

BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY EUROPE

European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations

Given the positive experiences of the coordination of the European Year of Citizens and the lack of a really efficient civil dialogue at EU-level as stipulated in the Lisbon-Treaty, we think that the time has come to **gather together and to launch Civil Society Europe – European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations**. This new coordination intends to be at European level a legitimate and representative platform of civil society organisations defending the values we claim and to put them back at the heart of the European project.

The values we stand for

During the “European Year of Citizens 2013”, 62 European networks of associations and 20 national co-ordinations have collectively developed a **common value-based vision on European citizenship** articulated in our founding Manifesto “**Active European citizenship is about pursuing European collective goals and values enshrined in the treaties**”:

European citizenship should be founded on the principle of residence and in the name of universality of rights all residents of the European Union should enjoy equality of treatment and the same right to participate in public life as EU citizens.

Participatory democracy meets the present-day needs of European democratic governance across the Union by supplementing and reinforcing representative democracy. Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty is particularly important, as it has provided an institutional commitment to an “open, transparent and regular dialogue” between Europe’s governing bodies and civil society, aiming at ending the “democratic deficit”, while providing active European citizenship.

Active European citizenship guarantees that all citizens can participate in the life of their communities and the shaping of public policies, including the most disadvantaged groups which are most often remote from the European building process.

The change we need to make these values a reality

Our collective work throughout the European Year of Citizens resulted in a policy document “**It’s about us! It’s about Europe! Towards Democratic European Citizenship**” that describes the change Civil Society Europe aims for. It envisages a future for Europe based upon solidarity, equality and democratic participation, a Europe which provides access to economic, social, cultural and civic rights for all.

Thus, the organised civil society we represent aims to regenerate the European project by bringing back citizens, solidarity, equality, fairness, inclusiveness to where they should be: at the heart of Europe. This implies a shift from a dominant approach of regarding citizens as individual-consumers to an approach of a citizenship that both respects individual aspirations and takes into account collective needs for a shared future.

Achieving this requires a paradigm shift from a Europe that is largely considered as an “economic project” to one that restores and promotes the values of solidarity and equality among States and European citizens. Only by emphasizing these fundamental components can the legitimacy of the European project, the trust and enthusiasm for Europe and greater progression in the integration process be ensured.

The indivisibility of rights and their effective progress through implemented policies is an indispensable pre-requisite of social inclusion and active citizenship. This requires specific attention to ensure that no citizen residing in the EU is excluded or discriminated against due to a lack of respect for his/her rights. At the core of the European social model is care and protection for all especially the more vulnerable members of society. We believe that citizens can only be conscious of their responsibilities towards each other in a society that enables effective and universal access to rights.

Beyond these core questions, we claim that all democratic pillars need to function so as to ensure a vibrant European democracy that is fit for purpose. Education and information through the media should be delivered independently and their European dimension reinforced. Within the framework of universal values enshrined in the international treaties, European Union institutions should ensure that decisions are in line with citizens’ needs, aspirations and vision of society. Organised civil society defending Human rights and the common good with constructive and collective solutions should be reinforced since its role as an advocate and agent for change is crucial for our democracies.

The rise of far-right extremism as witnessed in the latest European Parliament elections should set alarm bells ringing for all democratic forces across Europe. It indicates that the European project is now facing a major challenge and that business as usual is no longer an option. Confronting this phenomenon of regressive radicalisation is a matter of urgency at European, national and local level. It means that we should implement policies which re-establish trust and credibility in the capacity of institutions to ensure social protection, social inclusion and welfare for all. As long as people fear exclusion when facing major difficulties the regressive populist discourse denouncing the weaker and the poorer will be listened to and will continue to occupy political space and put democratic institutions at risk.

The role of Civil Society Europe – European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations

During the “European Year of Citizens 2013” many of us worked together to build a common vision of the Europe we want. We need to keep up the momentum, unite and coordinate our efforts to make this vision become a reality.

Civil Society Europe - the European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations we call for today, linked to the civic movements at sub-national, national and European level, aims to represent the values we claim should be at the heart of the European project. Civil Society Europe should:

CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR HORIZONTAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS ACROSS EUROPE

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- ⇒ Provide a **common and permanent space** for the **pooling of**:
 - Experience and good practice;
 - Knowledge and documentary resources;
 - Campaigns and other forms of collective action.
- ⇒ Strengthen **capacity to connect people and the diversity of their democratic forms of expression**
- ⇒ **Promote common agendas**
- ⇒ **Act for change** around our shared values

BE INFLUENTIAL IN SHAPING THE AGENDA ON TRANSVERSAL ISSUES OF COMMON INTEREST FOR ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY IN EUROPE

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- ⇒ Promoting and strengthen the political recognition of **organised civil society across Europe as frontrunners for and identified with the promotion of Equality, Solidarity, Democracy and Inclusiveness**
- ⇒ **Working with European Institutions on transversal issues** with which CSOs are concerned, especially alongside the provisions of Article 11 of the Lisbon treaty.

Join Civil Society Europe!

List of first signatory organisations on verso

Association des Etats Généraux d'Etudiants d'Europe - AEGEE
Association Européenne de défense des Droits de l'Homme - AEDH
Association of Local Democracy Agencies - ALDA
Concord Europe
Danubiana Network
EU association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities - EASPD
European Alternatives
European Citizens Action Service - ECAS
European Civic Forum
European Intercultural Platform on Lifelong learning - EUCIS-LLL
European Movement International - EMI
European Network for Education and Training - EUNET
European Network of National Associations - ENNA
European Roma Information Office - ERIO
European Volunteer Centre - CEV
International Federation for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus - IFSBH
International Planned Parenthood Federation - IPPF
Network of Educational associations Mladiinfo
Santé Mentale & Exclusion Sociale - SMES
Social Platform
Solidar
Volonteuropé
World Organisation of Scout Movement
Young European Federalists – JEF Europe