



Strengthening democracy and the rule of law in Europe in face of polycrises

Polish “Civil EU Presidency”

17th June 2025, 9:00 - 13:30 CET

Sapieżyńska Street 10a, Warsaw

Today Europe grapples with complex and interconnected crises - including climate change, widening economic precarity, and increased sense of insecurity following the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the change of approach of the US administration. At the same time as these crises are unfolding, we are also witnessing the deterioration of trust in democracy itself and in institutions' capacity to protect fundamental rights and address people's needs. Deterioration of social cohesion and disillusionment with institutions' ability to protect fundamental rights and meet people's needs are among the most pressing threats of our time, as they are leaving societies vulnerable to internal and external actors seeking to dismantle democratic principles, the rule of law and the universality of rights.

In this context, a robust civil society is instrumental in strengthening our democracies vis-à-vis these challenges, in its everyday action for just, inclusive and sustainable societies. Civil society plays a crucial role in fostering and protecting European values, rule of law, democracy, fundamental rights and equality across Europe; building European public space and participatory democracy; and mitigating the social costs of multifaceted crises. However, civil society across Europe is increasingly facing restrictive regulations and funding policies, as well as political pressure that hinders its capacity to effectively act and advocate for democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law.

This conference, building on the conclusions of the [Civil Society Forum](#) held in Warsaw on 26 June 2024 and the [Civil EU Presidency](#) organised by civil society shadowing the official Hungarian EU Presidency in the fall 2024, will bring together civil society representatives from Poland and from across Europe, including the Western Balkans, EU and Polish policymakers, as well as donors. It will provide an opportunity to inspire EU policy agenda for the next five years in areas such as the defence of democracy, the rule of law, an EU civil society strategy and how these are supported through the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The outcomes of this debate will particularly be handed over to the Danish, Cypriot, and Irish civil society in order to inform the priorities of the respective upcoming EU Presidencies.



Draft Programme

08:30 – 09:00 | Registration and welcome coffee

09:00 – 09:30 | Opening remarks - setting the scene

Ewa Kulik-Bielińska, Stefan Batory Foundation Board

Karolina Dreszer-Smalec, President, OFOP – National Federation of Polish NGOs

Raffaella Bolini, Co-president, European Civic Forum

Veronika Mora, Okotars – Environmental Partnership Foundation, Hungarian Civil EU Presidency

09:30 – 09:45 | Keynote:

Adriana Porowska, Polish Minister for Civil Society, Chair of the Public Benefit Committee

09:45 – 11:15 | Civil society's priorities for strengthening democracy, civic space and rule of law in Europe

Panel discussion on the key priorities for the EU's role in defending democracy, civic space and the rule of law. EU policymakers engage in conversation with civil society.

With:

- Ignacy Niemczycki, Secretary of State in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister
- Alexandrina Najmowicz, Secretary general, European Civic Forum
- Ingrid Bellander Todino, Head of Unit Fundamental rights, European Commission, DG JUST
- Karolina Dreszer, OFOP, Vice-President of the European Civic Forum

Moderation: Filip Pazderski, Manager of the Civil Society Programme, Stefan Batory Foundation

11:15 – 11:30 | Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00 | The role of the MFF, private and public donors to support civil society in strengthening democracy and the rule of law

Panel discussion on the civil society's expectations for MFF and how public & private funding can better match to strengthen democracy, civic space and rule of law.

With:

- Monika Sikora, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy
- Ingrid Shulerud, Special Representative for Democracy and the Rule of Law, MFA Norway
- Hanna Surmatz, Head of Policy, Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association
- Ewa Kulik-Bielińska, Board Member, Stefan Batory Foundation
- Waltraud Heller, Lead on civic space and human rights defenders, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Moderation: Giada Negri, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, European Civic Forum

13:00 – 13:30 | Closing remarks & next steps

- Closing remarks by ECF, OFOP and Stefan Batory Foundation
- Passing on the torch to Danish, Cypriot and Irish civil society for upcoming Presidencies

13:30 – 14:30 | Networking lunch

