



**European Economic
and Social Committee**
Civil Society Organisations' Group

De-polarising societies – Key take-aways of Civil Society Week 2025, with **Michael McGrath**, European Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, **Brikena Xhomaqi**, Co-chair of the Liaison Group and **Kristýna Bulvasová**, Youth representative (YEYS).

Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group Vice-President Pietro Barbieri

EESC plenary session, 27 March 2025

- Dear Commissioner McGrath, Esteemed Speakers, it is a pleasure to have you with us at our plenary.
- I will speak today **on behalf of Séamus Boland, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group**, who can unfortunately not attend today.
- First, let me **congratulate you**, President Röpke and all the services involved, **for two successful events: the Civil Society Week and the Your Europe, Your Say**. These flagship events are examples of dialogue and cooperation with civil society organisations and citizens.
- I would like to **echo the recommendations** that we heard today from Brikena Xhomaqi. We need to *Build a Strong European Strategy for Civil Society*.
- Civil society is the *oil in the engine* of our societies. **Civil society organisations act as local safety nets**. At the same time, **they are key enablers of democracy and fundamental rights**.
- It is therefore with great interest that we noted the announcement of a *Strategy to support, protect and empower civil society* and to set up a *Civil Society Platform*.
- In coordination with my Group's president, Séamus Boland, I will focus my remarks on **two points**: civil dialogue should be built on existing structures and bring together all relevant stakeholders.
- Firstly, when setting up a Civil Society Platform, we do not have to start from a greenfield site. The EESC must be involved from the outset.
- Let me give you only *two examples* of our work:
 - 1) More than 20 years ago, the **EESC set up its Liaison Group**, a unique institutionalised structure for dialogue with *European* networks. At the same time, the EESC is a direct channel to *national* civil society.
 - I believe that there is also some untapped potential in this house. **For instance, each year, the EESC could facilitate a wide dialogue process**, which would feed into the EESC's contribution to the annual **work programme of the European Commission**.

- 2) If we are to reinforce civil dialogue, we need to have an overview of what is already happening. This is why our Group has **initiated a mapping exercise of civil dialogue**. Our hope is that this study can directly support the work of the European Commission.
 - Moreover, in the latest Opinion of this house, for which I was rapporteur, **the EESC calls for a strategy for civil dialogue, potentially resulting in an interinstitutional agreement**. This leads me to my second point: Progress on this strategy and a potential interinstitutional agreement needs to be the result of a shared process.
 - That is why my Group has called for a **working group to be set up**, to be facilitated by the EESC, and involve all relevant stakeholders, CSOs and EU institutions.
 - We heard last week that **consultations on the Civil Society Strategy and Platform will start shortly**. I will therefore end on a call to the European Commission: **now is the ideal time to consult and involve**, to make time and space for dialogue that is needed. The EESC is the ideal place for this.
 - Thank you for your attention.
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