



European Economic
and Social Committee
Diversity Europe Group



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Civil Society Organisations: Key actors for the Future of Europe

Conference on the state of associations

Brussels & online | 05.11.2021 | 9:30 – 17:00





Séamus Boland

Séamus Boland has been the President of the EESC's Diversity Europe Group since October 2020 and an EESC Member since 2011. He has held different roles at the Committee, including the Vice-Presidency of the Diversity Europe Group (2018-2020). His policy and political interests include the eradication of poverty, social exclusion and inequality. Mr Boland currently sits on the SOC and ECO Sections of the Committee as well as on the CCMI. In addition to the Group presidency, he holds several other roles outside the EESC. He has been CEO of Irish Rural Link since 2001, a Board Member of Inland Fisheries Ireland since 2018 and Chair of Peatlands Council since 2012. Mr Boland is a farmer and has worked in civil society for over 40 years, including with young people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and people living in rural isolation. He is a trained Speech and Drama Educator.

Jean Marc Roirant

Jean Marc Roirant started his career as a school teacher. He then joined the NGO sector at the Ligue de l'Enseignement, where he was elected Secretary General from 1993 to 2015. As the biggest not for profit association platform in France with 24 000 local associations, employing 18 000 workers and engaging 350 000 volunteers, La Ligue acts daily for the development of education and culture and the promotion of active citizenship. Since 2005 he has been the President of the European Civic Forum, a transnational European network actively working on issues such as citizenship education, defence of Human Rights and Democracy. At the end of 2014 he contributed to the establishment of Civil Society Europe, the coordination for civil society organisations in Europe, which includes the most representative EU platforms of associations active in areas such as social rights, environment, international cooperation, culture, non-discrimination and education. He is the President since 2016. Between 2015 and 2020 he has been member of the Group III of the European Economic and Social Committee. He is member of the French Committee of UNESCO and Board member of Université Paris 1 La Sorbonne. He was knighted in the Ordre National Français de la Légion D'Honneur in 2010.





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Věra Jourová

Věra Jourová is currently Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency and deals with democracy, rule of law, media pluralism, and the fight against disinformation. From 2014 to 2019, she served as EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. In 2014, before arriving to the European Commission, Ms Jourová held the position of Minister for Regional Development in the Czech Republic. Previous to this, from 2006 to 2013, she worked in her own company as an international consultant on European Union funding, and was also involved in consultancy activities in the Western Balkans relating to the European Union Accession. She holds a Degree in Law (Mgr.) and a Master's degree (Mgr.) in the Theory of Culture from the Charles University, Prague.

Christa Schweng

Christa Schweng was elected President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in October 2020. She has been an EESC member for 22 years, working as rapporteur for several opinions. She is the outgoing president of the EESC's Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship and chaired the Labour Market Observatory from 2013 to 2015. Ms Schweng gained deep expertise in social and employment issues, working as an advisor both at EU level and in her native Austria. Outside the EESC, she works for the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. She has been a member of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work since 1995 and has held every three years the rotating presidency of the Board of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work since 2001. She chaired the SMEunited Social Affairs Committee between 2001 and 2009. Christa Schweng holds a master's degree in law from the University of Vienna.





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Filip Pazderski

A lawyer and sociologist after studies at University of Warsaw, he has also graduated from a European Master's Degree Program in Human Rights and Democratization (E.MA) in Venice. He is the Senior Policy Analyst and Head of the Democracy and Civil Society Program of the Institute of Public Affairs (Warsaw based non-partisan think tank organisation), where he works on civil society, civic education, public participation, quality of democracy and social enterprises development. He carried out research and wrote reports, inter alia, for OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI), National Democratic Institute (NDI),

International IDEA, Office of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Educational Research Institute. He is also a vice-President of the European Civic Forum (ECF) and a consultant to the Council of Europe in the field of civic education and participation.

Ingrid Bellander-Todino

Ingrid Bellander-Todino is Head of the Fundamental Rights Policy unit of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST). Previously, she was member of the cabinet of Equality Commissioner Helena Dalli, and has held Deputy Head of Unit and team leader roles in the areas of gender equality, procedural criminal law and victims' rights in DG JUST, as well as programme manager for the Daphne Programme on combatting violence against children, young people and women. Before joining the European Commission in 2004, Ingrid worked as legal counsel for the International Fund for Agricultural Development, a UN agency based in Rome, and has also practiced EU law in an international law firm in Brussels. She holds a law degree from Uppsala University in Sweden and a post-graduate Master's degree in EU law from the Institute of European Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium.





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Andreas Accardo

Andreas Accardo is the Head of Unit for Institutional Cooperation & Networks at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The FRA provides independent advice to the EU institutions and EU Member States to ensure that the fundamental rights of people living in the EU are protected. Andreas Accardo oversees the Agency's cooperation with its institutional partners, including the EU institutions, Member State governments, human rights bodies, civil society and intergovernmental organisations. His Unit manages the Fundamental Rights Platform, a collaborative network of more than 700 civil society organisations. He joined the Agency's precursor organisation, the European Monitoring

Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, in 2004. He then continued working for FRA. Prior to joining FRA, he worked on institution-building programmes in former Yugoslavia with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). He is a political scientist with a specialisation in international relations, and holds a postgraduate degree in peace and conflict studies.

Brikena Xhomaqi

Brikena Xhomaqi is the current Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform – European Civil Society for Education (former EUCIS-LLL) and Co-chair of the European Economic and Social Committee Liaison Group of Civil Society. She is a member of the Civil Society Europe Steering Committee since 2017 and the Advisory Board member of Association Hub Belgium. She is the former Head of Office of the European Students' Union (ESU) and Director of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). She was active in civil society from an early age as an elected representative of different school and university student bodies. She graduated in Innovative Project Management at the Polytechnic University of Nice Sophia Antipolis, France and holds a professional Master Degree in Corporate Strategy and International Development and bachelor in Political Sciences from the University of Trieste, Italy.





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Cristian Pirvulescu

Cristian Pirvulescu is EESC member since 2017, Chair of the Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group, Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Political Science at the Bucharest School of Politics and Administration, activist for human rights and democratic education, honorary president of the Pro Democratia Association and member of the Board of Directors of the organization for the promotion of democratic education Step by Step Romania. He is the author and coordinator in 2017 of the book "Civil society, democracy and institutional building". He was also the rapporteur of the more than 20 Opinions for the European Economic and Social Committee on rule of law, migration, asylum and education.

Linda Ravo

Passionate human rights advocate, Ms Ravo holds a PhD in EU law and has more than ten years of work experience on the protection of human rights in Europe, including in the EU institutions and the NGO sector. Building on a strong record of expertise on legal research and analysis, litigation, policy and advocacy work, Ms Ravo currently works as freelance consultant, offering legal and policy advice and expertise on issues related to the protection of human rights in Europe to international organisations, EU institutions and bodies, think-thanks and NGOs. Ms Ravo's fields of competence include rule of law issues and the protection of civic space.



Neža Repanšek

Neža Repanšek was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Neža is an experienced youth worker, that grew into her role from scouting, volunteering in local youth groups and facilitating advocacy activities. Since 2020, she has been a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) representing the National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS). She has been a vice president of National Youth Council of Slovenia for 6 years, working on topics of non-formal education, youth work and international cooperation. Neža is specialized in the field of youth work, non-formal education, youth autonomy and employment. She has been active in youth rights advocacy since 2014 when she was actively involved in EZA – European Center for Workers Questions, where she coordinated a Platform for Young Workers (PYW EZA). The platform focused on the promotion of social dialogue and the discussion concerning social challenges on the European level and the promotion of the social and economic development of society as well as of the integration of young workers to the ever-changing labour market. Neža has a degree in International relations studies from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Ljubljana and vast scope of work experiences, both formal and non-formal.



Elena-Alexandra Calistru

Elena-Alexandra Calistru has been a member of the EESC since 2020 and is part of the REX and ECO sections. She is the President of the Romanian organisation Funky Citizens.

Ionuț Sibian

Ionuț Sibian is the executive director of the Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC), publicly recognized as one of the most prominent NGOs in Romania. Ionuț is also currently serving as a member of the Orange Foundation Board. Ionuț's educational background includes a BA in History from the University of Bucharest, an MA in International Relations from the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Studies, University of Bucharest, and a Master's degree in South-East European Studies, granted under the EU Stability Pact's program with the





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University of Athens, Greece. In 2009 he was included as a fellow in the German Marshall Fund's flagship leadership development program.



Arnaud Schwartz

Arnaud Schwartz is president of France Nature Environnement, the largest French environmental umbrella organization, gathering about 6000 associations. He's also a farmer and used to work in the cross-border cooperation between France, Germany and Switzerland, as well as in the field of culture & education. His studies have to do mostly with nature based engineering, environmental science, and land planning.

Sif Holst

Sif Holst is the Vice Chairperson of the Disabled People's Organisations Denmark. She has long history of being an active member of civil society and she serves on a large number of boards and committees, including on the board of The Danish Institute for Human Rights. She is also a Member of the Diversity Europe Group of the EESC.





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Dr. Rupert Graf Strachwitz

Dr. Rupert Graf Strachwitz, a political scientist by training, is the Executive Director of the Maecenata Foundation, a think tank based in Berlin, Germany, and the Director of the Maecenata Institute for Philanthropy and Civil Society, the foundation's research and policy centre. He teaches and lectures regularly and has published widely on philanthropy and civil society as well as on European, intercultural and cultural heritage issues.

Karolina Dreszer-Smalec

Karolina Dreszer-Smalec is President of the National Federation of Polish NGOs in Warsaw and Vice President of the European Civic Forum in Brussels. She is a former member of the European Economic and Social Committee (2015-2020), where she was Vice President of the Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group. She lives on the Polish-German border, where she is responsible for international affairs in the Foundation for Collegium Polonicum in Słubice (Poland). She has graduated from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, where she finished her PhD studies. She is working on her PhD thesis about civil dialogue at the European level.





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Ioannis Vardakastanis

Ioannis Vardakastanis was born in Zakynthos, Greece in 1957. He has been an active disability rights campaigner in Greece, Europe and across the world throughout his life. From 2010 until now, he is a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) representing the National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece (N.C.D.P.) in

Group III. He holds the office of one of the Vice - Presidents of Group III. He has been the President of the N.C.D.P. since 1993, which is the umbrella organization of the Greek disability movement. Also, he has been the President of the European Disability Forum (EDF) since 1999. EDF is the voice of the European disability movement and acts for the promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities within the European Union. Since 2007 he has been the EDF representative in the International Disability Alliance (IDA), where from 2010 to 2012 he held the position of the Vice-Chair and from 2012 to 2014 the position of the Chair. He has held the office of IDA Treasurer since 2014.



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić has been a member of the European Economic and Social Committee since July 2013. An architect by profession, she has also completed a postgraduate course in the Practice of Social Change at the Social Policy Department, London Metropolitan University. She is director of ODRAZ-Sustainable Community Development, a Croatian CSO established in 2000. She has more than twenty years of experience in sustainable community projects and education for sustainable development. She is the founder of several civil society organisations and networks. She has ten years of experience at the Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning. She has eight years of experience in international organisations (REC, USAID/AED) in the area of environmental protection and civil society development. She was a member of

Croatian Council for environmental protection and sustainable development and an adviser to the Ministry of Environment in the preparing of an action plan for education for sustainable development. She participates in different advisory bodies. Her area of interest is sustainable development, rural/urban development, sustainable mobility and civil society development.



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Niklas Nienaß

Niklas Nienaß, born in 1992 in Marl/NRW, has lived in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania since 2012, describing himself as child of the German reunification and as a fighter for European unification. Since July 2019, he has been a Member of the European Parliament for the European Green Party. Mr Nienaß is coordinator for the group in the Committee on Regional Development and a member of the Committee on Culture and Education, as well as the Committee for Constitutional Affairs. In addition, Mr Nienaß leads the Parliamentary Group of the Europa-Union (German section of the Union of European Federalists) and is member of the EP's Spinelli Group. He is one of the EP's delegates to the Conference on the Future of Europe.



Andris Gobiņš

Andris Gobiņš is a Member of European Economic and Social Committee, President of European Movement – Latvia and Vice Chair of the Council of the Government and NGO Cooperation Memorandum in Latvia. Andris Gobiņš has studied education but since 2000 is professionally engaged in the Civil Society Sector and as freelance trainer at national and European level. He is the co-rapporteur for the EESC opinion on the European Democracy Action Plan.



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Alexandrina Najmowicz

Alexandrina Najmowicz has a legal background and extensive track record of international cooperation, working for more than fifteen years in the third sector and not-for-profit environment in Romania, France and at European level. She is currently Secretary General of the European Civic Forum, a transnational network of over 100 associations across Europe, working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity and democracy in Europe. In this role, she leads different campaigns and initiatives aiming to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to stand and act for these values, defend citizens' rights and become influential in the decision-making process. She is Co-chairwoman of the CSOs Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe and member of the CoFoE plenary.

