracies by acting everyday to make rights effective for all, educating citizens on EU values and alerting about breaches to the rule of law. Organised civil society is a sustainable actor for the defence of these values and for social justice for the long term. Alongside, issue-driven and short-lived citizens' movements emerge. They can be very impactful on short-term demands. The potential of all these different forms of engagement to revive democracy depends on the institutions' capacity and willingness to recognize them, to engage in dialogue and answer their claims.

- **Freedom of association and assembly** should be recognised, alongside the freedom and pluralism of media, among the **indicators for democracy** while assessing the implementation of EU values, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- The mandate of the **European Agency for Fundamental Rights** should be expanded and strengthened in order to develop more values-based policies and ensure that European legislation does not downplay rights. Crucially, the mandate should allow the agency to carry out in-depth country by country assessments about the respect and implementation of fundamental rights both by EU institutions and Member States and to receive and investigate complaints. Such assessment should be set up and implemented in coordination with other relevant institutions in the monitoring of human rights and with civil society actors.
- The institutional monitoring should be linked to a **more effective sanctioning system**. The EU cannot become complacent about breaches of its values: it should condemn and have the tools to hold governments to account for them. A reflection on positive conditionality



and new forms of sanctioning which target governments and simultaneously engage societies is needed.

- For countries covered by the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the EU should assist the consolidation of democracy by enhancing the role of civil society to achieve sustainability.
- A robust, independent and diversified organised civil society is underpinned by **adequate public financing**. Strengthening civil society means improving access to financing for the smallest organisations and the most disadvantaged sectors of society as well as for national organisations and European infrastructural organisations that allow for the creation of a European civic space.
- The new strand of funding to support the promotion and protection of fundamental values, as part of the **Rights and Values funding programme**, needs ambitious resources. The Commission should ensure that in the implementation of this strand of the programme, the fund is accessible to European, national and local CSOs across the Member States, including human rights defenders aiming to promote and protect the EU's fundamental values. In order to reach its aim, the fund should cover operational costs as well as litigation, capacity building and watchdog activities.
- The European Commission should react promptly with relevant measures, including infringement procedures against Member States, when national administrative or legal provisions restrict the access of national civil society organisations to EU funds, including when funding conditions are imposed that restrict their advocacy activities.

Foster a culture of active participation

- The European Union and member states should **empower citizens** of all ages, genders and social conditions **to fully participate in social, cultural and democratic life** and promote life-long learning to facilitate their active involvement in all aspects of life.
- **Social inclusion and active citizenship** are strongly connected. A culture of active participation requires specific attention to ensure that no citizen residing in the EU is excluded, and that no citizen is at risk of exclusion or discrimination due to the lack of respect for their social and economic rights.
- **Citizenship education and the promotion of critical thinking** should empower people to actively participate in public debates and in voting for elections. To this end, the EU should support and encourage **reforms to education systems** to help young people become active citizens and ensure they are involved in societal progress. While recognising degrees in formal education, in addition to employability, set a focus on providing quality citizenship education for all, so that young people practice critical thinking and enhance political and media literacy. Activism and non-formal education experiences provided by CSO should be recognised for their educational and societal value. The contributions of youth work, volunteering and non-formal education to people's lives and to society more broadly should be formally recognised.



- The revival of a **free, trusted and pluralistic media** in Europe is also a crucial component of a culture of active participation. Legislation must be enforced against media monopolies and dominant market positions to guarantee transparency of media ownership and management. Member States should be called to ensure independent oversight and effective compliance mechanisms in order to prevent conflicts of interests, ensure editorial independence and safeguard the media's role as public watchdog. The **protection of whistle blowers** should also be safeguarded.

Democratising European democracy to serve European common good

In order to rebuild trust in democracy and universal values that a growing part of the European population has lost, there is no other way than to demonstrate that democracy is delivering for social cohesion.

The idea of "Europeanness" with a democratically engaged citizenry, cannot simply be promoted from the top and should be driven by European citizens themselves. The European Union project has been developed by unifying the single market. During the last decades, citizens have witnessed rising inequality and growing precariousness. Today there is a need to move towards a truly democratic Union, inspired by the principles of representative democracy, participation and accountability that not only delivers on the economic but also on the social dimension.

Make EU democracy more representative of people's needs and diversity

The European Union institutions should reinforce representative democracy and restore the legitimacy of the European Union by increasing democratic accountability and control of decisions by the citizens.

- Within the current institutional and legal framework, strong **political weight should be given to the European Parliament**; as the sole European institution directly elected by European citizens: it is unacceptable that its role is reduced to co-decision with the Council and that its power is restricted to the capacity to block or amend. **Transnational lists** for EU elections should be established in order to give concrete substance to a European constituency and to move towards a European Parliament that makes decisions for the European common good.
- Make it easier for **underprivileged groups** including young people, women, poor people, migrants, disabled people, LGBTI people, Roma... **to vote in elections or run as candidates**. Encourage political parties to promote them within their own structures.
- Make laws that ensure **transparency in political campaign funding and spending**. Reform European and national electoral laws to ensure that every vote counts, seats elected match the votes they received.



- The EU must guarantee the right to information, participation and justice for all, as well as **greater transparency in decision-making and lobbying activities**, and improve **restrictions on “revolving doors” practices**.
- **Put an end to lobbying secrecy: a Mandatory EU transparency register** for all lobbyists is essential for institutions to become more accountable and for journalists and citizens to be able to understand who influences EU politics. It is an essential and necessary step towards making EU policy-making more transparent and closer to citizens and the common good.

Give citizens and their organisations real say in EU decision-making processes

Participatory democracy is a democratic imperative that helps strengthen representative democracy and ensure effective scrutiny of decision-making, including the appropriate and sustainable articulation of the economic, social and democratic components of the European project.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union has introduced a major innovation: the concept of citizens’ participation through its Article 11. Yet, 10 years after its adoption, its provisions have failed to be implemented apart from the European Citizens Initiative and with limited results. The ability of citizens to be part of decisions beyond voting in elections is still very limited resulting in double dissatisfaction with the policies themselves and with the lack of possibilities to influence decisions.

In order to establish a consistent framework defining the relations between civil society and the European Union and concrete participatory mechanisms, Article 11’s provisions in its four dimensions – developing a European public sphere, Civil Dialogue, Consultation, and Citizen’s participation – have the potential to make Europe more citizen-powered. They can be given concrete substance through the following processes:

- Organise **randomly-selected Citizens’ Assemblies** at the national and/or EU-level to develop concrete recommendations on the democratic future of Europe.
- Tap into the potential of **European Citizens’ Initiative’s (ECI) to make citizens agenda setters**: with the recent reform, ECI becomes a more user-friendly tool of participatory and direct democracy in Europe. Yet, its political impact on the EU agenda remains the weakest point in the new regulation.
- **Improve the framework of public consultations** towards more user-friendliness, accessibility for the general public, transparency and responsiveness of the European Commission to the contributions received and the way they have been taken into account in drafting legislation.
- All **EU institutions** must **review their terms of engagement with civil society** organisations to avoid box-ticking, one-way and one-off consultations, and ensure that organisations can contribute in a timely and informed manner to EU policy making.



- Adopt an **inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue**, for EU institutions to engage in open, regular and transparent dialogue with civil society organisations, **granting NGOs participatory status** within EU policy making processes following the example of international institutions such as the UN or the Council of Europe.
- The **mandate of the new first Vice-president of the European Commission** in charge of the rule of law and fundamental rights should include a specific objective to respect, **protect and promote the role of civil society**. The mandate should include a requirement to coordinate work across the Commission and ensure all EU leaders systematically engage into dialogue with civil society.
- **Civil dialogue** should be implemented by all relevant EU and national institutions at all levels of decision-making. In order to restore confidence, it is important that citizens have on the one hand easy access to information concerning the decision-making process both at EU level and through their elected representatives and their government, but on the other hand they should also be able to take part in a meaningful way in such decision-making.

Making Europe socially just and sustainable for present and future generations

We need a democratic Europe where the common good and social and environmental rights come before particular economic interests. Europe should implement ambitious socio-economic convergence policies to curb the great imbalances between countries and territories, social groups and people, men and women in Europe, in our neighbourhoods, regions and in the whole world. Europe is not just the EU, the future of Europe will also be determined at its fringes.

We call for a truly inclusive European social model beyond the GDP indicator, that combines economy and well-being, a model that serves the people and the environment. The EU, nation states, local authorities and communities should be co-active parts of this fairer, inclusive, sustainable solution.

Ensure equal access to fundamental rights for all

- Public policies and legislative measures should ensure that, in line with European and international human rights law, **all European citizens and residents enjoy the same level of protection and can exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms**, allowing them to live according to their own convictions under the principles of self-determination and human dignity, free from discrimination.
- To restore citizens' trust in a Union that is willing and has the capacity to meet their needs, EU institutions should ensure **equal access to socio-economic rights for all** and ensure **citizens' involvement through civil and political rights**.
- **Harmonise social policies upward** and promote universal access to social services and adequate safety nets, as well as an inclusive, fair and equal labour market.



- Ensure **equal representation of women and men in political decision-making in EU bodies**, including in the EU “top jobs”.
- Adopt **European targets for care infrastructures for dependent, elderly and disabled persons**. Adopt a ‘care guarantee’ to address care needs throughout the life-cycle, as a valuable part of functioning of society and invest in the care economy by directing investments in the EU budget in this area.
- Adopt a **European Disability Strategy 2020-2030** based on the establishment of a structured dialogue with people with disabilities and their representative organisations with an independent budget line.

Adopt a **people-centred response to migration**. Asylum seekers should be welcomed in Europe and treated in the spirit of the UN Conventions.

Towards social and environmental sustainability in Europe

- The **European Social Model should provide full and fair protection to all citizens**, while alleviating poverty and providing opportunities for everyone to thrive. Social inclusion and protection, decent work, gender equality, public health and health care, access to affordable and quality housing, environmental justice, quality education and equal access to culture, must be the main principles driving national and European political agendas.
- Support measures that ensure a quality school-to-work transition. Invest strongly in the **Youth Guarantee** and in improving its effectiveness, so that it can offer a future for all young people, in particular the most vulnerable.
- Effective and coordinated taxation measures should ensure that all companies pay their **fair share of taxes** and contribute to national and European public budgets for access to socio-economic rights and wellbeing. The EU must commit to effectively **fighting tax evasion** worldwide and shut down European tax havens.
- The Paris Agreement for climate should be fully implemented and reflected in the alignment of the EU’s emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2050 with the **commitment to limit temperature increases to 1.5°C and through ambitious EU climate policies**, including a rapid phase-out of all fossil fuels, and moving from energy efficiency towards an absolute decrease of energy use. The EU should accelerate the just and sustainable transition to a 100% renewable energy supply, which is clean, affordable and supports community ownership and does not lead to energy poverty.
- The new European Parliament should mandate a **Commission President to be in charge of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals**, which should serve as the overarching framework for the EU’s development up to 2030.
- Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is imperative to produce **healthier food and give fair prices for European small scale and organic farmers**. This should mean more environmental and nature protection, increased food sovereignty, regional farmers’ markets, healthier food systems, less food waste and the halting of dumping in the Global



South. The EU should prioritise the transition towards organic, small scale agriculture, and reforestation as key measures for fighting climate change.

- The EU Budget should use its potential to catalyse sustainability and economic justice and wellbeing, through investment in social infrastructure, education, culture, and climate action. This includes phasing out unsustainable investments and subsidies as well as strengthening accountability mechanisms. In other words, it should be a budget made for and with people and the planet.



Make Europe great for all: the way forward

The present agenda is a living document collecting civil society proposals for an ambitious vision of the European project.

We, civic actors are committed to:

- ❖ Reclaiming our political voice and deliberative space to point at the failures of current policy and political frameworks and to contributing to the rebuilding of a European project for a society based on the values of inclusivity, equality and solidarity.
- ❖ Raising awareness on the indivisibility of all rights: political, civil, economic, social and environmental, because when one category of rights is under attack, the whole body of rights is shrinking.
- ❖ Building convergence of our struggles for democracy and social justice in order to bring about systemic change.
- ❖ Developing a European civil society strategy that discusses not only the mechanisms and functioning of democracy, but also its capacity to deliver inclusive policies for all.
- ❖ Following European civil society gatherings and debates beyond the European elections continuing to develop this vision into concrete proposals.
- ❖ Working together with all institutions and political forces willing to make this agenda a reality.



References

AGE Platform: The Europe we want is for all ages!

https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/PRESS_RELEASE_21_February_2019_Launch_of_AGE_EP_campaign.pdf

Austrian Institute for International Affairs

BAOBAB experience, Italy.

Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement.

Civil Society Europe: Civic Space in Europe

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UG4PIg7tObjUoK9tBKq3ldqCT-eB5iM9/view>

Democracy International.

Deutscher Naturschutzring.

European Alternatives.

European Civic Forum: Make Europe Great For All Manifesto. http://megacampaign.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MEGA_Manifesto.pdf

European Civic Forum: Opinion on the proposition of the European Commission “Regulation establishing the Rights and Values Programme”.

http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/08/10/2018/European_Civic_Forum_opinion_Rights_and_Values_programme.pdf

European Civic Forum: Towards an enabling environment for civil society in Europe. <http://civic-forum.eu/publication/view/towards-an-enabling-environment-for-civil-society-in-europe>

European Civil Society Joint Statement: Civil society on the frontline - 5 Points for EU action.

https://civilsocietyeuropedoteu.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/joint-civil-society-statement_fundamental-rights-colloquium.pdf

European Council on Foreign Relations.

European Economic and Social Committee: Financing of civil society organisations by the EU.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/financing-civil-society-organisations-eu>

European Federation of Journalists: Journalists’ Manifesto. <https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/manifestoEN-3.pdf>



European Volunteer Center.

European Youth Forum: 10 ideas to #YouthUp the 2019 European Elections.

https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0142-18_EP2019_Policy%20Platform_FINAL.pdf

Civil Society Development Foundation, Romania.

Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, Germany.

IDDRI - Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, France.

Institute of Public Affairs, Poland.

Liberties: Participatory democracy under threat: Growing restrictions on the freedoms of NGOs in the EU.

Liberties: Two proposals to promote and protect European values through the Multiannual Financial Framework: Conditionality of EU funds and a financial instrument to support NGOs

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UG4PIg7tObjUoK9tBKq3ldqCT-eB5iM9/view>

Maecenata Foundation, Germany.

Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for its citizens (promoted by SDG Watch, Friends of the Earth Europe, GCAP, European Humanist Federation, EEB, Global Health Advocates, Solidar, COFACE, European Civic Forum, Eurodiaconia, Nyt Europa).

NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education.

Ökotárs Alapítvány, Hungary.

National Federation of Polish NGOs – OFOP.

SOLIDAR: Civic education.

http://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/000/238/original/2015_building_learning_societies_case_studies_civic_education-2.pdf?1457601298