CORE VALUES

SOLIDARITY RULE OF LAW INCLUSION
JUSTICE COHESION DIVERSITY FREEDOM
NON-DISCRIMINATION DEMOCRACY
HUMAN RIGHTS SECURITY WELL-BEING
EQUALITY HUMAN DIGNITY
PEACE FREEDOM

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Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation

STUDY

European Economic and Social Committee

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Study

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Foreword

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Values such as the "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities"[1] are at the core of the European project. However, despite this highest priority, the effective endorsement of the EU's core values seems to have suffered over the last decade. As the EU has had to deal with multiple crises and increased confrontation between Member States, the common interpretation of values such as democracy, the rule of law and solidarity is drifting apart. The latest confirmation of this is found in the declaration of the EU Council from July 2020.

As recent EESC opinions and studies have shown, civil society organisations (CSOs) could play a crucial role for both the respect and implementation of the above values. However, in a context in which the common understanding of European values is regularly undermined, CSOs are facing challenges such as the reduction of their advocacy role. In fact, despite their different backgrounds and general differences among European CSOs, CSOs across Europe seem to be becoming more and more alike in the way they react to major societal trends such as demographic changes, economic crisis, populism, shrinking civic space and digitalisation.[2] As a result, EU values are losing ground in favour of other opinions.

It is for this reason that Group III of the EESC – Diversity Europe – took the initiative to commission and support this study, entitled *Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation*, which I am pleased to recommend to you. It has been prepared by the European Policy Centre (EPC) and I am convinced that its results will be most useful for both CSOs and decision-makers, but also for academics and the broader public. It will be very helpful to design and discuss further steps to strengthen the foundations for a joint understanding of European citizenship.

As the title indicates, this study seeks to explore which core values drive citizens and societal change and whether CSOs are and will be able to endorse and promote them in the future, in 2030 and beyond.

To this end, the researchers focused on three core values: democracy, the rule of law and solidarity. Efforts were – due to budget limits – further concentrated on six Member States: Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Hungary, a rather accidental choice of representatives from amongst the EU Member States.

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[1] Treaty on European Union, Article 2.
[2] C.f. Divjak, Tina and Forbici, Goran (2017), *The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030*, Brussels: European Economic and Social Committee.

Relying on quantitative and qualitative data, they show that despite the fact that CSOs operate under different legal frameworks, representatives of civil society organisations interviewed for the purpose of this study largely concur in their understanding of democracy, the rule of law and solidarity. However, the challenges these organisations face in promoting these values differ mostly with regard to national political contexts. While CSOs in Western countries describe a positive relationship with the state, others, in the East and to a certain extent in the South, face distrust and social challenges or are confronted with an increased polarisation of civil society between traditionally-minded and state-supported CSOs and others that are more liberal and pro-European.

While it is safe to say that values are not losing ground among representatives of the interviewed CSOs, there are reasons to be concerned about their advocacy role. In doing their work – which is crucial for the health of democratic societies – CSOs across the continent increasingly have to face political opposition and a climate of distrust, confrontation and polarisation.

What is also particularly striking in this study is the picture it paints of the understanding of the value of solidarity. Rather than referring to an economic solidarity among Member States, representatives of CSOs define this value in a humanitarian sense, underlining the importance of social inclusion and solidarity towards the vulnerable. This is in line with the opinions of the general public, where there is broad support for humanitarian solidarity, while the majority of people (except in Greece) disapprove of the economic and social aspects. Moreover, in both cases, solidarity is above all seen to apply in local or national contexts. The association with Europe is generally absent.

The task of countering these tendencies and fostering a climate which is more understanding and open to compromise will not be an easy one. In doing so, I believe that it will be of great importance to work towards a joint understanding of values, not just in certain countries, but by all European citizens as a way to establish the values of a European citizenship.

Our responsibility, in this regard, will be of a shared nature. Action will be required not only from CSOs, but also from EU institutions, national authorities and maybe other relevant decision-making bodies as well.

As suggested in this study, the EU will have to learn the importance of a permanent and joint understanding and communication about its founding values. Rather than speaking only the language of economics and financial figures, it needs to engage in dialogue with its citizens and better communicate its projects and achievements. Civil society organisations, e.g. members of the EESC, must contribute to this common and European understanding of values through education and civic activism. In a diversifying associational landscape, CSOs may also have to find new and unconventional allies, such as grassroots movements, and further invest in European and cross-border cooperation. The EESC will have to actively play its role as the European voice of organised civil society especially in view of the Conference on the Future of Europe. However, in doing so they will need the support of

Member States, which, in some cases, will have to respect the space of CSOs and improve the framework in which CSOs operate.

Finally, the recent coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent health and economic crises also shed new light on the value of solidarity, not only in the humanitarian sense, but also when it comes to burden-sharing among Member States. We have seen a certain increase in the readiness to find common solutions.

To achieve these solutions and make it a successful process in the upcoming decade we have to work on the joint understanding of the values and the procedural structures for projects. We will have to work very hard to defend the process towards an educational, sustainable, social, inclusive and prosperous EU.

Without success in these fields, Europe is falling back on nationalism and destruction. It is the duty of every European, both officials and the general population, to play their role to deliver on this chance.

Don't mess with our Europe!

Brussels September 2020

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Abstract

Do civil society organisations in France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Hungary, and Poland share a common understanding of the values of democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity? This research shows that CSOs tend to converge in their definitions of these values, even if they display more diverse interpretations of solidarity than of democracy and the rule of law. It also reveals that CSOs recognise the crucial role that the civil sector plays in promoting these values. Yet CSOs face diverse challenges in doing so, relating especially to restricted access to funding, technological and generational change, and above all unfavourable political environments. Government and civil society itself are becoming more confrontational, more political and less open to compromise in all countries studied, with CSOs in the South and East describing their situation, perception of values and future outlook less positively than CSOs in the West. The future will require cooperation and innovation from both civil society and governments at all levels if CSOs are to be able to continue defending our Union of values. This paper presents proposals and recommendations from CSOs themselves and from the research team.

Executive summary

The EU's core values are described in Article 2 of the Treaty of European Union, and the EU is committed to upholding them. Civil society, too, plays a vital role in promoting these values. This study investigates the extent to which civil society organisations (CSOs) from six EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Hungary, and Poland) share a common understanding of three of these core values that have come under particular pressure through the EU's experience of poly-crisis since 2008: democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity. It explores what hurdles CSOs face in promoting them and what capacity they have to continue doing so until 2030 and beyond. As civil society is facing a worsening situation in many parts of Europe, confronted with economic crisis, populism, and shrinking civic space, understanding the challenges CSOs face and the degree to which they have a single vision of values is of utmost importance for the Union's future. This is especially the case as the EU begins to emerge from the Coronavirus crisis, perhaps its biggest challenge yet. For this reason, the study provides targeted recommendations for EU institutions, member state governments, and CSOs themselves to help strengthen civil society and facilitate the promotion of European values.

The study relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. In particular, it draws on interviews carried out between March and June 2020 with 62 CSO representatives: 13 from Greece, 12 from Germany, 11 from France, 10 from Italy, 8 from Poland, and 8 from Hungary. The research served to investigate whether civil society across Europe operates under broadly similar legal frameworks (Hypothesis 1); whether there are regional differences, such as between East-West or North-South (Hypothesis 2); and whether the definition of any given value varies significantly within and across countries (Hypothesis 3). The CSOs interviewed cover a wide spectrum of actors, including organisations representing socially vulnerable groups and advocating active citizen participation in decision-making (26); human rights and family organisations (16), environmental CSOs (5), media (5), youth (3), religious (3) and consumer (2) organisations, as well as new grassroots movements (2).

The analysis shows that CSOs across Europe operate under very different legal frameworks. Above all, political circumstances emerge as a driving force not only for the general environment in terms of attitudes towards civil society, but also for the shaping of the legal framework itself. Other challenges faced by CSOs, such as access to funding, were largely seen as closely tied to national political situations.

The interviews reveal that CSOs in all six countries broadly agree in their definition of the three European values studied. None of the respondents had any difficulty explaining their understanding of these values and most offered theoretical, almost textbook, descriptions of them. They also drew connections among the three values, linking, in particular, the rule of law and solidarity to the meaning of democracy. Greater convergence emerges on the CSOs' conceptualisation of democracy and the rule of law, whereas solidarity seems to be the subject of more diverse interpretations.

For many CSOs, democracy is not just a means for 'the people' to determine how they are governed but also the principle that decisions should be made for the good of the community as a whole. This understanding of democracy as an inclusive and communitarian political system prompted several interviewees to say that CSOs are crucial in the promotion of democracy, precisely because they give citizens another channel to participate in politics (and/or shape society more widely), beyond the 'usual' means of political parties.

Such a rights-centred vision of democracy also transpires from the high value that interviewees place on the rule of law, which many defined as the presence of a strong legal system that restricts the abuse of power and guarantees the same rights and duties for all, as well as a free and just trial. Here too, respondents saw themselves as sharing in the responsibility to implement the rule of law, alongside the state, considering civil society to be a fundamental part of their country's system of checks and balances.

Regarding solidarity, despite nuances in the interpretations of this value among interviewees, the findings suggest that there is a firm core to the notion of solidarity, which most respondents identified in the humanitarian dimension of the concept and which, again, they connected to responsibility and action. When speaking about solidarity, interviewees mostly invoked human rights and dignity, social inclusion, and equality, going beyond race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or nationality. As such, it is safe to say that the humanitarian aspects of this value – rather than its economic facets – ultimately lie at the centre of the CSOs' understanding of solidarity.

Consequently, values are not losing ground: the CSOs tend to converge both in their definitions of the values studied, as well as with regard to the crucial role that the civil society sector plays in promoting them. Yet respondents do highlight differences between their own personal definitions of values and those of different actors in their national context or other member states.

In all cases, the interviews expose regional similarities and differences, corresponding to the countries in the West (Germany and France), South (Greece and Italy), and East (Poland and Hungary) of Europe. Within each of these groups, CSOs describe their situation, their perception of values, and their outlook for the future similarly. More specifically, respondents from Western countries mainly describe stable circumstances and a positive relationship with the state, while being vocal about violations of the rule of law and democratic backsliding in other member states. Southern countries tend to have a much more pessimistic view about the state of play and the future, not least given the impact of the poly-crisis in these member states. The assessment of CSOs from Eastern countries is comparable to that of Southern Europe, but the findings portray a notably worse political situation in these countries, where governing parties tend to support mainly traditionally-minded and pro-government organisations over pro-European, liberal and government-critical parties, resulting in fragmentation and polarisation in the civil society landscape.

Having said that, the overall picture that emerges from the interviews is one in which society in all the countries surveyed is in fact becoming more confrontational, more political, more polarised, and less

open to compromise: these characteristics apply both to the government and to civil society itself. Thus, CSOs are experiencing increasing difficulty in engaging with state institutions impacted by political polarisation. At the same time, the civil society sector is diversifying, with many of the newcomers themselves less open to constructive dialogue and working within the confines of the system. The civil sector remains at the forefront in the defence and promotion of values across the EU but its constant and tireless endorsement of values is not without challenges in the present volatile and interdependent national, European and global contexts.

Reflecting on the future, the analysis indicates that domestic political dynamics and populism are seen as enduring challenges for CSOs, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe. The EU's efforts are often considered slow and ineffective, especially when it comes to European solidarity. In this context, the biggest challenge that CSOs identify for the future of the EU is the in-fighting among member states and the inability of EU capitals to put on a more united front. Many organisations do find optimism, however, in the potential of digitalisation, which they perceive as beneficial to democracy and democratic participation, and in the renewed interest of the younger generations in civic engagement, which manifests itself through the emergence of increased grassroots movements.

The CSOs best placed to promote EU values in the coming years will be those that make use of opportunities for collaborating with like-minded organisations, including those based in other countries, European-level umbrella organisations, and new movements with different methods and support bases. Staying abreast of fast-changing social developments, such as the use of digital technology and the interests and priorities of the youngest generations, will be essential. Ultimately, however, CSOs' ability to shape their own future is limited: their conditions for promoting values rely to a great extent on a favourable political climate. Member states and European institutions must therefore take steps to improve access to funding, strengthen and maintain channels for civil dialogue, and harmonise or simplify legal requirements. The EU should also ensure particular support for those CSOs operating in countries with restrictive political environments.

While the Coronavirus crisis struck right in the middle of the work for this study and, therefore, was not initially factored into the analysis, it soon became clear from desk research and interviews that the pandemic has put serious constraints on civil society's ability to carry out its activities, and the ensuing economic crisis is bound to cause serious funding problems for CSOs. Dealing with the aftermath of the crisis has to be a concerted effort, involving all actors at the different levels of decision-making in Europe, and should include adequate and targeted support and attention for the civil society sector. Europe is more than just an economic project – it is a Union of values, the sustainability and health of which depends on the everyday work of CSOs across member states.

1.   Introduction

1.1   The research puzzle

Values matter! According to Inglehart and Weltzel,[3] culture and politics are closely interrelated. Major cultural tendencies at the individual level are, on the larger scale, linked to political institutions. In a classic example, the failure of the Weimar Republic is often explained by its lack of a democratic culture and used as a warning that a "democracy without democrats" contributed to the rise of Nazi Germany.[4] The functioning of our democratic systems is dependent on a set of democratic values, which are anchored within society. As such, democracy is not simply a matter of institutional functioning, but also a normative construction. Unless support for democracy is coupled with these values, democracy is but a hollow shell. In short, values can make or break the substance of democracy.

The values of the European Union (EU) are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). "[R]espect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights" are the EU's founding values, common to all of the member states. Article 3 TEU further gives the promotion of democratic values as one of the main objectives of the European project. As a central part of the EU's accession criteria set out in Article 49 TEU, these core values are agreed upon by all member states upon accession. Thus, values are not merely of symbolic importance for the EU; they form its legal basis as well.

Yet, despite this existing legal framework, the circumstances in which values are implemented in practice in the EU have changed over the past years. The EU's poly-crisis,[5] which has affected each member state and its citizens, seems to have also impacted the way Europeans understand the Union and its founding values. A decade of crises may have given rise to different notions of the same values on the political and societal level. Hungary and Poland, for example, have come to defend their reforms of the political and judicial system against the European Commission, which assesses democracy and the rule of law to be in danger in these countries.[6] During the Eurozone crisis, thousands of Greeks protested against a 'German diktat' and the lack of member states' solidarity, whereas public opinion in Germany became significantly anti-Greek and against providing further financial assistance to Greece.[7] Thus, the EU is faced with increasing polarisation within and fragmentation between member states, not only in terms of political views, but, it appears, also with regards to the Union's core values.

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[3]   Roland, Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005), *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[4]   Kershaw, Ian (1990), *Weimar: Why did German democracy fail?,* New York: St. Martin's Press.

[5]   Former Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker referred to the poly-crisis as the "worst economic, financial and social crisis since World War II". He described how "various challenges – from the security threats in our neighbourhood and at home, to the refugee crisis, and to the UK referendum – have not only arrived at the same time. They also feed each other, creating a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of our people."; see Juncker, Jean-Claude, "Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Annual General Meeting of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)", European Commission, 21 June 2016; For further details on the EU's 'poly-crisis' see Emmanouilidis, A. Janis (2017), *Re-energising Europe: A package deal for the EU27*. Third report New Pact for Europe.

[6]   *European Parliament*, "Rule of law in Poland and Hungary has worsened" (accessed 8 June 2020).

[7]   Connolly, Kate (2015), "How German voters are losing patience with Greece", *The Guardian* (accessed 8 June 2020); Dempsey, Judy (2015), "Greece's cynical anti-German rhetoric", Brussels: Carnegie Europe.

Whether and how different member states diverge in the way they conceptualise and apply EU values is critically important for the future of European democracy and of the Union as a whole. If values are the glue that holds the member states together, the banner under which they take action, and the code that defines their conduct, then without a mutual understanding of these values, and in the absence of a staunch commitment to them, the liberal democratic foundation of the EU project is in trouble. This study investigates whether different definitions and practices of the EU's core values can be observed among civil society organisations (CSOs) in its member states, what they are doing to promote these values in their work, and what the prospects are for the coming years.

1.2   The scope of the study

From among all the values specified in Article 2 TEU which are "common to the Member States", this study chooses to examine three core values which have come under fire during the poly-crisis: **democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity**.

In recent years, a weakening of democratic institutions and values has become apparent.[8] The fragile political landscape of the poly-crisis has provided fertile ground for an emergence of illiberal political actors and a surge in populism on both the ideological right and left. Far from being a prerogative of Eastern Europe, populism has become rampant on the entire European continent, as shown by the electoral success of populist radical parties at the national and European levels. In some cases, such as Italy and Austria, those challengers have even stepped into governmental positions, thanks to the connivance of mainstream politicians. From the UK to Spain, and from Denmark to Germany and France, the electoral success of populist forces has had polarising effects on public opinion and public debate, fuelling insecurity and fear and undermining liberal democratic values. In the European Parliament, populists today control 29% of the seats, compared with just 9% in 1999.[9]

It is nevertheless important to note that populism *per se* is not anti-democratic in a formal sense: it embraces popular sovereignty, majority rule, and the rules of parliamentary democracy. Rather, populism is at odds with the idea and institutions of liberal democracy. Opposing pluralism and the practice of political compromise, the populists are anti-liberal, and in this way they pose risks for liberal democracies. The division of society between the strongly antagonistic camps of the 'people' and the 'elites' deepens fragmentation within national societies as well as between EU member states.[10]

Hungary and Poland are the most prominent examples in this regard. In both countries, populist parties are currently heading the government. Since returning to power in 2010, Hungary's Prime Minister

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[8]   Mair, Peter (2006), *Ruling the void: The hollowing of western democracy*, New York: Verso.
[9]   Rankin, Jennifer, "Why populists could struggle to capitalise on EU elections success", *The Guardian*, 28 May 2019.
[10] Galston, William (2018), "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 29, Number 2, pp. 5-19; Krastev, Ivan and Stephen Holmes (2019), *The light that failed – A reckoning*, London: Penguin Books Ltd; Mudde, Cas (2004), "The populist Zeitgeist", *Government and Opposition*, Volume 39, Number 4, pp. 542-563.

Viktor Orbán has presided over a number of controversial reforms that have severely restricted independent media, blocking political forces in opposition and hindering the activities of state-critical NGOs and other independent civil society platforms.[11] As a consequence, Hungary's Freedom House ranking has experienced a steep decline over the past ten years: from an overall score of 92 out of 100 in 2009, the country has now fallen to 70, losing its "Free" status in 2019.[12]

Closely connected to the populist surge and its threat to European values are the current developments in Hungary and Poland concerning the state of the **rule of law**. The independence of judges and their ability to restrain the executive and legislature have been significantly compromised in both countries through judicial reforms. In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has weakened the separation of powers through a number of legislative acts targeting the judiciary in order to assert political control over it.[13] Not only does recent legislation adopted in Poland allow for partisan influence over judges' appointment, but political control will also be exercised over their actions, through the creation of a disciplinary chamber with sanctioning power. A similar law regulating the status and code of conduct of journalists is under discussion. According to Freedom House, the country has experienced a deterioration – especially in the categories of the functioning of government and the rule of law – from an overall score of 93 out of 100 in 2016 to 84 in 2019, albeit maintaining the status of "Free".[14] While the EU has tried to halt the backsliding by means of the so-called 'rule of law dialogue',[15] infringement procedures,[16] and the Article 7 process,[17] these measures have thus far been largely ineffective.

In addition, the recent economic and migration/refugee crises have fuelled discontent with domestic and European politics among the public, as well as boosting sentiments of mistrust towards other individuals, social categories, or even countries. This trend has called into question one of the core values and principles of European cooperation: the **solidarity** among member states. While solidarity was at the centre of the Eurozone crisis management – most prominently through the Greek bailout or programmes for several member states under the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) – it also contributed to the rise of populist movements. This greatly helped the electoral fortunes of populist parties in Southern Europe, including electoral victories for the left-wing SYRIZA in Greece and the right-wing Lega in Italy.

Such tendencies have been amplified by the way in which the migration/refugee crisis of the last years has been handled. The crisis increased polarisation within European societies, with leftist political

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[11] *Bertelsmann Stiftung,* "Bertelsmann Transformation Index: Hungary Country Report 2020" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[12] *Freedom House*, "Hungary" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[13] *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, "Bertelsmann Transformation Index: Poland Country Report 2020" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[14] *Freedom House* (2019), "Poland" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[15] European Commission (2019), COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 2017/1520 of 26 July 2017 regarding the rule of law in Poland complementary to Recommendations 2016/1374 and (EU) 2017/146, Brussels.
[16] Most recently see: *European Commission*, "Rule of Law: European Commission refers Poland to the Court of Justice to protect judges from political control" (accessed 5 May 2020).
[17] European Commission (2017), Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION on the determination of a clear risk of a serious breach by the Republic of Poland of the rule of law (COM (2017) 835 final, Brussels.

parties in Western Europe generally expressing solidarity with migrants and the member states on the frontline, while right-wing parties strictly opposed migration from outside the EU, following an identity-based, nationalist, and often xenophobic approach. Member states' polarisation on migration has also prevented the EU from agreeing on sustainable and constructive measures in this field. While it was possible to agree on a relocation scheme for refugees by majority voting in 2015, the implementation of the measures was opposed by several Central and Eastern European member states.[18] Furthermore, to this day, the member states have been unable to agree on a compromise regarding the reform of the Common European Asylum System, with the main (so far) unbridgeable difference being the reform of the Dublin regulation towards a system on the basis of solidarity among EU countries. In other words, due to different views on the concept of solidarity across the EU, member states have been unable to agree on a common approach to the migration challenge and cannot share the burden equally.

Different interpretations of the concept of solidarity have thus played an important role in the discourses and actions of the EU member states. The management of both the Eurozone and the migration/refugee crises generated polarisation among and within the member states, pitting the North against the South (Eurozone crisis) and the East against the West (migration).

Overall, the many, recent, and complex crises in the EU appear to have inspired diverging interpretations and applications of the values specified in Article 2 TEU. This study investigates such differences in the case of the member states that have been most affected by the crises, as well as those EU countries most involved in their management. Thus, the **selected member states are: Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Hungary**. The study looks at Italy and Greece, two of the member states hardest hit by the Eurozone and the migration/refugee crises, and at Poland and Hungary, the member states undergoing rule of law disputes with the European Commission. Any changes with regard to EU values in these cases are compared with the situation in France and Germany – the EU's 'big two' founding members, which assumed a key role in the management of the crises.

This study sheds light on the extent to which discrepancies exist within member states in the way citizens and their elites understand the same values. In this context, the analysis of civil society organisations (CSOs), as crucial actors in the promotion of EU values, is particularly valuable. CSOs are defined here as all organisations which serve "the general interest through a democratic process, and which play the role of mediator between public authorities"[19] and include social actors as well as non-governmental and grassroots organisations (including youth groups). From this perspective, CSOs embody democratic norms and principles, as well as reflecting the health of the democratic political systems in which they operate.

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[18]   *European Commission*, "Relocation: EU solidarity between member states" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[19]   *EUR-Lex Glossary*, "Civil society organisation" (accessed 10 June 2020).

The findings of this study are relevant both for the national and EU level of governance, and its recommendations target not only CSOs in different member states, but also EU national governments and European officials and decision makers.

1.3   Hypotheses and relevance of findings

The study seeks to answer questions relating to the perception of European values among CSOs across Europe, such as: Are there different understandings of values within and between member states? Are EU values losing ground? How do CSOs advocate for these values, and what capacity do they have to continue doing so in the years to come?

The working hypotheses of the study are:

>   ***Hypothesis 1*** *CSOs across Europe operate under broadly similar legal frameworks, but there is significant divergence between member states in terms of how values are interpreted;*

>   ***Hypothesis 2*** *In particular, an East-West split is expected, and perhaps also a North-South divide;*

>   ***Hypothesis 3*** *Divergences will likely be more significant for some values than others, for example, more various understandings of democracy than the rule of law.*

If these hypotheses are confirmed, EU policymakers will have grounds to worry. Values are the basis of the EU, appearing in Article 2 TEU ahead even of details on the Union's aims (Article 3) and competences (Article 4). If there is no agreement on what exactly these values refer to, the EU will not only struggle to act as a cohesive whole; its fundamental structure will be undermined. If member states – the EU's constituent parts – are pulling in different directions, the Union cannot function.

More specifically, the implications of diverging views depend on the values in question:
- A thorough analysis of how the core value of **democracy** (see section 3.2) is understood across Europe is necessary to evaluate the expectations that citizens and CSOs have of their political leaders, and of their own ability to enact political change. This is especially the case given increasing discussion about the future of EU democracy, such as via the European Citizens' Consultations and the Conference on the Future of Europe, and overall low levels of trust in existing political models.[20]
- Of all EU values, **the rule of law** has perhaps seized the most headlines in recent years, with infringement procedures launched against the governments of Hungary and Poland, violence committed against journalists in Malta and Slovakia, and an unconstitutional referendum held in Catalonia. At the same time, it is perhaps the value that *should* be subject to the least

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[20]   Van der Meer, Tom W.G. (2017), *Political trust and the crisis of democracy,* New York: Oxford University Press.

variation in interpretation, relating as it does to legal and judicial matters, a core part of any functioning liberal democracy. Particularly in light of the debate on tying EU funds to respect for the rule of law, ensuring that all Europeans share the same understanding of this value seems crucial.

- **Solidarity** between member states is an essential prerequisite of the EU, in which the member states surrender a certain degree of national sovereignty in agreeing to come together for their common good. But even beyond this basis, solidarity has become a highly relevant concept in multiple key policy areas that have faced the EU in recent years, being frequently evoked in discussions on migration and the accommodation of refugees, as well as the Eurozone crisis. An investigation of how solidarity is perceived across the EU may provide valuable insights, such as answers to the questions of whether the migration and Eurozone contexts of solidarity are complementary, or whether CSOs interpret the value in terms of one or the other; whether all CSOs in a given member state have similar relationships to the term, or whether it depends on their field of work; and whether solidarity only extends to other Europeans, or whether Europeans feel solidarity towards others (for example, refugees) as well.

If there are diverging views on values and how CSOs advocate for them, it is essential for EU policymakers to understand these differences and take account of them in their policy responses. This requires not only an appraisal of what exactly the differences are, but also where their sources lie. If, as expected, there is a broadly similar legal framework underpinning CSO operations across Europe, this suggests that effective policy can be applied on the EU level. If this hypothesis is mistaken and legal realities also diverge between member states, then this must be reflected in EU policymaking relating to values.

Assuming that the study finds that a lack of agreement on values exists, it will attempt to ascertain whether this is the result of legal differences or of conceptual divergences – or both. This information will then be used to develop recommendations for how CSOs can continue to promote and advocate for these values in a manner that may draw Europe's fragmented societies together. The role and responsibility of EU national governments and European decision-makers will also be assessed and prescribed if found lacking.

2. Methodological approach

The study adopted a **comparative, multi-strategy research design,** combining both **qualitative** and **quantitative** methods of data collection and analysis. This approach offered two main advantages. Firstly, the quantitative and qualitative research methods employed were complementary and enabled the research team to provide findings that offer both breadth and depth. Secondly, using the two methods helped to ensure the validity of findings, in line with the principle of triangulation, which entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. We thus expect our results to be reliable, despite the negative impact of the Coronavirus crisis on the response rate for the interviews.

In concrete terms, the project involved both **qualitative analysis** – to understand *how* and *why* CSOs operate the way they do with respect to the promotion of the chosen values – as well as a **collection or measurement of quantitative data**, to illustrate the *what*, *where* and *when* of CSOs' experiences in different countries.

Quantitative data was gathered from statistics and different types of polls and surveys, including, for example, the most recent Eurobarometer surveys, the Flash Eurobarometer on National Justice Systems from January 2018 and the Special Eurobarometer on the Rule of Law from April 2019, a Special Eurobarometer from 2017 on solidarity, and a YouGov poll on different forms of solidarity from 2019. Such data on European citizens' perceptions of the values of democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity, both in the member states and at the EU level, helped the team to assess whether there has been a shift in the EU's core values among citizens.

While these surveys and polls represent a valuable data source, given that they are based on a large number of respondents from all member states, relying on quantitative data would be insufficient for a number of reasons. For certain categories of the Eurobarometer, questions were not asked every year, meaning that a full trend line is not possible. Still, this report highlights change (or continuity) throughout recent years by comparing results whenever data is available. Furthermore, some of the questions are quite vague and it is not always clear how respondents have interpreted them, especially in relation to the values covered by this report. This could be seen as a limitation. Thus, to fill in any gaps with regard to the meaning and concept behind these data, the study also collected **qualitative pieces of information.**

The qualitative data used to supplement and complement the quantitative resources were collected from **interviews**, as well as from **secondary materials** such as official government/party documents, specific policies, and declarations by party leaders and politicians in domestic and international media.

2.1   Selection of CSOs

To carry out the interviews, the research team first identified a broad **selection of CSOs in the six member states**. As thousands of CSOs operate in Europe, a complete or exhaustive directory of them all was clearly impossible. In response to this objective limitation, the study decided to develop a list that would cover a suitably broad selection of CSOs (20-30 per country) working in a variety of areas, including both large and small organisations.

The starting point for putting together the list of CSOs was the memberships of the European-level CSOs close to the EESC's Diversity Group (Group III),[21] such as the European Environmental Bureau

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[21]   *European Economic and Social Committee,* "Diversity Europe Group partner organisations" (accessed 11 March 2020).

and the European Consumer organisation BEUC. This initial list was supplemented using data from previous research into civil society carried out by the European Policy Centre (EPC). For example, in 2018, the EPC conducted a study[22] on the European Citizens' Consultations, which involved coordinating a network of CSOs following the process in the member states. In a previous project, the EPC also mapped media organisations and foundations in order to identify opportunities for combatting the shrinking space for civil society. Furthermore, the EPC is itself a membership-based organisation with about 150 non-corporate members[23] with whom it maintains regular contact. The research team made full use of these existing networks in the expectation that CSOs that already know the EPC would be more responsive to interview requests.

Using this initial research as guidance, the team devised a set of rough categories to help identify gaps and narrow down the search for further CSOs. It is important to stress that the chosen categories are not a tool of empirical analysis, but rather a rough framework to help the team in gathering a good spread of CSOs. They are based largely on the Group III partner organisations and the other prominent groupings of organisations identified in the first phase of the research. The categories are as follows:

● Environmental	● Disadvantaged social groups
● Consumer	● Media
● Family	● Foundation
● Youth	● Democracy and citizens' participation
● Human rights	● Voluntary
● Religious	● Activist and grassroots movements

As a general principle, the team tried to include at least one organisation for each country under the categories for environment, consumers, family, youth, human rights, religious, and disadvantaged social groups. This ensured a minimum level of diversity, covering some of the most prominent areas in which civil society is active. Other categories turned out to be more complicated, raising questions about which CSOs to include and which to leave out: for example, media organisations are often linked to commercial news outlets or journalists, while activist organisations and foundations frequently have ties to political parties. Many organisations can be grouped under more than one category, with the 'voluntary' category in particular consisting of many duplicates. For this reason, the team felt it was not essential to ensure an equal spread across all categories, instead prioritising the aforementioned 'main' ones where commercial or political ties were less prevalent.

Ensuring a diversity of views, including politically, was nonetheless a key goal of the exercise. The aim was not only to cover 'pro-European' CSOs, but also those which may have a different view of Europe – or even those for whom 'Europe' is not a priority topic at all. For that reason, a conscious decision was made to avoid including too many organisations working directly on EU issues, feeling that their

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[22] Stratulat, Corina and Paul Butcher (2018), "The European Citizens' Consultations: Evaluation report", Brussels: European Policy Centre.
[23] *European Policy Centre*, "Members" (accessed 11 March 2020).

views on European values are already widely known and understood. The team also tried to include a few organisations with 'alternative' views, such as those with more conservative views, or even radical missions or methods (for example, the 'Alternatiba' movement in France) – these are also a part of the European civil society landscape and must be taken into account in the study.

Due to limitations on the number of organisations with which we could conduct interviews, we did not consider it necessary to be strict about balance *within* categories. For example, including one organisation from each of the main religious denominations in the 'religious' category (Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) would be beyond the scope of the project.

We also opted not to systematically include large international organisations, such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace. In most cases, these organisations' views of values are relatively clear, and unlikely to vary significantly between national offices. For this reason we felt that our efforts would be better spent on smaller organisations with a national focus. The exceptions are those cases in which an international organisation has an especially prominent role in a particular member state, such as is the case with the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. We did not wish to exclude internationals entirely, since they also constitute part of European civic society – indeed, quite an important part. However, we felt that interviewing branches of the same organisation in several member states would not be an efficient use of our resources for the purposes of this study.

Once we had put together a list with a broad coverage of categories, we sourced feedback from colleagues internally and from other contacts with knowledge of the relevant member states, including EESC members. This feedback was valuable in making sure that the list was relevant, up to date, and did not contain glaring errors or omissions.

Using these techniques, we fairly quickly reached a total of 40-50 CSOs per chosen country. This list of 282 CSOs in total was deemed sufficient to proceed with interview requests. The list continued to be updated throughout the study, with new organisations added on the basis of discussions with the EESC Task Force and recommendations from interview partners. Annex 1 includes the final version of this directory.

2.2   Interviews with CSOs representatives

The team then approached these CSOs in order to request interviews with their representatives. However, the quick spread of the Coronavirus pandemic throughout the EU and the ensuing decision of the member states included in this study to enter quarantine complicated our team's efforts to reach CSOs and secure interview dates with them. The crisis mood and the fact that many organisations had closed their offices and reduced their activity while working remotely has meant that many of our calls for interview were answered late or not at all. CSOs working in the social field, for example, proved particularly difficult to reach since they were busy dealing with the crisis. Our own team members had to continue working on this project from home as well, as the EPC had to comply with the measures adopted by the Belgian government in response to the crisis and close its doors.

Thanks to our repeated appeals to contacts from the directory, the team eventually managed to speak with **62 CSO representatives from all six member states**. The team interviewed 13 CSO representatives from Greece, 12 from Germany, 11 from France, 10 from Italy, 8 from Poland, and 8 from Hungary. The final list of organisations interviewed is available in Annex 2.

The most responsive were organisations directly working on EU affairs, those representing socially vulnerable groups and those advocating active citizen participation in decision-making (26). A relatively high response (16) also came from CSOs working on human rights – usually well-known or local branches of international organisations – and from family organisations – generally smaller and more locally-oriented.

Furthermore, 5 environmental and 5 media organisations also accepted to speak to us, while a rather lower response rate was received from youth (3), religious (3), and consumer (2) organisations. New grassroots movements were also quite unresponsive (2), owing in some cases to the difficulty of finding an 'official' contact channel for movements without clear leadership structures. In the end, despite looking for a diversity of views across the civic sector, 'pro-European' and liberal organisations were still overrepresented, as they were disproportionately likely to respond to the interview requests.

The purpose of the interviews was to find out how various civil society actors conceptualise the chosen values and how they actively promote them in their everyday work. While interviewing these CSOs, our researchers also sought to learn about how these organisations perceive the national context in which they operate, both in terms of challenges and opportunities and how they have so far managed to work effectively in spite of – or thanks to – the existing domestic environment.

For the interviews, our team devised a common grid of questions to guide the discussion (see **Interview Questionnaire**, Annex 3), fully aware that some countries might require more in-depth analysis or closer attention to specific issues that are not shared by others. This means that the questionnaire that we used in the interviews was semi-structured, allowing the interviewee to bring in new comments and ideas about the specificities of their country. This approach enabled us to put together comparative information as well as country and issue-specific data. The researchers kept detailed notes of each interview, which was carried out either by Skype or phone.

The first few interviews led the team to make small adjustments to the interview guide, for example, by including an opening question that explores the interviewee's personal understanding/definition of the values under consideration and the extent to which, in the respondent's opinion, that understanding is shared in his/her organisation and country.

2.3 Desk research

In parallel, the team undertook **desk research** in order to make sense of the legal framework in each country and understand the degree to which the values included in the study are mentioned, protected, and promoted by law in the six member states studied. The mapping of the legislative framework in each member state also took into account the type of state support available to CSOs engaged in

activities that pursue and promote the values included in the study. The individual cases continued to be updated throughout the study on the basis of new information from the interviews and with the help of the EESC members.

2.4   Framework of analysis

In order to explain the choice of focus on civil society in the context of a project on perceptions of democratic values, the team researched different conceptual understandings of representative democracy. Following Saurugger,[24] it is possible to distinguish between:

- **elective representative democracy,** in which direct citizen participation in policymaking processes is not essential to democracy and should be limited to voting for leaders and thus producing a government,[25] and
- **participatory democracy,** where citizen participation is more than voting in elections and is essential to ensuring good government.[26]

This study focuses on participatory democracy, stressing the role of civil society in maximising the potential for citizens to participate in civic and political life.[27] Participatory democracy enables greater civic engagement through various forms of participation in the governance process, such as citizens' surveys, public consultations, legal crowdsourcing or participatory budgeting[28] — and participation via the work of CSOs may also be considered part of this definition. Thus, participatory democracy guarantees that people's concerns and ideas are discussed, negotiated and taken into consideration in the policymaking processes.[29] It not only provides space for active citizenship, but also bridges the gap between political elites and citizens, forging a constructive partnership between the two.[30] Furthermore, it is founded on the belief that the basis of political equality is not merely a multi-party system and the right to free elections, but the extent to which citizens have access to decision-making.[31] A strong and active civil society plays a key role in this process, empowering citizens for greater political involvement, while also holding decision-makers accountable. Thus, civil society organisations are not just community service providers, government watchdogs and advocates for human rights; they also keep public discourse open and communicate citizens' demands to the political level. In other words, they work hand-in-hand with state institutions to develop policies that will reflect the voices of different social circles, thus promoting the transformative power of active citizenship — in a perfect world, at least.

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[24] Saurugger, Sabine (2007), "Democratic 'misfit'? Conceptions of civil society participation in France and the European Union", *Political Studies*, Volume 55, Number 2, pp. 384-404.

[25] For example, Schumpeter, Joseph (1942), *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*, New York: Harper & Brothers.

[26] For example, Pateman, Carole (1970), *Participation and democratic theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[27] Busschaert, Gautier (2018), "Participatory democracy, civil society and social Europe: A legal and political perspective", *Intersentia,* Volume 8.

[28] Participatory budgeting is a form of decision-making process in which citizens discuss and decide on the allocation of part of a municipal or public budget.

[29] Wainwright, Hilary, "Why participatory democracy matters – and movements matter to participatory democracy", *Transnational Institute* (accessed 7 June 2020).

[30] Lessenski, Marin and Assya Kavrakova (2019), "Study on societies outside metropolises: The role of civil society organisations in facing populism", Brussels: European Economic and Social Committee, p. 156.

[31] Wainwright, Hilary (2004), "Civil society, democracy and power: Global connections", in Glasius, Marlies; Helmut Anheier and Mary Kaldor (eds.), *Global civil society 2004/2005,* London: Sage Publications, Chapter V.

As Saurugger[32] explains, when looking empirically at civil society participation, three elements inspired from the normative and theoretical debate on participatory democracy can be used for comparative purposes. These are:

1. **The regulation of civil society's access to political institutions**. This refers to the legal framework in which representative groups operate and which stipulates the relationship between civil society and the government. It offers important insights into the extent to which CSOs have access to decision-making based on transparency – or not. In turn, the degree and type of government openness to civic input is likely to have a bearing on an organisation's perception and practice of democratic values. A legal environment that is restrictive or inhibiting to civil society activism and CSOs' interaction with the state, for example, could have great explanatory power in case differences are exposed between member states with regard to CSOs' perceptions or promotion of democratic values.

2. **The financial and social resources**, meaning the capacities that organised civil society possesses or requires in order to intervene and influence the public, political or private debate, and to provide services.[33] This is another element of the general environment which can facilitate or obstruct civil society's understanding and implementation of values. The extent to which CSOs enjoy state budget allocations or access to sustainable (even structural) sources of funding goes a long way towards determining the scope of their action and their performance in fighting for values. Put differently, the type of funding and the ease of access to financial resources can reveal not only the state's democratic openness, but also the constraints or opportunities that may explain how certain organisations position themselves with respect to values. A given organisation's take on values – both in terms of how it conceptualises those values and the degree to which it applies them through its activities – will also depend on the resources at its disposal.

3. **The grassroots character of civil society mobilisation.** This measures the degree to which CSOs cover a wide scope of people's concerns, facilitating broad-based citizens' participation in decision-making, either through protests, marches, sit-ins, and so on, or through interest representation at the political level. If, from the perspective of participatory democracy, civil society plays a key role in ensuring good governance, then the extent to which the sector functions as a transmission belt from the society to the political level is a critical element to assess its work. Moreover, whether civic activism is expressed directly through citizens' mobilisation or via interest groups, for example, can be revealing about whether organisations use informal and/or formalised channels to practice values in a given country.

Thus, these three indicators offer a promising starting point for an analysis of the context and type of organisations that define the conceptualisation of values in different EU countries. This framework of

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[32] Saurugger (2007), *op. cit.*, pp. 388-391.
[33] Hirst, Paul (1994), *Associative democracy: New forms of economic and social governance,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

analysis also offers a suitable way to draw comparisons across the member states included in the project and understand the reasons behind similarities or divergences.

3.   Findings and analysis

By applying this methodological approach and analytical framework, the research team uncovered a wealth of information that could answer the hypotheses advanced in this study. Desk research and quantitative data analysis painted the contours of the different national contexts in which CSOs operate in the EU, both in terms of legal frameworks and citizens' broader perspectives of values in their countries. This exposed the main lines of distinction between countries and hinted at some of the points of tension within individual member states when it comes to values. As such, they helped to guide the subsequent research phase of the study, which focused on interviews with CSOs representatives. The qualitative analysis of these conversations drew on and complemented the information brought to light through desk research and quantitative analysis. Only by bringing together all these pieces did the research puzzle reveal itself, offering answers, exposing trends, suggesting future prospects, and inspiring recommendations, as described below.

3.1   National Frameworks for CSOs

In order to establish an understanding of the circumstances under which European CSOs operate, and the extent to which they vary between member states, the research team conducted desk research into the legal frameworks, historical developments, and contemporary conditions for civil society in each of the case study countries. After an initial research phase based on the secondary literature and relevant legal documents, gaps in the research were filled and further details added following the interviews with CSO representatives. The national frameworks are intended to give a broad overview of the diverse situations faced by European CSOs, including the applicable legislation, their relationships with state institutions, and what problems or inconsistencies they face in practice.

France[34]

Civil society – an overview

France has long been considered a **"civic desert"** compared to the vibrant civic involvement of citizens in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries.[35] The spirit of the French Revolution stipulated a direct interpretation of the general interest ahead of that of individuals and groups. In this 'Rousseauan' interpretation, the involvement of civil society groups may enhance democratic legitimacy, but at the same time it is seen as an **appropriation of public power by marginal segments of society**. Thus, compared to other European countries and the United States, the recognition of civil society organisations came relatively late. The Chapelier law of 1791 forbade the founding of corporations and

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[34]   Based on a contribution submitted for this study by Lukas Schneider, Research Assistant at the European Policy Centre (EPC).
[35]   Saurugger (2007), *op. cit.,*p. 389.

shaped the state's mission that the **general interest** should not be interfered with by any intermediate interest.

Whereas statism (*Étatisme*), state control, and centralisation remained the main principles of the French state, the association law of 1901, which is still in place, created liberal rules concerning the foundation of associations.[36] The law broadly defines associations as a contract between two or more people with the aim of "a purpose other than profit". However, the recognition of an association still builds on its educational character and the preservation of the general interest. Beginning with the legal recognitions of the "corps intermédiaires", **civil society organisations have been intertwined with the build-up and expansion of the French welfare state**. The significant growth of associations in the aftermath of the Second World War, and particularly since the 1960s, increased the trend of less state control.

General legal framework

From a legal point of view, the recognition of a civil society organisation is based on a simple and liberal procedure guaranteed in the **association law of 1901**. "Associations" constitute the generic legal form of the majority of French non-profits. The creation of an association is explicitly recognised in Article 2 of this law: a **simple declaration to the prefecture or sub-prefecture** confers **legal personality** on the association and exemption from taxes if the association is non-lucrative. However, at the same time, the liberal conditions for the formation of associations are deliberately limited concerning the powers and means at their disposal. Legal personality is recognised, but it is **not accompanied by a recognition of full civil capacity**. Access to this capacity is reserved only for a limited category of associations: those which have received a **recognition of public utility** (*utilité publique*) from the public authorities. It should be noted that France is **the most liberal EU member state in recognising the legal personality of associations**, but one of the **most restrictive in granting them a legal capacity that gives additional rights** such as the right to receive donations and legacies.[37] Furthermore, only associations with the label "reconnue d'utilité publique" are eligible to rent property or have profitable financial assets.

In total, there were **1,500,000 associations and 2,300 foundations** in France in 2017, most of them operating in the health, social service, or culture and education sectors.[38] The vast majority of these are small and locally active organisations which either exclusively work with volunteers or have a few paid employees. 160,000 associations are managed by professional staff and nearly 2,000 associations have been granted the "reconnue d'utilité publique" by the French government.[39] Furthermore, associations with a public-interest label largely benefit from tax exemptions for donations and legacies. Especially for humanitarian and advocacy organisations, **private donations have an increasing importance**. A major source of income remains **membership fees** (accounting for 42% of funding in 2017) which have steadily increased in the last few years. Whereas public financing was still the biggest source of

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[36] Rosanvallon, Pierre (2004), *Le modèle politique Français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours*, Paris: Seuil.
[37] Conseil d'Etat, "Les associations et la loi de 1901, cent ans après – Rapport public 2000" (accessed 10 June 2020).
[38] Archambault, Edith (2018), *French civil society: historical background, present position and major issues,* Paris: Centre d'économie de la Sorbonne, Paris1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University.
[39] Ministère de l'Intérieur, "Associations reconnues d'utilite publique" *(*accessed 30 March 2020).

financing in 2005 (51%), by 2017 **private financing of organisations had come to dominate** the budgets of associations (56%).[40] The rising importance of private financing therefore reflects the impression of interviewees, who indicated that state support was decreasing.

Relation of CSOs with the state

Despite a solid legal framework, relations between the French state and civil society associations have experienced periods of tension. French *Étatisme* remains strong, and some associations are still considered to be at odds with the general interest. At the same time, others are deeply intertwined with state activities, "which makes it sometimes difficult to differentiate between public and private interests."[41]

The **integration of associations into the policymaking process** therefore **depends on the CSO's form of organisation**. Groups that refer to collective protest actions are less likely to be integrated in cooperation with the state.[42] The reference to the "general interest" remains a strong argument to integrate associations into or exclude them from the policymaking process. However, an association's representativeness is decided **according to the government's interpretation** and not on legal grounds.[43]

In addition, while the French state makes significant financial contributions to CSOs, the overall public funding landscape is perceived to benefit **mostly the well-known and established organisations**, particularly those operating in the field of **social policies** such as family welfare.[44] The majority of CSOs, especially those which are small, local or new, rely on donations, their own economic activities and membership fees.

Problems for implementation

In the past there have been some attempts to **institutionalise the representation of organised civil society**, especially in the field of social affairs. In 1983 the Socialist government established the *Haut Conseil de la vie associative* (HCVA, High Council of Associative Life), which is directly subordinated to the Prime Minister. Notably, the HCVA is in charge of proposing legislation and regulation in order to increase associative participation. However, the Council does not determine the extent to which groups have access to political institutions, which remains linked to the notion of representativeness. Given that the notion of representativeness is not defined by French administration nor by any legal terms, representation largely depends on a comparison of influence between different groups.[45]

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[40] Tchernonog, Viviane and Lionel Prouteau (2019), *Le paysage associatif français – Mesures et évolution,* Lyon: Dalloz Juris Associations.
[41] Saurugger (2007), *op. cit.*
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] Grossman, Emiliano and Sabine Saurugger (2006), "Les groupes d'intérêt au secours de la démocratie?", *Revue française de science politique,* Volume 56, Number 2, pp. 299-321; Le haut conseil à la vie associative, "Rapport sur la notion d'interet general fondant l'intervention des associations" (accessed 24 June 2020).
[44] Chabanet, Didier and Alexander H. Trechsel (2011), "EU Member States' Consultation with civil society on European policy matters", Florence: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.
[45] Saurugger (2007), *op. cit.*

In recent years civil society has become more diverse with new forms of engagement emerging. Especially grassroots initiatives, such as the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement, have attracted strong support among the French population. Historically, **protests for social concerns have generally been shaped by major trade union strikes**. The *Gilets Jaunes* movement, however, was marked by **spontaneous, unorganised and unconventional methods of participation** taking place outside the traditional structures of labour relations and organised civil society alike. The movement was also marked by the **social and political heterogeneity of the protesters**, covering a wide variety of backgrounds, political outlooks and even demands.[46] While the *Gilets Jaunes* were the most prominent grassroots movement of recent years, other movements exist that are deliberately making the choice not to become an 'association'. In particular, environmentalist protests and activism are largely led by grassroots movements such as *Citoyens pour le climat*, Alternatiba or Youth for Climate France.

Even though the French state is increasingly trying to integrate more civil society organisations into infrastructure projects, **civil dialogue is not institutionalised**. In this field, the government is the main stakeholder and decides freely to which extent representative partners are included in policymaking.[47] The rise of alternative movements making their demands outside the traditional structures of organised civil society has only served to highlight the **ambiguous relationship** between civil society and the French State.

Germany

Civil society in Germany – an overview

Engagement in organised civil society has been a vibrant and important part of German society since the foundation of the Federal Republic. According to the latest German Civil Society Survey,[48] **one in two Germans are a member of at least one association**. Both the number of active citizens and the number of CSOs have been growing continuously throughout the last decades, so that in 2016 there were **more than 600,000** active associations in Germany,[49] predominantly operating in the field of social services, health and education, and on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, civil society has also become more diverse in recent years, with many new forms of civil society emerging. In particular, protest-oriented grassroots initiatives have become a rather prominent part of the German civic scene, covering a variety of political positions and demands: examples include Fridays For Future, the Stuttgart 21 protests, and PEGIDA. Compared to 'traditional' organised civil society, such movements are more spontaneous and have rather unconventional methods of participation, but they reach and attract a growing number of people among the German population. Organised civil society is thus a vivid and essential pillar of German everyday life and an embodiment and important transmitter of values within

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[46] Grossman, Emiliano (2019), "France's Yellow Vests – Symptom of a chronic disease", *Political Insight*, Volume 10, Number 1, pp. 30–34; these insights were confirmed in the interviews with French CSOs.

[47] Saurugger (2007), *op. cit.*

[48] Priemer, Jana; Holger Krimmer and Anaël Labigne (2017), "ZiviZ-Survey 2017: Vielfalt Verstehen. Zusammenhalt Stärken", Berlin: Bertelsmann Stiftung, p. 10.

[49] Priemer; Krimmer and Labigne (2017), *op. cit.,* p. 9.

the German society, but **no longer the 'only game in town'**, with citizens also turning to less organised methods of making their voices heard.[50]

Being an important part of German democratic life, the **German Basic Law** ranks the right for citizens to form associations and corporations among the constitution's unchangeable fundamental rights at its very start.[51] On the same level as individual rights such as the freedom of expression, religion or assembly, the German Constitution places organised civil society in the centre of its democracy and societal activities.

General legal framework

Despite its importance, however, "**no Civil Society Law** […] and no separate body of law for charities"[52] exists. There is a large variety of legal forms of organisations which can be counted among organised civil society, such as associations (*Vereine*), non-profit corporations (*gemeinnützige GmbHs*), cooperatives (*Genossenschaften*), and foundations (*Stiftungen*).

The most precise characteristic of CSOs in Germany can be found in the **German tax law**, which defines civil society by its non-profit character and the promotion of the general public interest.[53] German organised civil society is thus based on its non-profit tax status, which enables organisations to receive tax benefits for donations and membership fees or apply for funding from public or private entities.[54] The tax code (§52) mentions **25 distinct areas** in which organisations can be active in order to be able to receive non-profit status. They include all activities conducted for "public benefit, charitable or church-related purposes",[55] such as "the promotion of arts, culture and sports", "the general promotion of the democratic state" or "the promotion of support to people who are politically, racially or religiously persecuted".

The tax code, furthermore, gives tight provisions on how to spend the organisation's assets, but does not specify beyond the 25 areas *how* a non-profit organisation should act (apart from the prohibition of direct funding by political parties). Further specifications only exist in the form of the Federal Finance Ministry's Implementing Rules as a guideline for tax authorities, which give room for interpretation to the local tax offices.

The importance of the tax status becomes evident with regard to how German CSOs are usually funded. Although the great majority of CSOs rely on a mix of diverse funding sources, **membership fees and**

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[50] Guggenberger, Bernd (2013), "Bürgerinitiativen", in Andersen, Uwe and Wichard Woyke (eds.), *Handwörterbuch des Politischen Systems der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 43-48.

[51] Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of the Federal Republic of Germany of 23 May 1949, Article 9.

[52] Gilbert, Cathal (2018), "Regulating political activity of civil society: A comparative analysis of regulation of civil society organisations, political activity and international funding – Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Finland", Dublin: CIVICUS/Irish Council for Civil Liberties, p. 13.

[53] Diefenbach-Trommer, Stefan (2018), "Engagiert Euch – Nicht? Wie das Gemeinnützigkeitsrecht Politisches Engagement erschwert", Berlin: Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement.

[54] *Ibid*.

[55] Gilbert (2018), *op. cit*.

donations constitute the main income for most CSOs in Germany. For nearly 40% of the organisations, membership fees are the main source of income; 16% refer to donations as their highest income source.[56] Furthermore, 20% of CSOs are mainly funded by the state, but half of the CSOs in Germany are financially independent from state funding. Additional income is generated from organisations' **economic activities** (such as participation or entrance fees for their events) and financial support provided through **philanthropy**.[57] With regard to foreign funding of CSOs, no further specific provisions or restrictions apply other than regulations on money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities, which are valid for all individuals and legal entities in Germany.[58]

Problems for implementation

The hardly defined legal setting provides for flexibility for CSOs regarding their form, but at the same time, it results in legal uncertainty. As a study by the Federal Network for Civic Engagement demonstrates, local tax authorities' room for interpretation results in "**highly diverging understandings** of the legal framework"[59] among tax offices concerning whether or not to grant non-profit status. This applies especially to cases in which CSOs follow **political motives**. While the tax code gives "the promotion of basic democratic principles" and the promotion of "political responsibility" as non-profit purposes, the Federal Ministry's Implementing Rules specify that "charitable purpose does not extend to 'one-sided agitation', 'uncritical indoctrination' or 'party-politically motivated influence'".[60] This has led to repeated problems for some CSOs working on human rights advocacy, political mobilisation against racism, or further political action to maintain their non-profit status, most recently for Attac Germany and the environmental NGO BUND. In several cases, local tax authorities regarded the organisations' advocacy as one-sided or party-political and thus **revoked the non-profit status** or demanded extensive tax re-payments. While several courts have ruled in favour of CSOs in the past, the issue is currently still unresolved after several ongoing appeals filed by tax authorities. The current Federal Government is reportedly working on **renewing the Implementation Rules** in order to resolve the issue. While no detailed plans have yet been put forward, the Federal Government decided not to revoke any further non-profit status until new rules are in place.[61]

Relation of CSOs with the state

The inclusion of civil society into lawmaking is a relatively new element of German politics, emerging only in recent decades.[62] Nevertheless, there are formal and informal methods of consultation between the German parliament, its committees and federal ministries on one hand, and CSOs on the other. However, practices still vary between institutions and policy areas. In most cases, **it is up to the institutional body**, the parliamentary committee or the respective ministry **to decide when and to**

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[56]   Priemer; Krimmer and Labigne (2017), *op. cit.,* pp. 24-25.
[57]   *Ibid*.
[58]   *Ibid*.
[59]   Diefenbach-Trommer (2018), *op. cit.*
[60]   Gilbert (2018), *op. cit.*
[61]   Kreutzfeldt, Malte, "Nach Attac-Urteil: Politische Vereine erstmal sicher", *Taz*, 28 February 2020.
[62]   Chabanet and Trechsel (2011), *op. cit.*

what extent civil society is included in policymaking. While there is a "mandatory duration for public consultations at the ultimate stage of a legislative proposal",[63] consultation processes remain entirely informal at all further stages of policymaking. At the parliamentary level, the involvement of civil society has a completely informal and voluntary character at all stages. Such consultations are used to gather information and expertise among experts and civil society for governmental policies. Despite these underdeveloped formal channels with government and parliament, CSOs still play an important role that can influence policymaking to a certain extent by promoting the formation of political opinions among individuals, organising, and mobilising public opinion and through advocacy — something confirmed by the interviews carried out for this study.

The emergence of a growing number of **grassroots initiatives** in recent years has somewhat altered the relation of civil society with the state, as these movements seek to influence politics through street protests and unconventional protest methods. While this development is not completely new to the German context — for example, there were student protests and a strong anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s[64] — social media and the current political context (especially the high salience of controversial subjects such as migration and climate issues) make today's grassroots movements distinct. However, due to the anti-hierarchic (and often anti-establishment) character typical of such movements, there is **little possibility of direct interaction between the movement and the state**, which makes it more difficult for the state to react to the movement's (often vague or radical) demands. Still, the immense political pressure that those movements can spark have had an **immense effect on political debate and public opinion** in Germany, and thus indirectly on decision-making. For example, the prominence of the climate movement has put environmental issues at the heart of German political debate and may have contributed to the increasing electoral success of the German Green Party, while the PEGIDA protests played a role in the rise of the Alternative for Germany party and the normalisation of parliamentary opposition to the right of the CDU/CSU.[65]

Greece[66]

Civil society in Greece – an overview

Civil society in Greece is considered to be **rather weak** in relation to the central government and political parties. Participation in CSOs other than trade unions is low, while voluntarism is anaemic.[67] In comparison to other countries, particularly those in Northern and Western Europe, grassroots movements

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[63] Chabanet and Trechsel (2011), *op. cit.*
[64] Guggenberger (2013), *op.cit.* pp. 43-48.
[65] Schuler, Katharina, "Urgrün ist der Zeitgeist", *Zeit Online*, 26 May 2019; Rucht, Dieter (2015), "Pegida & Co. – Aufstieg und Fall eines populistischen Unternehmens", Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, p. 8
[66] Based on a contribution submitted for this study by Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos, PhD, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Athens and Senior Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy.
[67] Clarke, Jennifer; Asteris Huliaras and Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos (2015), *Austerity and the third sector in Greece: Civil Society at the European frontline*, London: Routledge, pp. 9-27; Polyzoidis, Periklis (2009), "Non-profit organizations and human services in Greece: The residual segment of a weak sector", *Voluntas,* Volume 20, Number 2, pp. 188-206; Sotiropoulos, A. Dimitri (2004), *The unknown civil society*, Athens: Potamos (in Greek); Mouzelis, Nicol and George Pagoulatos (2002), "Civil society and citizenship in post-war Greece", in Birtek, Faruk and Thalia Dragonas (eds.), *Citizenship and nation state in Greece and Turkey*, London: Routledge, pp. 87-103.

such as the climate strikes have a **relatively low profile** in Greece, according to the interviewees: while they exist, they are largely a response to or imitation of the movements elsewhere, and are generally confined to larger cities.[68] **Political parties** have dominated collective mobilisations through their collateral organisations in the labour, student, women's, and other social movements, while government ministers used to supply selected CSOs with public funds on a haphazard and mostly **political patronage** basis. Such practices were curbed after the economic crisis started in 2010, but were not completely discontinued. In 2018, there were 6,217 CSOs in Greece, most of them small in terms of organisational structure and operating at the local level in the fields of culture, human rights, sports, and health. In addition, there were 983 large and well-established organisations, including 40 branches of international organisations such as MSF and Greenpeace, which focus their work on human rights, humanitarian aid, and the environment.[69] There is evidence that just before the **Athens Olympics of 2004** there was an **upsurge in voluntarism** (to help with the organisation of the Olympic Games), while after the crisis struck, **informal self-help groups** and **social solidarity networks** emerged to help **protect the victims of the crisis**.[70] Moreover, after the refugee/migrant crisis started in 2015, scores of national (but also international) CSOs provided support to refugees and migrants landing on the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea, as government authorities were unprepared and slow in managing this inflow.

General legal framework

There is **no unified legal framework** covering CSOs in Greece and there are **separate regulations** for three types of CSOs: a) all sorts of membership associations, including labour unions, farmers' and professional associations, sports clubs, and the like; b) Civil Not-for-Profit Corporations (in Greek, AMKE); and c) asset-based foundations. Furthermore, different types of organisations may be subject to **additional requirements**: this is notably the case for consumer organisations.

Membership associations are regulated by the **Civil Code,** requiring minimum membership (20 people), a draft of by-laws, a temporary administrative board, and official recognition of the association by a first-instance civil court (articles 78, 80 and 89 of the Civil Code). The same Code regulates the AMKE (articles 741-784). There is additional legislation (2372/1996 article 8) for Not-for-Profit corporations which are founded in order to apply for EU funding for social inclusion projects. Laws passed in 2013 and 2019 (L. 4182/2013 and L. 4646/2019) regulate asset-based foundations which rely on a large donation and are governed by a board of trustees. On the borders between civil society and profit-seeking commerce, one also finds 'social corporate enterprises' (KOINSEP), regulated by laws 4019/2011 and 4430/2016. Originally conceived to strengthen the social and solidarity economy amidst the economic crisis, the KOINSEP have met with implementation difficulties.

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[68] *Keep Talking Greece*, "Global climate strike: Greek students demonstrate in Athens", 20 September 2019.
[69] Vathakou, Eugenia (2019), "2018 Report on the state of civil society in the EU and Russia: Greece", Berlin: EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.
[70] Simiti, Marilena (2017), "Civil society and the economy: Greek civil society during the economic crisis", *Journal of Civil Society,* Volume 13, Number 4, pp. 357-373; Sotiropoulos, A. Dimitri (2017), *Economic crisis and Greek civil society*, Athens: Potamos (in Greek); Mavrikos-Adamou, Tina (2015), "Informal relationships and structures in Greece and their effects on civil society formation", in Clarke, Jennifer; Asteris Huliaras and Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos (eds.), *Austerity and the third sector in Greece: Civil society at the European frontline*. London: Routledge, pp. 45-66.

For **consumer organisations**, law 2251/94 sets out the circumstances under which a commercial practice may be considered misleading or aggressive, and what a consumer organisation may do to take action against them. Article 10 provides stipulations with which a consumer organisation must comply, in addition to the Civil Code that governs all membership associations. These stipulations include a minimum number of founding members, the requirement to sign up to the Register of Consumer Organisations in order to obtain legal personality, and the sources of funding they may use. In particular, they are **forbidden** from accepting donations or any kind of funds from **political parties or private companies**. The same law also grants consumer organisations the right to obtain information from companies and public services and to bring legal cases against companies that have engaged in aggressive or misleading commercial practices.[71]

Problems for implementation

Since 2010, the **lack of public funding** has been a major issue for the sustainability of CSOs, whose dependence has drastically shifted from state funds to **private foundations**, as indicated by CSO representatives interviewed for this study. Many organisations, particularly 'formal' ones (i.e. those with paid staff), turned to private foundations, whose financial support increased significantly in the 2011-2013 period: there was an increase of 772% for organisations working on migration, 105% for human rights, and 70% for health.[72] Meanwhile irregularities in the channelling of state funds to CSOs in the 2000s appears to have contributed to **mistrust towards NGOs** among the general public and prospective donors[73] — a matter of some concern to many of the organisations interviewed. Moreover, before the crisis taxation legislation used to largely exempt CSOs from the obligation to pay taxes; since then, **such exemptions have been phased out**. Nowadays CSOs report facing challenges on various fronts, e.g. with regard to taxation costs and the status of volunteers and their social insurance coverage.[74] AMKE corporations are treated by tax authorities as if they were professionals (i.e. lawyers, engineers etc.), while all CSOs pay land property tax (the ENFIA), unless they can justify the use of their land asset for a common benefit purpose. Finally, donations by natural persons to CSOs benefit from a tax break of 10%, but several interviewees mentioned that **tax regulations in Greece change very frequently**. Overall, the main financial resources of formal CSOs remain **donations and contributions by private foundations**, followed by state funds, EU programmes and membership fees, while the operational expenses of informal CSOs (largely voluntary and temporary) depend mostly on donations and fundraising activities.[75]

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[71] European Consumer Centre Greece (1994), "Law 2251/1994 (Government Gazette 191 A'/November 16, 1994)", Athens.
[72] Vathakou (2019), *op. cit.*
[73] Chrysostomou, Apostolos (2015), *When the state fails: the rise of informal civil society organisations in Greece*, Lund: Department of Political Science, Lund University.
[74] Vathakou (2019), *op. cit.*
[75] Durán Mogollón, Lía; Olga Eisele and Maria Paschou (2020), "Applied solidarity in times of crisis: exploring the contexts of civil society activities in Greece and Germany", *Acta Politica.*

Relations of CSOs with the state

The relations of CSOs with the state in recent years have been erratic and mostly conflictual.[76] The competent parliamentary committees invite selected CSOs to express their views on policy issues (e.g. educational reform), but there are **no systemic means** for taking their views into account. Laws approved in 2012 and 2019 (law 4048/2012 and article 61 of law 4622/2019) require the government to consult social partners and CSOs at the stage of drafting a bill to be submitted to parliament. This requirement is sometimes fulfilled, but since the onset of the Greek crisis, successive Greek governments have in **practice prioritised consultations with representatives of Greece's creditors** (the 'Troika') over civil society representatives, according to several organisations interviewed for this study. This was necessary in order for governments to satisfy the conditionality imposed on Greece in exchange for its rescue from sovereign default.

In this context, trade unions and professional associations, as well as CSOs with ties to far-right or far-left parties and social networks formed during the post-2010 crisis, have repeatedly **mobilised against the state**. As the crisis deepened in 2011-2014, civil society activism became more radical and was largely guided by opposition political parties.[77] According to an interviewee from a consumer organisation, such activism has become less intense, and is largely linked to labour relations (trade unions and professional associations, which still mobilise along political party lines) rather than organised civil society.[78] A notable exception is on the Greek islands, where many CSOs work with refugee and migrant arrivals. According to interviewees, many of these organisations are **international in their organisational structure** and **do not have close relations with Greek state authorities** or political parties. On the other hand, anti-migrant and/or far-right forces continue to operate on the islands, largely in opposition to the humanitarian efforts of other CSOs.

Hungary[79]

Civil society in Hungary – an overview

The development and influence of civil society in Hungary have been limited due to tight administrative regulations, government harassment, and a lack of public funding. Since 2013, the sector has come under pressure by members of the government and faced **disparaging and misleading coverage by the media**, often claiming that CSOs serve **foreign and/or political interests** or are linked to political parties or entities.[80] Civic participation in policymaking and CSOs' engagement with state institutions

[76] See Chrysostomou, Apostolos (2015), *op. cit.*; Karamagiolo, Evika and Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos (2006), "Greek civil society: the long road to maturity", Athens: Civicus.

[77] Eleftheriou, Costas and Myrto Tsakatika (2013), "The radical left's turns towards civil society in Greece: one strategy, two paths", *South European Society and Politics*, Volume 18, Number 1, pp. 81-99.

[78] See also Sotiropoulos, A. Dimitri (2004), "Formal weakness and informal strength: civil society in contemporary Greece", London: Hellenic Observatory, London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. 17-18.

[79] Based on a contribution co-authored and submitted for this study by Krekó Péter, PhD, Executive Director at Political Capital Institute and Katalin Bálint, Analyst at Political Capital Institute, Budapest.

[80] Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (2017), "Independent civil society under attack", Budapest; Hungarian Helsinki Committee (2017), "Timeline of governmental attacks against Hungarian civil society organisations", Budapest.

are legally guaranteed, but limited in practice, with those working on women's rights, homeless people, Roma and LGBTI community in particular finding it harder to gain access[81] than "loyal organisations" such as family or patriotic associations.[82] In recent years, **controversial legislative changes** have been carried out that significantly limit the freedom and independence of the sector, particularly of those CSOs focusing on human rights, poverty and migration issues.[83] However, although the public trust in CSOs has weakened, a recent study shows that **the vast majority of Hungarians are still willing to support a CSO in principle**,[84] though in practice three quarters of Hungarians are currently not engaged with CSOs at all.[85] According to the latest data, there were **61,000 CSOs** in Hungary in 2017,[86] operating either in the form of an association or foundation. The main fields of activities are related to sports (15%), leisure (15%), culture (15%) and education (13%),[87] while very few focus on political issues, human rights, and international relations.[88]

General legal framework

While the legal procedure for establishing a CSO remains relatively easy, organisations' operations have become more restricted, resulting in a **decrease of the number of active CSOs**, particularly in the field of human rights.[89] This is due to the remodelling of categorisations of the various types of organisations, which resulted in **reduced access to the government's financial and regulatory support**.[90] In recent years, two highly controversial changes in the legislature have been adopted. In June 2017, the *Act LXXVI on the Transparency of Organisations Supported from Abroad* (Lex NGO) was adopted, which obliges CSOs that annually receive 7.2 million HUF (EUR 25,500) or more from foreign, "non-Hungarian" sources to register with the court, **report their foreign funding annually**, and **indicate the label "foreign funded"** on their website and publications.[91] Failure to comply could lead to a judicial procedure that may result in fines and the dissolution of the organisation.[92] Another legislative proposal, called the *'Stop Soros' package*, was adopted in June 2018. The package consists of three bills targeting individuals and organisations that work on migration and asylum in nearly any capacity. Organisations working on issues of migration have to **apply for a license** from the Interior Ministry, which includes a **tax investigation and a national security clearance**. There is no court remedy for organisations if they are not granted a license. Furthermore, a 25% tax has to be paid on any

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81 European Economic and Social Committee (2019), "Fundamental rights and the rule of law: national developments from a civil society perspective 2018-2019", Brussels.
82 Foltányi, Zsuzsa; Veronika Móra and Ágnes Oravecz (2019), "2018 civil society organisation sustainability index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia", Hungary: FHI 360, pp. 102-11.
83 Svensson, Sarah and Júlia Szalai (2018), "On civil society and the social economy in Hungary", *Intersections*. Volume 4, Number 4, pp. 107-124.
84 *Political Capital*, "Seven out of ten Hungarians would support CSOs" (accessed 15 March 2020).
85 European Parliament (2020), Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement 4023, Brussels, p. 15.
86 Foltányi; Móra and Oravecz (2019), *op. cit.*
87 *Ibid.*
88 Svensson, Sarah; Júlia Szalai and Daniel Vince (2017), "Contested forms of solidarity: An overview of civil society organisations in Hungary and their impact on policy and the social economy", Budapest: CEU Center for Policy Studies, p. 36.
89 Foltányi, Zsuzsa; Veronika Móra and Ágnes Oravecz (2017), "2016 civil society organisation sustainability index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia", Hungary: United States Agency for International Development, pp. 107-117.
90 Svensson and Szalai (2018), *op. cit.*
91 *Hungarian Helsinki Committee*, "What is the problem with the Hungarian law on foreign funding NGOs?" (accessed 25 March 2020).
92 *Ibid.*

foreign funding, and the Interior Minister is able to issue a ban on the movement of both Hungarian and foreign nationals involved in refugee assistance in border areas.[93]

The sector's total income was approximately EUR 2.2 billion in 2017, of which **41% came from the government**, whose resource distribution is decided by the parliament in the framework of the laws on budget and spending.[94] However, a major issue is the **lack of transparency and accountability** in the allocation of these funds, as well as favouritism benefitting those CSOs related to members of the regional decision-making bodies.[95] This has made many CSOs turn to **private funding** provided by **philanthropic foundations and foreign donors**, which have become the main investors in CSOs' capacity building and professionalisation.[96] In 2017, 23% of the sector's overall income came from private funding sources and international donors.[97] Additional income was generated from CSOs' own income (26%) such as membership fees, 8% from business activities, and 3% from the collection of personal income tax,[98] which can be given to a public benefit CSO of one's own choice. Approximately 35% of CSOs have the status of being a public benefit organisation,[99] and 45% of Hungarian taxpayers use this opportunity to donate money to organisations, mostly to those working on issues related to education, culture, welfare services and healthcare.[100]

Problems for implementation

The two recent legislative changes, 'Lex NGO' and the 'Stop Soros' package, drew heavy criticism from home and abroad. In 2017, the European Commission referred Hungary to the Court of Justice of the European Union for 'Lex NGO' over several violations of EU law.[101] Similarly, the 'Stop Soros' package was criticised in an open letter by more than 250 national and international organisations,[102] and in 2019 the European Commission launched an **infringement procedure** against Hungary, claiming that the package was a violation of EU directives, as the laws curtail asylum applicants' rights and criminalise the support for asylum applications.[103] Interestingly, however, "[a]ccording to public record information, **no civil society organisation faced any prosecution** for failing to register as a foreign founded entity or for allegedly supporting illegal migration to Hungary".[104] Nevertheless, CSOs' financial viability has been deteriorating as some of them, particularly small and locally active ones, have become **reluctant to accept foreign funding** out of concern for how the local governments

[93] *Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union*, "Operation starve & strangle: how the government uses the law to repress Hungary's civic spirit" (accessed 25 March 2020).
[94] Foltányi; Móra and Oravecz (2019), *op. cit.,*p. 106..
[95] Sator, Balazs (2010), "International practices on funding civil society Organisations", Kyiv: OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, p.47; Kover, Agnes (2015), "Captured by state and church: Civil society in democratic Hungary", *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, Volume 6, Number 2, pp. 187-212.
[96] Sator (2010), *op. cit*., p. 53.
[97] Foltányi; Móra and Oravecz (2019), *op. cit.,* p. 106.
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] Radinger, Gerald (2017), "My taxes go to NGOs!", Vienna: ERSTE Stiftung.
[100] Svensson and Szalai (2019), *op. cit.*
[101] Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (2017), *op. cit.*
[102] *Human Rights Watch*, "We stand in solidarity with civil society in Hungary" (accessed 25 March 2020).
[103] *Hungarian Civil Liberties Union*, "Slowly, steadily, stealthily – How rule of law is further undermined in Hungary" (accessed 26 March 2020).
[104] Hegedüs, Dániel (2019), "Closing spaces for civil society – A multidimensional game", *Visegrad Insight* (accessed 5 March 2020).

might react and influence future public funding opportunities.[105] Also, the amount of money generated from personal income tax has decreased due to the 'automatic' tax declaration system introduced in 2017 which **no longer requires taxpayers to make declarations themselves**, unless they specifically want to make a donation to a public benefit CSO.[106] In this way, the taxpayers' 1% remains in the state budget and the state decides how to spend it.

Relation of CSOs with the state

Generally, CSOs exert little influence on policymaking, as the relations between CSOs and the state can be described as one-sided and uncooperative, and channels of advocacy are restricted, often ignored, and therefore ineffective. Firstly, this is due to a **lack of institutionalised points of access** to decision-makers.[107] While the Hungarian constitution guarantees civic participation and engagement, decisions are often made without consulting expert CSOs due to the issue's "national strategic importance".[108] In case of a public consultation taking place, deadlines for comments are often shortened, relevant materials and information, even sometimes draft legislations, not published, and feedback on CSO's inputs not provided.[109] However, interviews carried out for this study revealed that some CSOs, such as family organisations, have established a **stable relationship with state institutions**, being perceived as **partners on family, social and employment policies** and often invited to participate in drafting legislative proposals and conducting expert analyses. Secondly, the process of policymaking has sped up in recent years, with **accelerated procedures** and measures being used to push through legislation. In this way, consultation with outside parties and entities has become scarce. Thirdly, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office have taken on an **active role** in policy procedures in all areas, with the **Ministries having less control** over their respective policy fields. For this reason, certain Ministries which used to cooperate with CSOs now have a limited possibility of doing so. Funding from the European Union, as well as its institutional framework, also pushes for a centralised administration, which has resulted in weakened regional and local administration.[110] Finally, the government engages with the public through so-called **national consultations**, which take the form of a survey sent to Hungarian households posing questions about their opinion on a certain ongoing issue.[111] However, this further demonstrates the one-sidedness of the state-society relationship and gives a false impression of the extent to which citizens are involved in decision-making.

Civil activism is **concentrated mostly in Budapest** and a few other urban centres, with a particular concentration of activity in 2012 and 2013 against the politics of Viktor Orbán's second government.[112] **Legislative changes** such as the media law, which granted state institutions the power to restrict the

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[105] Foltányi; Móra and Oravecz (2019), *op. cit.*
[106] Ibid.
[107] Svensson and Szalai (2018), *op. cit.*
[108] Foltányi; Móra and Oravecz (2019), *op. cit.*
[109] Chabanet and Trechsel (2011), *op. cit.*
[110] Cartwright, Andrew (2018), "Civil society and policy making in the Visegrad group countries: lessons for the Western Balkans", Belgrade: European Policy Centre.
[111] Nova, Eszter, "National consulation campaings in Hungary", *Friedrich Naumann Foundation* (accessed 28 March 2020).
[112] Pető, Andrea and Zoltán Vasali, "The 'laboratory' called Hungary: a challenge for understanding protest movements", *Open Democracy* (accessed 4 June 2020).

freedom of speech, the criminalisation of homelessness and the so-called 'slave law' doubling the hours of overtime work contributed to the **emergence of grassroots groups** with the help of social media platforms, which encouraged many like-minded traditional CSOs, opposition parties and citizens to go out on the streets and engage in peaceful civil disobedience in front of state institutions. However, despite the success of newly-formed grassroots movements in encouraging a considerable civic mobilisation, scepticism about **their ability to really have an impact** on government policy remains high, eventually leading to a **general disengagement in activism**.[113] Compared to other Central and Eastern European countries, mass mobilisation and protests have been a less frequent phenomenon in Hungary both in the communist era and today,[114] with powerful grassroots movements often being **institutionalised** into political parties or associations,[115] moving activists from the streets into mainstream politics. This was the case, for example, with the prominent Milla movement, Hungary's Green Party (LMP) or the Momentum Movement. However, after entering politics, many **turn towards more general policy issues**, leaving a space for new and innovative movements to address current and upcoming socioeconomic and political challenges.

Italy

Civil society in Italy – an overview

The strength, size, and visibility of Italian civil society has long been **closely tied with the country's politics**. Traditionally, civil society in Italy was relatively weak, with noticeably fewer civic associations than many other European countries.[116] During the Berlusconi era, however, it picked up significantly, despite remaining locked out of political structures.[117] This awakening of Italian civil society was largely a **response to the political environment** of the Berlusconi era, marked by a politicised media, instability, and scandals.[118] The Italian National Institute of Statistics, in its only statistical analysis on the subject, found that the number of non-profit organisations in Italy increased from 60,000 in 1991 to **more than 235,000** ten years later.[119] By 2011 this had grown to just over 300,000 (the next census of non-profit organisations is not expected before 2021).[120] The vast majority of these organisations (about 80%) are run at least partly by volunteers, with only about 40,000 employing professionals. However, between the 2001 and 2011 censuses there was a roughly 40% increase in the number of employees in the non-profit sector, suggesting that professionalisation is a

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[113] Bayer, Lili (2017), "Hungary's new wave of anti-Orban activists", *Politico*, 23 October 2017.
[114] Szabó, Máté (2000), "External help and the transformation of civic activism in Hungary", *The Public,* Volume 7, Number 1, pp. 55-70.
[115] Mikecz, Daniel (2017), "Environmentalism and civil activism in Hungary", in Moskalewicz, Marcin and Wojciech Przybylski (eds.), *Understanding Central Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 359-365.
[116] Ginsbourg, Paul (2013), "Civil society in contemporary Italy: theory, history and practice"*, Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Volume 18, Number 3, pp. 283-295.
[117] Navarria, Giovanni, "Looking back at Italy 1992: the sudden spring of civil society", *The Conversation*, 24 October 2016.
[118] Sandri, Giulia; Mario Telò and Luca Tomini (2013), "Political system, civil society and institutions in Italy: the quality of democracy", *Comparative European Politics*, Volume 11, Number 3, pp. 261-279.
[119] Cugliandro, Donatella (2009), "New actors on the horizon: the international outreach of Italian CSOs", *The International Spectator*, Volume 44, Number 1, pp. 185-198.
[120] ISTAT, "Non-profit institution profile based on 2011 census results" (accessed 27 March 2020).

growing part of the Italian civil society landscape. Despite the rapid increase in the last decades, two thirds of Italians are currently not engaged at all with a CSO in any way.[121]

For many years, the strongest civil society activities in Italy were **Catholic organisations and those linked to anti-mafia activity**.[122] Although the scene has diversified in the last twenty years, religious groups and humanitarian organisations with Catholic ties remain heavily present, although they do not dominate the civic space and they cooperate widely with secular organisations.[123] CSOs working on justice and civic education are also well represented as part of a tradition of civic organisations, particularly in the South, considering themselves a 'third way' between government and organised crime.[124] According to the 2011 census of non-profits, culture, sport and recreational organisations constitute by far the largest single group of CSOs, accounting for nearly two thirds of the total number (195,841 out of 301,191). The second-largest group is social services and emergency prevention (25,044 organisations), followed by education and research (15,519).[125]

General legal framework

Until 2016, the legal basis governing non-profit organisations and corporations remained the **Civil Code of 1942**, which was supplemented over the years by a wide variety of additional laws for specific types of non-profit.[126] To replace this outdated Code and harmonise the complex legal landscape for non-profits, a **reform procedure** began with the new decree no. 106/2016 on the reform of the third sector and social enterprise, and the resulting **Third Sector Code** adopted by decree no.117/2017. The new code defined Third Sector Entities (*Enti del Terzo Settore*, ETS) and brought together their requirements under a single document for the first time.[127] It lists **seven types of ETS**: voluntary organisations, social promotion associations, social enterprises (which are also subject to requirements set out in decree 112/2017), philanthropic bodies, membership networks, mutual aid companies, and other entities, which includes recognised and non-recognised associations, foundations, and non-profit private entities.[128] In order to be recognised as ETS and obtain exemptions and economic benefits (including tax incentives for associations and state funding opportunities), organisations must enrol in the Single National Register of the Third Sector (*Registro unico nazionale del Terzo settore*) and comply with obligations set out in the Code, such as financial transparency, internal democracy, and limits on how profits can be used.[129]

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[121] For example by volunteering, donations, or participation in protests; see European Parliament (2020), Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement 4023, Brussels, p. 15.
[122] Schneider, Jane and Peter Schneider (2001), "Civil society versus organized crime; local and global perspectives", *Critique of Anthropology,* Volume 21, Number 4, pp. 427-446.
[123] Cipriani, Roberto (2019), "Diffused religion and civil society in Italy", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, Volume 19, pp. 65-79.
[124] Cayli, Baris (2013), "Italian civil society against the Mafia: From perceptions to expectations", *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, Volume 41, pp. 81-99.
[125] ISTAT, "Non-profit institution profile based on 2011 census results" (accessed 27 March 2020).
[126] Prele, Chiara (2012), "Legal issues considered for changing Italian foundation law", *International Journal of Civil Society Law*, Volume 10, Number 1, pp. 33-48. A reform of the third sector based on a new code is ongoing at present.
[127] Ministro del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, "Codice del Terzo Settore" (accessed 24 June 2020).
[128] Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana (2017), "Decreto Legislativo 3 luglio 2017, n. 117. Codice del Terzo settore, a norma dell'articolo 1, comma 2, lettera b), della legge 6 giugno 2016, no.106": Article 4 Paragraph 1, Rome, p.1
[129] CSVnet, "Il Codice del Terzo settore è legge. Cosa cambia con il grande 'riordino'" (accessed 24 June 2020).

The reform of the third sector is **still ongoing**, with a total of 20 ministerial decrees required in order to fully implement the code.[130] So far only three decrees have been approved, the most recent being the Ministerial Decree of 5 March 2020 on the adoption of budget models for Third Sector Entities.[131]

Until the reform is completed, the previous law continues to apply for certain sectors, including the legal personality of foundations and associations. Under decree no. 361/2000, registration of foundations involves a **discretionary choice by the state** on whether the foundation's endowment is large enough for the scope stated in its founding statute. Foundations that conduct economic activity must be enrolled in the register of enterprises, and if their dominant activity is an economic one, the rules of the Civil Code referring to commercial enterprises apply. A foundation must have a **founding statute** which cannot be modified by the board; members of an association, on the other hand, are free to change the association's purpose.

Unlike foundations, associations may **choose whether they wish to register** (and receive legal personality) or **remain unregistered without legal status**. For example, mutual aid societies (which constitute 38% of Italian non-profits, the other 62% being public benefit institutions)[132] that choose to register are then governed by requirements listed under law no. 3818/1886, which allows them to establish funds for the benefit of their members and grants them exemption from various types of taxation.[133] Some **regions** (specifically Abruzzi, Calabria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Apulia, Sardinia, and Veneto) have introduced **supplementary legislation** governing mutual aid societies that goes beyond the national law.[134]

Between 1929 and 1986, the Italian state paid a **direct monthly contribution** to the Catholic Church in compensation for the nationalisation of church assets at the time of the unification of Italy. In the 1980s it was agreed to replace this system with a scheme under which **Italian taxpayers contribute 0.8%** (hence the law's colloquial name, *otto per mille*) of their **annual income tax** to an organised religion of their choice (Law 1984/222, Article 47). Taxpayers could also choose to distribute this contribution to state social assistance programmes instead. In 2006 a similar system — *cinque per mille* (Law 2005/266, Articles 337-340) — was introduced as an **optional contribution to socially-relevant causes**, including scientific research and non-profit activity. Any organisation registered as an ONLUS (non-profit organisation) or as an association of social promotion (ASP) in the national, regional or provincial registers can receive funds through this channel.[135] Thus, the state also plays an important role in the distribution of funds from private individuals.

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[130] *Ibid.*
[131] Ministro del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, "Codice del Terzo Settore" (accessed 24 June 2020).
[132] ISTAT, "Non-profit institution profile based on 2011 census results" (accessed 27 March 2020).
[133] Rago, Sara (2012), "Italian mutual benefit societies: an organisational social innovation in health and healthcare system", Forli: AICCON.
[134] *Ibid.*
[135] Stefano, Amelio, Patrizia Gazzola; Zenom Michaelides and Fragkoulis Papagiannis (2019), "Sustainability reporting practices and their social impact to NGO funding in Italy", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*.

Problems for implementation

The **implementation of the third sector reform** has caused some confusion and difficulties for Italian CSOs, according to one of the organisations interviewed for this study. The respondent explained that some of the concrete details of the implementation have **not yet been agreed** at the political level, drawing out the process of adopting further decrees to implement the reform. At the same time, **many CSOs remain unaware of the changes** and how or whether they need to adapt. As a result, the reform remains very much a work in progress, meaning an assessment of its implications is premature for now.

There is some disagreement among legal scholars as to whether a foundation must have a **public utility** or whether it may also follow a **private interest**. In practice foundations with both aims exist. The only stipulation for receiving foundation status is the non-distribution constraint: profits must be devoted to the foundation's scope and activity (outlined in its statute), not distributed among board members.[136]

The state is a major funder of Italian CSOs, with a significant amount of public resources invested particularly in those organisations operating in healthcare and the social assistance sector.[137] In 2016, the CSOs which received most state funding were organisations working on the issues of social welfare, natality, poverty and immigration.[138] However, there have been allegations of **mismanagement of funds** by regional authorities, which made many social assistance and shelter organisations close their services in the 2012-2014 period due to a lack of resources.[139] This and similar problems in terms of resource allocation have forced many organisations to rely only on private donations. In fact, 86% of NGOs in 2016 claimed that **their main source of funding was the private sector**,[140] coming from philanthropic foundations, individuals, and especially private enterprises, which have started to show concerns about the social and environment impact of their activities and are now willing to contribute financially and cooperate with CSOs. The sectors that receive the most public funding are health (36% of CSOs in this sector receive public funds), social services and emergency preparation (33%) and development and housing (30%), while religious organisations, business and professional associations and unions receive the least (around 4-5% each).[141]

Civil society in Italy is somewhat **erratic**, with organisations and movements frequently ebbing and flowing in response to political developments. Illustrative in this regard are the grassroots movements, which often raise high expectations but fail to meet them: the 'Sardines' movement of 2019, a grassroots protest movement against the far-right, is one recent example. The fast-changing nature of Italian politics means that many organisations **struggle to maintain their significance over the long term**,

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[136]   Rago (2012), *op. cit*., p. 5.
[137]   Capesciotti, Marta (2017), "Standing and operational space of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in contributing to respecting and promoting fundamental rights in EU member states", Belgium: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; p. 8.
[138]   *Ibid*.
[139]   Capesciotti (2017), *op. cit.,* p.9.
[140]   Capesciotti (2017), *op. cit.,* p.7.
[141]   ISTAT, "Non-profit institution profile based on 2011 census results" (accessed 27 March 2020).

while the presence of strong party political ties and clientilistic networks makes it difficult for them to have a life of their own.[142]

Relation of CSOs with the state

As Italian civil society, particularly in the last twenty years, has largely mobilised against the government, it has remained outside the policymaking process and is generally ignored by the state.[143] Under Berlusconi, civil activism had particularly low visibility due to media control, driving activists towards alternative means of generating publicity, such as the internet. The Five Star Movement, for example, had its origins on an internet blog, eventually becoming a political party in the belief that **political change outside the party system was not realistic**.[144] The National Agency on Non-profit Organisations (Agenzia per le ONLUS) was established in 2000 to provide legal advice for non-profits and gather information on their activities.[145] However, it provides no input into the policymaking process. Frozen out of political influence, some commentators have expressed concerns that 'civil society' may remain merely a rhetorical tool to oppose the state rather than a means of advocacy.[146]

Several organisations interviewed for this study referred to concerns that the circumstances for civil society under the previous government (Five Star Movement/League) were moving in a worrying direction, particularly for CSOs working in the field of migration. In February 2019 a think tank linked to Matteo Salvini's League presented a report in the Chamber of Deputies **recommending Hungary's recent legal changes as a model for Italy**, for example by requiring organisations that receive funding from abroad to sign up to a special register.[147] The fall of the government later that year put an end to this proposal, but regulating NGO activity (especially with regard to migration) remains a policy priority of Lega, currently the largest single party in the Italian political landscape. In the view of some interviewees, a return of the League to power could further strain relations between civil society and government.

Poland[148]

Civil Society in Poland – an overview

Due to a high level of **political polarisation** in Poland, civil society is often divided into pro-liberal and conservative, pro-government CSOs. It has often been difficult for those organisations working on

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[142] Ginsbourg, Paul (2013), "Civil society in contemporary Italy: theory, history and practice", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Volume 18, Number 3, pp. 283-295.
[143] Navarria,(2016), *op. cit.*
[144] *Ibid.*
[145] Cugliandro, Donatella (2009), "New actors on the horizon: The international outreach of Italian CSOs", *The International Spectator*, Volume 44, Number 1, pp. 185-198.
[146] Dotti, Marco, "Advocacy: contro lo stallo italiano, la società civile deve ripartire dall'Europa", *Vita*, 17 January 2020.
[147] *Civic Space Watch*, "Italy: debate on NGOs and foreign funding in the Parliament raises worries among Italian civil society", 28 February 2019.
[148] Based on a contribution submitted for this study by Adela Gąsiorowska, LL.M., Coordinator of Citizens' Panels at the Inicjatywa z Natury Rzeczy Association, Warsaw.

issues contrary to the government's agenda, such as women's and LGBTI rights, migration and human rights, to operate, as their sustainability has been deteriorating due to limited access to public funding, state harassment and negative media coverage, which often accuses them of being financially privileged, misusing public funds or associated with a political party.[149]

Overall, there were **117,000 associations** and **26,000 foundations** registered in Poland at the end of 2018, although only 70% of them are considered active.[150] The majority of them operate in the fields of sport, tourism, recreation, education, culture, social services, and health, while only 8% of them work on issues related to human rights, politics, and law.[151] While advocacy efforts and space for civil dialogue remain limited for many CSOs, with public consultations often being inconclusive and a majority of recommendations not taken into consideration by decision-makers,[152] they still enjoy considerable public support, demonstrated in flourishing grassroots movements and mass protests for democracy and the protection of human rights.

General legal framework

The right to establish and run a CSO in Poland is guaranteed on the basis of **Article 12 of the Constitution of Poland**, which guarantees freedom of assembly as one of the system rules of the Republic of Poland. The most important prescriptions concerning CSOs' operations are contained in the *Act on public benefit and volunteer work* (APBV), which, however, does not relate to all CSOs but only to NGOs that meet the statutory definition of being corporate or non-corporate entities that do not form part of the public finance sector nor operate for profit. The most important legal forms of Polish CSOs are associations and foundations, regulated in the *Law on Associations* (LA) and *Law on Foundations* (LF), respectively. An association is defined as a voluntary and non-profit union which independently sets its goals and creates its programmes, while a foundation is established to pursue **socially or economically useful objectives** that are consonant with the basic interests of Poland. Since 2017, the government has ensured greater control of the sector by establishing the Committee for Public Benefit (CPB) and the National Freedom Institute - Centre for Civil Society Development (NFI), and thus, further centralised the cooperation between the state and CSOs. The CPB is a government body responsible for coordinating ministerial policies related to public benefit organisations, while the NFI is in charge of the distribution of all public funds dedicated to civil society development. Its director is appointed by the prime minister's office.[153]

The **financial sustainability of Polish CSOs has decreased** as many organisations focused on democracy and human rights issues, particularly in relation to immigration or women's and LGBTI

[149] Novakova, Nataliya (2020), "The conservative-liberal clash reshaping Poland's civil society", *The German Marshall Fund of the United States (*accessed 28 May 2020); Szuleka, Małgorzata (2018), "Situation of civil society organisations in Poland", *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* (accessed 1 June 2020); Hooper, Melissa (2017), "Poland's new front: A government's war against civil society", Washington: Human Rights First.
[150] Pazderski, Filip (2019), "2018 civil society organisation sustainability index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia", Poland: FHI 360, pp. 168–177.
[151] Smith, Barbara (2018), "Polish civil society: Adapting to new pressures", Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
[152] Pekacka, Magdalena, "Countering shrinking space in Poland", *Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe* (accessed 2 June 2020).
[153] Pazderski (2019), *op. cit.*

rights, have had their **access to public funding limited**.[154] The government's position is that such organisations were generously funded in the past, and a rebalancing of the civil society sector was required. Thus, conservative organisations working on issues of patriotism, family and reproductive rights have benefited significantly during the last years.[155] Apart from **public funding** provided by the government and local administration, which **remains the main financial provider**, CSOs generate 18% of their income through membership fees, 7% through economic activities and 7% through fundraising initiatives and private donations.[156] In addition, taxpayers can designate **1% of their personal income tax** to a CSO with a public benefit status, which has proven to be a major additional resource of revenue for the 7% of CSOs which have acquired this status:[157] in 2017, the 1% tax collection **reached its highest level** with 14 million Poles donating EUR 180 million to organisations,[158] significantly benefiting those focused on democratic governance and the rule of law.

Problems for implementation

Although the NFI is obliged to comply with the provisions of the APBV (art. 28 of the Act of NFI), most of the financial sources it distributes are currently granted outside the procedure specified in the APBV, on the basis of implementing provisions issued by the Chairman of the CPB (*Regulation of the Chairman of the CPB on the detailed conditions for obtaining funding for the implementation of tasks in the field of supporting the development of civil society*). The power of these two bodies also reflects the CPB Chairman's right to issue a regulation that allows inspections of public benefit organisations without justification, as happened with five CSOs in October 2018.[159]

The current law regarding the operation of CSOs further affects their work in terms of creating financial burdens when conducting a paid public benefit activity, which according to the *Goods and Services Tax Act* is not tax exempt and is treated as a normal business activity. The **public financing system also has loopholes**: except for European funds, there are **no existing legal measures** that allow a CSO to **appeal** the authority's negative decision.

Relation of CSOs with the state

Public consultations between the government and CSOs formally exist, but are **rarely organised**. They are often **not announced early enough to provide sufficient time** for interested groups to prepare themselves, and CSOs' contributions are often not taken into consideration in the final decision-making process.[160] For example, despite numerous appeals and criticism prior to adopting the Act on the creation of the NFI due to a lack of clarity about the funds' distribution and potential interference with

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[154] Pekacka, Magdalena, *op.cit.*
[155] Marczewski, Paweł (2018), "Freedom to exclude: Conservative CSOs in Law and Justice Poland", Brussels: Carnegie.
[156] Pazderski (2019), *op. cit.*
[157] Radinger (2017), *op. cit.*
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] *Ibid.*
[160] Smith (2018), *op. cit.*

organisations' agendas, the Parliament passed the law on establishing the Institute.[161] Moreover, since 2015, there have been **more than 60 cases of violations of the principles of cooperation** registered against the government, mainly related to the illegal distribution of public funds or lack of transparency in organising public consultations.[162] Thus, several interviewees felt that the quality of civil dialogue has deteriorated, particularly in terms of **participation in policymaking by those CSOs whose objectives conflict with the government's agenda**. Furthermore, such CSOs are often **presented in a negative light by government-controlled media**, being accused of receiving or spending public funds unfairly[163] or promoting a vision of society contrary to real Polish values and traditions.[164]

Although it has been difficult to bridge gaps between citizens and politicians, especially at the local level, **some cities have shown remarkable progress**. Some **local leaders** have become more determined and explicit in standing alongside civil society, such as Rafael Trzaskowski, the capital's mayor, who took part in the Warsaw Pride in 2019 for the very first time and encouraged mayors in other cities to do the same,[165] sending a strong message of tolerance and inclusiveness. Also, local politicians have found themselves under pressure to include citizens in local decision-making, such as through participatory budgeting, where citizens are invited to submit project proposals to be implemented in their town, thus becoming involved in the allocation of public funds. One of the most successful cases was in the city of Wroclaw in 2016, where EUR 5.87 million of the city budget was allocated by the citizens themselves.[166]

Despite the difficult political environment for civil society, CSOs are **supported and trusted by a large majority of Polish society**, and have therefore enjoyed some success in mobilising citizens to take part in mass protests, support their protest letters on social media, or sign petitions. In urban areas, numerous grassroots movements have emerged, often initiated on social media by ordinary citizens, challenging the government on a variety of issues including transparency, the rule of law, corruption, environmental protection, abortion laws, tenants' and workers' rights, and other demands for social and political changes.[167] On some occasions, such grassroots activism has been powerful enough to **succeed in forcing the government to withdraw legislative proposals**, while also bringing different-minded citizens and CSOs closer together. As such, the Black Protest against the tightening of restrictions on abortion rights in 2016 was joined by both liberal, pro-choice supporters and more conservative citizens who believed no changes were needed to the existing abortion law.[168] Environmental grassroots initiatives have also successfully encouraged significant civic mobilisation, not just among youth and the urban population in bigger cities, but **also in local and rural communities** among people with no advocacy or campaigning

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[161] Pekacka, Magdalena, *op.cit.*
[162] Szuleka, Małgorzata (2019), "The situation of the civil society organisations in Poland", Warsaw: Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.
[163] Portal of non-governmental organisations, "NGO protest letter", (accessed 11 March 2020).
[164] Marczewski (2018), *op. cit.*
[165] Pekacka (2019), *op. cit.*
[166] Rosenzweigova, Ivana and Vanja Skoric (2016), "Civil participation in decision-making processes: An overview of standards and practices in Council of Europe member states", Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
[167] Davies, Christian, "Poland's democratic spring: the fightback starts here", *The Guardian*, 30 January 2019.
[168] Chimiak, Galia and Dominika Polanska, "Polish citizens turn their back on NGOs and embrace community activism", *The Conversation*, 28 February 2017.

experience, for example by bringing them to fight against air and water pollution caused by local factories or preventing the authorities from building a waste-processing plant in a town centre.[169]

However, the NGO sector in Poland has been criticised for **interfering with the full potential of grassroots movements** and seeking to turn them into "project-based, grant reliant activities".[170] In reaction against the professionalisation of large CSOs and their concentration in Warsaw and other big cities, new locally-oriented initiatives frequently take the form of self-organised and informal activism of a particularly communitarian and pragmatic nature,[171] with the objective of participating in local decision-making and controlling their own resources, rarely seeking a broader political change at a national level. Such activities, where present, have strengthened the sense of community belonging and encouraged the locals to continuously engage in grassroots initiatives.

3.2   Citizens' perceptions of European values in member states

Is a shift concerning the EU's core values really observable among citizens? To find out, this section looks at existing quantitative data on European citizens' perceptions of democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity, both in the member states and at the EU level.

QB16 How important is the role of civil society (associations, NGOs) in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate?

Base: all respondents (n=27,474)
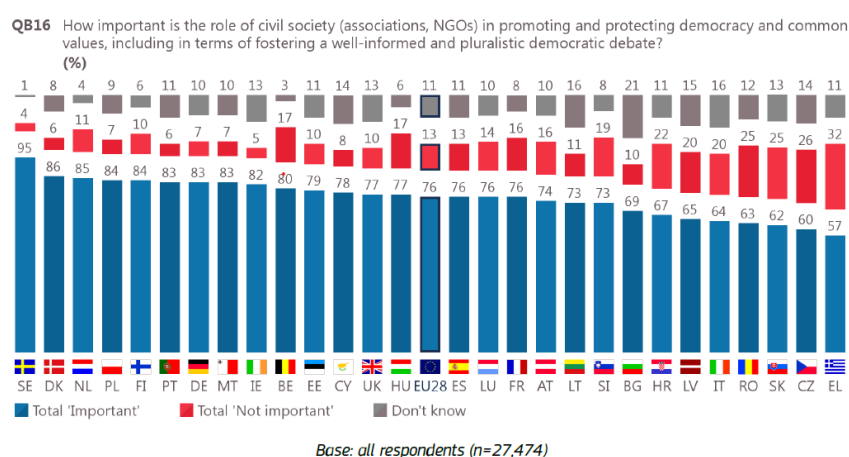
Figure 1: importance of CSOs for democracy
Source: European Commission (2018) Special Eurobarometer 477, Brussels, p. 87.

CSOs are an important part of life in EU member states. **Nearly half of all European citizens has been engaged with CSOs,** e.g. by donating money, volunteering or participating in protests organised by CSOs.[172] At the same time, CSOs have an impact on the behaviour of European citizens. Only 20% of respondents of the Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement (2020) state that their behaviour has not been impacted by campaigns of CSOs. A majority of respondents (55%) even took concrete action following CSO campaigns, and 54% discussed campaign topics with friends or family. In all selected

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[169]   Davies (2019), *op. cit.*
[170]   Chimiak and Polanska (2017), *op. cit.*
[171]   Polanska, Dominika (2020), "Going against institutionalization: new forms of urban activism in Poland", *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Volume 42, Number 2, pp. 176-187.
[172]   European Parliament (2020), Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement 4023, Brussels, p 13.

member states, a majority of respondents have been affected by CSO campaigns before, although the lowest numbers can be seen in Italy (37% not impacted) and Hungary (43% not impacted).[173]

As the Eurobarometer from 2019 shows (see Figure 1), respondents from all countries think **CSOs play a major role when it comes to the promotion and protection of European values** – even though support varies across member states, with Greece (57%) recording the lowest level of all member states.

Shared values

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer, **54% of Europeans think that there are shared values among the member states, with only 39% disagreeing**.[174] When asked which values they believe represent the EU, respondents from the EU28 ranked democracy (35%), the rule of law (22%), and solidarity (17%) in the top 5 (along with 'peace', 42%; and 'human rights', 34%).

QD7 In the following list, which values best represent the EU? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
(% - EU)

PEACE	42 =
DEMOCRACY	35 =
HUMAN RIGHTS	34 =
THE RULE OF LAW	22 ▼ 1
SOLIDARITY, SUPPORT FOR OTHERS	17 ▲ 1
INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM	16 =
RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE	15 =
RESPECT FOR OTHER CULTURES	14 ▲ 1
EQUALITY	13 ▲ 1
TOLERANCE	12 ▲ 1
SELF-FULFILMENT	4 =
RELIGION	3 =
NONE (SPONTANEOUS)	5 =
DON'T KNOW	6 =

Spring 2019 / Autumn 2018
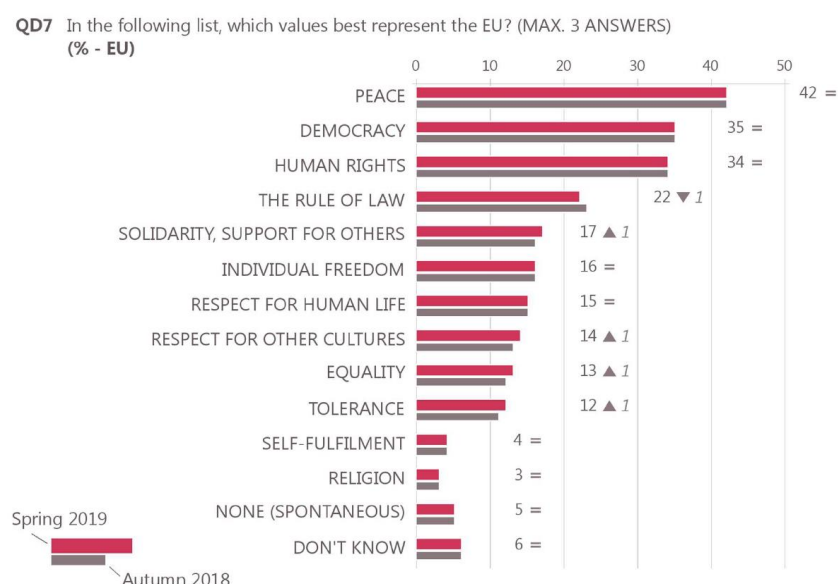
Figure 2*: values representing the EU*
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 91 – citizenship, Brussels, p. 72.

While this seems to be a strong indication of the existence of shared values, a closer look reveals a more heterogeneous picture. The responses to the question of whether EU member states have common values suggest that they diverge quite significantly (Figure 3). Whereas a large majority of respondents from Poland and Hungary say that member states are close to each other with regard to their values, Italy, Germany, Greece, and France all dissent, ranking below the EU average when it comes to their belief in shared values. In Greece and France, a relative majority of respondents disagree that member states have common values. This illustrates that, while there are certain 'European values' which citizens consider important, they are not equally perceived as common to all EU countries. This picture is reinforced by the data discussed below for each of the chosen values.

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[173] European Parliament (2020), Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement 4023, Brussels, p 26.
[174] European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 91, Brussels.

QD8 In your opinion, in terms of shared values, are EU Member States...?
(%)

	IE	SK	PL	CZ	PT	MT	DK	HR	AT	HU	BG	FI	UK	LT	NL	SI	LU	EE	EU28	IT	RO	DE	ES	BE	EL	CY	SE	FR	LV
Don't know	5	6	11	3	10	14	3	3	5	3	11	5	10	6	2	3	4	8	7	7	11	6	7	0	1	4	1	7	4
Very distant	4	3	2	6	3	3	5	9	5	7		3	7	5	4	7	6	7	8	9	7	5	12	7	13	12	7	13	14
Fairly distant	16	18	17	23	20	20	30	26	29	29	22	33	24	32	38	34	35	30	31	31	30	38	30	43	37	38	48	40	50
Fairly close	62	65	64	59	65	59	60	57	49	55	51	57	53	55	54	51	51	54	50	50	46	48	48	47	45	41	44	38	30
Very close	13	8	6	9	2	4	2	5	12	6	10	2	6	2	2	5	4	1	4	3	6	3	3	3	4	5	0	2	2

- Very close to each other
- Fairly close to each other
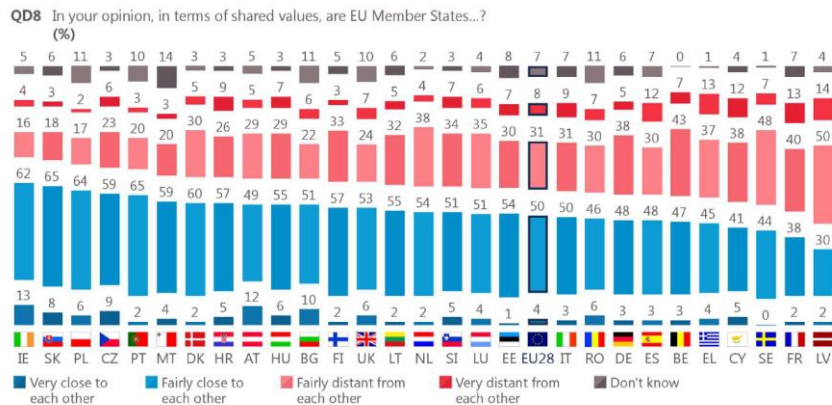- Fairly distant from each other
- Very distant from each other
- Don't know

Figure 3: shared values in the EU, per member state
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 91 – citizenship, Brussels, p. 62.

Democracy

Several indicators provide insights into citizens' views on democracy in the EU and their own member states. When asked about democracy in the EU, **an overwhelming majority of respondents agree that the EU promotes democratic values.**[175] When looking at specific member states, however, the picture is more diverse (Figure 4): while in Germany, Poland and Italy, the EU is predominantly connected with democratic values, France and Greece are at the very bottom of the list (Hungary ranks in the midfield). Greece stands out in this regard, given that 40% of Greek respondents rank democracy as a value that is important for them (in the top 3), but only 28% associate this value with the EU – the second worst rating among all 28 member states (after France).[176] The respondents' view of democracy as an EU value has remained stable throughout the poly-crisis[177] – for the EU as a whole, but also with regard to the picture in individual member states. Hence, we can see that, while EU citizens agree on the importance of democracy as a value, the results are more nuanced when it comes to whether those values apply to the EU and its member states as a whole.

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[175] Pew Research Centre (2019), "Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey", Washington.
[176] European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 91, Brussels.
[177] Compared to 37% (EU27) in 2012; European Commission (2012), Standard Eurobarometer 77: Values of Europeans, Brussels, p. 14.

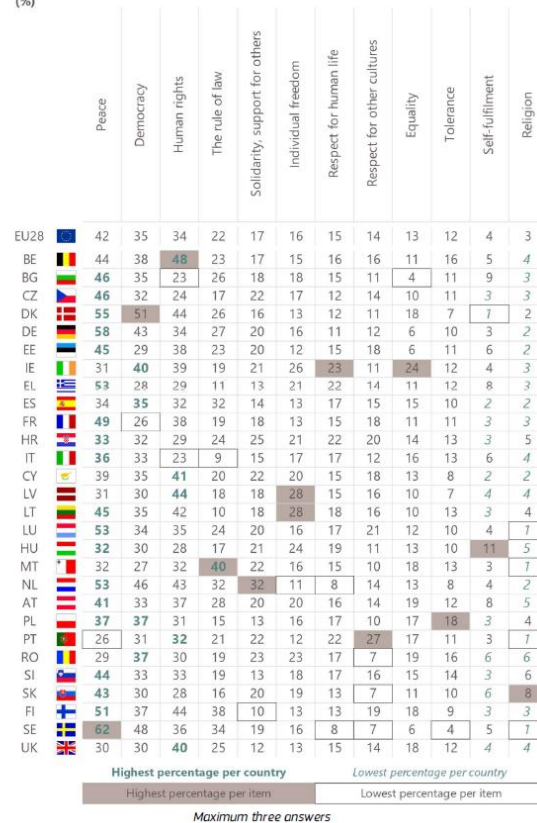QD7 In the following list, which values best represent the EU?
(%)

	Peace	Democracy	Human rights	The rule of law	Solidarity, support for others	Individual freedom	Respect for human life	Respect for other cultures	Equality	Tolerance	Self-fulfilment	Religion
EU28	42	35	34	22	17	16	15	14	13	12	4	3
BE	44	38	48	23	17	15	16	16	11	16	5	4
BG	46	35	23	26	18	18	15	11	4	11	9	3
CZ	46	32	24	17	22	17	12	14	10	11	3	3
DK	55	51	44	26	16	13	12	11	18	7	1	2
DE	58	43	34	27	20	16	11	12	6	10	3	2
EE	45	29	38	23	20	12	15	18	6	11	6	2
IE	31	40	39	19	21	26	23	11	24	12	4	3
EL	53	28	29	11	13	21	22	14	11	12	8	3
ES	34	35	32	32	14	13	17	15	15	10	2	2
FR	49	26	38	19	18	13	15	18	11	11	3	3
HR	33	32	29	24	25	21	22	20	14	13	3	5
IT	36	33	23	9	15	17	17	12	16	13	6	4
CY	39	35	41	20	22	20	15	18	13	8	2	2
LV	31	30	44	18	18	28	15	16	10	7	4	4
LT	45	35	42	10	18	28	18	16	10	13	3	4
LU	53	34	35	24	20	16	17	21	12	10	4	1
HU	32	30	28	17	21	24	19	11	13	10	11	5
MT	32	27	32	40	22	16	15	10	18	13	3	1
NL	53	46	43	32	32	11	8	14	13	8	4	2
AT	41	33	37	28	20	20	16	14	19	12	8	5
PL	37	37	31	15	13	16	17	10	17	18	3	4
PT	26	31	32	22	21	22	12	22	27	11	3	1
RO	29	37	30	19	23	23	17	7	19	16	6	6
SI	44	33	33	19	13	18	17	16	15	14	3	6
SK	43	30	28	16	20	19	13	7	11	10	6	8
FI	51	37	44	38	10	13	13	19	18	9	3	3
SE	62	48	36	34	19	16	8	7	6	4	5	1
UK	30	30	40	25	12	13	15	14	18	12	4	4

Highest percentage per country — Lowest percentage per country
Highest percentage per item — Lowest percentage per item

Maximum three answers

Figure 4: values connected with the EU
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 91 – citizenship, Brussels, p. 74.

This sentiment is even more nuanced when citizens are asked about their satisfaction with EU democracy and concrete EU policies. According to the Eurobarometer, in autumn 2019 **a majority of European citizens felt that their voice did not count in the EU** (Figure 5). The most negative views come from citizens in Greece and Italy, but France too ranked below the EU average. In contrast, a majority of citizens in Hungary, Germany, and Poland feel that their voice *does* count at the EU level.

D72.1 Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
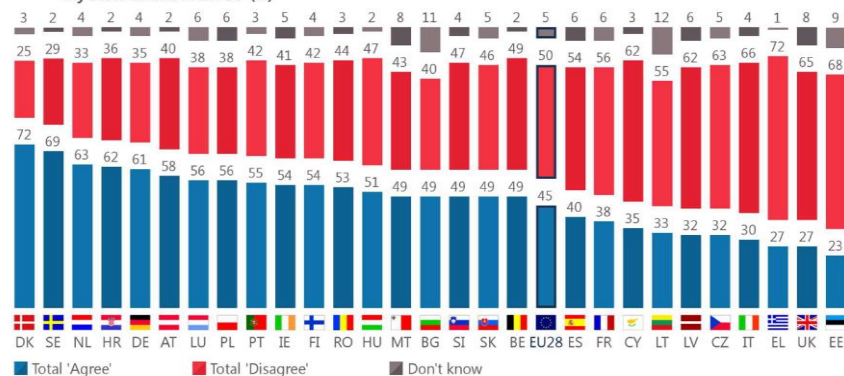My voice counts in the EU (%)

	DK	SE	NL	HR	DE	AT	LU	PL	PT	IE	FI	RO	HU	MT	BG	SI	SK	BE	EU28	ES	FR	CY	LT	LV	CZ	IT	EL	UK	EE
Don't know	3	2	4	2	4	2		3	5	4	3	2	8	11	4	5	2	5	6	6	3	12	6	5	4	1	8	9	
Total 'Disagree'	25	29	33	36	35	40	38	38	42	41	42	44	47	43	40	47	46	49	50	54	56	62	55	62	63	66	72	65	68
Total 'Agree'	72	69	63	62	61	58	56	56	55	54	54	53	51	49	49	49	49	49	45	40	38	35	33	32	32	30	27	27	23

■ Total 'Agree'   ■ Total 'Disagree'   ■ Don't know

Figure 5: my voice counts in the EU
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 92 – first results, Brussels, p. 11.
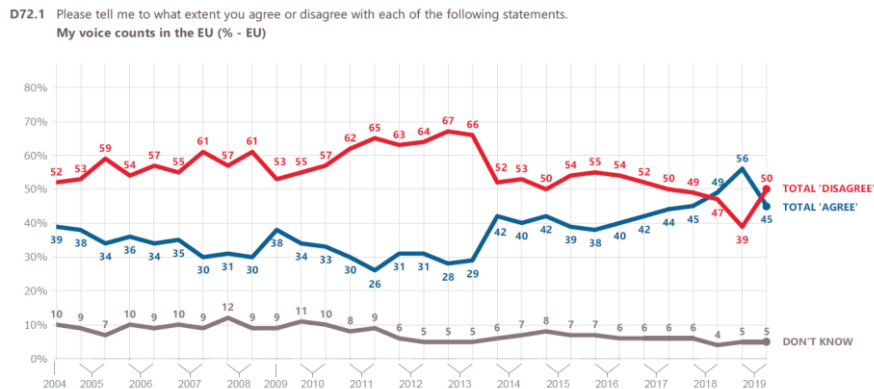
37

Figure 6*: my voice counts in the EU – trend*
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 92 – first results, Brussels, p. 10.

The trend of the past years (Figure 6) even shows that this is not a singular result, but rather that **European citizens consistently hold a negative impression of their ability to influence European democracy, with especially low ratings recorded during the economic and Eurozone crises,** and only a short change of sentiment before the 2019 European elections. On the other hand, the number of respondents saying that their voice counts in the EU increased steadily between 2014 and spring 2019.
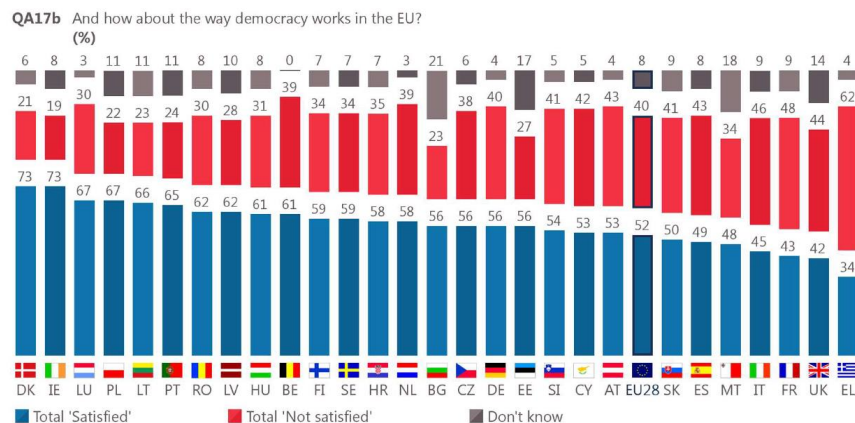
Figure 7*: does democracy work in the EU?*
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 92 – first results, Brussels, p. 13.

Similarly, while European citizens are generally **rather satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU** (51% agree, 40% disagree), again, in Greece, France, and Italy, a majority disagrees (Figure 7). Germans, Hungarians, and Poles are, once more, rather content with the way democracy works in the EU. Hence, there is quite significant variation among the selected member states in their citizens' perception of EU democracy.

When assessing democracy on the national level (Figure 8), cross-country differences are even more pronounced. Whereas the EU28 average remains comparable (EU democracy: 52% satisfactory; national democracy: 54% satisfactory), Poles and Hungarians trust their national democracies

remarkably less than EU democracy. In Germany, Greece, and Italy, the levels of satisfaction with national and EU democracy are comparably high (Germany) or low (Greece, Italy); only French citizens emerge much more satisfied with their national democracy than with EU democracy.
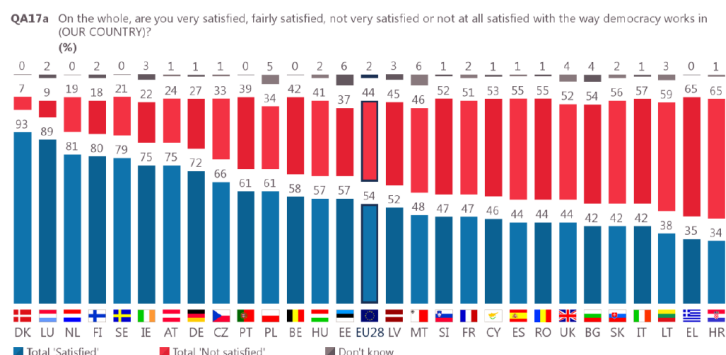

Figure 8: does democracy work in the member states?
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 92 – priorities, Brussels, p. 111.

Rule of law

Looking again at the Eurobarometer question on European values (Figure 4),[178] the rule of law was ranked in fourth place in the EU28. Among member states, however, huge variances can be observed. Only Germany and France rank in line with the overall EU rating. Hungary, Poland, Greece, and Italy, on the other hand, have among the lowest ratings of all EU member states, with only 9% of Italian respondents connecting the EU with the rule of law – the lowest rate of all member states. Poland and Hungary also rank significantly below average. Both values, however, have had a rather low rating throughout the last eight years.[179] Hence, the backsliding in the rule of law in these countries in recent years does not seem to have had a significant impact on their citizens' perception of the EU.
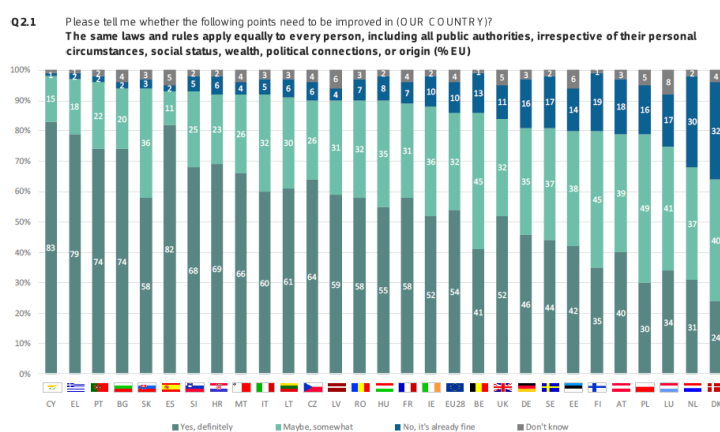
Base: all respondents (N=27,655)

Figure 9: same rules for everyone
Source: European Commission (2019) Special Eurobarometer 489, Brussels, p. 13.

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178   Figure 4: "Values connected with the EU"
179   See, for example, European Commission (2012), Standard Eurobarometer 77: Values of Europeans, Brussels, p. 14

39

When turning to the national level, however (Figure 9), **a large majority of citizens in all member states think that their national justice systems do not ensure that the same laws and rules apply equally to everyone**, with a staggering 97% of Greeks seeking improvement (again, the second highest in the EU after Cyprus).

Whereas a majority (56%) of respondents in the EU28 think that courts and judges in the EU are independent, numbers vary immensely across different member states (Figure 10). The lowest trust in the judiciary can be observed in Poland and Italy, where a relative majority does not have trust in its independence.[180] Germany, France, and Greece all rank above the EU average, with trust in the German judiciary among the highest across all member states. A special case is Hungary, where, although a relative majority express faith in its independence (43% versus 33%), nearly one quarter of respondents do not answer the question. Both in Hungary and Poland, the number of those who agree that their national justice systems are independent has been constantly in decline since 2016. In all other member states, approval has either increased or remained stable. The reason most frequently invoked by Hungarians and Poles for negatively assessing the state of the judiciary in their countries was "interference or pressure from government and politicians".[181]
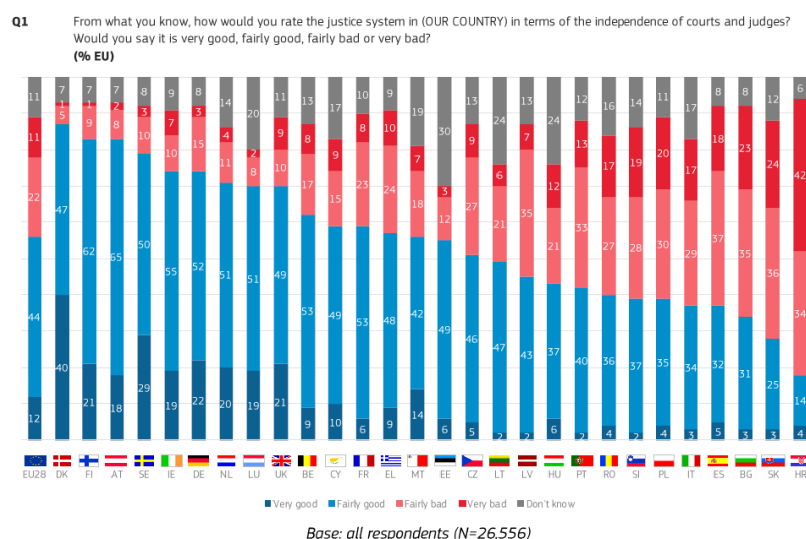

Figure 10: independence of courts and judges
Source: European Commission (2019) Flash Eurobarometer 474, Brussels, p. 6.

To sum up, there is overwhelming agreement that the rule of law is indispensable on both the European and national levels. It is seen as essential that all member states are unified in their courts' independence. However, with regard to its implementation, there is great variety. While European citizens do not think that the rule of law works similarly well for all member states, even when it comes to their own national systems, most member states see urgent need for improvement.

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[180] However, at least in Italy, approval has increased by 12% since 2016; see European Commission (2019), Flash Eurobarometer 474, Brussels, p. 8.

[181] European Commission (2019), Flash Eurobarometer 461: Factsheet Hungary, Brussels, p.2; European Commission (2019), Flash Eurobarometer 461: Factsheet Poland, Brussels, p. 2.

Solidarity

When speaking of solidarity, a distinction can be made between economic and humanitarian solidarity. The former captures "member state solidarity, establishing financial transfers between countries and transnational solidarity, [or] granting cross-border welfare rights to EU citizens".[182] The latter includes support measures such as development aid (to third countries), support in case of natural disasters, and solidarity towards refugees and immigrants.

Both the Eurobarometer and an analysis of a YouGov poll from 2019 (Figure 11) show that these different forms of solidarity are supported differently in member states.[183] **The picture for humanitarian solidarity is rather uniform in most of the member states, with strong support for solidarity across the board in case of a natural disaster and for development aid towards third countries**[184] and rather less – though still overall support – **for solidarity towards refugees** in all member states, with the exception of rather lower numbers in Poland and Hungary.
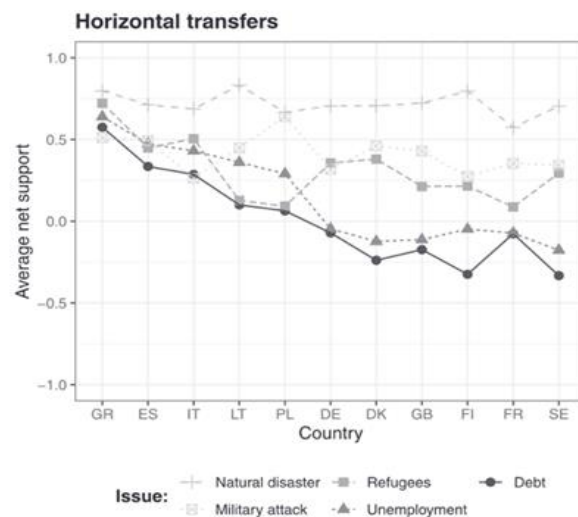

Figure 11: support for horizontal transfers
Source: Bremmer, Björn et al. (2020) "Juncker's Curse? Identity, Interest, and
Public Support for the Integration of Core State Powers", Journal of Common
Market Studies, Volume 87, Number 1, p. 64, data from YouGov poll

EU-wide, more than two thirds of respondents agree that member states should help refugees (Figure 12). In Germany, Greece, Poland, France, and Italy, a broad majority is in favour. Only in Hungary do more people disagree with the statement (53%). When comparing the answers over time,

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[182] Baute, Sharon *et al.* (2019) "Public support for European solidarity: between Euroscepticism and EU agenda preferences?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 57, Number 3, pp. 1-18.

[183] The graph shows the average net support (relation of supporters (+1) and opponents (-1)) for horizontal transfers on EU level; Bremmer, Björn *et al.* (2020) "Juncker's curse? Identity, interest, and public support for the integration of core state powers", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 58, Number 1, pp. 56-75.

[184] European Commission (2018), Eurobarometer 90, Brussels; Lahusen, Christian and Maria Grasso (2018), *Solidarity in Europe: a comparative assessment and siscussion*, London: Palgrave.

no major shifts can be noticed: when comparing the numbers from 2019 with those from late 2015 (the first time that this question was asked), the support in member states is largely unchanged. Only support in Greece has significantly dropped, from 85% to a still very positive 74%.[185]
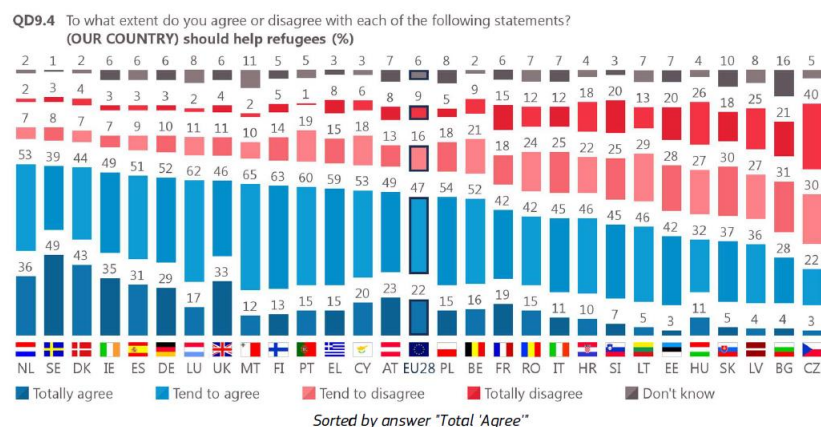

Figure 12: *help for refugees*
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 91 – citizenship, Brussels, p. 94.

When it comes to economic solidarity, however, differences between member states increase. While horizontal transfers of debt and unemployment support meet with approval in Greece and Spain, the values for Germany and France are consistently low, with Poland somewhat in between (Figure 11). Yet the Eurobarometer reveals **overwhelming support overall for the freedom of movement of EU citizens** (Figure 13). The survey from 2019 shows that 64% of EU respondents favour immigration from other member states. This positive view can be seen throughout nearly all member states – even if France, Hungary, Greece, and Italy all rank below the EU average. A different poll from 2014, carried out by the Horizon 2020 project TransSOL, shows similar numbers (61%), indicating that even in the late crisis period there was support for economic solidarity, at least as expressed in support for immigration from inside the EU.[186]
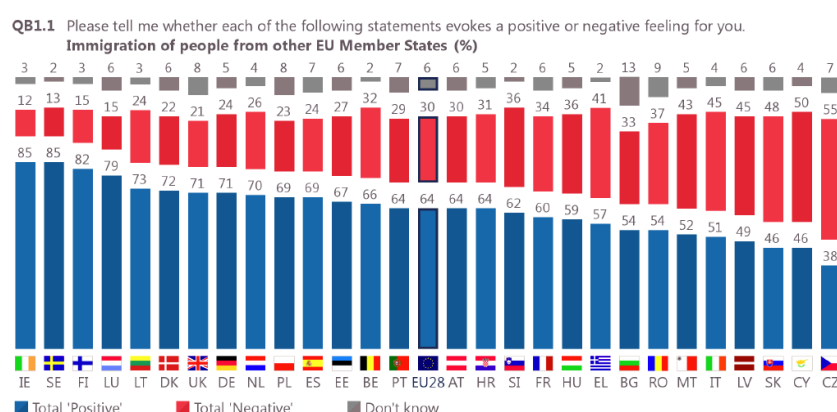

Figure 13: *immigration from inside the EU*
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 90 – priorities, Brussels, p. 39.

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[185] European Commission (2015), Standard Eurobarometer 84: European Citizenship, Brussels, p. 39.
[186] Lahusen and Grasso (2018), *op. cit.*

The situation is different if immigration is not connected to an EU context. As shown in Figure 14, **a majority of EU citizens (53%) hold negative feelings about immigration from outside of the EU when not connected to refugee issues**. While all the selected member states rank at or below EU average, there are, again, differences between them – they range from 40% support for immigration in Germany to only 20% in Greece.
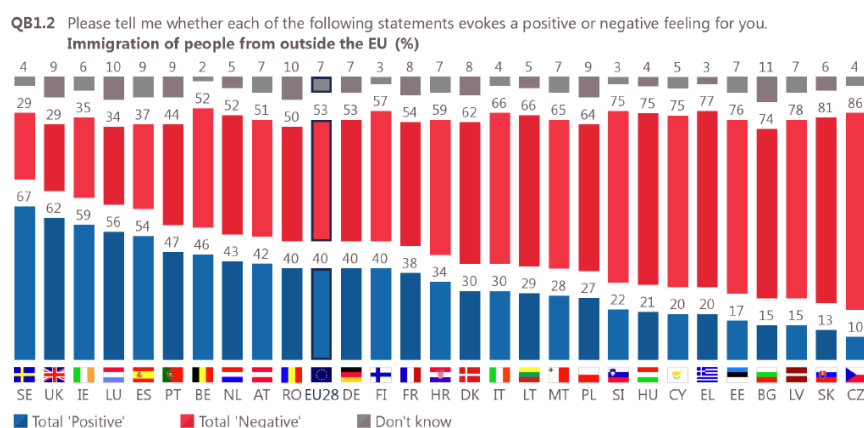

QB1.2 Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you.
Immigration of people from outside the EU (%)

Figure 13: immigration from inside the EU
Source: European Commission (2019) Standard Eurobarometer 90 – priorities, Brussels, p. 40.

This illustrates that there is indeed **diversity among member states when it comes to solidarity,** especially regarding immigration from outside the EU or economic horizontal transfers and the pooling of debts. **However, the data also shows that there is a firm core: humanitarian aspects of solidarity are overall very much supported in all member states.** This is especially the case when it comes to development aid or support in case of disasters, but to a lesser extent also towards refugees.

To sum up, when comparing the results for democracy, rule of law, and solidarity, it becomes clear that there is a general agreement across the EU that these values are important and that there are joint core values on the European level. Yet, citizens' perceptions of these values are at times very different among member states. Only for the rule of law does there seem to be a uniform understanding and perception of importance. When talking about democracy and solidarity, larger gaps emerge between the member states. Furthermore, although these values are considered important, they are not necessarily associated with the EU or its member states as a whole.

3.3   Definition of values

To interpret the findings from the interviews, the research team drew on the quantitative analysis and desk research presented in the previous sections, connecting all the information available so as to answer the hypotheses of the study. Again, these findings need to be read under the understanding that 'pro-European' and liberal organisations responded disproportionately to our interview requests, meaning their views are overrepresented in our analysis. Nevertheless, the findings give a valuable insight into the CSO interpretation of EU values, and have been balanced where appropriate with other perspectives.

CSOs' definition of values

In order to understand how civil society organisations in the different member states included in this study define the values of democracy, rule of law and solidarity, the representatives of the civic sector who agreed to be interviewed were first asked to elaborate on their personal interpretation of these values and then to say whether, in their opinion, their own definitions were shared by their organisations and in their country as a whole.

In general, respondents offered **largely theoretical, almost textbook, definitions of the values** and had no difficulty explaining their understanding of them. Moreover, they **all drew connections between the three values**; or rather, they linked the rule of law and solidarity to democracy. A German interviewee described these values as a constitutional guarantee of "stability, security and a good, organised life".

Unlike in France and Germany, none of the interviewees in Italy, Greece, Hungary or Poland made reference to their **national constitutions** when talking about these values. This is despite the fact that many of these countries' constitutions mention the values under consideration explicitly. For example, the Italian constitution begins: "Italy is a democratic Republic…Sovereignty belongs to the people" (Art. 1) and states that "The Republic expects that the fundamental duties of political, economic and social solidarity be fulfilled" (Art. 2).[187] This suggests that awareness of the constitution and its relevance for values varies between countries. Moreover, only those organisations that work explicitly on EU-related themes made any reference to the **European Treaties**.

Democracy

To define democracy, one French interviewee chose the classic quote from Abraham Lincoln: "government of the people, by the people, for the people". The other respondents, too, placed citizens at the heart of democracy, linking the concept to **active citizenship or participation in state affairs**. In other words, they identified democracy as a **living concept** that needs **constant personal engagement and commitment** to endure. However, this seems to be a belief shared only among civil society actors, not among the wider population, as the Eurobarometer indicates: according to the survey, interest in politics is on a rather moderate level and respondents have become less and less interested in politics in recent years.[188]

More specifically, the interviewees described democracy as not just a means for 'the people' to determine how they are governed: it is the principle that decisions should be made **for the good of the community as a whole**. Several French interviewees mentioned the importance of republican values like *liberté*, *egalité* and *fraternité*, while a Greek respondent explained: "Democracy means that decisions are taken by the community for the benefit of the community as a whole. In Greece, the Orthodox Church has a privileged position in society, which is reflected in the constitution: so, in this

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187   Senato della Repubblica, "Constitution of the Italian Republic" (accessed 29 April 2020).
188   European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 92, Brussels, pp. 42-43.

sense, democracy in Greece is flawed because some decisions are taken not for the benefit of the community, but for the benefit of the church."

This understanding of democracy as an inclusive and communitarian political system prompted several interviewees to say that **CSOs are crucial in the promotion of democracy**, precisely because they **give citizens another channel to participate in politics** (and/or shape society more widely), beyond the 'usual' means of political parties. CSOs help to "accelerate discourses, develop ideas (such as through advocacy and agenda setting), and support the implementation of policies", as one German respondent explained. This is also why many interviewees mentioned the importance of access to information and government transparency for democracy.

Indeed, some interviewees stressed that **democracy cannot be divorced from liberalism**, though this may reflect the predominantly liberal perspective of the CSOs interviewed. According to an Italian respondent, "liberal democracy is the only democracy we know". Where liberalism is under threat, several French and German respondents argued that CSOs function as "drivers of democracy, the rule of law and solidarity." One Hungarian interviewee then said that democracy means that "citizens must be able to participate in *everyday* politics… They also need to be well-informed, so media freedom is also part of democracy." Many supported the view that citizens' involvement in policymaking was the only way to arrive at legitimate, democratic decisions.

It is important to note that the CSOs' self-perception of their role in promoting democracy is in line with the vast majority of citizens in all EU member states. As the Eurobarometer shows, 76% of Europeans agree with the statement that civil society plays a vital part in "promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate".[189] While support for CSOs' active role for democracy is high in all member states, it is consistent with the findings of this study that support is lowest in Greece (57%), which may be due to the relatively modest level of civil society engagement in a country marked by high levels of political polarisation and distrust (see section 3.1).

Interestingly, only a handful of interviewees mentioned **elections** when they described democracy. Despite the strong emphasis they put on participation's ability to give voice to citizens and defend individual and collective rights, the overwhelming majority of respondents seemed to downgrade electoral processes in their definition of democracy.

This could be explained by the fact that the interviewees are representatives of the civic sector and use non-conventional modes of political engagement in their daily work, which inevitably become their point of reference in the conceptualisation of the term 'democracy'. Alternatively, this omission may simply reflect a more general trend of **popular disengagement from traditional political modalities** (such as voting) and a concomitant tendency to emphasise the constitutional component of democracy

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[189]   European Commission (2018), Special Eurobarometer 477, Brussels, p. 21.

– which stresses the need for checks and balances across institutions – as essential for the survival and well-being of democratic systems.[190]

The rule of law

This rights-centred vision of democracy also transpires from the high value that interviewees place on the rule of law: **"if there is no rule of law, there is no democracy"**, one Italian respondent remarked. According to the interviewees, the rule of law entails the presence of a strong legal system that restricts the abuse of power, and guarantees the same rights and duties for all, as well as a free and just trial – principles that the general public also understands as indispensable for the rule of law.[191]

> Interviewees placed a high value on the rule of law: "if there is no rule of law, there is no democracy" (Italian respondent).

Responsibility for implementing the rule of law is not left exclusively to the state. Two German CSOs expressed their readiness to sue states or companies that do not comply with environmental laws, and they also explained that they screen the state and other organisations for compliance with social laws, working to mobilise the public through campaigns whenever they observe irregularities. As such, they **see themselves as a fundamental part of the country's system of checks and balances**. Making use of legal means to enforce policy change is also a tool used by CSOs in Greece and Italy, for example to ensure their states' compliance with international human rights laws. With the exception of Italy,[192] the Eurobarometer suggests that citizens of these countries rank above the EU average in their trust in their national justice systems.[193] Just as with their understanding of democracy, CSO representatives described a very participatory approach in maintaining the rule of law, seeing it as something that requires regular citizen and CSO oversight rather than merely being left to the state.

The two Hungarian family organisations interviewed declined to comment on the rule of law, defining it as simply the "implementation of the law", and claiming that Hungarians "are not interested in it". This mirrors the findings of the quantitative data presented in section 3.2, where one in four Hungarians did not respond to the Eurobarometer question on whether they think that their national courts are independent. One German interviewee talked about how **"democratic legitimacy is used to attack the rule of law"** in Poland and Hungary, and many other German and French respondents spoke of rule of law violations in Poland and Hungary as a major issue of concern for the European Union as a whole.

The interviews have shown that CSOs and the wider public share the same views when it comes to the rule of law. Although it is seen as an essential value both for their state and the EU in general, they recognise that **the rule of law does not work similarly well in all member states**.

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[190] Mair, Peter (2006), "Polity-scepticism, party failings, and the challenge to European democracy", Amsterdam: The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences.
[191] European Commission (2019), Special Eurobarometer 489, Brussels, p. 11.
[192] Although trust in the Italian judicial system is low, support has increased remarkably (by 12%) in the last four years. See European Commission (2019), Flash Eurobarometer 474, Brussels, p. 8.
[193] EU average: 56% trust in national judicial system, Germany, 74%; Greece: 57%; European Commission (2019), Special Eurobarometer 474, Brussels, p. 6.

Solidarity

Much like the wider public, CSO representatives understand solidarity mostly in a **humanitarian rather than economic sense**, with a strong emphasis on empathy and tolerance towards others. Respondents mostly linked the term to the concept of human rights and dignity, social inclusion, and equality, going beyond race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or nationality. Essentially, they all interpreted it as support from the safe, strong, healthy, wealthy, etc. for those in need and vulnerable: citizens helping refugees, the homed helping the homeless, the rich helping the poor, and so on. **"Whoever has more, gives more to those who need more"**, an Italian interviewee specified. French respondents in particular related solidarity to the concept of "social justice", whereas some German interviewees defined it as standing together as a society.

The fact that there is strong support for humanitarian solidarity among all member states, both at the level of the CSOs and the wider public, is also reflected in the quantitative data presented in section 3.2. Humanitarian aspects of solidarity build a firm core of the European understanding of this value. When connected to the refugee crisis, two thirds of European Eurobarometer respondents agree that member states should help refugees.

Social inclusion was mostly mentioned by Greek respondents in relation to refugees, socially vulnerable groups and one's own (local) community. Polish CSOs often understood it as friendly relations between neighbouring countries or cooperation/sacrifice among Poles for the greater common good. Hungarian interviewees often drew connotations between solidarity and "human dignity", the understanding of which varied depending on the type of CSO, with differences in whose human dignity they prioritise. For example, family organisations spoke about this in the context of the 'pro-life' movement or intergenerational solidarity that ensures decent care for the elderly, while many human rights organisations focused on protecting the dignity of victims of violence by law enforcement through legal activities.

Most respondents **connected solidarity with migration and refugees first of all**. With some exceptions, the memory of the Eurozone crisis and any perceived lack of solidarity at that time does not seem to be a strong association with the term any more, even in Greece and Italy, with the more recent migration crisis taking priority. Only some of the French interviewees prominently recalled the lack of solidarity within the EU during times of crisis (especially the Euro and migration crises).

Very few respondents referred to the Coronavirus, except for one Greek interviewee who mentioned it to highlight the lack of European solidarity with "southern countries" in general. It could be that the Coronavirus is not associated with this value because it threatens everybody, not just certain 'disadvantaged' members of the community.

CSOs' perception of the definition of values in their society and beyond

The interviewees were also asked about their perception of how values are interpreted in their broader national context. This was deemed important in order to gain insights into the contexts of different member states through the eyes of civil society activists, and to understand whether and why they see themselves

as operating in a permissive or inhibiting environment from the point of view of value promotion. Whether interviewed organisations believe that fellow CSOs, citizens, and governments in their country share in their own vision of democratic values can influence the extent to which the respondents think that they are 'fighting against the system' or are assisted by it in their endeavours. In turn, this can prove either motivating or discouraging, and can impact on the repertoire of actions and causes that the CSOs adopt in their work.

Perceptions matter because, even if their legal national framework might objectively give them access to decision-making based on transparency, and even if they have financial and social resources to carry out their activities, if specific CSOs perceive themselves as outliers in the wider society, they might hold back or undertake action which is coloured by their own interpretations or biases about what the system needs and how it may respond. It can also encourage them to opt for more informal means of activism (such as protests, marches, or sit-ins) as opposed to institutionalised channels of interest representation (see section 2.3).

When asked whether their own definition of values reflects a general view shared by others in their country, nearly all of the interviewees said that, **although their colleagues in their organisation would share a similar understanding, some other CSOs and people in their country or across Europe might not**. This means that, despite differences in the legal national frameworks of the member states included in this study, CSOs in all the studied counties perceive there to be some variation in their wider societies regarding the understanding of values.

The Hungarian family organisations were the only exceptions in this regard, since they claimed that a majority of Hungarians would agree with their conceptualisation; they nevertheless acknowledged that their views would be more similar within the country than in Europe as a whole. This feeling is supported by the data from our quantitative analysis, where Hungary very often stands out among other member states, especially those from Western Europe.

It is also important to note that most respondents **did not make a distinction between** wider societal interpretations of the **particular values**: either they felt that their definitions as a whole were shared by others, or they were not; very few believed that their understanding of one value would meet with agreement while the others would not, for example. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between the three values under consideration in this section. Yet, based on their responses, it is possible to explain their optics as:

A question of their perception on the state of democracy

Most of the interviewees explained that the different interpretation of values that exist in their country and beyond are the result of **political developments** over recent years which have **pushed societies into more radical positions**, especially regarding tolerance. They connected this explicitly to the recent surge in

populist/extremist/sovereigntist[194] parties or movements and their supporters. It must be borne in mind, however, that many of the organisations that accepted our interview requests were liberal and/or pro-European in outlook, and that these views may not be shared by CSOs across the political spectrum.

According to one Greek interviewee, **populist politicians and parties** encourage a **black-and-white understanding of nuanced issues**, thus dividing societies and countries. For example, the migration/refugee crisis is about both security and solidarity, but many populist actors try to make it exclusively about security. Most of the French and German respondents expressed concern about populism polarising society and calling into question basic principles of their countries' constitutions.

Respondents also recognised that the decrease in people's common understanding of values is not a unique phenomenon to their country, but rather **a phase through which the EU as a whole is passing**. This is epitomised at the European level by sovereigntist movements that share a populist or extremist ideology. One Italian respondent stated that "sovereigntist political movements are an indication that there is an EU-wide shift with respect to democratic values." One Polish interviewee claimed that **democracy is being understood in a majoritarian way**, in which some basic democratic principles, such as minority rights or the dignity of the homeless or refugees, are being brought into question or traded off with others.

However, several interviewees expressed the belief that, even if the rising profile of populist parties suggests a shift in values, the majority of their voters are not really opposed to democracy or the rule of law. Rather, they suggest **populist voters are angry with ineffective politicians** and choose radical options as "a last resort to express their frustration with the mainstream", as perceived by one Italian interviewee, not because they really agree with populist values. The quantitative data from Eurobarometer appears to support this view. Although support for populist and, in some cases, even anti-democratic parties and movements has increased in the past years[195] – an observation which is shared by CSO actors – it has not resulted in a fundamental change in how democratic values are interpreted among the respective member states' populations. This is in line with other studies that have also suggested that **populist voters are not motivated by values, but by other concerns such as frustration or fear.**[196] Thus, the pessimistic view expressed by many interviewees – that populist party support indicates a shift in values away from liberal-democratic norms – seems exaggerated when compared with the data.

Italian interviewees felt that this frustration derives from the perception of a **huge divide between "the elites"** (especially "progressive" politicians) **and the general public**: politicians are seen as distant from the people, corrupt, uncaring, and difficult to influence. A similar view emerged from the interviews in Greece, where distrust – towards politics and civil society alike – is a big problem, and in France. This view transpires also from the quantitative data (see section 3.2), where majorities in all

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[194] Greek interviewees mostly used the term 'populist' when referring to SYRIZA and 'extremist' when referring to Golden Dawn; in Italy, they used 'sovereigntist' in reference to both the Five Star Movement and Lega.

[195] Grindheim, Jan Erik (2019), "Why right-leaning populism has grown in the most advanced liberal democracies of Europe?", *The Political Quarterly,* Volume 90, Number 4, pp. 757-771; Csaky, Zselyke (2020), "Nations in transit 2020: Dropping the democratic façade", Washington: Freedom House.

[196] De Vries, Catherine and Isabell Hoffmann, "Fear not values: Public opinion and the populist vote in Europe", *Bertelsmann Stiftung* (accessed 26 March 2020).

selected member states think that **politicians, especially at the EU level, are not in tune with the needs of their citizens**. This divide has likely been exacerbated by social and economic crises.

> Politicians are seen as distant from the people, corrupt, uncaring, and difficult to influence. Majorities in all selected member states think that politicians, especially at the EU level, are not in tune with the needs of their citizens.

Italian and Greek respondents specified that **democracy is not openly questioned** in their country except by some very fringe voices (in contrast, the rule of law and especially solidarity are sometimes attacked by populist political actors). Some pointed out that populists and their supporters perceive themselves to be the 'true' democrats. German respondents gave examples of how certain fringe groups in their country actually lament that "our society is in decline (especially regarding wealth), democracy does not work anymore, and the media does not report correctly", referring to a 'Meinungsdiktatur' or 'dictatorship of opinion'. Thus, hardly anyone is really "anti-democratic", in their own rhetoric at least. In Poland, too, one interviewee remarked that "government supporters may consider traditional values important, but they are not anti-democratic as such," highlighting that the Polish transition to democracy is still widely considered the country's greatest success story.

A partial exception in this regard is **France**, where two of the **respondents spoke of a general trend of authoritarianism**: "The Fifth Republic is a very poor constitution in terms of democracy", one of them affirmed – a view which finds some resonance among the wider population. A majority of French respondents to the 2019 Eurobarometer expressed dissatisfaction with the state of their democratic system.[197]

A question of their perception on the condition of rights

French interviewees also made reference to **growing inequalities** in the country, which, in their opinion, translate to an increasingly unequal access to common rights. This concerns mostly the access to legal representation and advocacy, which is unaffordable for migrants (especially those '*sans papiers*' and the poorest). As one French respondent put it: "In France, and disproportionately in Hungary and Poland, we see that public freedoms are limited, especially in times of crisis." This remark was linked to the way in which the state responded to the Coronavirus crisis in France, which they assessed as breaching the freedom of speech and of assembly.

Problems with the interpretation of rights were also mentioned in the Italian interviews. One Italian respondent, for example, said that some organisations in the country that deal with minors insist on the rights of 'our' minors: those who are white, born in Italy, and live in traditional families. In so doing, they **shrink the scope of the right** which they claim to defend and, in this sense, **their definition of rights is not universal**.

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[197] European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 92, Brussels, p. 130.

Other Italian interviewees explained that such discrimination is symptomatic of societies, like the Italian one, in which the Church and traditional religious beliefs still dominate and where there is a lack of sexual and emotional education. They further added that, "by reference to the European average (leaving the Balkans and Eastern Europe aside), Italy is not a tolerant country." In Greece, too, **the strong influence of the Church** contributes to a very traditional society, although some interviewees referred to the significant work done by the Church to provide help for those in need.

Concerns about the rule of law are not limited to the Eastern member states. But while the law may not always be properly implemented in Italy, this is perceived by the interviewees as Italy's problem. As described in section 3.2, only 9% of Italian respondents to the Eurobarometer felt that the rule of law was something they associated with the EU, suggesting that they do not see the EU as a guarantor for national circumstances in this area. **In general, issues with the rule of law are seen as 'national' rather than European issues, except in France and Germany,** where the situation for civil society in certain member states has aroused widespread concern. CSO representatives from France and Germany repeatedly mentioned Poland and Hungary, claiming that in these countries, "problems do not get smaller, but rather bigger when it comes to the rule of law".

In Hungary and Poland, where pro-EU and liberal viewpoints in civil society are under pressure, CSOs that support these values consider it part of their duty "to make sure that these views are still reflected in [Hungarian] society even if they have disappeared from the political scene." They see grassroots mobilisation as particularly important to reach out to "those in society who might not agree with the government, but are not willing to actively support an opposition party either", according to one Hungarian organisation. Similarly, in Italy, a few interviewees referred to **the role that civil society can play in improving political discourse and keeping people engaged even if they cannot relate to any political parties**. As the Eurobarometer data reveals, this is a view that is widespread not only in Italy but throughout the whole European Union: 76% of Europeans view CSOs as important for democracy and a pluralistic democratic debate.[198]

A question of their perception on the practice of solidarity

When it comes to the notion of solidarity, several organisations (notably in Italy) outright rejected the suggestion that most people in their countries would think of solidarity between countries when they hear the term: they thought people would think mostly of solidarity between citizens and refugees, and solidarity among citizens themselves, for example at community level. One Italian interviewee responded **"I don't think anyone in Italy would think of the EU when you say solidarity."** Moreover, a Greek interviewee from a humanitarian organisation said that Brussels understands solidarity only in financial terms, proving that "the EU is simply a business union". Only those organisations that work on European issues specifically (or interviewees based in Brussels) felt that solidarity between EU member states was a common association with the term.

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[198] European Commission (2018), Special Eurobarometer 477, Brussels p. 21.

"Solidarity mostly takes place in the geographical proximity of the organisations, which means that people help in their neighbourhood but not in the geographical zones where help would be needed the most. Populism and the success of the *Rassemblement National* is one of the consequences of this", one French interviewee explained. Thus, **solidarity is almost exclusively interpreted at the local (or national) level**: solidarity with refugees, with struggling people in the community, and sometimes solidarity between different regions (particularly in Italy, where there is a big divide between north and south).

> Solidarity mostly takes place in the geographical proximity of the organisations, which means that people help in their neighbourhood but not in the geographical zones where help would be needed the most.

The interviews have shown that whenever **solidarity** was connected not to humanitarian, but rather to social and economic factors, it was **mostly linked to the local and national level. Any association with the EU was largely absent.** An explanation for this can be provided by a YouGov survey which revealed that citizens of all member states selected for this study, except for Italy and Greece, tend to oppose the economic and social aspects of solidarity on the EU level, and therefore do not associate the EU with this kind of solidarity.[199]

At the same time, as one Greek interviewee described, **people's interpretation of 'solidarity' depends on their personal experiences**: those on the islands affected by the refugee crisis would see it as implying the need for the EU to help Greece cope with the crisis, while those who lost their jobs in the Eurozone crisis would take it to mean the need for national or European help with the economy and the social situation.

Likewise, in Germany, the experience since the migration/refugee crisis seems to have diminished the initially strong national consensus in favour of welcoming refugees ('*Willkommenskultur*'), with some groups now outright rejecting the notion of solidarity. However, there is still a large majority in favour of supporting migrants/refugees, as the Eurobarometer demonstrates. According to the latest data, 81% of Germans think their country should help refugees – among the highest values of all member states, ranking considerably higher than the EU average (69%).[200]

3.4   Ups and downs in the promotion of values

Quite clearly, the perceptions of the CSOs interviewed betray concerns about changing circumstances in an increasingly intertwined national, European and global arena, which impact on a common definition of values at different levels and thus also on CSOs' abilities to promote them. This section reviews the factors identified by CSOs as the main drivers of changing values in their own societies and beyond. The caveat, again, is that most interviews carried out were skewed towards more liberal and

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[199]   Bremmer *et al.* (2020), *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[200]   European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 91 – European citizenship, Brussels, p. 94.

pro-European perspectives. With that in mind, the main causes mentioned by our respondents relate to domestic political developments and global trends. These present a number of opportunities for CSOs' visibility and importance. Yet, they also generally result in an environment that makes the work of civil society more difficult from the point of view of its relationship with the state (indicator 1, framework of analysis) and the financial and social resources available (indicator 2, framework of analysis), which, in turn, bestow a certain type of character to civil society mobilisation (indicator 3, framework of analysis): one which is more informal, unstructured, and innovative in terms of methods (see section 2.4 for the framework of analysis). One overall implication of these developments is that, throughout Europe, new civil society movements see themselves in opposition to or discounted by their governments, and therefore choose to act in protest rather than within existing/formal structures (see section 4.2 for more details).

Political developments and global trends

Changing circumstances in national politics

What are the reasons behind the challenges that CSOs face in promoting values? In describing their work, almost all CSOs in the countries studied, coming from all different political backgrounds, **made reference chiefly to their national political situations**. Exceptions were concentrated in Germany and especially France, where **wider global trends** – climate change, feminism and the movement towards gender equality, and to a lesser extent migration – were seen as important factors influencing civil society. In other words, politics has a strong impact on civil society in all countries, but the **relative political stability in Western Europe** can be contrasted with **more unpredictable situations in the East and South**, with consequences for the relative strength of civil society.

The populist surge

In particular, respondents in all countries referred to the rise of political forces with negative attitudes towards civil society and/or democratic values, variously described as "populist", "extremist" (especially in Greece), or "sovereigntist" (especially in Italy). Such parties have had different levels of success in each country, but in all cases their strength and influence have increased in the past 10-15 years. In Hungary and Poland, they have entered government and implemented policies that, in some cases, have restricted civil society activity. In Italy and Greece, they have recently formed governments but have subsequently been removed from power, remaining a strong opposition. In France and Germany, they have not been able to capture national government but, especially in France, they have risen to become prominent opposition forces and enjoy significant support at local level in some areas.

Populist political forces, according to several interviewees from more liberal organisations, do not feel that they need to listen to civil society, believing instead that they **have a more direct connection to "the people",** for example through social media. Their supporters, too, do not accept collaboration between the state and CSOs. The result is that when such parties gain power, it becomes difficult for CSOs to establish a constructive relationship with the state. From this perspective, such countries score

low on indicators 1 and 2 in the framework of analysis adopted here (see section 2.4), with implications for the character of civil society mobilisation (indicator 3).

By way of example, the most extreme situation for civil society was described in Hungary and Poland, where the environment has become quite restrictive in recent years. Interviewees reported **hostile rhetoric from the government** and a resulting **stigmatisation** of those CSOs that support liberal values. In Hungary, those organisations that work with migrants and refugees feel under particular pressure: they are theoretically subject to a 25% supplementary tax on financial support to any migration-related activity and their work is consistently demonised through official channels and state-controlled media. In Poland, it is organisations working with LGBT rights who mentioned the most hostility from the state, especially regarding their funding, media access, and harassment of their members and volunteers. Furthermore, as **the government** promotes itself as strongly Catholic and pro-family, several interviewees felt it has **purposely exploited divisions between liberal and conservative organisations**, accusing the former of having been financially privileged in the past. This has allowed it to justify its recent decision to increase public funding for pro-family organisations as a budgetary "re-prioritisation".

However, some of these restrictive measures against civil society appear to be mostly symbolic. In Hungary, for example, the **extra taxes for organisations** that work with refugees **have never been properly implemented**, interviewees said. One respondent claimed that he was "not aware of any organisation that has actually had to pay it… So either the law has been forgotten or the government does not actually dare to use it because it is afraid of international condemnation." He indicated that it is **the hostile environment** his organisation faces, **rather than any specific policies, that has the biggest impact on its work.** This contrasts with the situation for other sectors, such as media organisations, who report that many media investors have been "banished" from the market and a significant number of independent media outlets have been bought by individuals with close ties to the government. Some Hungarian interviewees also complained about the **systematic weakening of independent media** through legal and practical instruments, such as a lack of available tenders or limited access to the public sphere and important political events, negatively impacting their ability to report effectively.

Although the situation for liberal organisations in Hungary and Poland is difficult, and deteriorating, it is far from hopeless. Organisations opposed to the government can still make their voices heard. In fact, as several interviewees from affected CSOs mentioned, the **government hostility has served to raise the profile of many liberal pro-EU organisations**: they get more (international) media attention, more support from the public and, in some cases, increased donations, precisely because they are perceived as 'enemies' of the government. One Hungarian interviewee said "this stigmatisation has made civil society more relevant… Our profile would not be so high if we did not get attacked by the government!" Italian interviewees noted a similar feeling under the previous (Five Star Movement/League) government.

> Several interviews mentioned that government hostility has served to raise their profile: "this stigmatisation has made civil society more relevant… Our profile would not be so high if we did not get attacked by the government!" (Hungarian respondent)

Indeed, many interviewees indicated that they and their organisations are aware of and concerned by developments affecting organisations working in other sectors, and even those operating in other countries. Many German and French CSOs referred to Hungary and Poland as examples of worrisome environments. In Italy, some interviewees drew comparisons between the situation under the previous government and that in Hungary, especially regarding policies towards CSOs working with migrants and refugees. Those organisations that do not work in this area, and so are not directly affected, are still aware of and troubled by these signs. A few **organisations** mentioned that they are **part of networks**, or have close connections with other CSOs working in different fields, and believe that **"an attack against one is an attack against us all"**, in the words of one interviewee from Italy.

One Polish interviewee from an organisation directed against the government was eager to stress that the situation in that country is not as restrictive as in Hungary. "There are commonalities with the situation in Hungary, but the nature of the democratic backsliding is different. Core values are being undermined in both, but civil society is not in as bad a state in Poland. There are some worrying instances, but not yet a political trend towards targeting CSOs." In fact, civil society opposition to undemocratic trends in Poland is at an all-time high. He referred to the fact that the resistance of Polish judges to the recent judicial reforms is unprecedented globally: there has never been such a strong pushback by judicial authorities against the state in any country in history, he claimed. Certain recent successes, such as the reversing of the law restricting access to abortion, indicate that Polish civil society is still able to mobilise against the government and achieve results.

The attitudes of the Hungarian and Polish governments are not universally hostile to civil society. Hungarian and Polish CSOs whose work corresponds to government priorities are generally in good health; in fact, these appear to be proliferating. A few Polish human rights and media CSOs said that during the first years that the current ruling party was in power, they maintained a good relationship with government officials, who occasionally agreed to join their events despite sometimes disagreeing with their policy recommendations. However, after strengthening its position and influence, the government has minimised the CSOs' access and potential impact on decision-making. Thus, there is now a situation whereby **a CSO's stability and operational success is largely linked to its political outlook** or the degree to which its work is in line with government priorities.

> In all countries it appears that working with the state is harder than it once was, but the struggle CSOs face in influencing government policies has many causes, many of them unique to particular national circumstances.

Deteriorating government-CSO relations more widely

The same is true, albeit to a lesser extent, in other countries. Many interviewees in Italy and Greece referred to poor conditions under recent populist governments, but also said that **things have not significantly improved since the change in power**. Indeed, **in all countries it appears that working with the state is harder than it once was**. One Italian CSO expressed the situation as follows: "It used to be the case that if you spoke with a politician, they would listen and be respectful even if they did not agree with your cause. You were an 'adversary', but not an 'enemy'. But now there is more hostility and you are treated as an enemy." In some cases, it can be hard for them to meet with government representatives at all. A Greek interviewee also expressed the belief that her organisation's relationship with the state had been very good before the Eurozone crisis, with successive governments (both left and right) frequently consulting CSOs even when they knew that they were not their political supporters. Following the coming to power of the SYRIZA government, it became harder for CSOs not politically aligned with them to get a hearing.

> "While countries in the South of Europe report a certain degree of hostility from state institutions, those in the West (France and Germany) generally felt that they can work with the state, but are unsure of the extent to which they are actually taken seriously by policymakers."

The struggle CSOs face in influencing government policy has many causes, many of them unique to particular national circumstances. One interviewee in Italy mentioned that **other actors, notably business and industry, continue to exert such a strong influence** on government policymaking that it is difficult for his own organisation (an environmental NGO) to make itself heard despite increased public concern for climate issues. In Greece, civil society largely collapsed during the crisis years, meaning there is little remaining tradition or custom of civil society engagement remaining. In countries that have recently experienced political changes (notably Italy), interviewees mentioned that 'new' parties, meaning especially **those with a populist outlook, had no experience with consulting civil society**: **the CSOs no longer have the contacts they had** with older parties, and struggle to make new connections. One Italian interviewee said that they "need to build trust and allies from scratch", something which is particularly difficult with populist politicians who are inherently distrustful of civil society. While countries in the South of Europe report a certain degree of hostility from state institutions, those in the West (France and Germany) generally felt that they can work with the state, but, unless they are big umbrella organisations or have officials and politicians among their board members or working groups, they are **unsure of the extent to which they are actually taken seriously by policymakers**. Again, this mistrust in politicians is in line the results of the quantitative data analysis presented in section 3.2.

> Policies at the local level can be just as damaging to CSOs' operations: "even at the local level, if a local administration is hostile, it is more difficult to be active in schools, organise demonstrations, and so on." (Italian respondent)

Hostility at local level

It emerged from the interviews that populist actors do not need to be in power nationally to exert a strong, largely negative, influence on the civil society landscape: **policies at the local level can be just as damaging to CSOs' operations**. One Italian interviewee referred to how "even at the local level, if a local administration is hostile, it is more difficult to be active in schools, organise demonstrations, and so on. Last year, for example, in Trieste, the local government did not want to allow the gay pride in the central market", and in Verona members of organisations advocating LGBT rights are barred from schools because of the local government's hostile attitude. Another Italian respondent referred to a situation the previous autumn when a local government banned immigrant children from school canteens unless they could present specific documents that were impossible for them to procure, effectively meaning that they could no longer get a meal. This policy was only reversed after the civil sector fought hard against it. According to the interviewee, such a policy would never have been introduced in the past. That said, the success in resisting and overturning such measures demonstrates that civil society is still able to make a difference even in the face of government opposition.

Interviewees in Italy, Greece, Poland, and Hungary referred to an **environment of hostility towards liberal civil society** and negative perceptions of the sector on the part of the public, often exacerbated or encouraged by the rhetoric of populist parties or governments. All Greek interviewees mentioned **high levels of public distrust** directed towards CSOs in their country, noting that bad press affecting one type of CSO (for example, those helping migrants and refugees on the Greek islands) impacts the reputation of other organisations. In Italy, meanwhile, the previous government acted against civic rights (such as by organising a 'Family Day' in opposition to CSOs pushing for civil unions) and legitimated a discourse of hate and intolerance in the media. One Italian interviewee expressed concern about the move towards a **"criminalisation of solidarity"** under the previous government, referring not only to migrants but also authoritarian or illiberal attitudes towards those in the prison system. Respondents in several countries referred to polarisation within their society, notably divisions between rich and poor and between 'elites' (especially political elites) and the 'general public': these divisions are exacerbating distrust and frustration with the mainstream, driving people towards populist political options, according to interviewees in Italy and France.

In some cases, such a negative environment has spilled over into **harassment, vandalisation or even violence** directed against CSOs and their members. For example, a few interviewees from Italy mentioned that their members have been attacked in public, and their properties have been damaged. One referred to a worsening environment: "Two years ago, our CEO received a hand-delivered threatening letter. That was something that has never happened before". One Greek organisation said that their members (medical professionals) sometimes even faced armed militias in the Greek islands preventing them from doing their work. While prosecutors have taken action, demonstrating that the rule of law still functions, they have often been slow and rather ineffective in doing so.

Anti-establishment civic activism

In virtually all respects, **circumstances appear to be rather better in France and Germany** than in the other countries. German respondents felt that their operational environment has been **relatively stable** over recent years, while those in France noted only **long-term trends** in society, notably among organisations dealing with socially disadvantaged groups who felt they were increasingly coming to **replace state functions**: they cited growing inequalities in terms of access to legal advocacy, higher levels of poverty, and the need for helping migrants as major developments which require stronger action by CSOs to pick up the slack left by government.

However, in these countries too, populist politics has become more prominent and is making its influence felt on the civil society sector. Mostly, this influence is confined to an increase in hostile rhetoric, as in the other countries, but there is also a sense of **civil society norms being overturned by new actors**. Several German interviewees mentioned that **a considerable number of CSOs have emerged recently that mobilise *against* democratic values**, for example representing anti-establishment views (PEGIDA) or denying climate change (EIKE). For the time being, these remain a small minority, but the presence of this kind of perspective in civil society has not been prominent in Germany before now.

These are not the only new forms of civic engagement observable in Western Europe. German interviewees reported that **civil society** in their country **has become very diverse** in recent years, with grassroots activists such as Fridays For Future and protest movements like Stuttgart 21 attracting a great deal of support. These initiatives are often **informal, unstructured, and make use of new methods** (such as street protest). Their proliferation can be seen as **a parallel development to the rise of populist-linked CSOs**. In the words of one German interviewee: "we live in a special moment in history, a moment in which an incredible number of people are fighting and getting involved – keywords gender equality, Fridays for Future, integration of migrants into our society – but at the same time we also see developments like the rise of the AfD and related movements (PEGIDA), which are also a kind of civil society movement."

> All over Europe, new civil society movements are generally directed against the government, choosing to protest rather than engage with existing structures.

These initiatives "may not last forever, but work very intensively for their goals", according to an interviewee from a long-established organisation, indicating that they have made a large impact on German society despite their focus on protest methods over traditional means of civil dialogue. However, there is some uncertainty among existing CSOs about how to respond to and work with such new movements, especially those making use of more confrontational practices such as occupying public space or engaging in civil disobedience. It appears to be a pattern, not just in the West but **all over Europe**, that **new civil society movements are generally directed against the government**, **choosing to protest rather than engage with existing structures** (see section 4.2). One Hungarian interviewee suggested

that civic activism has become a kind of entertainment, mentioning the example of LGBT Pride Parades supposedly becoming a tourist attraction.

In general, the picture that emerges is one in which society in all the countries surveyed is becoming **more confrontational, more political, more polarised, and less open to compromise**: these characteristics apply both to the government and to civil society itself. Thus, CSOs are experiencing increasing difficulty in engaging with state institutions impacted by political polarisation. At the same time, the civil society sector is diversifying, with many of the newcomers themselves less open to constructive dialogue and working within the confines of the system.

The bigger picture: global trends and international cooperation

National political dynamics are not the only factors impacting CSOs' abilities to promote values effectively. In France, and to a certain extent also in Germany, interviewees felt that it was not national politics that made the biggest recent changes to their work, but wider changes in society. In particular, an increase in interest for topics relating to the **environment and climate change, gender equality and feminism**, and – to a lesser extent – **migration** were cited as having a major impact on French civil society. For one interviewee, this attention was driven partly by developments outside of France: "there is a greater interest in gender equality at the political level, reflected in the Istanbul Convention (the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence). Beyond that, the UN has considerably increased its action in the field of gender equality and disability rights." These impressions were largely absent from the other countries, where domestic political circumstances dominate.

It appears that **cooperation on the European level** has increased in recent years, but unevenly, with Western CSOs engaging across borders far more than those in other countries. One German interviewee noted that awareness has increased among 'normal' civil society (that is, those organisations which do not work directly in the EU context) that solidarity is needed in Europe, and that they can make common cause with civil society in other member states. While the main focus of most organisations remains the national level, **the European dimension has gained in importance**. A great deal of the CSOs from all member states interviewed for this study said that they were members of European umbrella organisations or were otherwise in contact with counterparts elsewhere in Europe. Some organisations (mainly from Western European member states) even **work directly in other member states**, such as by supporting vulnerable groups – but this kind of support is generally unidirectional, with French and German organisations working with refugees in Greece, or providing support for civil society in Poland, for example. One German interviewee from a foundation engaged in such actions in Poland perceived his possibility to make a difference there as limited: "how can I save a CSO in Poland, for example?" He felt that his organisation could only support actors on the ground by ensuring funding or raising awareness. His organisation's support, however, **cannot address the underlying structural problems** in those member states.

Organisations that follow developments at the European level are also aware that EU policy makes a difference to their operations as well as national and local policies. One interviewee involved with

aiding refugees in Greece mentioned that several of the largest Greek humanitarian CSOs decided to cease taking funds from EU sources in 2016, following the EU-Turkey statement, in protest of the EU's reluctance to engage effectively in crisis management. In Hungary, **pro-EU CSOs look to the rest of Europe for solidarity and support**, and several interviewees mentioned that they see the European level as a kind of **safeguard** against their own national government. Such a European perspective, however, was **missing** from the majority of CSOs interviewed for this study.

Other obstacles and opportunities

Crisis and emergency

While political developments may be the biggest change influencing the activities of civil society, according to the interviews conducted, there are also other factors affecting their success and failure. **The impact of recent crises** – economic, financial, refugee/migration, and most recently Coronavirus – has reached beyond political changes. The economic crisis put severe financial pressure on smaller CSOs in particular, while the work of organisations supporting socially-disadvantaged groups in Greece and Italy has radically changed since the 2015 refugee crisis.

However, it is also possible to identify a **positive development** in civil society as a result of the past decade's experience of crises. Just as organisations in Poland, Hungary, and Italy reported **an increased interest in their activities when they came under attack by the government**, interviewees in all countries explained that the **recent crises have made the public reach out to them more** than they did in more stable times. For example, several mentioned that, since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis, people have been approaching them in greater numbers offering to help, donate or volunteer. Thus, **a sense of emergency has a direct result on motivation and willingness to help**. A similar feeling was noted in both Greece and Germany during the 2015 refugee crisis. Similarly, the profound and sudden impact of the Coronavirus on all European societies has had the effect of replacing divisive talk about immigration and other hot-button topics, allowing a **less highly-charged and confrontational debate** to emerge.

Funding and administration

With notable exceptions in those countries where the government is putting pressure on certain parts of civil society (such as Hungary and Poland), **legal or administrative requirements** were **not perceived as a significant barrier** by most interviewees. In some countries, there have been problems, such as the recognition of non-profit status in Germany (see section 3.2), but, in general, respondents did not believe that this was impeding their work.

> The biggest challenge to civil society's day-to-day work in nearly every country is funding, particularly the sustainability of funding sources.

Apart from the political situation in each country, **the biggest challenge to civil society's day-to-day work in nearly every country is funding.** The **sustainability** of funding sources is a particular problem in Italy and Greece, while access to public funding is subject to political influence in Poland and Hungary. For France and Germany, no particular problem was noted by the CSOs interviewed, although many small CSOs in Germany largely rely on short-term financing. In general, though, German funding sources have remained relatively stable over the past years: the only exceptions are in those German states where the AfD has a strong representation in the state parliaments, according to one interviewee. Obtaining state funding in those regions has become more difficult for liberal organisations, as the atmosphere within the states and the funding process is more disputed than before.

The low availability of sustainable funds is a problem not only because it limits what actions a CSO can take, but also because **it makes the sector undesirable as a career path**, as salaries remain low: "nobody can make a good living in civil society in Poland", said one interviewee, indicating that this meant they struggle to find and hold on to staff.

Generally, the CSOs interviewed were supported by a variety of funding sources, often a combination of private (foundations, contributions by businesses, members' subscriptions and donations) and public support (from local authorities, national governments or European institutions). Private funding is a significant source of income for smaller organisations, but is generally less dependable than EU or state funds. One Italian interviewee mentioned that a lot of the NGOs that "didn't make it" after the 2008 financial crisis had depended mostly on private sources of income, and those that did survive sought to **diversify their income sources** for greater financial security.

EU funding is a prominent source of money for civil society in all countries, but it **only reaches certain kinds of organisation**. In particular, CSOs operating locally usually only receive EU funds via large national or international organisations that they partner with: according to one Italian interviewee, most local organisations in the country rely entirely on local funding, whether it be from local authorities or local businesses and public donations: "At local level, 95% of funds are sourced from the community". The procedure for applying for European funds is often perceived as **excessively bureaucratic**, requiring expertise that is beyond the reach of smaller organisations.

An example of good practice in terms of funding is France, where private donations and legacies are largely exempted from taxes, providing a major income stream for associations. The funding framework gives associations relative safety and independence from public funding, which is important for long-term stability. The **1% tax contribution** (see section 3.2) is a **lifeline** for CSOs in Hungary and Poland, where there is not a strong culture of donations. (A similar system operates in Italy.) In Greece, even this is missing, with a corresponding need to rely on other forms of income, whether public funding or private foundations.

> The 1% tax contribution is a lifeline for CSOs in Hungary and Poland, where there is not a strong culture of donations. (A similar system operates in Italy)

Political independence

In Hungary (and to a lesser extent Poland) the fact that nearly all government funding is linked to political conditions means that many CSOs have to look for funding elsewhere. The **EEA/Norway grants** are a very important income stream for these countries. This, in turn, gives the government the opportunity to denigrate these organisations as 'foreign-funded' – allowing them to put further legal requirements on them. Thus, there is a **vicious circle** involved in **accepting this funding source**, as to do so would **further alienate an organisation from the state**.

Although by no means as extreme as in Hungary or Poland, such considerations factor also into the funding choices of organisations in all countries. Several interviewees from different political backgrounds and areas of work mentioned that they **purposefully avoid accepting government funds** in order to maintain their independence and neutrality. With the exception of German and French CSOs, many organisations also avoid requesting mandatory subscriptions from their members, preferring to receive financial support from citizens on a voluntary basis so that their members do not feel under any obligation to contribute. Thus, some of the more 'obvious' funding channels are cut off for reasons of principle or operational independence.

> Funding often comes with conditions that de facto determine the whole organisation's work.

In some cases, access to funding has a direct impact on the type of activities the organisation chooses to undertake. One Italian organisation said that, when the time came to select which type of organisation they would register as, they opted to become a business because they knew they would need to undertake commercial activities (consulting and training) to support themselves; not because they actually intended or wanted to turn a profit. Several organisations in Italy and Greece reported that they have to depend on **project-based funding** more than they would like. This type of funding is problematic because it means they only have time to chase short-term projects rather than focusing on their long-term goals. **Funding often comes with conditions that *de facto* determine the whole organisation's work**.

When talking about obstacles or challenges to their work, surprisingly few organisations referred to shrinking memberships, decreasing engagement, or lack of public interest in their work. Some French interviewees noted that voluntary engagement is generally short term and unreliable, and while people continue to join associations, they increasingly prioritise those connected to their individual interests (such as music and sports associations) over organisations working for a social cause; but in general, this was not a common concern that emerged from the interviews. While it could merely be the case that politics and funding are more immediate and threatening challenges, comments on the changing nature of the civil society landscape suggest that **new types of outreach**, **such as social media**, **are making up for any diminishing public engagement** with civil society through traditional means.

3.5 Implications of the findings for the hypotheses

The quantitative data analysis and interviews allow us to draw conclusions with respect to the study's hypotheses (elaborated in section 1.3).

Hypothesis 1: *CSOs across Europe operate under broadly similar legal frameworks, but there is significant divergence between member states in terms of how values are interpreted.*

The results from the desk research and specific cases discussed during the interviews demonstrate that there is **more dissimilarity than expected** in terms of the national frameworks in which CSOs operate. In particular, **political circumstances** can affect not only the general environment in terms of attitudes towards civil society, but also the **legal framework itself**. Thus, CSOs in Hungary, Poland, and Italy have found themselves subject to restrictive laws, supplementary taxes or reduced funding opportunities. In some countries, certain types of CSO are subject to extra requirements: for example, consumer organisations in Greece must meet a separate set of standards beyond those required of other CSOs. This contrasts with France, for example, where associative status is relatively open and accessible, or Germany, where only minor irregularities concerning the non-profit status were detected in an otherwise stable environment.

Regarding the interpretation of the chosen values, the interviews revealed that **they are understood quite similarly** by CSOs in all the countries under consideration. However, when it comes to how society as a whole sees them, many respondents referred to divergent views within their countries, as well as different interpretations of the values in other member states. Again bearing in mind that the interviews in the context of this study are skewed towards more liberal perspectives, many CSOs felt they faced populist political forces with a hostile or dismissive attitude towards civil society. Although they vary in strength and influence (forming governments in some, remaining in opposition in others), populists have made an impact on the operating environment in all countries. These actors generally have different interpretations of the values under consideration. Although they support democracy, theirs is a more majoritarian conception with little room for civic voices; they are less committed to the rule of law and do not allow it to stand in the way of their political ambitions; and the solidarity they espouse is limited to in-groups, excluding migrants and in some cases even their political opponents. Thus, the **understanding of values** in each member state is **rather strongly influenced by political outlook**, and is **becoming more polarised** as politics splits into antagonistic camps.

In countries where traditional beliefs remain strong, such as those where the Church maintains a prominent role in society (notably Poland and Greece, but also Italy), interviewees reported that populists can more easily force a **prioritisation of certain values** on society, such as security over solidarity.

In all six member states, **'solidarity' is mostly understood in a humanitarian sense**, referring to a feeling of empathy and the instinct to help individuals in need. Yet, broadly speaking, solidarity is almost exclusively interpreted at the **local or national level**, with the West and South often associating

it with migrants and refugees on their own territories, and the East with the needs of one's own socially vulnerable groups.

Hypothesis 2: *In particular, an East-West split is expected, and perhaps also a North-South divide.*

The interviews did reveal similarities and differences between countries that could be grouped geographically. However, rather than a 'split' between East and West or North and South, the picture that emerges is of **three distinct regional situations**, corresponding to those countries in the **West**, **South** and **East** of Europe respectively. This is in contrast to the picture that emerges from the quantitative data, which rather suggest only an East-West split concerning general aspects of the values, or even a divide between countries within particular issues without regard to the expected geographical divisions. For example, France breaks up the Western bloc when it comes to whether its citizens feel their voices count in the EU: while 61% of German respondents feel heard, compared to only 38% of the French polled.[201]

a) The West: Germany and France

In these countries, interviewees generally felt that **democracy and the rule of law are strong** and **work efficiently**, especially in Germany. In addition, numerous German CSOs mentioned a **positive relationship** with the state institutions, a satisfactory experience with the courts, and, if needed, a realistic possibility of defending existing rights through legal action, including against the state. In France, even though democratic values are seen as the backbone of the French Republic, there is growing concern over the extent to which the state uses its power to interfere with the freedom of speech and the right to protest — but this does not go as far as in other countries where civic space has been restricted.

French and German interviewees often referred to the three values, particularly democracy and the rule of law, as being enshrined in their constitutions. This detail is not mentioned in the other countries. This may suggest that constitutions hold different roles in public awareness in different member states: in these relatively stable Western countries where the rule of law functions well, the constitution may hold more relevance in people's minds than elsewhere, especially compared to member states where the constitution has been amended multiple times in a short period (such as Hungary).

The West is particularly vocal about the **violations of the rule of law in other member states**, with a significant number of French and German interviewees referring to the **democratic backsliding** in Poland and Hungary as a major issue for the EU. (None mentioned concerns about other countries, such as those in the South.) This **cross-border or even pan-European awareness** is also reflected in the work of Western CSOs, some of which engage in action beyond their countries' borders (for example, with refugees in the Greek islands) and are more closely engaged with EU-level advocacy efforts than their counterparts in other member states.

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[201] European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer 92, Brussels.

Financially, too, CSOs in these countries are in relatively good shape. Although in France there appears to be a concentration of public funding for CSOs working on social service issues, most German CSOs did not see major problems with the financial support they receive from federal and state institutions. There is a well-developed donation culture in both Germany and France, meaning that many CSOs can also reliably count on other streams of income.

b) The South: Italy and Greece

Both Italy and Greece have been **severely affected by successive crises** in the past ten years, notably the financial/Eurozone crisis and the migration/refugee crisis. At the time the research for this study was being carried out, the Coronavirus crisis was also having a disproportionate effect on Italy. It therefore comes as little surprise that the situation for civil society is rather less stable in these countries than in the West, and that populist actors have had more electoral success, including spells in government. Political polarisation, and the proliferation of more restrictive or anti-democratic interpretations of the values, are therefore higher than in the West.

Interviewees in these countries generally felt that democracy and the rule of law were not working too well in their countries, and that due to domestic political disputes, these values can often be **selectively understood, prioritised, and traded off**. CSOs face a higher level of **harassment, intimidation** and even **violence** than in France or Germany, and are often subject to generally unfriendly or distrustful attitudes from certain sections of the public.

Generally respondents from this region were **pessimistic** about future developments, citing **funding problems**, continuing social challenges (especially relating to **distrust** and **polarisation**), and likely further difficulties caused by the ongoing experience of **crisis**. An additional problem, referred to particularly by the Greek CSOs, is the **EU's inability to put on a more united front**. This negative perception of EU solidarity mirrors the findings of the quantitative data presented in section 3.2, which shows that Italians and Greeks do not see solidarity as a value represented by the EU.[202] Overall, Greek interviewees appeared to be the most pessimistic about the future of these values, mostly referring to them in the context of disappointment with the EU's management of the migration/refugee crisis. They generally believe that democratic feeling and support for the protection of human rights will continue, but it might be **detached from the EU context** and promoted simply as the values of a "progressive and modern state", in this case Greece, rather than values of the EU specifically.

c) The East: Hungary and Poland

These countries share some of the characteristics of the South, notably **polarised politics**, high levels of **public distrust** for civil society, and **government policies** that sometimes obstruct CSOs' ability to promote democratic values. However, the situation is notably worse, with both countries currently governed by parties that seek, through the distribution of state funds, legislative means and general discourse, to **support traditionally-minded civil society** over pro-European, liberal or pro-democracy

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[202]   Only 15% of Italians and 13% of Greeks said that solidarity is a value they associate with the EU.

CSOs. Most Polish and Hungarian CSOs criticised or at least acknowledged the controversies in their countries regarding the quality of democracy and judicial independence. However, Polish interviewees were eager to stress the differences between their country and Hungary, asserting that the nature of democratic backsliding and the environment for civil society are not as bad as in Hungary. Hungarian interviewees also acknowledged that the circumstances they face, although sometimes difficult, are far from hopeless.

Moreover, it is true that pro-government forces in these countries do not consider themselves 'anti-democratic'; in fact, they refer to democracy to legitimise restrictive measures against certain CSOs (notably those working with migrants/refugees or supporting the LGBT community), indicating that **their understanding of the value** is **rather different** to that which dominates among the liberal or pro-European organisations and elsewhere in Europe. Similarly, when it comes to solidarity, they prioritise the needs of the national community over perceived outsiders.

These countries have the shortest record of civic activism among those chosen for the study, and have been EU members for the shortest time. Several interviewees drew attention to the **enormous growth in civil society** since the end of communism, and though they might be going through a difficult period, they expressed **optimism about the future** in relation to the power of young generations in raising awareness and fighting for democratic values.

Hypothesis 3: Divergences will likely be more significant for some values than others, for example more various understandings of democracy than the rule of law.

It does appear to be the case that, while some values are more or less subject to consensus, others are interpreted in a more varying fashion. However, the results of the interviews demonstrate that it is **not democracy** that is subject to the **largest divergences in understanding**, but **solidarity**: the majority of CSOs interviewed in all member states had a similar, even textbook, interpretation of democracy and the rule of law (often linking these two as counterparts), while there was somewhat more diversity in their views of solidarity. That said, most revealed a humanitarian, rather than institutional, understanding of the value, associating it with individual action, especially the support of the comfortable or wealthy with those less fortunate.

By far the most common association with solidarity was the situation with **migrants or refugees**, both in terms of the humanitarian needs of arrivals (Greece, Italy) and the integration of those who have made their home in Europe (Germany, France). Some respondents in the South also referred to solidarity in the context of the Coronavirus crisis, and occasionally the experience of the financial and Eurozone crises in 2008 and 2010, but mostly to assert that solidarity (especially from the EU) was lacking in these scenarios. A few organisations in the East referred to the **solidarity of civil society** in other countries for their counterparts facing difficulties in Hungary and Poland.

The quantitative data also suggests the same distinction between economic and humanitarian aspects of solidarity. There is disagreement among member states when it comes to economic solidarity, particularly with regard to the pooling of debt or European unemployment support, and there is a clear division

between Northern member states rejecting and Southern member states supporting the idea. However, qualitative data from the interviews and the quantitative data both show that humanitarian aspects constitute the core of Europeans' understanding of solidarity among CSOs and the wider public alike.

Thus, considering the questions with which the study began, certain conclusions can be drawn. Understandings of values generally follow a continent-wide division in line with political polarisation, rather than differing between countries. EU values do not appear to be losing ground, as CSOs maintain a clear understanding of what they stand for and continue to advocate for them. However, they face increasing challenges in doing so, meeting with political opposition, difficult financial situations, and changing global circumstances. The following section will analyse their capacity to continue advocating for them in the years to come.

4. Projections

The interviews allowed the research team to explore not only the circumstances currently facing CSOs, as seen through the eyes of the respondents, but also their hopes, fears, and expectations for the future. The CSOs' projections for the upcoming years are documented in section 4.1 and reveal that liberal democratic organisations across the EU are nervous, believing that the populist phenomena will endure. For many CSOs, an effective response to the challenges posed by the rise of populism lies in European cooperation and with young European citizens mobilising in defence of democratic values. They also see a role for digitalisation in facilitating their work, although they tend to have different views on whether technology will have a positive influence on the quality of democracy in the long run.

By considering the interview data alongside the desk research and our own expertise in the political developments facing Europe, the team then proceeded to draw up its own projections for how the 'big picture' may change over the coming years. The EPC's forecasts, presented in section 4.2, reflect on the CSOs' prognosis while also discussing a number of key factors which are re-shaping the present and thus are also bound to influence the future. These include the rise in grassroots movements, social media activism, and the multi-dimentional impact of the Coronavirus crisis.

4.1 CSOs' expectations about the future

Populism will remain an extensive challenge

When thinking about the future, most organisations in Eastern and Southern Europe referred to **worries about their future domestic political situation** rather than any other factors that could impact their operations.

Most interviewees directly or indirectly referred to **populism** or (especially in the Greek case) **extremism** when talking about the prospects for the future.[203] While they seem united about the need to counter populism and the critical role CSOs can play in this context, the representatives interviewed differed in how optimistic they were about achieving this goal.

Only in Germany and France did interviewees feel that the political situation is and will remain **stable and suitable** for their work. In other member states, many interviewees expressed worries about their ability to work in the future due to the domestic political situation. In Hungary, and to a lesser extent Poland, interviewees felt that things are **changing too fast right now** and it is impossible to say what will happen in the next few years. One Polish interviewee pointed out that government-friendly CSOs get significant support from the state, while the rest do not. This could mean that in coming years Polish civil society could become **less diverse**, as liberally-minded CSOs are unable to support themselves.
In both countries (and to a certain extent also in Italy) there is already a problem with an **atmosphere of hostility towards civil society**, encouraged by government or populist parties, manifesting itself in hate speech and threatening statements online, vandalisation of offices, and other forms of harassment. This could escalate in the future, with violence not being out of the question, according to interviewees from Poland, Hungary and Italy. Verbal harassment, death threats and even physical violence were already reported by interviewees from Greek humanitarian organisations, especially those working with refugees on the Aegean Islands. Furthermore, civil society in Greece is **strongly distrusted** (with little distinction made between different kinds of organisation), and most interviewees felt that this **does not seem to be improving** even despite the absence of government-encouraged stigmatisation in that country.

The EU's ability to hold together is of vital importance

Interviewees were split about the role the EU will play in countering populism and dealing with further challenges. Some interviewees expressed optimism that things would improve – or at least not get worse – at the European level. One respondent from Hungary expressed his belief that **Europe and European values were going through "a bad phase" just now**, but that things will get better: "populists and extremists will not have the chance to destroy the European project… We will survive the current critical years and move the EU forward in the future." For him, the likely bright future for general European society was a contrast with and a beacon of hope for the difficult situation his organisation faces in Hungary.

Other representatives, however, were disappointed with the EU's crisis management and expression of solidarity. A few CSOs in Italy and Greece said that the three values, particularly solidarity, often turn out to be just statements in EU treaties, the interpretation of which depends on the situation. Humanitarian solidarity often depends on the individual level rather than the institutional one, especially in the Greek migration context. Greek CSOs reported that they were often contacted directly by other organisations or individuals to support their work. These individual efforts, however, cannot last forever, particularly as public attention fades from 'emergency' situations that inevitably have long-

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[203]   Many of the organisations that accepted our interview request were liberal and/or pro-European in outlook, and their views may not be shared by CSOs across the political spectrum.

term consequences. As **the EU's efforts are often considered slow and ineffective**, the future of European solidarity looks poor in the view of Greek CSOs.

In addition, some respondents pointed out that moving forward as a Union will be difficult. The biggest challenge identified for the future of the EU is the in-fighting among member states and **the inability of EU capitals to put on a more united front**. "We need a united Europe" because it gives us a sense of security, one Greek interviewee said. "Each for itself is risky, but it is the reality we face", declared another respondent from Italy. According to the interviewees, going one's own way affects the situation elsewhere, given the **high level of interdependence** among EU countries; this makes for a very uncertain future, in which European values could become harder to uphold. Similarly, they felt that domestic bashing of the EU and national condemnations of other member states (such as the Greek attitudes towards Germany and vice versa during the Eurozone crisis) instigate hate and put European democracy in danger.

European cooperation will become more important for CSOs

Several interviewees expressed concern over a supposed **increasing emphasis on individual needs over collective ones**, exacerbated by socioeconomic difficulties, especially relating to the succession of crises European countries have faced over the past 10-15 years. They felt that this development, in which citizens struggle to provide for themselves and their families and so have little time or other resources to worry about others in their community and further afield, would make it more difficult to promote solidarity in particular. Given the close interrelation between the values under consideration in this study, this would likely entail difficulties in effectively promoting democracy and the rule of law as well.

For this reason, they said, **CSO engagement has to become more European in the future**. Much has already been accomplished in this direction in recent years. The work of organisations seems to have become more transnational. Most of the organisations interviewed for the study belong to European federations that represent their interests at a European level; some organisations are even part of several federations at the same time. This trend will continue in the future – as interviewees describe – also because they recognise that speaking in one voice is necessary in order to make an impact. **Small organisations are worried about their future role at the European level**, given that it is harder to be heard in times of social media and European representation, since there is so much competition of ideas. Since the European and national institutions mostly consult big associations, joining a European association themselves is the only way to bring in their interests and concerns.

Digitalisation will benefit democracy, but also brings challenges

CSOs working on democracy and citizens' participation highlighted the opportunity that technology provides to improve participation and therefore the quality of democracy in the long-run. In their view, **Europe is already experiencing a positive change in how democracy works**. They specifically referred to electronic voting, e-petitions, and the opportunity to communicate with millions of citizens via online formats and social media. "Giving citizens the means to express their views through a virtual

petition list now only takes a matter of seconds", one respondent explained. A Greek interviewee also pointed out an increasing interest in online crowdsourcing, which enables citizens to draft, amend, and express their opinions about legislative proposals. Prospects for participatory democracy have thus increased through digitalisation, with the possibility of making our democracies more inclusive, equitable, and transparent.

In France, for example, the Citizens' Convention for Ecological Transition – an assembly consisting of 150 citizens selected from a random pool – was cited by interviewees as remarkable progress in terms of citizens' participation and digitalisation, not least since they had to work remotely in the past months due to the Coronavirus crisis.

Other respondents, however, had diverging views regarding the benefits of digitalisation. One interviewee argued that, although the media and a critical public are essential for democracy, **social media and the internet have harmed public discourse** while also impeding the work of traditional media outlets. The spread of biased, partisan or outright false information online is a challenge that many organisations face, and one which they struggle to counteract alone. Disinformation may be spread by foreign actors seeking to subvert European democracies for their own ends, but it is also increasingly a technique used by domestic political activists to sow distrust in their own societies. The result is **increasing political polarisation**, including in countries where consensus politics has traditionally been strong (such as Germany), and a corresponding **stigmatisation of CSOs** perceived as belonging to one 'side' of a controversial debate. Particularly in those countries where social media is used extensively by populist political forces – notably Italy – online disinformation has been relatively successful in spreading rumours and stirring up negative sentiment about the work of CSOs, especially those involved in helping refugees, such as rescue organisations in the Mediterranean. Once lost, this trust is difficult to win back. For this reason, the interviewee argued, we need to progress the discussion towards improving the conditions for forces which supplement democracy and the rule of law, including conditions for public discourse online – both on the national and the European level. As online content does not respect borders, a European approach to the disinformation challenge is essential.

Hope lies with the younger generation

The **younger generations** were seen as a **source of optimism** for many interviewees in all selected member states. "The youth is our hope", Polish and Italian respondents described. Younger generations are often seen as a catalyst of civic activism, eagerly joining volunteering groups and protest movements, which have contributed to far-reaching awareness-raising all over the world, especially in defending human rights and environmental protection.

Interviewees also argued that the youth have **eradicated limits or boundaries that older generations once believed in**: they have become too Europeanised (through Erasmus and social media) to be able to live in closed and divisive societies like populists propose. For the respondents, populism stands at odds with who our sons and daughters are – hence populism cannot survive in the long-run, they said.

4.2   EPC's projections

While CSOs in interviews were able to make predictions about how their own circumstances may change in their specific national and sectoral contexts, their insights can be paired with the desk research findings and EPC's experience as a policy-oriented think tank to draw some conclusions about the likely direction of European civil society in the coming years. Our analysis of the interview data in context leads us to consider the issues below as likely challenges, but also opportunities, for CSOs in their promotion of values.

New actors in town: grassroots movements

The findings of this study indicate that grassroots movements, which have become popular in several EU member states in recent years, will continue to thrive in the future. They represent a **new generation of civic engagement** in the evolution of our European societies and political systems. Unlike the 'traditional' model of CSO, which is built around a structured leadership, often including a board of directors, physical offices and professionalised staff, grassroots movements tend to be **horizontal in structure** and have **no formal leadership positions** or staffing roles.[204] As one of the activists described in an interview for this study, the 'movement' format allows them to act without any administrative barriers, allowing for a flat organisation in tune with the movement's egalitarian ethic. While CSOs generally need to respect certain legal requirements (see section 3.1) in order to obtain official recognition, collect funds, set up membership registries and do their work, grassroots movements can eschew all of these conditions by remaining informal. For example, they may allow individuals to gather under a particular name or logo, but without requiring any kind of registration for membership or support. The trade-off is that **their ability to enter into negotiating relationships with government or political actors is limited**, as their lack of legal personality or organisational structure prevents them from fitting into the established channels of civil dialogue. For many such movements, according to activists interviewed for this study, this is in any case not a priority: their main aim is to **raise awareness** about a particular issue or reach large numbers of people through public demonstrations, media attention or online channels in order to make their demands heard. Due to their legal and organisational vagueness, grassroots movements can offer original – sometimes radical – forms of protest, such as the occupation of public spaces, sit-ins, and other types of civil disobedience.[205]

These movements seem to be **most present in countries where civil society is already strong and well-developed**, notably Germany and France. They are largely missing in places where civil society is struggling, like Hungary and Greece. In these countries, international movements such as the 'Extinction Rebellion' climate movement are present, but notably less so than in Northern and Western Europe; home-grown movements of this type are largely absent from the scene.

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[204] Böhm, Steffen, Christopher Land and Neil Sutherland (2013), "Anti-leaders(hip) in social movement organizations: The case of autonomous grassroots groups", *Organization,* Volume 21, Number 6, pp. 759-781.
[205] Cross, Remy and David A. Snow (2011), "Radicalism within the context of social movements: Processes and types", *Journal of Strategic Security*, Volume 4, Number 4, pp. 115-130.

This pattern, with the most prominent new movements appearing in places where civil society is already well-established, suggests that they are not completely separate from 'traditional' civil society, but offspring of the same culture. In other words, **they seek to complement the work of 'traditional' CSOs**, allowing the public, especially younger generations, to engage in civic action via techniques to which they can better relate, such as social media.[206] From this perspective, far from being a challenge to 'traditional' models of civil engagement, grassroots movements actually appear to help in fostering – through other, more modern means – a culture of strong and active civil society. Until now, the 'old' and 'new' types of organisation and movement have sometimes come into conflict or faced disagreement regarding methods (see, for example, Extinction Rebellion′s occupation of Greenpeace headquarters in protest against Greenpeace′s reluctance to use civil disobedience),[207] but their underlying aims and motivations are the same. Thus, they can be expected to co-exist and eventually cooperate to a greater extent.

Grassroots movements are an appealing method of civic engagement also because **they do not require significant effort** on the part of their activists: everyone can get involved, without having to pay a membership fee or make commitments. Since these movements usually have relatively broad goals, often defined negatively (so as to distance themselves from the position of the government or established political parties), **they can attract a vast number of followers** who do not subscribe to any specific set of ideas or principles, and do not seek to homogenise their opinions. In fact, some such movements can be so broad that they can feasibly unite opposing and mutually hostile factions under a single banner, sometimes obscuring the details of their message or hampering their ability to voice cohesive demands: the *Gilets Jaunes* movement in France, for example, employed symbolism that was embraced by the far-right through to the far-left, also giving voice to centrist or largely unpolitical citizens who sought to voice their frustration and disapproval with government policy. But even if these movements do not have formal channels of policy influence, they still aim to facilitate activism for a society that is more individualised, better connected, and more empowered through access to resources and technologies than traditional representative channels can cope with.

This stands in contrast with all the administrative and political hoops through which traditional CSOs must jump in order to set themselves up and function. As the study has shown, the obstacles that organised civil society faces in conducting its activities according to the legal and administrative requirements can be high and difficult to overcome. This is most extreme in cases such as Poland and Hungary, but also applies, to a lesser extent, to irregularities in the application of the non-profit law in Germany or other legal ambiguities. Little surprise, then, that grassroots mobilisation has emerged to circumvent such difficulties, providing a more flexible channel through which to push for political change.

These new movements reflect a move towards an **increasingly individualised civil society engagement**, facilitated by social media (see below), which will likely lead to a more politicised and engaged society in the long run. This development could challenge the relationship between existing CSOs and grassroots movements. CSOs interviewed for this study reported that **cooperation**, such as

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[206] Manzoor, Amir (2015), "Social media for promoting grassroots political movements and social change", in Guzzetti, Barbara and Mellinee Lesley (eds.), *Handbook of research on the societal impact of digital media*, Pennsylvania: IGI Global, pp. 609-637.

[207] Extinction Rebellion, "Open statement to Greenpeace", *Facebook* (accessed 24 June 2020).

formulating joint positions, **is sometimes difficult**, as many grassroots movements are unwilling to compromise or moderate their own demands for the sake of reaching policy demands that may be feasibly presented to the political level. In addition, **their methods can at times prove incompatible**, particularly when they engage in civil disobedience or potentially illegal techniques such as trespassing or blocking traffic. Still, there are CSOs which do participate in grassroots movements to promote their positions, gain visibility and thus influence the policy agenda: long-established environmental NGOs, for example, have welcomed the explosion of grassroots activism related to climate causes, particularly for the "urgency" it has brought to the debate and its ability to attract significant political attention.[208] This was also reflected in interviews for this study. Such symbiosis could increase in the future and thus become complementary one to another.

The same cannot be said, however, about the grassroots movements' relationship with policymakers. Given that these movements are only loose initiatives that essentially form a melting pot of people, ideas, and concerns without common positions, **governments cannot really enter into dialogue with them or answer them**. As the interviews have shown, when they make use of uncompromising or confrontational styles, this poses additional obstacles to an effective engagement with the political level. The years to come are thus likely to see **less structured engagement between CSOs and the state** and less effective lobbying for concrete demands. Without interaction and cooperation with governments, these movements will struggle to have direct policy impact, but will probably continue to turn up political pressure and influence agenda setting.

The online sphere: growth and change

Social media is indispensable to grassroots movements in their effort to make their cause as widely visible as possible. The potential of social media to facilitate political action was demonstrated for the first time during the Arab Spring in 2011, but since then it has become almost a standard means of organisation for political and civil actors alike. Thus, it is not just climate protestors or pro-democracy demonstrators in oppressive regimes who have been spurred to action through online channels: social media has also played an important role in sparking protest movements in well-established democracies, such as the *Gilets Jaunes* in France or PEGIDA in Germany. The appeal of social media for actors of all backgrounds is clear, as it allows large numbers of potential supporters to be reached with virtually no financial or organisational commitment.

Thus, **social media** is expected to **remain a preferred tool for social movements**, inspiring their spontaneous emergence and contributing to their success also in the future. It is true that the relatively anarchic online space that enabled the Arab Spring nearly a decade ago has undergone changes: today, social media platforms are making more serious efforts to moderate their content, while governments and international institutions (including the EU) are taking steps towards regulation and competition control.[209] In some cases this has **included changes to the platforms that are likely to impact civil**

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[208] Kay, Liam, "Friends of the earth and Greenpeace back extinction rebellion protests", *ThirdSector*, 18 April 2019.
[209] European Commission, "Tackling online disinformation" (accessed 20 May 2020).

society's use of them for activist purposes: notably, Twitter's decision in late 2019 to **ban all 'political' advertising** (defined very broadly) has significantly reduced its potential for CSOs to engage in outreach activities.[210] While most CSOs may qualify for exemption from the ban, the appeals process constitutes a further time-consuming organisational hurdle that may not be considered worthwhile for activists who, as they repeatedly mentioned in interviews, are already facing legal and administrative issues. Should other platforms follow Twitter's lead (TikTok has already taken similar measures), **the social media landscape for CSOs could be significantly altered**. Furthermore, the manner in which such sweeping changes in social media platform content policy can be implemented with little notice, fundamentally altering business practices and promotional techniques, makes it difficult for established CSOs to rely on social media as a reliably stable long-term strategy.

In general, however, none of these changes to paid-for content present a challenge to grassroots movements that have largely built up their online following organically. Their ability to organise and reach new followers through their sympathisers' personal accounts and attention from prominent influencers is a strength in the current social media era, and likely to remain one. But with social media fashions and business models changing so rapidly, these movements, too, will have **to demonstrate their ability to adapt and keep up to date with user preferences** to avoid becoming irrelevant. While Facebook once held a virtual monopoly position on online activism, changing user habits have seen the attention of younger generations turn first to Twitter and Instagram, and now to newer platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat. Any organisation or movement that is not able to keep up with the trend will put itself at a disadvantage in reaching out to new audiences, or find that it has been caught in a filter bubble where the conversation has moved on without it.

Coronavirus: the elephant in the room

In all discussion of the likely future scenario for civil society activism in Europe, there is one factor that, more than any other, throws things into doubt: the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and the multifaceted impact it has had – and, in all likelihood, will continue to have – on all aspects of European social and political life. The long-term results of the pandemic and accompanying crisis are, of course, impossible to predict. Nevertheless, there is much that can be said of the possible challenges that civil society could face over the coming years as a result of the virus and the political-institutional response to it.

The research for this study began while the virus was in its earliest phases, with the shutdowns across Europe coming into force while the interviews were ongoing. As a result, the interviewed CSOs were largely reluctant to make any projections of their own, given the uncertainty of the situation. What is clear, however, is that this very uncertainty will be a major obstacle for their future work. Although restrictions are slowly begin to ease across Europe, it is clear that **there will be no return to 'normality'**, and the post-crisis world will look very different. With the possibility of some measures remaining in place for the medium or long term, and the prospect of a second spike or further health

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[210]   *Twitter Business,* "Political content" (accessed 2 June).

implications impossible to rule out, CSOs continue to find themselves in a position where they **cannot realistically plan** for anything more than short-term action.

Regarding the political impact, there is some evidence to suggest that the Coronavirus pandemic **could weaken populist political actors**. Some have already seen their ratings decline in comparison with pre-crisis levels, while governing parties and politicians have increased their support. For example, at the peak of the pandemic, Italian PM Giuseppe Conte enjoyed a striking 71% of public support,[211] while polls showed that Matteo Salvini's League had dropped from 27.7% in February to 26% in April.[212] In Germany, while Angela Merkel and the federal health minister, Jens Spahn, have seen a rise in popularity, the AfD has experienced a ratings decline, with some recent opinion polls showing the party's support at 9-10% — well below their recent high-point of 16%.[213]

Populists have long demanded national borders between the member states be restored and multiculturalism halted. The Coronavirus fulfilled their dream – one which even they perhaps did not believe could actually be realised. But although the Coronavirus proved to be an anti-globalisation virus, and will likely continue to challenge our notion and practice of openness even after the crisis, it was **those in government who benefited most** from the generalised state of anxiety during the pandemic, irrespective of whether or not they were populist in persuasion. Citizens turned towards their governments and wanted to trust them to organise their collective defence against the pandemic, regardless of their ideological positions. Opposition parties, particularly those who owe much of their support to dominating the discussion on a few select topics (for example, immigration and integration of migrants), fell in relevance when it was clear they had no better ideas about how to respond to the virus.[214]

Moreover, the crisis made not only the nature of the government but also that of the political regime largely irrelevant to the efficiency of the response. Authoritarian and democratic countries alike adopted very similar, often repressive, policies, which citizens accepted.[215] Distinctions will arguably become obvious only once governments have to look for ways to address the very different socio-economic and political consequences of the pandemic in their own contexts. Thus, it is still too early to tell how the Coronavirus has impacted the fate of populism and democracy in Europe and beyond. It is likely, however, that the appeal of populism will not enter a steady decline as a result of the recent boost for mainstream governing parties. As long as the structural weaknesses feeding populism in our democratic systems remain unaddressed, **the populist challenge is not likely to go away**.[216]

What is nevertheless clear is that **the crisis has put serious constraints on civil society's ability to carry out its work**, leaving it with little space for advocacy, political contestation and promotion of citizens' participation. Of course, the pandemic affected different countries in different ways, and the pre-existing circumstances in each member state (for example, their economic situations) will to a great

[211] Erlanger, Steven (2020), "Coronavirus has lifted leaders everywhere. Don't expect that to last", *The New York Times,* 15 April 2020.
[212] Rubino, Monica, "Sondaggi politici: Lega sempre più giù, sale Il M5s. Pd stabile", La *Repubblica.* (accessed 4 June 2020).
[213] Langenbacher, Eric (2020), "Has the coronavirus pandemic broken the populist fever?", Washington: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies.
[214] Wright, Thomas and Kurt Campbell (2020), "The coronavirus is exposing the limits of populism", *Brookings*, 5 March 2020.
[215] Krastev, Ivan (2020), "Seven lessons from the coronavirus", European Council of Foreign Relations (accessed 20 May 2020).
[216] See, for example, Mair, Peter (2006), *op. cit.*

extent determine their respective routes out of the crisis and the future conditions they face. But in general, the experience of lockdowns, quarantine, and physical distancing enforced in all of the member states under consideration in response to the pandemic have obstructed CSOs' ability to organise and advocate, with a vast number of organisations cancelling their planned events and having to move their activity online as much as possible. At the peak of the pandemic, the promotion of civic engagement was unfeasible, as it would have required people to come together in initiatives of social and citizen-led accountability, which had been banned in response to the crisis.[217]

Furthermore, CSOs' capacity to influence the policy agenda and decision-making through advocacy was reduced during the crisis, as their addressees — national and European parliaments and courts — were not able to work properly. Social distancing, curfews, and other emergency measures imposed in reaction to the Coronavirus have **also changed the rules of engagement for most political institutions**. Many parliaments, for example, switched to remote work or reduced their workload so that important parliamentary committees were not able to convene and meetings with external stakeholders were suspended. Furthermore, many responses to the Coronavirus were adopted by fast-track emergency proceedings, with transparency becoming a victim of the crisis. Many organisations interviewed said that these **changes in governance processes have immensely diminished their channels for advocacy** and their ability to function as part of the society's checks and balances system – a trend which will continue until emergency measures are lifted.

Less formal methods of advocacy have also been impacted by the crisis. If **social distancing measures remain in place** in the medium- to long-term, once the immediate health crisis subsides, they could continue to **endanger the fundamental democratic freedom of assembly**, which plays a very important expressive function in giving people a voice between elections. Street politics and social movements may not be a formal part of civil dialogue, but they serve a useful purpose in allowing politicians to take the pulse of public opinion on various issues and helping citizens to vent and diffuse their concerns and frustrations. Restrictions on the size of the groups allowed in public and the obligation to keep a distance between people could now make large-scale protests an exception and render smaller gatherings more frequent and popular. Yet numbers are not unimportant for the force and impact that these extra-representative forms of participatory democracy can have. While many citizens could still join causes online, it will arguably be more difficult to be loud and exert pressure in a virtual context where your voice has no sound. This is especially the case for those grassroots movements that depend heavily on the politics and imagery of mass street protest: these movements will have to find a new means of expression or risk losing their ability to make themselves heard. The experience of the 'Black Lives Matter' protests in the US, and the related solidarity protests in EU member states, demonstrate that when people feel sufficiently strongly about an issue they will take to the streets even in defiance of lockdown restrictions. But if physical demonstrations become a technique only open to the most urgent demands, it is likely that **advocacy for 'smaller' issues will disappear from the limelight** or be limited to online formats where their voices can be easily ignored.

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[217] Aarvik, Per and Saul Mullard (2020), "Supporting civil society during the Covid-19 pandemic: The potentials of online collaborations for social accountability", Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

Indeed, almost every sector experienced an **unprecedented boost in digitalisation** as organisers and members were forced to continue their work online, engaging with the opportunities and challenges of technology. Thus, the challenges and opportunities of online technology (as referred to above) will likely become all the more significant. A vast number of CSOs had to adopt digital tools and platforms to enable remote work, communication, and taking action 'on the ground' in innovative ways. For example, many crowdsourced mapping projects were established to share information, organise assistance and ensure that those in need of food, supplies or help were connected to those who could provide it. For example, the French platform *En Première Ligne* was created to put medical staff in contact with volunteers who could take care of their children or occasionally do groceries for them, while the Italian website covid19italia.help published voluntary offers of services such as distance learning and telecommunication tutorials to those interested.

Furthermore, civic mobilisation and participation set up camp online, with environmental CSOs asking people to join a digital strike for action on climate change by posting photos online with the hashtag #ClimateStrikeOnline instead of hitting the streets for three days, as initially planned.[218] In France, for example, participants at public consultations on the Citizens' Convention for Ecological Transition refused to give up on their sessions, turning instead to Zoom. In doing so, they made the first online citizens' assembly possible, ensuring that the opportunities for and engagement by participants remained as inclusive and meaningful as if the event had taken place in-person. It remains to be seen, however, whether these adaptations will allow the voice of participants to be heard and accounted for in the political process, or whether it will make it easier for decision-makers to ignore what they cannot physically see.

So far, most civic mobilisation has been locally and grassroots-oriented as communities came together to address people's immediate needs during the crisis. The interviews revealed an impressive social reorganisation on the part of CSOs, local communities and individual citizens to help vulnerable and marginalised groups. This speaks of **a potential shift from traditionally-organised CSOs towards more decentralised, informal activism**,[219] taking the form of self-help groups and social solidarity networks that seek to **fill in the gaps in the government's response**, in a similar manner as was done in Greece during the debt crisis.

Such initiatives may have **helped civil society regain public legitimacy and acknowledgement** for its work, which is important, especially for CSOs in countries such as Greece, where interviewees reported that the civil sector is largely distrusted by the general public. Moreover, although these activities did not hesitate to take on the humanitarian emergency caused by the Coronavirus, many activists and civic groups might next decide to embrace a political mission that strengthens their country's resilience to future shocks. In that case, **the scope of civil society's agenda could become narrower** and focused almost exclusively on ambitious reforms in policy areas such as healthcare, social security, education, and digital transformation, at the expense of other potentially important fields. As some of the interviewees explained, the sense of urgency fostered civic mobilisation through

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[218] Calma, Justine, "Activists pick up their phones and move online as coronavirus curbs protests", *The Verge,* 13 March 2020.
[219] Brechenmacher, Saskia; Thomas Carothers and Richard Youngs (2020), "Civil society and the Coronavirus: dynamics despite disruption", Brussels: Carnegie.

citizens' eagerness to lend a helping hand when it was most needed, but **the relevance and sustainability of such initiatives after the crisis remain uncertain**.

Finally, the economic effects of the crisis could hit all forms of civil society hard and cause **serious funding problems for CSOs**, many of which are already faced with scarce public resources and rely on short-term funding from private funds, donations, and membership fees. Due to limited public money, alongside a reduced capacity among private donors, civil society might become less diverse, with some governments potentially prioritising funding of those organisations in line with their political agenda, contributing to the rise of government-controlled CSOs and making it very difficult for other types of organisations to survive: such a pattern was already visible in some member states before the crisis, and is likely to exacerbate as available funds reduce. A reprioritisation of public money spending on healthcare and security in order to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus crisis could then further reduce the national budget lines allocated to the civil sector. In this context, it is especially alarming **that civil society has not been included in any recovery instruments proposed to counter the Coronavirus crisis**. Yet, additional support of CSOs through emergency instruments are essential to avoid a dying of civil society in Europe, as feared by a number of CSO representatives interviewed in the course of this project.

The immediate future is crucial

The coming months and the EU's ability to be united in its response to the Coronavirus crisis will be crucial for the future of the Union, as some Southern European interviewees pointed out. A few organisations, particularly in Italy, mentioned that how the EU responds to the ongoing pandemic, and especially the required restructuring and recovery afterwards, will make a huge difference: it has raised the stakes and sharpened the need for a **sensitive response that will prevent populists from capitalising on any failure by the "mainstream" to act**. One Italian representative mentioned that support for Matteo Salvini's League has fallen during the crisis, which is a positive sign – but it is still too early to say whether this will be a turning point. He said: "Things *have* to get better because there are no other options. But we need immediate answers and a proper liberal response to populism. Overcoming the divide between citizens and elites will be tough, but it is essential".

> "Things have to get better because there are no other options. But we need immediate answers and a proper liberal response to populism. Overcoming the divide between citizens and elites will be tough, but it is essential". (Italian respondent)

In some respondents' view, the Coronavirus crisis, paired with anti-democratic and populist developments in several member states, together constitute a challenge similar to that faced by Europe after the Second World War and which led to European cooperation. The difference now, they explained, is that in the years of peace that the continent experienced thanks to European cooperation not enough was done to promote democratic values and to **cultivate a vision of the Union as more than just an economic project**. In the eyes of too many, it remains a "business Union" rather than a Union of values.

5.   Recommendations

Many of the CSOs interviewed offered ideas for how their situations could be improved, presented below in section 5.1. Just as with the projections, their insights are based on their own individual experiences but can be compared and contrasted with those of other interviewees and considered alongside desk research and the EPC's own analysis. As many interviewees were not especially familiar with the structures of EU institutions, this section will also propose some means through which their suggestions can be addressed within the framework of EU and national politics. Safeguarding and improving CSOs' ability to promote values will require action by multiple layers of government (local, national, and European) as well as by the CSOs themselves. For this reason, the EPC's recommendations in section 5.2 are split according to the actor addressed. Some of the CSOs interviewed are already making use of ideas mentioned in the recommendations: cases of good practice are therefore provided as examples of how these recommendations can be applied.

5.1   CSOs' proposals

In addition to their expectations about the future, many interviewees voiced concrete suggestions for the European level on how to counter the problems they raised with respect to the three values and for their work. Many recommendations were somehow connected to fighting populism, with security of funding being the other main concern. While many interviewees refrained from making recommendations, suggesting they felt things were somewhat out of their hands and needed to be solved on a political level, some did voice suggestions on how their work or the situation in their member state could be improved.

Some CSO representatives pointed out that the EU should adopt a more **human-centred approach** for their policies and communication. The EU must learn to speak not only the language of economy and finance, which divides us into rich and poor, but also the language of solidarity and care, interviewees said. The EU has to find its soul and adopt a more human discourse, like the one that President Ursula von der Leyen gave at the start of the Coronavirus crisis, one Italian respondent explained. Without offering a vision, it would be difficult to inspire unity, a Greek respondent suggested.

The fact that the EU also has to **better communicate** its many projects and financial investments in the member states was further highlighted by respondents as necessary for the future, so that the democratic spirit of the EU's support gains visibility and fosters values on the ground. In the words of one French interviewee, such support can make the EU "tangible" — but only if it is widely recognised.

In this respect, some CSO representatives also drew a connection between communication and their work. Civil society, too, should adopt a **different language:** one which would involve emotions and thereby formulate a positive contrast to populists' negative emotional picture, as concluded by three Polish pro-EU organisations. "Promoting an emotionally-based value stays longer in people's minds and reminds them of the importance of ensuring its protection," one Polish representative stated.

While the interviewees placed the hope in eradicating populism with the young, Europeanised generations, they also acknowledged the importance of **education and civic activism** to raise awareness of European values among young people. Current EU instruments such as Erasmus and increased European cooperation among CSOs are a good start. Still, these should be supplemented with further initiatives to instil those values in young people so that they can carry them forward into society at large, they argued.

To this end, according to the interviewees, civil society also has a significant role to play. For example, it can build on the **European civil society coalitions** already created in the EU, such as those in the fields of consumer protection, health, environment, and so on, which defend democratic values daily in their work and reach out to and connect with citizens, including young people. Cross-border initiatives and cooperation among like-minded CSOs from different member states should also be increased.

However, CSOs cannot survive on their own. They need active support from the European level and philanthropy to be able to continue promoting values in the future. As interviewees from foundations pointed out, **philanthropy** can act as a driver for CSO support when thinking and acting European. "There is no equivalent of the single market for civil society and philanthropy", one German representative said. If philanthropic organisations adopt a more European approach, they can be an enabler and driver for the civil society engagement, especially in those member states in which civic space is shrinking.

As several interviewees, especially in Southern Europe, expressed concern about the availability and sustainability of funding sources, they suggested that access to European funds should be made easier (especially in terms of the administrative burden implied by the application procedure) and that the money should be tied to fewer conditions such as project-specific funding. This should relieve the pressure that many feel to chase short-term funding opportunities at the expense of more dependable long-term support.

> "European values need to be embodied in concrete achievements. When Delors set up the structural fund, it became something tangible." (French respondent) By promoting EU values through European funding, the Union could establish just that.

Interviewees also advocated for more financial and non-financial support from the **European level**. Especially interviewees from German and French CSOs called for more support for civil society in those member states in which democracy and the rule of law are experiencing difficulty. As a Union which is based on solidarity, one representative said, "you have to ensure that civil society can still work and get funded, even in member states that restrict their rights". Interviewees did not perceive the EU's support as being entirely about finances, with several noting its importance in providing moral support (especially against hostile national governments) and channels of communication with organisations in other countries. But funding remains the most important aspect because it supports their operations directly, and it raises the visibility of the EU in the member states. As one French interviewee remarked, "European values need to be embodied in concrete achievements. When Delors

set up the structural fund, it became something tangible." By promoting EU values through European funding, the Union could establish just that.

5.2 EPC's proposals

Summary of recommendations for CSOs
- Join regional and EU-level umbrella organisations where possible
- Be vocal about what needs to change at national and EU level
- Work with grassroots movements with similar aims
- Diversify sources of funding as much as possible
- Reach out beyond their traditional audience using tools such as social media
- Consider moving more of their activities online
- Work constructively with national and EU policymakers

Summary of recommendations for national authorities
- Improve CSOs' access to funding from state and local authorities
- Streamline the tax framework for private donations
- Expand or introduce direct tax contributions to CSOs
- Harmonise legal frameworks so that CSOs from all sectors are subject to the same requirements
- Formalise channels for CSOs to be consulted in the legislative process
- Consider introducing voluntary service in CSOs as a compulsory part of school or university curriculums

Summary of recommendations for EU institutions
- Ensure there is sufficient support for CSOs in the Coronavirus recovery package and the new MFF
- Take steps to lower the EU's high administrative burdens for making funding applications
- Extend the availability of funds for structural purposes rather than specific activities
- Prioritise support for the smaller, less well-established organisations at the national and local levels
- Provide EU support for CSOs in illiberal member states
- Consider introducing a single European status for foundations
- Make improvements to the EU's toolkit for action in response to democratic backsliding
- Institute other EU-wide tools such as an online petitions or legislative crowdsourcing platform
- Give civil society a prominent role in the Conference on the Future of Europe and consult CSOs throughout the planning and implementation stages

The recommendations put forward by the CSOs interviewed provide a useful starting point for developing a plan of concrete policy actions that can be taken by various actors at different decision-making levels in order to sustain or make more effective civil society's promotion of European values. The suggestions offered by the civil society sector are intuitively correct, but they lack detail or ambition, at times overlap with existing EU initiatives, and do not always consider the limits of the Union's competences. This section expands on the CSOs' proposals, adding more detail and specificities to them, before supplementing them with further recommendations from the research team.

Of course, each member state and civil society sector presents a different set of challenges, and their respective national circumstances will determine the extent to which each of these recommendations

can feasibly be applied. Nevertheless, as the findings of this study suggest, many of the issues confronting civil society are common to all the member states. These are linked to long-term trends, like populism, the polarisation of societies, the widening gap between political elites and electorates, cultural and inter-generational differences, gender inequality, climate change, cracks in European unity and cooperation, and so on – all of which will require time and a multifaceted approach in order to be resolved. Any recommendations in this regard will require consistent efforts over time to produce visible change. The long-term and multidimensional nature of such reforms is also bound to meet substantial resistance not just from the political level but also from citizens, whose habits and values will be challenged in the process.

This set of recommendations is distinct from those which focus on some of the more urgent, and possibly also more specific, changes needed to deal with more immediate problems confronting the member states, such as the EU's and national governments' responses to the ongoing Coronavirus crisis and its aftermath, the inadequate funding conditions for CSOs, or the large discrepancies among national legal frameworks for CSOs. In most of these cases, recommendations can be quite straightforward and the relevant actors are also already aware of what has to be done. What is lacking in this category is not ideas but, again, political will. The urgency of some of these issues, combined with high public demand for action, is nevertheless likely to prompt politicians to find the courage for bold actions.

Finally, any recommendations have to take into account the EU's multilevel system of governance, in which different actors on various tiers of government hold keys to the adoption and implementation of (policy proposals). By virtue of the nature of these different levels, but also their divergent legal competences, it is necessary to target some suggestions towards civil society and national decision-makers, while other recommendations are better suited for the EU level.

What CSOs should do

The analysis reveals that the state of democratic values in the member states and their promotion by the civil society sector is not really dependent on the work of the CSOs *per se*. All the organisations interviewed for this study were able not only to easily and accurately define the values of democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity, which constituted the focus of investigation; they were also prompt in explaining how (or if) their daily activities seek to foster these values. Organisations from all six countries chosen for this study identified themselves as a valuable link between citizens (including marginalised groups) and politicians in their own national contexts and as an embodiment of the essence of democratic values. "These values are part of our job description", in the words of one interviewee. Although some explained that certain CSOs in their countries may have started to adopt and implement a narrower conceptualisation of these values (prioritising, for example, the rights of co-nationals over those of foreigners), they argued that these values cannot be divorced from what a CSO is and does, and that this view was generally shared by their peers and fellow citizens.

A recurrent point in the interviews was that CSOs were constantly trying to do their jobs as well as possible. The conversations always revealed the (sometimes long-standing) commitment of the

organisations to projects and causes that translate values into practice – and whatever obstacles they faced, their determination to overcome them was clear. Democratic rights and principles may be broken or threatened, but CSOs are there to sound the alarm or fight for justice on behalf of citizens each time. Sometimes they must do so year after year, on the same issue, tirelessly defending aspects of the democratic core of our societies. On other occasions, they have to be ready to react to sudden and unexpected developments that stand at odds with their mission and goals. They all bravely expressed their readiness to play these roles. Low morale or flagging enthusiasm for the fight do not enter into the equation.

Based on the interviews carried out, there is no shade of doubt that the problem with how European values are interpreted and applied in the member states does not stem from the CSOs. To a large extent, the civil sector's work, intentions, and goals continue to align with the values of democracy, the rule of law, and solidarity. It is thus difficult to arrive at recommendations that target and seek to improve what CSOs across the EU do in regard to democratic values. In most cases, they do their job and try to do it well.

The problem lies elsewhere and tends to be external to these organisations: it has to do with glitches in the national legal frameworks regulating CSOs' relations with their governments; the currently complex, prejudiced, and cumbersome political and societal climate in the member states and across the EU; and global developments and trends which bring unprecedented challenges and seem beyond anyone's control. Hence, if CSOs are not taken seriously or listened to at national or supranational level, if they struggle financially to perform their activities, if they repeatedly have to remind politicians and others of basic democratic principles and values, and if they now often find themselves on the front line of major crises, trying to fill in for a lack of effective or common European policy responses, it is not because they are failing in their own efforts.

Therefore, any recommendations for CSOs can merely advise them to **keep the fight going** no matter the circumstances. They are indispensable to the democratic fabric of our societies, and their work matters enormously. Even when their efforts do not directly or immediately translate into policy change — which is often the case — they help to raise awareness about important issues and help societies advance (even if only timidly) in the direction of cultural and political progress. Their initiatives might not always result in success, but their actions can make all the difference for those on behalf of whom they intervene or for those whom they seek to help. It tells such people that someone does care, and it offers hope, both on a personal level and for the future of democracy. As such, the civil sector across Europe should continue to press for these values and count its successes not only in the number of

> **Best practice in cross-border philanthropic support**
> Some of the foundations interviewed for this study already work with a cross-border or pan-EU perspective in mind. The German Allianz Kulturstiftung, for example, only funds projects, if they are explicitly cross-border initiatives such as exchange or European education programmes. Furthermore, the Polish Stefan Batory Foundation, is one of the organisations responsible for distributing the EEA/Norway Grants in Poland. Thus, they are in tune with European values 'by default'. In this way, they play a role in balancing Polish civil society funding patterns so that organisations that struggle to get money from government sources are still supported. By playing this role, it ensures that the international funds of the EEA Grants are distributed via a Polish organisation in touch with local needs. The Foundation additionally serves as a network for pro-democracy CSOs in Poland, provide help and advice to CSOs beyond funding if they require it.

decisions they influenced, but also in how many times they managed to stand up and try again. Democracy relies on their persistence and resolve.

Beyond this recommendation, which is really more of a plea, CSOs in the member states should **look for likeminded allies in the national, regional, and European arenas**, joining forces and pooling resources in order to be able to take action with greater ease and more impact. Many of the organisations interviewed are already part of European networks, and they rightly acknowledge the importance of their membership in such groups. They should continue to develop and invest in their contacts and interactions in these forums, or else seek to join regional and EU-level umbrella organisations where possible, if they are not already members. As the interviews also suggested, cross-border initiatives among CSOs are the way forward, and they can also be used as a learning exercise with regard to the national level. Additionally philanthropic actors should increase their support for CSOs engaging in European cross-border projects with likeminded organisations from other member states.

The same goes for the domestic arena, where CSOs working in similar areas might see themselves as rivals rather than in the same camp. At a time of limited (and possibly decreasing) resources, when issues are ever more complex and interdependence a reality, albeit sometimes also a vulnerability, **building coalitions at all levels behind similar causes** can only improve their prospects of success. In unity and cooperation there is a greater possibility for putting pressure on the system and surely, even if slowly, affect change.

> **Best practice in national coalition-building**
> The Italian Coalition for Liberty and Civil Rights (CILD) is a multi-thematic network of CSOs that work together to support one another in upholding civil rights. The organisations, which all work in different areas, form a united front so that if rights are eroded in one area, they can all mobilise in solidarity with the affected organisations, ensuring a higher level of public awareness and putting greater pressure on the state. The coalition includes CSOs working on the justice system (Antigone), LGBT rights (Arcigay), Roma rights (Associazione 21 Luglio) and many others. They see rights and liberties as deeply interconnected, believing that an attack on one is an attack on all. This demonstrates that CSOs do not need to be working in exactly the same area to find common ground and work together to protect their shared interests

In particular, CSOs should **link up to new movements** with similar aims but different techniques, **such as grassroots street protest movements**. As referred to in section 4.2 above, 'old' and 'new' forms of activism may be tempted to see one another as competition (for attention, members, or funding), but this would be mistaken, as they spring from the same desire for social and political change but appeal to different audiences. Hence, organisations and movements that share the same broad goals should consider how they can work together to achieve legal and policy changes. Grassroots movements with a strong presence on social media and among younger generations can serve to raise the visibility of issues, while more traditional CSO models with well-established connections and better ties to government and decision-makers can serve as the channel for translating protest movements' anger and frustration into political or policy changes.

Indeed, CSOs should keep up with the times and **make maximum use of social media to reach out beyond their traditional audience**. This requires a certain degree of expertise in order to ascertain the most suitable platform, the possibilities for paid promotion (if appropriate), and which interest groups to target. To improve their efforts in this regard, CSOs can partner with others, such as the grassroots movements described above, who can help them take advantage of social media networks and influencers.

> **Best practice in building bridges between CSOs and new movements**
> The Hungarian grassroots organisation Szabad Egyetem, which mobilised in response to the Hungarian government's attempt to shut down the Central European University in Budapest, occupied a public square and transformed it into a meeting space for likeminded CSOs. Both grassroots movement and more traditional CSOs worked jointly towards organising lectures, discussions and other events for the public and thus towards gave the movement additional visibility. Thus, through the unconventional technique of public space occupation, the movement achieved to bring together more traditional CSOs that had fallen on hard times.

In fact, CSOs should **consider moving more of their activities online** in general, so as to save on operational costs. The experience of the national shutdowns caused by the Coronavirus crisis has proven that a great deal of office work can be carried out from home. This could lead some organisations to question whether renting or buying dedicated office space is really necessary for their work. For some organisations, such as those dealing with disadvantaged social groups, maintaining a physical presence may be essential; but others could seize the opportunity of increased technical capacity for and cultural openness to remote work in order to make savings.

> **Best practice in online tools**
> The Greek CSO SciFy is committed to encouraging civic engagement through technology. They have developed IT tools such as the open-source collaborative platform 'online open legislation', which collects data from official public consultations and allows citizens to argue for or against a legislative proposal, and even respond to other users' comments. In this way, they seek to build upon and complement official public consultations, which have failed to motivate greater civic participation. At the same time, they aim to help vulnerable groups, women and youth, which tend to have lower participation in national politics. The organisation's digital tools also provide support to CSOs: they created an online volunteer development platform which serves as a database of all volunteers in Greece, indicating their availability, skills and experience, and allowing others to evaluate and coordinate their work. The tool has been widely used by the Municipality of Athens. Thus, the process of bringing together volunteers and raising awareness of active projects can be facilitated using online tools.

CSOs should not only engage in coalition building with their peers at national and EU level – they should also continue their efforts to **ally with national policymakers** as a means of pushing for better policy. As the interviews revealed, this task appears to be getting more difficult, especially when politicians without previous governing experience come to power. CSOs must be patient in working to overcome any initial hostility or scepticism on the part of their political interlocutors. In practice, most policymakers are eager to find the best solutions for the problems faced by their societies, and civil society can be an important source of inspiration and understanding for them. They must be encouraged

to listen, even if their first instinct is to disregard or attack competing ideas. Civil society can attempt to get them on board by maintaining a conciliatory attitude. If they are tempted to adopt any of the more radical techniques sometimes favoured by grassroots groups, such as civil disobedience, they must bear in mind the potential of such confrontational methods to worsen relations rather than improve them.

Keeping up with constantly changing social and political circumstances means that CSOs must demonstrate not only that they have the capacity to renew their approaches, but also that they can **diversify their sources of funding as much as possible**. This could include seeking international or European support, increasing donation drives, or reconsidering their position on accepting government funds. Several interviewees, especially from the hard-hit Southern European countries, mentioned that it was organisations that relied largely on a single source of funding (or private funding in general) that were most likely to disappear during the financial and Eurozone crises. As Europe enters another economic crunch as a result of the Coronavirus crisis, CSOs must ensure they are not making the same mistakes.

In case of violations of CSOs' rights by other organisations, authorities or the state, there are already a number of legal instruments in place that organisations can turn to, both on national and European level. CSOs should **make use of the full toolkit of legal instruments available**. Apart from legal action before a court, CSOs can raise the issue with the respective National Human Rights Institution[220] or the national ombudsperson. If the national level is not an option, the European level offers a number of additional tools. CSOs can file a petition to the European Parliament or make a formal complaint to the European Commission, who can take up the matter. In case those institutions decide not to do so, CSOs can also approach the European Ombudsman, who can start an inquiry and force institutions to deal with the issue in a proper way.[221]

> **Best practice in using legal means to enforce policy change**
> The German environmental CSO Deutsche Umwelthilfe regularly makes use of legal channels to ensure the federal and regional governments as well as businesses respect their commitments on environmental issues. The organisation initiates about 400 lawsuits per year, which makes the legal scrutiny one of its core activities. Similarly, the Greek Atheist Union has had some success in ending discriminatory practices by means of appeals to European and international human rights laws. Notably, in a case that went to the European Court of Human Rights, they successfully ended the practice in Greek schools whereby pupils were required to give personal data (an official statement of their belonging to a different religion) before they could obtain exemption from compulsory religious classes. This demonstrates that CSOs can look to European or international law if their national courts do not take action.

Ultimately, civil society should continue to **be vocal** not only about values, but also **with regards to what national governments and the EU should do** more of to protect and support the sector, as well as to improve the environment in which CSOs operate. This study focuses its recommendations on the political level because the research clearly suggests that the nub of the problem is precisely there. CSOs

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[220] See European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, "Our members".
[221] See European Center for Not-for-Profit Law *et al.* (2020), "How to use EU law to protect civic space", The Hague, pp. 55-61.

should more forcefully insist on the kind of requests that are identified below and learn to fight not only for others, but also for themselves.

What member states should do

When it comes to member state governments, they should focus their efforts on **improving the legal and financial frameworks under which CSOs operate**, with the aim of allowing them to support their work over the long-term while remaining politically independent. This begins with **improving CSOs' access to funding from state and local authorities**. In particular, such funds should not be tied to any kind of political conditions. Governments should consider outsourcing the distribution of funds to independent institutions to guarantee there will be no political oversight over funding choices. This should not only enable consistent support to CSOs regardless of their political outlook, but would also encourage more CSOs to apply for such funding safe in the knowledge that it will not compromise their independence – something which appears to be of particular importance to many CSOs in the member states considered in this study, judging by the frequency with which this concern was raised in the interviews.

Simultaneously, **national authorities should streamline the tax framework for private donations**. As traditional membership models of civic engagement decline, there is increasing public interest in supporting causes directly. This is facilitated by new technologies, such as social media's personalised news feeds and the ease of making donations via online crowdsourcing platforms. Facilitating donations is also important because donating money is already the single biggest means through which citizens engage with CSOs: 27% of Europeans engage in this way, almost twice as many as the next-highest method (actively encouraging others to engage), according to a recent Flash Eurobarometer on the subject.[222] However, 51% of citizens still do not engage with CSOs at all. The same survey revealed that the main motivation that would encourage citizens to engage more is if they were confident that their engagement would make a real difference (33%).[223] Many of these citizens may be put off by the thought that their donations will be swallowed up by taxes, so it is especially important to make sure that this channel is made as straightforward and mutually beneficial as possible. As civic engagement becomes increasingly personalised, the importance of private donations is likely to increase and must be supported and made as straightforward as possible, both for donors and recipients. What is more, particular causes and even the work of CSOs themselves are no longer restricted to the national level: it has become perfectly common and normal for citizens in Germany or France, for example, to wish to contribute to the actions of CSOs in Poland or Greece. This should be encouraged by harmonising tax requirements for donations between EU member states, so that each donating citizen can know that their donations will be received in full by their organisation of choice regardless of where they are based.

One way in which national authorities can help to facilitate donations for CSOs is through a **direct tax contribution scheme**, similar to the 1% schemes that exist in several Central and Eastern European member states (including Poland and Hungary) and the *cinque per mille* system in Italy (see section

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[222] European Parliament (2020), Flash Eurobarometer on Civic Engagement 4023, Brussels, p. 13.
[223] European Parliament (2020), *op. cit.,* p. 19.

3.2). The experience in Poland and Hungary has demonstrated that such channels provide a valuable lifeline for CSOs, while also being simple and unobtrusive for citizens. Other member states should consider implementing a similar scheme. In those countries where it already exists, measures could be taken to expand the number of eligible CSOs: currently, only 7% of Polish CSOs receive funds this way.[224] The scheme could also be expanded to apply not only to personal income taxes but also corporate taxes, so that corporations can also make contributions.

For those member states where there are multiple sets of legislation applying to different kinds of organisation, the **legal framework can be harmonised or simplified**. This is the case for Greece, for example, where consumer organisations are subject to different requirements to other organisations (see section 3.2).

Member states should also **formalise CSO involvement in their legislative processes**, where such channels do not already exist. Some member states have bodies similar to the European Economic and Social Committee, providing a link between civil society and policymakers, such as the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council. Precisions in the national parliaments' rules of procedure and the working methods of governments and ministries should make the involvement of CSOs mandatory in all stages of the legislative process, for example through consultation processes, CSO participation in policy reviews, and regular hearings for civil society perspectives in parliamentary committees. This process should be as open as possible to make it available to a wide range of different organisations.

Meanwhile, governments should consider what other actions they could take to preserve a strong and healthy culture of civic engagement and participatory democracy in the future. As the interviewed CSOs indicated, the younger generations are a source of optimism for civil society. But to ensure that young people's appetite for activism and supporting social causes complements existing CSO efforts, rather than being channeled entirely through new grassroots movements that do not necessarily seek to form close connections with policymakers, national authorities could consider **introducing voluntary service in CSOs as a compulsory part of school or university curriculums**. Certain EU member states maintain some kind of military national service or civilian equivalent (such as *Zivildienst* in Austria); such a scheme could also be applied to the wider civic sector in form of an incentivised voluntary civilian service (such as *Bundesfreiwilligendienst* in Germany). A short period of voluntary work in an established CSO as part of the educational system would not only encourage a feeling of community involvement among young people, but would also give younger generations valuable work experience. This model may even help to turn young people into lifetime volunteers or otherwise ensure that they remain keenly aware of civil society's work and the causes it supports; it could also serve to break down the generational divides that are partly driving the split between 'traditional' CSOs and new grassroots movements.

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[224]   Radinger (2017), *op. cit.*

What the EU should do

The EU, of course, has limited ability to intervene directly in issues relating to civil dialogue or CSOs' demands in areas of member state competences. Nonetheless, as indicated by the interviews, many CSOs look to the EU institutions for help and support, whether because they recognise the cross-border nature of the challenges they face in their work, or because their relationships with their national governments are difficult. As the Coronavirus crisis morphs from a health crisis to an economic one, the role played by the EU in the recovery process will be especially important. The European Commission has already outlined a plan for providing unprecedented levels of support to the member states for their recovery efforts;[225] however, this plan does not include dedicated measures for civil society. This lack must be addressed urgently. The Coronavirus has hit all sectors of society hard; any economic recovery that does not include civil society will be incomplete. In a similar vein, the EU's **emergency response should not result in any reduction in financial support for CSOs in the rights and values programme of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027)**. The MFF should also include a continuation and expansion of the European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps, which can serve to complement similar national initiatives described above, and thus promote not only volunteering as such, but also European solidarity and transnational cooperation.

To improve the financial viability of CSOs during the recovery period and beyond, the EU should first take steps to **lower its high administrative burdens for making funding applications**. This would enable a larger number and more diverse types of organisations to access EU funds. In the interviews it became clear that EU support generally only reaches organisations at the national level, with smaller organisations at the local level lacking the expertise to find and apply for such funding opportunities. Most EU funds that reach these organisations are disbursed by national-level associations and institutions. **Raising awareness about EU funds at local level is also important**, and can best be done through institutions the CSOs are already in touch with, such as local authorities and national-level umbrella organisations.

Similarly, the **EU should also extend the availability of funds for structural purposes rather than specific activities**, to reduce CSOs' dependence on short-term financing. CSOs that depend largely on European funds frequently complained that they had no option but to pursue short-term project funding, meaning that they were unable to plan long-term campaigns or work strategically.

The EU could also be more judicious about where it chooses to distribute its funds. **Prioritising support for the smaller, less well-established organisations at the national and local levels** will help to keep the backbone of civil society strong. Large international organisations are generally well-positioned to weather difficult times, being better able to access a variety of funding support and enjoying considerable name recognition and outreach ability to help in attracting private donations. Just as small and medium enterprises require special support during challenging economic times, it is small and medium CSOs that are most vulnerable to the obstacles faced by the sector, including financial and political ones. One way that this vulnerability can be overcome is by encouraging them to band together

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[225] European Commission (2020), The EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe (COM(2020) 442 final), Brussels.

into coalitions or umbrella organisations, as suggested above ('What CSOs should do') – further European funds could be made available for such umbrella organisations as an incentive to encourage even locally-focused CSOs to seek alliances.

Those **member states where CSOs find themselves under pressure** are a particular point of concern. The EU should do whatever it can to make sure that **organisations in these countries can fall back on European money**, without conditions, if their national funding sources are cut off. This should include opening funding to pro-government organisations in order to break down divisions and polarisation within these societies: by supporting only one side of the divide, the EU allows populist governments to depict it as undermining the country's national interest. While such governments remain in power, it is likely that the national funding landscape will continue to be lopsided; but by distributing selective support the EU risks playing into their hands and exacerbating the situation for liberal-minded organisations that are already subject to stigmatisation.

Beyond the question of funding, the EU can take steps to harmonise or simplify the diverse national legal frameworks that complicate CSOs' efforts to work together with their counterparts in other countries. While a complete harmonisation of legal frameworks is hardly feasible, the EU could at least make steps towards setting minimum standards for legal frameworks in order to ensure a level playing field of rules, thereby aiding CSOs' ability to function independently. In particular, the EU should consider **introducing a single European statute for associations and foundations, which would create a European association status.**[226] This would not replace all 27 national legal frameworks, but rather introduce a 28th, European, regime. This would ensure EU-wide recognition of CSOs' legal status, reduce administrative burdens for working across borders, simplify and thus enhance civil society's transnational work and, as a result, strengthen European cooperation among CSOs. The statute should also include a **European foundation status** to promote and simplify philanthropic work across borders and thus improve the funding environment for CSOs in Europe. In this context, we welcome the decision by the European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee to start a legislative initiative report on the establishment of a European association and foundation statute.[227]

Similarly, the EU can **make improvements to its toolkit for action in response to democratic backsliding,** such as by **developing a democratic *acquis***. The European Commission has already announced a yearly rule of law monitor to be launched in autumn 2020. A mapping of the civic space and possible infringements of CSOs' rights should be a prominent part of this monitoring instrument. **A European Law on the Promotion of Democracy**, based on the model of a similar law currently being discussed in Germany (in German: *Demokratiefördergesetz*), could be part of this package. The law would provide **a direct European funding mechanism for civil society**, skipping the national level and supporting CSOs on the ground that promote democracy and the rule of law. Since funds for

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[226] For more details on this idea, see European Economic and Social Committee (2012), "Opinion on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the Statute for a European Foundation (INT/645)", Brussels; European Economic and Social Committee (2010), "Opinion on the European Foundation Statute (own-initiative report, INT/498)", Brussels.

[227] See European Parliament (2020), Own-initiative report 2020/2026(INL) on a statute for European cross-border associations and non-profit organisations, Brussels, p. 10.

CSOs promoting democracy and the rule of law in the EU are limited, a dedicated funding instrument such as the European Values Instrument proposed by the European Parliament would directly fund those CSOs operating at the local and national level, and engaging with citizens on the basis of participatory democracy.[228]

Furthermore, the EU should **institute more EU-wide online tools to aid CSOs**' abilities to encourage civic engagement and advocate for change, such as **an independent EU platform for e-petitions** or **online crowdsourcing of legislative proposals** as a new instrument in policy-making. Petition platforms for legislative proposals at the EU level already exist in the form of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and petitions to the European Parliament, but a user-friendly online platform that allows CSOs to set up common-format petitions addressed to national-level institutions would facilitate cross-border advocacy efforts. Improving the ECI by reducing the number of required signatures and simplifying the procedure for organisers would also be an appropriate step to support European civil society.

Finally, the EU leadership should **put citizens and CSOs at the centre of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)**, in line with the Commission President's initial vision of this initiative as expressed in her Political Guidelines, where she foresaw "a significant role for young people, civil society, and European institutions as equal partners".[229] Prior to the outbreak of the Coronavirus crisis, European institutions were preparing this two-year process of inclusive discussions about key issues of importance for the EU, to be held in innovative formats at different levels of governance. The crisis has diverted attention away from the Conference, the launch of which has now been deferred until such time as it can be held safely. This delay should be used by those deciding on the precise set-up of the CoFoE to carefully carve room for civil society and public participation at various stages of this process. CSOs have both expertise and experience with participatory democracy, which they can lend to EU leaders in planning and carrying out the exercise. For example, if they opt to organise a European Citizens' Assembly at the start and/or the end of the Conference, if they decide to rely on a National Group of Experts to provide input on thematic priorities, if they reach out to the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, or if they need the sector to support the efforts of governments in the member states in the organisation of National Citizens' Consultations — civil society is well-placed to advise and assist in all these aspects and more.[230]

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[228] European Parliament (2018), European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018 on the need to establish a European Values Instrument to support civil society organisations which promote fundamental values within the European Union at local and national level, Strasbourg.

[229] Von der Leyen, Ursula (2019), "A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe", Brussels: European Commission.

[230] For more ideas about the different roles that civil society can play in the context of the CoFoE, see Stratulat, Corina and Janis A. Emmanouildis (2020), "Second draft blueprint for the Conference on the Future of Europe", Brussels: European Policy Centre.

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7. Appendices

7.1   Appendix 1: List of contacted CSOs

<u>**France**</u>
45 orgs

Environmental
- **Alternatiba**
  https://alternatiba.eu/en/
- **France Nature Environnement (FNE)**
  https://www.fne.asso.fr/
- **Agir pour l'Environnement**
  https://www.agirpourlenvironnement.org/
- **Energies partagées**
  https://energie-partagee.org/
- **SOS Loire Vivante – ERN France**
  http://www.sosloirevivante.org/
- **Association pour la protection des animaux sauvages**
  https://www.aspas-nature.org/
- **CREAQ**
  http://www.creaq.org/

Consumer
- **Consommation, logement et cadre de vie – CLCV**
  http://www.clcv.org/
- **UFC-Que Choisir**
  https://www.quechoisir.org/

Family
- **Union des Familles Laïques**
  https://www.ufal.org/
- **Familles de France**
  https://www.familles-de-france.org/
- **UNAF - Union Nationale des Associations Familiales**
  https://www.unaf.fr/
- **Conseil National des Associations Familiales laïques (CNAFAL)**
  http://www.cnafal.org/

Youth

- **Comité pour les relations nationales et internationals des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire (CNAJEP)**
  http://www.cnajep.asso.fr/
- **ATD-Quart Monde**
  http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/

Human rights

- **Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigés**
  https://www.gisti.org/
- **SOS Racisme**
  https://sos-racisme.org/
- **Ligue des droits de l'Homme**
  http://www.liguedh.be/
- **L'auberge des migrants**
  https://www.laubergedesmigrants.fr/en/home/
- **Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigés**
  https://www.gisti.org/spip.php?page=sommaire

Foundation

- **Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progress de l'homme**
  http://www.fph.ch/index_en.html

Religious

- **Union des Familles Laïques**
  https://www.ufal.org/
- **Federation Entraide Protestante**
  http://www.fep.asso.fr/
- **Secours Catholique**
  https://www.gisti.org/
- **Fondation du Judaïsme Français**
  https://www.fondationjudaisme.org/
- **Secours Islamique**
  https://www.secours-islamique.org/

Democracy / citizens' participation

- **Missions Publiques**
  https://missionspubliques.org/en/
- **La ligue de l'enseignement**
  https://laligue.org/
- **Culture & Liberté**
  http://www.culture-et-liberte.asso.fr/

- **CIDEM Civisme et Démocratie**
  https://www.cidem.org/
- **Démocratie ouverte**
  https://www.democratieouverte.org/

Disadvantaged social groups
- **France terre d'asile**
  https://www.france-terre-asile.org/
- **Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir (FDFA)**
  http://fdfa.fr/
- **Secours Populaire**
  https://www.secourspopulaire.fr/
- **Les Restos du Coeur**
  https://www.restosducoeur.org/
- **Fondation Abbé Pierre**
  https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/
- **Les restos du Coeur**
  https://www.restosducoeur.org/
- **Conseil Français des Personnes Handicapées pour les Questions Européennes (CFHE)**
  http://www.cfhe.org/
- **Advocacy France**
  https://www.advocacy.fr/
- **Association des Familles d'Enfants Handicapes de la Poste et Orange (AFEH)**
  https://www.afeh.net/
- **Droit au savoir**
  http://www.droitausavoir.asso.fr/

Voluntary
- **Comité pour les relations nationales et internationals des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire (CNAJEP)**
  http://www.cnajep.asso.fr/
- **Cotravaux**
  http://www.cotravaux.org/English-version

Activist/Grassroots
- **Alliance générale contre le racisme et pour le respect de l'identité française et chrétienne (AGRIF)**
  http://www.lagrif.fr/
- **ANV COP 21 Mouvement populaire et non-violent pour relever le défi climatique**
  https://anv-cop21.org/category/sortons-macr

52 orgs

Environmental

- **Naturschutzbund Deutschland – NABU**
  https://www.nabu.de/
- **BUND – Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland**
  https://www.bund.net/
- **Deutsche Umwelthilfe**
  https://www.duh.de/home/
- **Grune Liga**
  https://www.grueneliga.de/index.php/de/
- **Hej! Support**
  https://hej-support.org/
- **Runder Tisch Reparatur**
  https://runder-tisch-reparatur.de/
- **Munich Environmental Institute**
  http://www.umweltinstitut.org/english.html
- **Verband der deutschen Höhlen- und Karstforscher**
  https://www.vdhk.de/
- **Öko-Institut**
  https://www.oeko.de/en/

Consumer

- **Verbraucherzentrale Berlin**
  https://www.verbraucherzentrale-berlin.de/
- **Stiftung Warentest – STIWA**
  http://www.test.de/
- **Zentralverband deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften e.V. (ZdK)**
  https://www.zdk-hamburg.de/

Family

- **Association of German Family Organisations (AGF)**
  https://www.ag-familie.de/home/index.html?en
- **Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk**
  https://www.dkhw.de/
- **Deutscher Familienverband**
  https://www.deutscher-familienverband.de/

Youth

- **djo-German Youth in Europe**
  https://www.djo.de/de

- **Solidarity Youth of Germany (Solo Youth)**
  http://solijugend.de/
- **Dbb Jugend**
  https://www.dbb.de/der-dbb/jugend.html
- **Deutscher Bundesjugendring**
  https://www.dbjr.de/

Media
- **Netzwerk Recherche**
  https://netzwerkrecherche.org/
- **Deutsche Journalistenunion**
  https://dju.verdi.de/
- **Correctiv**
  https://correctiv.org/en/about-us/
- **Reporter Ohne Grenzen**
  https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/
- **Netzpolitik**
  https://netzpolitik.org/

Human rights
- **Grundrechtekomitee**
  http://www.grundrechtekomitee.de/
- **Pro Asyl**
  https://www.proasyl.de/
- **Gesellschaft fuer Freiheitsrechte**
  https://freiheitsrechte.org/
- **Deutscher Anwaltverein**
  https://anwaltverein.de/de/
- **Civil Liberties Union for Europe**
  https://www.liberties.eu/en
- **Gesellschaft für Freiheitsrechte**
  https://freiheitsrechte.org/

Foundation
- **Stiftung Mercator**
  https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/
- **Allianz Kulturstiftung**
  https://kulturstiftung.allianz.de/en_EN.html
- **Bertelsmann Stiftung**
  https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/startseite/
- **Volkswagen Stiftung**
  https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/

- **Stifterverband**
  https://www.stifterverband.org/

Religious
- **Deutsche Bischofskonferenz**
  https://dbk.de/
- **Diakonie Deutschland**
  https://www.diakonie.de/
- **Caritas**
  https://www.caritas.de/startseite

Democracy / citizens' participation
- **Bundesnetzwerk Buergerschaftliches Engagement**
  https://www.b-b-e.de/
- **Verein gegen Vergessen, Fuer Demokratie**
  https://www.gegen-vergessen.de/startseite/
- **Digitale Gesellschaft**
  https://digitalegesellschaft.de/
- **Europa-Union Deutschland (EUD)**
  https://www.europa-union.de/

Disadvantaged social groups
- **Interkultureller Frieden e.V.**
  http://interkulturell-leben.de/
- **ABiD – Allgemeiner Behindertenverband in Deutschland E.V.**
  https://www.abid-ev.de/
- **Bundesverband Kleinwüchsige Menschen und ihre Familien e. V.**
  https://www.bkmf.de/
- **Verband der Kriegsgeschaedigten**
  https://www.vdk.de/deutschland/
- **Deutscher Behindertenrat**
  https://www.deutscher-behindertenrat.de/

Voluntary
- **Bundesfreiwilligendienst**
  https://www.bundesfreiwilligendienst.de/

Activist/Grassroots
- **Rettet die Wahlen**
  https://rettetdiewahlen.de/
- **Attac Germany**
  https://www.attac.de/

- **Fridays for Future**
  https://fridaysforfuture.org/
- **Pulse of Europe**
  https://pulseofeurope.eu/en/about-us/

Greece

38 orgs

Environmental
- **Mediterranean SOS Network**
  http://medsos.gr/medsos/
- **ECOCITY**
  http://old.ecocity.gr/
- **Elliniki Etairia**
  http://en.ellet.gr/

Consumer
- **EKPIZO**
  http://www.ekpizo.gr/
- **Pan-hellenic Consumer's Union Federation**
  https://www.pomek.gr/
- **Consumers' institute of Creta**
  http://www.inkakritis.gr/
- **Kavala's Consumer Association**
  http://fonikatanaloton.blogspot.com/
- **Consumers' Protection Union of Sterea Ellada Prefecture**
  www.epka-ste.gr
- **KEPKA**
  http://www.kepka.org/

Family
- **Confederation of large families' associations of Greece (ASPE)**
  https://www.aspe.gr/

Youth
- **Hellenic National Youth Council**
  http://www.esyn.gr/
- **Greek Guiding Association**
  http://www.seo.gr/homepage.asp?ITMID=2&Lang=GR
- **Scouts of Greece**
  http://www.sep.org.gr/el/normal/home

- **Praxis Greece**
  https://praxisgreece.com/

Human rights
- **Hellenic League for Human Rights**
  https://www.hlhr.gr/en/
- **Doctors Without Borders, Greece**
  https://www.msf.org/greece
- **Doctors of the World, Greece**
  https://mdmgreece.gr/en/
- **Colour Youth**
  https://www.colouryouth.gr/en/
- **Diktio Spartakos**
  http://diktiospartakos.blogspot.com/2020/05/ket.html
- **Infomobile**
  http://infomobile.w2eu.net/

Foundation
- **Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy**
  https://www.eliamep.gr/

Religious
- **Church of Greece**
  http://www.ecclesia.gr/English/EnIndex.html
- **Muslim Association of Greece**
  https://equalsociety.com/
- **Atheist Union of Greece**
  http://union.atheia.gr/

Democracy / citizens' participation
- **SciFy**
  https://www.scify.gr/site/el/
- **Citizens' Union Paremvassi**
  http://www.paremvassi.gr/
- **Evropaiki Ekfrassi**
  http://www.ekfrasi.gr/en/home.html

Disadvantaged social groups
- **Greek Forum of Refugees**
  https://refugees.gr/
- **Athens Network of Collaborating Experts (ANCE)**
  http://ance-hellas.org/en/#

- **Samos Volunteers**
  https://samosvolunteers.org/
- **Boroume Alliance**
  https://www.boroume.gr/
- **The National Confederation of Disabled People Greece (ESAEA)**
  http://www.esaea.gr/
- **PRAKSIS**
  https://praksis.gr/en-about/
- **Shedia**
  https://www.shedia.gr/
- **HIGGS**
  https://higgs3.org/en/higgs/
- **Association of Social Responsibility for Children and Youth**
  www.skep.gr

Activist/Grassroots
- **CIPSI**
  www.cipsi.it
- **Kyriakatiko Sxoleio Metanaston**
  https://www.facebook.com/kyriakatiko/posts/1297578260424831

Hungary
48 orgs

Environmental
- **Kék Bolygó Klímavédelmi Alapítvány**
  https://kbka.org/en/
- **Levego Munkacsop**
  https://www.levego.hu/
- **EMLA Egyesület**
  http://emla.hu/hu
- **Matúra és Natúra Alapítvány**
  http://termeszettar.hu/
- **Magyar Termeszetvedok Szovetsege**
  https://mtvsz.hu/
- **Pécsi Zöld Kör**
  http://pzk.artud2.arteries.hu/
- **Hiros Agora**
  https://www.hirosagora.hu/fooldal
- **Reflex**
  https://www.reflex.gyor.hu/

- **CSEMETE**
  http://www.csemete.com/
- **Alapítvány a Közösségi Hálózatokért**
  http://kozhalo.uw.hu/
- **Ökotárs**
  https://www.okotars.hu/
- **Védegylet Egyesület**
  http://xn--vdegylet-b1a.hu/

Consumer
- **Fogyasztóvédelmi Egyesületek Országos Szövetsége – FEOSZ**
  http://www.feosz.hu/
- **Tudatos Vásárlók Egyesülete (The Association of Conscious Consumers)**
  https://tudatosvasarlo.hu/
- **ÁFEOSZ-COOP Federation**
  http://www.afeosz.hu/

Family
- **National Association of Large Families (NOE)**
  https://noe.hu/
- **Emberi Méltóság Központ (Human Dignity Centre)**
  https://mltsg.wordpress.com/
- **Együtt az Életért Közhasznú Egyesület**
  https://egyuttazeletert.org/

Youth
- **Fiatal családosok klubjának egyesülete**
  https://ficsak.hu/
- **Nemzeti Ifjusagi Tanacs**
  https://ifjusagitanacs.hu/

Media
- **Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány (Central European Press and Media Foundation)**
  https://cepmf.hu/
- **Atlatszo**
  https://atlatszo.hu/
- **Mertek Media Monitor**
  https://mertek.eu/en/

Human rights

- **Hungarian Civil Liberties Union**
  https://hclu.hu/
- **Hungarian Helsinki Committee**
  https://www.helsinki.hu/en/about_us/
- **Emberség Erejével Alapítvány**
  https://www.emberseg.hu/en/
- **Háttér Society**
  https://en.hatter.hu/

Foundation

- **Subjective Values Foundation**
  https://szubjektiv.org/
- **Nem Adom Fel Alapítvány**
  https://nemadomfel.hu/
- **Századvég Alapítvány**
  https://szazadveg.hu/hu
- **Tihanyi Alapítvány**
  https://www.pallasalapitvanyok.hu/tihanyi-alapitvany
- **Carpathian Foundation**
  https://www.karpatokalapitvany.hu/en

Religious

- **Hungarian Interchurch Aid**
  https://www.segelyszervezet.hu/en
- **Katolikus Karitasz**
  https://karitasz.hu/
- **HÁLÓ Közösségfejlesztő Katolikus Egyesület**
  https://www.halo.hu/
- **Tett és Védelem Alapítvány**
  https://tev.hu/

Democracy / citizens' participation

- **Hungarian Europe Society**
  https://www.europesociety.hu/en
- **eDemokracia Muhely**
  http://edemokracia.hu/
- **Nézőpont Intézet**
  https://nezopontintezet.hu/en/
- **ERGO Europai Regionalis Szervezet**
  http://ergo-net.hu/

- **Civil Összefogás Fórum**
  https://civilosszefogas.hu/en/

Disadvantaged social groups
- **Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat (Hungarian Maltese Charity)**
  https://www.maltai.hu/
- **MEOSZ**
  http://www.meosz.hu/en/
- **Hungarian National Council of Federations of People with Disabilities (FESZT)**
  http://www.feszt.eu/
- **Szegényeket Támogató Alap Egri Alapítványa**
  http://www.szetaeger.hu/

Voluntary
- **Magyar Önkéntes Liga**
  https://www.onkentesliga.hu

Activist/Grassroots movement
- **Szabad Egyetem**
  https://www.facebook.com/SzEgyetem/

Italy
47 orgs

Environmental
- **Legambiente**
  https://www.legambiente.it/
- **Eliante**
  http://www.eliante.it/?lang=en
- **Cittadini per l'aria**
  https://www.cittadiniperlaria.org/
- **Federazione nazionale Pro Natura**
  https://www.pro-natura.it/
- **Genitori Antismog**
  http://www.genitoriantismog.it/

Consumer
- **Adiconsum (Consumers and Environment Protection Association)**
  https://www.adiconsum.it/
- **Consumatori Italiani per l'Europa**
  http://www.cie-europa.com/

- **Altroconsumo**
  www.altroconsumo.it
- **ANCC-COOP**
  https://www.coopnospreco.it/

Family
- **Coordinamento Familiari Assistenti "Clelia"**
  http://www.cofaasclelia.it/
- **Coordinamento Genitori Democratici**
  http://www.genitoridemocratici.it/

Youth
- **Arcigay – Associazione LGBTI Italiana**
  http://www.arcigay.it/
- **Arciragazzi**
  https://www.arciragazzi.it/
- **Alleanza per l'infanzia**
  https://www.alleanzainfanzia.it/
- **Impresa sociale con i bambini**
  https://www.conibambini.org/

Media
- **Investigative Reporting Project Italy**
  https://irpi.eu/en/
- **Pagella Politica**
  https://pagellapolitica.it/
- **Ossigeno per l'informazione**
  https://www.ossigeno.info/?lang=en
- Liberta d'informazione
  https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/tag/liberta-d-informazione/

Human rights
- **Associazione Antigone**
  http://www.antigone.it/
- **Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights**
  https://cild.eu/en/
- **Ossigeno per l'informazione**
  https://www.ossigeno.info/?lang=en
- **A Buon Biritto Onlus**
  https://www.abuondiritto.it/
- **Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione**
  https://www.asgi.it/

- **Associazione 21 luglio Onlus**
  https://www.21luglio.org/
- **CIR Rifugiati**
  http://www.cir-onlus.org/en/
- **Cittadini del Mondo**
  https://www.associazionecittadinidelmondo.it/
- **On the Road Onlus**
  https://www.ontheroad.coop/en/
- **Diversity Lab**
  https://www.diversitylab.it/
- **Rete Lenford – Avvocatura per I Diritti LGBTI**
  https://www.retelenford.it/
- **Associazione Progetto Diritti Onlus**
  https://www.progettodiritti.it/
- **Diritti Globali**
  https://www.dirittiglobali.it/
- **Associazione Bambinisenzasbarre ONLUS**
  https://www.bambinisenzasbarre.org/

Foundation
- **Compagnia di San Paolo**
  https://www.compagniadisanpaolo.it/

Religious
- **Communità di Sant'Egidio**
  https://www.santegidio.org/
- **Caritas**
  https://www.caritas.it/
- **Associazione Nazionale del Libero Pensiero "Giordano Bruno"**
  http://www.periodicoliberopensiero.it/
- **Diaconia Valdese**
  https://www.diaconiavaldese.org/

Democracy / citizens' participation
- **Bipart**
  https://bipart.it/

Disadvantaged social groups
- **Carta di Roma**
  https://www.cartadiroma.org/
- **Associazione Italiana per l'Assistenza agli Spastici**
  http://www.aiasnazionale.it/

- **Arcigay – Associazione LGBTI Italiana**
  http://www.arcigay.it/
- **Fish**
  www.fishonlus.it
- **Anfas**
  www.anffas.net
- **Libera Terra**
  https://www.liberaterra.it/en/world-libera-terra/
- **Unione Italiana dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti**
  https://www.uiciechi.it/

Activist/Grassroots
- **Coordinamento di iniziative popolari di solidarietà internazionale**
  https://cipsi.it/

Poland
 52 orgs

General
- **National Federation of Polish Associations (OFOP)**
  http://ofop.eu/
- **Polish Republic Confederation of Nongovernmental Organizations (KIPR)**
  https://konfederacjaipr.pl/
- **Stowarzszenie Klon/Jawor**
  http://www.klon.org.pl/
- **Academy for the Development of Philanthropy**
  https://www.filantropia.org.pl/

Environmental
- **Stowarzyszenie Ekologiczne EKO-UNIA (Ecological Association EKO-UNIA)**
  https://eko-unia.org.pl/
- **Fundusz Partnerstwa**
  http://www.ffp.org.pl/en/
- **Towarzystwo na rzecz Ziemi (TnZ) (Society for Earth TnZ)**
  http://www.tnz.most.org.pl/en/
- **Fundacja Pro Terra**
  http://pro-terra.pl/kadra/
- **Nowa Idea**
  https://noveaidea.com/
- **Polish Zero Waste Association**
  http://zero-waste.pl/

- **Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD)**
  https://www.pine.org.pl/
- **Centre for Environmental Law**
  http://cpe.eko.org.pl/cpe.html

Education
- **Polish-American Freedom Foundation**
  https://en.pafw.pl/
- **Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej**
  https://ceo.org.pl/english

Consumer
- **Federacja Konsumentow (Consumer Federation)**
  http://www.federacja-konsumentow.org.pl/
- **Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich – SKP**
  https://konsumenci.org/

Family
- **Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę**
  https://fdds.pl/about-us/
- **Fondacyja Mamy i Taty**
  http://www.mamaitata.org.pl/

Youth
- **Polish Rural Youth Union**
  http://www.zmw.pl/
- **Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego**
  https://zhp.pl/serwis/en/
- Centrum Inicjatyw Międzykulturowych HORYZONTY (Center of Youth Initiatives Horizons)
  http://cimhoryzonty.org/en/home-page/
- **AIESEC**
  https://aiesec.pl/
- **Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego**
  https://zhp.pl/

Media
- **Demagog**
  https://demagog.org.pl/

Human rights
- **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Warsaw)**
  http://www.hfhr.pl/en/

- **Kampania Przeciw Homofobii**
  https://kph.org.pl/
- **Stowarzyszenie "Nigdy Więcej"**
  https://www.nigdywiecej.org/en/
- **Lambda Warszawa**
  http://lambdawarszawa.org/
- **Centrum Pomocy Prawnej**
  https://www.pomocprawna.org/
- **Polish Humanitarian Action**
  https://www.pah.org.pl/en/

Foundation
- **Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FSLD)**
  https://frdl.org.pl/en/frdl/
- **Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi**
  http://fundacjawspomaganiawsi.pl/
- **Fundacja ePaństwo**
  https://epf.org.pl/pl/
- **Institute of Public Affairs**
  https://www.isp.org.pl/en/about-us
- **Foundation Nowy Staw**
  http://www.eds-fundacja.pl/
- **Altum Fundacja**
  http://fundacja-altum.pl/
- **Fundacja Ocalenie**
  https://ocalenie.org.pl/
- **Foundation Robert Schuman**
  http://schuman.pl/
- **Foundation Stefan Batory**
  https://www.batory.org.pl/en/
- **Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej**
  https://frdl.org.pl/
- **Fundacja Inicjatyw Społeczno-Ekonomicznych**
  https://fise.org.pl/

Religious
- **Polish Humanist Association**
  http://www.humanizm.net.pl/

Democracy / citizens' participation
- **Centre for Citizenship Education**
  https://ceo.org.pl/english

- **Front Europejski**
  https://fronteuropejski.pl/
- **Citizens Network Watchdog Poland**
  https://siecobywatelska.pl/?lang=en
- **Panoptykon Foundation**
  https://en.panoptykon.org/
- **Stocznia**
  https://stocznia.org.pl/

Disadvantaged social groups
- **Polskie Forum Osób Niepełnosprawnych (Polish Disability Forum)**
  https://www.pfon.org/
- **Teatr Grodzki**
  http://www.teatrgrodzki.pl/en
- **The Polish Forum of Disabled People**
  https://www.pfon.org/
- **Wrocławski Sejmik Osób Niepełnosprawnych**
  http://www.wson.wroc.pl/
- **Stowarzyszenie Otwarte Drzwi**
  https://otwartedrzwi.pl/

7.2 Appendix 2: List of interviewed CSOs

France

Type of CSO	Name
Environmental	Alternatiba
Family	Union Nationale des Associations Familiales
Foundation	Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'homme
Human rights	Ligue des droits de l'Homme
Human rights	L'auberge des migrants
Human rights	Bureau d'accueil et d'accompagnement des migrants
Religious	Fédération Entraide protestante
Religious	Secours Catholique
Disadvantaged social groups	Secours Populaire
Disadvantaged social groups	Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir
Disadvantaged social groups	Fondation Abbe Pierre

Germany

Type of CSO	Name
Environmental	Deutsche Umwelthilfe
Family	AG Familie
Youth	Solijugend
Youth	Junge Europäische Föderalisten Deutschland
Media	Politik-Digital e.V.
Media	Correctiv
Foundation	Allianz Kulturstiftung
Foundation	*Asked not to be named*
Democracy/citizens' participation	Verein gegen Vergessen, Fuer Demokratie
Democracy/citizens' participation	Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement
Disadvantaged social groups	Diakonisches Werk Württemberg
Activist/grassroots movements	Pulse of Europe

Italy

Type of CSO	Name
Environmental	Legambiente
Family	Coordinamento Familiari Assistenti "Clelia"
Family	Coordinamento Genitori Democratici
Human rights	Arcigay – Associazione LGBTI Italiana
Human rights	Associazione Antigone
Human rights	Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD)
Media	Investigative Reporting Project Italy
Media	Pagella Politica
Democracy/citizens' participation	Bipart
Disadvantaged social groups	Unione Italiana dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti

Greece

Type of CSO	Name
Consumer	EKPIZO
Consumer	KEPKA
Foundation	Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy
Religious	Atheist Union of Greece
Youth	Praxis
Human rights	Doctors of the World, Greece
Human rights	Doctors Without Borders, Greece
Democracy/citizens' participation	SciFy
Democracy/citizens' participation	Evropaiki Ekfrassi
Disadvantaged social groups	Greek Forum of Refugees
Disadvantaged social groups	Boroume Alliance
Disadvantaged social groups	PRAKSIS
Disadvantaged social groups	HIGGS

Poland

Type of CSO	Name
Environmental	Fundacja Pro Terra
Environmental	Polskie Stowarzyszenie Zero Waste
Foundation	Robert Schuman Foundation – *Board member*
Foundation	Robert Schuman Foundation – *Project coordinator*

Foundation	Stefan Batory Foundation
Foundation	Institute of Public Affairs
Foundation	Shipyard Foundation
Democracy/citizens' participation	Front Europejski

Hungary

Type of CSO	Name
Family	Hungarian National Association of Large Families
Family	Human Dignity Centre
Media	Mertek Media Monitor
Human rights	Hungarian Helsinki Committee
Human rights	Hatter Society
Democracy/citizens' participation	Hungarian Europe Society
Democracy/citizens' participation	eDemokracia Muhely
Activist/grassroots movements	Szabad Egyetem

7.3 Appendix 3: Interview questionnaire

- How do you personally understand/define the values democracy, rule of law, and solidarity?
  - ○ Is this view widely shared in your organisation? In the country as whole? Across Europe?
- Do you think CSOs are important in the promotion of [value]? If so, why?
  - ○ How do you/CSOs in your country promote that value?
  - ○ How easy is it to do so? Are there any obstacles? (Legal, political, practical)
  - ○ Has anything changed in recent years? Has it become easier or harder to promote [value]?
  - ○ How do you expect things to change over the next 10 years? Do you expect it to become easier or harder to promote [value]?
  - ○ Do you think CSOs in your country are doing a good job promoting [value] in general?
- Do you see your/their work as part of a wider European effort to promote and sustain those values?
  - ○ Do you think this mission (to promote values) is something which is shared across Europe?
- How do you perceive your relationship with the state?
  - ○ Is your activity shaped or affected by political changes, such as changes in government or new policies?
- How much civic activism is there in your country?
  - ○ What kind? (Organised, grassroots, demonstrations…)
  - ○ How effective is it?
- To what extent are you in touch with citizens directly? Do you seek to represent their concerns? (Are you more of a professionalised or a grassroots organisation?)
- What legal requirements are there for your type of organisation? Are they easy to reach or is this a challenge for you?
- How important are external actors and external support for CSOs in your country?
- Anything else you want to add?

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