



Let us dare to dream the civil society of tomorrow

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Centralisation of power in the executive, politicisation of the judiciary, attacks on media independence and lack of trust in the traditional political parties are just some of the symptoms of the current widespread crisis of democracy.

It is not an understatement to say that European democracy is experiencing its biggest setback since the 1930s and that traditional models of participation seem ill-equipped to cope with the acceleration of change. Our societies are unprepared to deal with the many challenges they face, such as the **economic crisis** and the consequences of reduced

public funding, **digitalisation**, **demographic changes** leading to an ageing population and migration, **populism** and also **shrinking space for civil society** against the backdrop of sometimes authoritarian or even blocked democracies.

Traditionally regarded as the backbone of participatory democracy, civil society organisations are also changing and need to look for innovative ways to improve civil dialogue so as to ensure it is better suited to the conditions of the 21st century. This is essential if they wish to continue to influence decision-making processes in a meaningful manner, both at national and European level.

Just a few months ago, in February 2018, as President of the then EESC Various Interests' Group, I had the honour of presenting a study on [The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030](#) at a major event in Brussels. This publication identifies the main challenges faced by civil society and develops scenarios of change.

As I pointed out then, civil society organisations should promptly set about adopting new innovative working methods. They need to focus, in particular, on developing new services (for example media literacy, media fact-checking and civic education), on diversifying funding sources and on adapting managerial strategies.

On the other hand, we also need new forms of debate at European level and new measures that can be explored and put in place in the future. Only by strengthening participatory democracy can we bring citizens closer to the European project. Only by engaging the people of Europe can we transform challenges into opportunities.

During the weekend of 5-6 May, the EESC opened its doors to one hundred citizens from all over Europe who had gathered for the first ever European Citizens' Panel to discuss the future of Europe. As part of its mission, the Committee hosted the two-day debate in order to support the preparatory work for the citizens' consultations, proposed by the French president Emmanuel Macron and scheduled to take place this October.

The EESC, our 'House of European civil society', took part in this campaign, the aim of which is to bring together proposals from European citizens concerning the future of Europe. We can be proud of having inaugurated this new format – the citizens' consultation on Europe – based on our experience as the voice of civil society in Europe. The EESC is indeed an EU institutional space where members who are active on the ground can come together, share their expertise and make sure that this expertise is in turn used to inform European public debate. The Committee has been the home of European organised civil society for 60 years and it is this important anniversary that we are celebrating this week with our Plenary Session on 23-24 May.

This new culture of dialogue should be developed for a number of key areas that also form the main priorities of my mandate, namely: sustainable development, culture, peace and youth.

I truly believe that this is the beginning of a new journey, a journey that will boost dialogue among Europeans and allow us to build a more inclusive and cohesive Europe, while reinforcing our European identity. The European Union cannot be seen solely as a single market for 500 million people. We have created Europe, we need to create Europeans.

In this way, we can make a positive difference leading at last to a true "rEUnaissance" at European level, where civil society is the driver for change. Let us dare to dream the Europe of tomorrow, let us dare to dream the civil society of tomorrow.