Factsheet

The EESC’s Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL Group)

The EESC’s FRRL Group

The Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL Group) was set up in 2018 as a horizontal body within the EESC to provide a forum for European civil society organisations to share their assessment of the state of fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law in the Member States.

Composition

The FRRL Group comprises 21 members from the EESC’s three groups (employers, workers, Diversity Europe). Its president is José Antonio Moreno Díaz (ES, Gr. II), and its two vice-presidents are Karolina Dreszer-Smalec (PL, Gr. III) and Jukka Ahtela (FI, Gr. I).

Objectives and methodology

The FRRL Group promotes a culture of fundamental rights and the rule of law within civil society, including respect for the European values listed in Article 2 TEU, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and other instruments. Its objective is to address both collective and individual rights, and, given the EESC’s mandate, to also pay attention to economic and social rights.

The FRRL Group notes significant differences between countries in the nature and seriousness of challenges to fundamental rights and the rule of law. These range from challenges that might only raise concern, to systemic threats. It does not aim to single out specific country situations and instead highlights trends in the EU developing in specific national contexts. Relaying the views of organised civil society on these trends, the FRRL Group facilitates constructive dialogue at European and national levels applying the following methodology:

- The FRRL Group is aiming to visit all Member States, covering about five countries a year with delegations of six EESC members.
- Its two-day visits focus on areas of particular importance to civil society, including the social partners: freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of the media, the right to non-discrimination, and the rule of law.
- In line with the EESC’s mandate, its main interlocutors during the visits are representatives of organised civil society in the Member States – employers, workers and a broad range of other
organisations, including media and legal professions – who have limited opportunities to express themselves in a European context. The FRRL Group seeks to meet a diverse and representative panel of national CSOs, as well as independent national human rights institutions.

- The FRRL Group produces short reports (4-5 pages) on the visits. These reports are intended to faithfully reflect the views of the national CSO representatives and to relay them to the European level. The reports do not constitute a legal analysis by the EESC nor do they go beyond national civil society views.

- The FRRL Group also seeks feedback from the authorities on the views of organised civil society. It meets with the Member State’s permanent representation to the EU for a preparatory meeting before a country visit and the FRRL Group also offers an opportunity to the authorities concerned to briefly comment on the country report and publishes these observations at the same time as the report.

- Bringing together the views of organised civil society and the observations of national authorities, the FRRL Group seeks to highlight possible differences in interpreting developments. This is intended as a contribution to a constructive dialogue.

- Each year, the FRRL Group will organise a conference or other forum to gather relevant stakeholders to discuss trends in Europe from the perspective of civil society.

- The FRRL Group provides input into EESC activities in areas relevant to its mandate (notably through opinions) and develops contacts with EU institutions and European civil society platforms to support the involvement of civil society in discussions on fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Activities in 2018-2019

- **Country visits:**
  The FRRL Group has visited Romania, Poland (2018), Hungary, France, Austria, Bulgaria (2019), and will soon visit Italy.

- **Report:**
  The interim report for the 2018-2019 visits will be issued on 5 November.

- **Conference:**
  The FRRL Group will hold a conference on 5 November to discuss overall trends as they have emerged from the first five country visits.

- **Other activities:**
  In 2019, the FRRL Group notably contributed to opinions on "Further strengthening the rule of law within the Union - state of play and possible next steps" (SOC/627) (the EESC’s input into the Commission consultation on the rule of law) and on "Populism and fundamental rights - suburban and rural areas" (NAT/771) (to be adopted in December).