

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 has been elaborated in the frame of the European Conference "[Not without Us!](#)" on 21-22 March 2019 in Berlin organised by BBE - Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement with the support of the European Civic Forum in the frame of the European campaign "[Make Europe Great for All - #MEGA](#)". The "**Berlin Agenda**" compiles positions, proposals and demands previously adopted and published by numerous civil society networks, associations, foundations and think tanks, sorted 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 towards the upcoming European Elections in May 2019 and beyond, showcasing civil society's vision for the future of Europe. It shall serve as an open document to be completed further and beyond the 2019 European Election, keeping track of its implementation.

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, 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 raising investments plans. 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 down 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 common good, based on the values we mentioned, to regain primacy over technocracy and economic and financial particular interests. In order to transform Europe and recapture lost voices, technical policy debates are insufficient: citizens need to have a say on the 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 to organize and channel citizens' needs and aspirations as well as frustrations and grievances to institutions. Associations can be drivers in promoting and upholding European values but also in challenging the institutional and political frameworks on putting the common good at the helm of the decision making. This requires recognising associations' role and legitimacy in doing so.

Create an open and enabling environment for civil society

At a time when civil society space is attacked everywhere in Europe and 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 daily acting for making rights effective for all, educating citizens on EU values, alerting on breaches to the rule of law. Organised civil society is a sustainable actor defending these claimed values and social justice in the long run. 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, engage into 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 carry out 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 HR and with civil society actors.
- The institutional monitoring should be linked to a **more effective sanctioning system**. The EU cannot become complacent with breaches of its values: it should condemn and have the tools to hold governments accountable 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 for achieving 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 to 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 funding. 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.

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 the 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 we are involved in the 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 the “Europeaness” 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 raising inequalities and growing precarity. 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 side but also on its 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-decide with the Council and that its power is restrained to blocking or amendment capacity.
- **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... **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 every vote counts, and elected seats 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 strengthening representative democracy and ensuring 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 although with limited results. The ability of citizens to be part of decisions beyond voting in elections is still very limited resulting in a 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 – bear 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 one hand easy access to information concerning the decision-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 decisions.

Making Europe socially just and sustainable for present and future generations

We need a democratic Europe where 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 UE bodies**, including 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 the 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 persons 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 **fight 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 the 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:

- ❖ Reclaim our political voice and deliberative space to point at the failures of current policy and political frameworks and contribute to rebuild a European project for a society based on values of inclusivity, equality and solidarity.
- ❖ Raise awareness on the indivisibility of all rights: political, civil, economic, social and environmental, because when one category of rights is under attack, their whole universality is shrinking.
- ❖ Build convergence of our struggles for democracy and social justice in order to bring about systemic change.
- ❖ Develop 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.
- ❖ Follow European civil society gathering and debates and for a beyond the European elections to continue developing this vision into concrete proposals.
- ❖ Work together with all institutions and political forces willing to make this agenda a reality.

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