

Liaison Group – Civil Society Organisations

Minutes of the hybrid meeting, room VMA 3/Microsoft Teams

13 October 2022, 10:30-12:30

- **Participants:** see attendance list below
- The agenda was adopted without comment.
- **Welcome by Brikena Xhomaqi**, co-chair of the Liaison Group, who highlighted, that:
 - Members are invited to take part in the Associational Life Category meeting (taking place the following week) for a discussion on "Strengthening the cooperation with civil society organisations outside of the EESC: what to do from 2023 onwards?"
 - the EU Association legislative proposal is underway. The EC launched a consultation in August to prepare a draft legislation which is still open for feedback from CSOs until the 28th October. The proposal should be published in spring 2023.
- **Follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe by Tatiana Adamisova, EESC Head of Unit, Interinstitutional Relations:**
 - So far, no roadmap has been published by the EU institutions, which offers some flexibility to the EESC.
 - EESC contributed to the process by organising 45 CoFoE events
 - Key topics: stronger economy, social justice and jobs, climate change and environment.
 - Outcome of CoFoE: the EESC was mentioned in two recommendations related to the citizens' participation in the legislative process and as a facilitator/guarantor of participatory democracy activities.
 - The most important part of the process was that all the actors (MEPs, citizens, etc) met to discuss and draft the recommendations of the CoFoE.
 - Presumably a clearer roadmap will be presented at the 2nd December follow-up meeting.
 - The EC is committed to organizing a Citizen Panel about food waste.
 - Over the summer, the EESC addressed the EU institutions in a letter suggesting to become a central hub for citizens participation.
- Brikena Xhomaqi invited **CSOs representative** to give their perspectives on how the **follow-up of CoFoE** is proceeding:
 - **Maja Bobic, EMI:**

- will focus on the follow-up event.
 - wants to contribute to the process of Citizens' Panels. CSOs should engage in it and influence to make it more participatory.
 - insists on the crucial role that CSOs plays in the decision-making process and that it should be formalised. Role of social partners should also be protected in the process.
 - The follow-up event in Decemebr will constitute a useful bridge for experiences and to contitue the process of CoFoE towards the EP elections.
- **Adrien Licha, ALDA:**
 - is willing to include all CSO members in drafting a more readable narrative of the role of CSOs in this process.
 - would like to promote a democractic continuum of the representativeness of citizens. It is difficult for CSOs to be involved properly and a lot of effort should be made to enter the debate effectively.
 - will continue to follow up on the implementation of CoFoE recommendations, with the volunteer members of CSO Europe.
- **Maya Weisinger, CAE:**
 - contributed to CoFoE with an 18-month project involving under-represented members from 12 countries in the arts & culture sector.
 - will look very closely at the implementation of the CoFoE recommendations.
 - No direct reference to arts & culture among the key proposals made at the SOTEU but rather to a comprehensive mental health care process, which CAE is also working on in the "Culture for health" project based on a 2019 EC report. In this project CAE is seeing a positive impact of arts & culture on mental health and wellbeing.
 - Plans to release a State of the Art study in November, which they wish to share with the LG.
- **Gabriella Civico, CEV:**
 - The Commission intends to include Citizens' Panels as part of the process and not merely "tick the box". Civil society needs to be part of this process, by also checking which recommendations are included and which are not. Food waste, mental health and climate change will be important themes which the EC will want the Citizens' Panel to look at.
 - The citizens' teams working on these topics will be chosen by the EC and civil society will have to deal with this.

- CSE – together with the LG and EESC - will make sure that these recommendations are followed upon both in terms of advocacy content and in terms of process, ensuring that civil society is properly involved, not just limited to Citizens' Panels.
- **Alexandrina Najmowicz, ECF:**
 - The Civil Society Strategy was part of the CoFoE recommendation and it is part of the EESC proposal for the EC work programme. Currently ECF is discussing a follow-up letter sent by Civil Society Europe to EC President von der Leyen asking for the Civil Society Strategy to be included in the EC work programme.
 - The EC really wants to do something more and better for civil society in order to empower civil society through existing mechanisms, including the rule of the report and funding but also to engage with civil society.
 - Recently ECF had an inter-cabinet meeting: cabinets want to look into EC practices to build a more regular and structured civil dialogue.
 - ECF was disappointed by the SOTEU where a lot was said about enabling the rule of law and democracy but still nothing about civil society as such, not even mentioned once.
 - ECF agreed with ALDA on the need to work on narratives differently, better and more collectively.
 - The European Democracy Action Plan will be revised next year and ECF thinks that it can be a venue to push for civil dialogue, civil society strategy, better representation of civil debates in the annual report.
 - ECF is looking forward to the new Defence of Democracy package mentioned by President von der Leyen in the SOTEU. ECF has already started discussing it with the cabinet in charge of the development of this tool in order to expand its scope.
- **Tatiana Adamisova, EESC Head of Unit, Interinstitutional Relations** added that another possible topic for Citizens' Panels might be Intergenerational Solidarity.

➤ **Civil Society Days, 1-3 March 2023**

- Brikena Xhomaqi confirmed the date (1-3 March 2023), the structure and the provisional title: **How to secure a space for civil society?**
- CSD could be a good opportunity to revisit and revive the Action Plan for the Implementation of Art. 11 (ex Riga Road map) that has been drafted by CSOs of the LG in 2018 but not yet really put into practice.
- She invited the CSOs to reflect on another title, as the word "secure" is not convincing for everybody.

- Many LG members already expressed their interest to co-organise a workshop, but there is still time to join until 28 October:

CSOs	Topic
LLP, EVBB, AGE	Role of skills in fostering democratic societies, linked to EY of Skills
EMI, EEB, Solidar (+ contribution Philea, ALDA?)	Future of participatory and deliberative democracy
CEV and Volonteuroppe	Volunteering and Resilience in Europe.
ECAS (+contribution ECF)	Democratic challenges and opportunities in CEE (more linked to CSOs resilience in shrinking civil space)
Philea, Social Platform + Solidar?	Civil society space, civil dialogue and funding to enable the space
ESU, SDG Watch Europe	CSO participation in the European Semester – both at European/National level and good practices across Member States
EDRi, ALDA	Citizens' digital participation or digital rights in the European public space
UEF, ALDA	How to reach out to people outside the EU bubble and how to connect them to democracy? A potential title could be "Blowing up the bubble"

- **Anna Echterhoff (UEF)** asked for the use of a more optimistic headline. To "secure something" can sound a bit defensive.
- **Matteo Vespa (ESU)** commented that previously civil society needed to have a defensive approach since there was no space for civil society and probably was not even enough. He suggested the title "advancing the space for civil society", which does not sound defensive but it still underlines the need for CSOs to advance, as it is currently not enough. He suggested that CSD might have a focus or a session about the involvement of CSOs in EU policy-making. ESU might prepare something and he will let LG know.

- **Maya Weisinger (CAE)** suggested "A space for civil society" as a title to clearly state this is the space and civil society is occupying it. Further proposals: "Centering civil society" or "Civil society at the center".
 - According to **Gabriella Civico (CEV)** the title should focus more on the result rather than the process. A results-based approach would be better rather than just asking for more space without explaining why and with what impact.
 - **Brikena Xhomaqi (LLLP)** flagged that a workshop on youth is missing (ex. youth participation), reminding that Civil Society Days are an event organised in cooperation with EESC sections/members.
- **Presentation of a potential Foresight training session for CSOs by Pierluigi Brombo**, Head of Unit, Foresight, Studies and Policy Assessment, EESC
- A training session for CSOs has been scheduled for 7 November, 2-5pm. Those wishing to participate should reach out to Pierluigi.brombo@eesc.europa.eu directly.
 - Brikena thanked Pierluigi for having offered this opportunity to CSO members, stating that the involvement of civil society organisations in strategic foresight plays a key role as they are a central player in the construction of the future, and offer a diversity of expertise.
- **Presentation of an EESC online consultation of CSOs in the frame of the EU Voluntary National Review on SDGs**, by **Judit Carreras**, NAT Section
- Judit Carreras introduced the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Every year a number of countries do the Voluntary National Reviews, which analyse the implementation process of the SDGs.
 - Participation of civil society in this process is not only recommended, but encouraged.
 - According to the EESC this assessment should be complemented with inputs from civil society, and the NAT section would like to collect views and assessments from CSOs.
 - For this purpose, an online consultation will be launched on Monday 24 October that will be open until 27 November. The final document for the Commission must be filed by January 2023.
 - The space provided for contribution will be very short: CSOs members will have two boxes per SDG, one for the main challenges and the other one for the main achievements.

- **Julie Rosenkilde (SDG Watch Europe)** announced the contribution of her organisations to the report, asked about the next steps after the submission of the report and asked if the European Commission was planning to organise a hearing during the drafting process.
 - **Judit Carreras** announced in reply that the draft report will be ready by March or April and that the EESC was pushing to have a hearing.
- **Presentation of the upcoming opinion "The EESC's recommendations for a solid reform of the European Semester"** and the linked consultation of civil society organisations, by **Javier Doz Orrit**, President of the EESC European Semester Group (ESG)
- Mr Doz Orrit briefly outlined the EESC draft opinion on "The EESC's recommendations for a solid reform of the European Semester, based on a consultation of national economic and social councils, social partners and civil society organisations from EU Member States".
 - The ESG wishes to involve LG civil society organisations in this consultation.
 - The LG secretariat will share an English version of his presentation as well as more details regarding the consultations in due time.
- **Any other business**
- **Brikena Xhomaqi** offered the possibility of drafting the LG **newsletter editorial** to all CSO members, following the rotation principle. Expressions of interest to be addressed to her and the LG secretariat.
 - She announced that the next meeting with all members of the Liaison Group will take place on **30 November, 10.15-12.30**.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS (in alphabetical order)

Members of civil society organisations who attended in presence:

Ms	CIVICO, Gabriella	CEV
Ms	DE BONFILS, Laura	Social Platform
Ms	DELABIE, Mathilde	Cooperatives Europe
Mr	DREIMANN, Horst	EVBB
Ms	GOICOECHEA, Sonia	EEB
Mr	LAPEGNA, Andrea	LLLP
Mr	LICHA, Adrien	ALDA
Mr	LOURDELLE, Henri	FERPA
Ms	MASSAROTTO, Chiara	IUT
Mr	RODRIGUEZ, Sebastian	EMI
Mr	VESPA, Matteo	ESU
Ms	WEISINGER, Maya	CAE

Members of civil society organisations who attended remotely:

Ms	BOBIC, Maja	EMI
Ms	DAS, Sarada	CPME
Ms	DRIESKENS, Anne-Marie	COFACE
Ms	ECHTERHOFF, Anna	UEF
Mr	GYÖRGY, Dávid	UIPI
Ms	HEINISCH, Renate	EPA
Mr	HICKS, Davyth	ELEN
Ms	NAJMOWICZ, Alexandrina	ECF
Ms	NIESTROY, Ingeborg	SDG Watch Europe
Mr	ONIȚA, Horia	ESU
Mr	ROLDAN, Carlos	Solidar
Ms	ROSENKILDE, Julie	SDG Watch Europe
Mr	SADOWSKI, Piotr	Volonteurop
Mr	STOYANOV, Simeon	ECAS
Mr	TAGUEM, Eric	R.E.D.
Ms	XHOMAQI, Brikena	LLLP, co-president of Liaison Group

Guest speaker:

Mrs	ADAMISOVA, Tatiana	Head of Unit, Interinstitutional Relations, EESC
Mr	BROMBO, Pierluigi	Head of Unit, Foresight, Studies and Policy Assessment, EESC
Ms	Judit CARRERAS	NAT section
Mr	DOZ ORRIT, Javier	President of the EESC European Semester Group

Guest participants:

Ms	DÜRSCH, Roxana	CED
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Members of Civil Society Organisations who had sent their apologies:

ACE; AGE; EDF; EDRi; EFIL; EURAG; EUROCHILD; PHILEA; SSE

EESC staff members:

Mr	ANDERSEN, Jakob	ESG secretariat
Ms	BORG, Janine	Head of CSS unit
Ms	CALVY, Sonia	CSS unit
Mr	CEREA, Corrado	REL unit
Ms	GREGOIRE, Colombe	ESG secretariat
Ms	LHOEST, Catlin	Group III secretariat
Ms	LOPEDOTE, Stefania	REL unit
Ms	MARCASSA, Martina	CSS unit
Ms	SERAFINI, Karen	CSS unit
Ms	VERHELST, Caroline	NAT section