

Where do we stand with the European civil society strategy?

Conference for a thriving civic space



12 October 2023
Brussels, EFTA House

Reclaim
Our Civil
Space!

Organized by:



Implemented by



The endeavour of Reclaim Our Civil Space! started back in 2020 with 10 civil society organizations from 8 countries - Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Norway as an expert partner - and is coming to an end with this conference.

In the past three years we addressed the trends of democratic backsliding and shrinking civil space in Central and Southeastern Europe. We helped local organisations build their capacities, facilitated cross-border networking among them and brought the voice of civil society organisations to Brussels.

We put together a set of recommendations to develop a comprehensive EU civil society strategy and advocated for its adoption.

This conference serves the purpose to present these highlights of the project from local to European and to review the state of our proposals for the civil society strategy.

In addition, we will explore the potential next steps towards a comprehensive European civil society strategy at the conference with regard to the upcoming European elections next year.

Online streaming registration is now open! Registered participants can follow the conference online. The link to join will be sent by email before the event.

[Register here! \(online streaming\)](#)

For more information please contact:

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Looking forward to seeing you!



Tentative agenda

9.00-9.30 Arrival, registration

9.30-9.45 Opening and welcome

- Tori Hoven, Director of the Country and Programmes Department

9.45- 11.15 Reclaim Our Civil Space! – from local to European: what did we achieve?

- Pecha-kucha presentations by project partners with Q&A

11.15-11.30 Coffee break

11.30-12.15 Regional cooperation and civil society in the EEA Grants – past and future

- Åsmund Eriksen, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Panel discussion with project partners

- Peter Medved, Ekopolis Foundation (SK),
- Ionut Sibian Civil Society Development Foundation (RO)

12.15-12.30 Presentation of the FRA report: civil space developments in the EU in 2022-23

- Waltraud Heller, EU Fundamental Rights Agency

12.30-13.15 The European Commission's engagement to promote a thriving civic space in the EU – presentation

- Joachim Herrmann, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Reynders

13.15-14.15 Lunch break and networking

14.15-15.30 What has the EU done to protect and promote civil society? Evaluation of current processes and what we hope for.

1) Follow-up of the Charter report

- Giada Negri, ECF



2) Defense of Democracy package

- Carlotta Besozzi, CSE

3) SLAPP directive

- Francesca Fanucci, ECNL

4) Rule of Law report and recommendations

- Linda Ravo, Liberties

5) Social Economy Action Plan implementation

- Hanna Surmatz, Philea

Panel discussion with Q&A moderated by Veronika Móra (Ökotárs)

15.30-15.45 Coffee break

15.45-17.00 What can civil society expect from the European elections?

Introduction: "Civil society for EU" elections campaign on civic space and civil dialogue

- Riccardo Rossella, Social Platform & Civil Society Europe

Debate with MEPs:

- Martin Hojsík (Renew)
- René Repasi (S&D)
- Andrzej Halicki (EPP)

Moderated by Laura de Bonfils, Social Platform

17.00-17.15 Closing and next steps

17.30 Reception



ABOUT US

We aim at addressing the trends of democratic backsliding and shrinking civil space observed for the past years particularly in Central and Southeastern Europe.

We came together because we believe in our work and in the power of civil society to build healthier societies from the bottom up. Our organizations are from different countries with different backgrounds, but the challenges we face and the changes we strive for in this region bind us together. This project is our common effort to improve the quality of our democracies through strengthening civil society actors in Central and Southeastern Europe.

Our vision is a thriving civil space in a democratic and enabling environment, where people take action, get organized and advocate for their interests together freely, without fear or restrictions.

We believe in a society where everybody is capable of improving their own life and environment and is provided with the opportunity to live up to their potential.

Our main objectives are:

- **broadening** the grassroots basis and constituency of civil society
- **mapping**, training and mobilizing activist groups and movements
- **linking** this local level to the regional and the European
- **developing** together the outlines of a comprehensive European civil society policy

