



Report

The diverse topics discussed during Civil Society Week panels and sessions that revolved around civil dialogue and civic space, disinformation, polarisation, social inclusion, digital transformation, civil society in candidate countries, democratising economic policy-making, the impact of participatory democracy on policy through the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI Day), as well as young people's priorities for the EU's incoming leaders (YEYS) were brought together in a two-part closing session, **moderated by Shada Islam**.

In the first part, ***Civil Society Week: Bringing together civil society's messages***, civil society representatives presented concrete proposals for action in six areas.

In order to make our democracies resilient, there is a need to combat manipulation and disinformation through grassroots action, to support independent media for transparency and to prioritise democratic education from early childhood.

Creating a safe and enabling European civic space for civil society requires a comprehensive strategy that includes measures to protect civil society actors, increase funding accessibility and monitor civic space trends. Reforming civil society dialogue mechanisms is crucial to ensure structured and meaningful engagement and representation in policymaking processes.

Citizens' participation in EU decision-making is crucial and requires that their voices be included through participatory tools like the European Citizens' Initiative and crowdsourcing policy ideas, complemented by robust follow-up and civic engagement activities. Reforming EU treaties to integrate citizen participation mechanisms and granting greater political influence to initiatives like the European Citizens' Initiative can enhance the legitimacy and ownership of European policies.

When it comes to effective youth engagement and active participation, it is essential to empower young people and to make sure they have a genuine voice in decision-making at an early consultation stage so that policies reflect their needs.

In terms of digital transformation, key actions include fostering digital literacy partnerships, investing in upskilling programmes and prioritising AI education. These initiatives aim to empower citizens, bridge the digital gap and ensure the EU's leadership in the digital era.

Civil society also urges a shift from growth-centric models to prioritising well-being within planetary boundaries, integrating sustainable water management into EU policies and reforming the European Semester to involve citizens in economic decision-making, promoting inclusivity and sustainability.

These messages served, in the second part, as a foundation for a dialogue between civil society and institutions for a more democratic Europe. During the interactive and vibrant debate civil society representatives advocated for inclusive governance, including as a means to tackle mistrust in EU institutions. Transparent decision-making processes are not only key in upholding democratic values but also essential for rebuilding trust and enhancing accountability within the EU framework. With CSOs being vital intermediaries between citizens and EU institutions, collaborative policy-making must be enhanced.

More specifically, **Pedro Silva Pereira, Vice-President of the European Parliament**, emphasised the importance of ensuring everyone's voices are heard and working together to address challenges in order to create positive change. As discussions unfolded about issues like corruption and the potential of digital democracy, his words revealed a strong dedication to fair governance. Additionally, VP Silva Pereira mentioned the importance of voting in these EU elections, highlighting the collective capacity to construct better solutions for shared issues.

Colin Scicluna, Head of Cabinet of Dubravka Šuica, European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, highlighted the need to build trust between citizens and EU institutions. He emphasised inclusive governance and electoral integrity, focusing on the volunteering sector and representative democracy. Mr Scicluna stressed the importance of recognising civil society's contributions and promoting inclusivity. Additionally, he advocated for structured engagement and effective space for civil participation to strengthen democracy.

Oliver Röpke, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, highlighted the importance of transparency within civil society groups. He agreed with the establishment of

supportive mechanisms which will enhance the structural framework of civil society organisations for greater effectiveness and impact. He also emphasised the EESC's focus on youth input and dedicated forums on youth issues. Additionally, he mentioned that this comprehensive approach reflected the EESC's ongoing commitment to accountability and adaptability in addressing evolving challenges.

In summary: In the closing session of Civil Society Week, which offered civil society a chance to voice their expectations from the next EU mandate and to have a debate with high-level institutional representatives about their vision of a more democratic Europe, elements like collaboration and inclusivity as well as transparent governance, trust-building and youth engagement were identified as key elements for advancing democracy in Europe.

The key messages from Civil Society Week will feed into the EESC's resolution for the new mandate to be adopted in July.