

29 January 2026

Programme
Palais de l'Europe, room 1

Monday, 2 February 2026

14.00-14.10 | Opening

Introductory remarks by Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

14.10-14.30 | Welcome and setting the scene

Introductory live poll

Welcoming by Ambassador Daniela Cujbă, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the Council of Europe, President of the Ministers' Deputies

Keynote address by Dr. Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe

14.30 – 15.50 | Session I: Taking stock – what is the state of civic space in Europe?

Objective: This session will present and discuss key findings, emerging trends, and lessons learned regarding the current state of civic space across Europe. Drawing on evidence and experiences from a diverse range of stakeholders, it will help identify critical gaps, vulnerabilities, and opportunities in civic space monitoring and protection. The session will set the stage for deeper exploration and strategic dialogue throughout the conference.

Moderator: Tara Petrović, Civic Space Research Officer, CIVICUS

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Andreas Accardo, Head of Unit, Institutional Cooperation and EU Charter, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
- Bartosz Cyran, Chief Coordinator for Cooperation with Social Partners, Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland
- Eszter Hartay, Program Director at the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) and member of the CINGO Expert Council on NGO Law
- Michal Piško, Director, Transparency International Slovakia

15.50 – 16.20 | Coffee Break



16.20 – 17.40 | Session II: Monitoring civic space – learning from practice

Objective: Building on the insights from Session I, this session will explore current pilot initiatives and institutional practices aimed at monitoring and protecting civic space. It will highlight lessons learned, showcase innovative approaches, and identify opportunities for stronger collaboration between international organisations, member states, civil society and human rights defenders. The session will also serve as a platform for proposing new ideas and partnerships to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of civic space monitoring efforts.

Moderator: David Milner, Head of the Human Rights Intergovernmental Co-operation Division, Council of Europe

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Goran Forbici, Director, the Centre for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS), Slovenia
- David Goessmann, Head of Open Governance Unit, Innovative, Digital and Open Government, OECD
- Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou, President, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)
- Aarti Narsee, Senior Policy Officer and lead for Rule of Law advocacy European Civic Forum (ECF)

18.00 – 19.30 | Networking and reception

Welcoming remarks:

Ambassador Vebjørn Heines, Permanent Representative of Norway to the Council of Europe and Chair of the Group of Friends to Promote Engagement with Civil Society within the Council of Europe - Palais de l'Europe, Salon Bleu Restaurant, ground floor



Tuesday, 3 February 2026

9.30 – 10.50 | Session III: Legislative trends and civic space – navigating regulatory change

Objective: This session will explore the evolving landscape of legislative, regulatory and practical measures impacting civic space, with a focus on laws and policies governing transparency, accountability, and funding, including those involving foreign sources. Drawing on national and regional experiences, the discussion will focus on how civil society and institutional actors can respond to these developments. The session will highlight legal, policy, and advocacy approaches to mitigate risks, adapt to new requirements, and identify opportunities for coordinated, constructive, and rights-based engagement.

Moderator: Eve Geddie, Director, European Institutions Office, Amnesty International

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Giorgi Kldiashvili, Executive Director, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Georgia
- Estelle Masse, Policy Officer, Fundamental Rights Policy Unit, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- Ambassador Sini Paukkunen-Mykkänen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Council of Europe
- Daniel Simons, Senior Legal Counsel Strategic Defence, Greenpeace International
- Tania Van Dijk, Legal Advisor, Venice Commission, Council of Europe

10.50 – 11.20 | Coffee Break

11.20 – 12.20 | Session IV: Digital civic space – innovation, inclusion, and protection

Objective: This session will explore how digital technologies are reshaping civic space and creating new opportunities for participation while also introducing risks such as surveillance, disinformation, and exclusion – risks that must be carefully addressed in monitoring and protection efforts. At the same time, digital tools hold significant potential for more inclusive civic engagement, and promising practices are emerging in this field. The session will explore new dimensions of digital civic space and discuss how the Council of Europe can strengthen its support through policy guidance and cooperation.

Moderator: Joanna Szymańska, Head of Programmes and Strategy for Europe, Article 19

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Pavel Antonov, Co-founder and Executive Editor, BlueLink Foundation
- Giulia Lucchese, Co-Secretary CDMSI, Council of Europe
- Claudia Luciani, Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe
- Alexis Prokopiev, Vice President, Association Civic Tech Europe (ACTE)

12.20 – 14.00 | Lunch Break

3



14.00 – 15.20 | Session V: Civic space at a crossroads – charting strategic pathways forward

Objective: This session will synthesise key insights from the conference and provide a platform for diverse actors – across institutional, academic, and grassroots sectors – to identify strategic directions and actionable recommendations. These reflections will inform the conference key takeaways and guide future Council of Europe initiatives to strengthen civic space across Europe.

Moderator: Anna Sevortian, Member of the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Ambassador Caitríona Doyle, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the Council of Europe and Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM)
- Dave Elseroad, Head of Advocacy and Geneva Office, Human Rights House Foundation
- Tom Matthew, Board Member, European Youth Forum
- Seema Shah, Head of Democracy Assessment Unit, International IDEA
- Niklas Wilhelmsson, Head of Democracy and Elections Unit, Ministry of Justice, Finland, and Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM)

15.20 – 15.50 | Coffee Break

15.50 – 16.50 | Closing Session: From insight to impact – advancing Council of Europe action on civic space

Objective: The closing session will consolidate the key outcomes of the conference and translate these into concrete next steps. The session will also summarise strategic opportunities for the Council of Europe to strengthen its role in protecting and expanding civic space and invite further dialogue and reflections from diverse stakeholders.

Moderator: Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy, Council of Europe

Speakers, in alphabetical order:

- Astrid Bergmål, State Secretary for Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway
- Antoine Buyse, Professor of Human Rights from a multidisciplinary perspective and Director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM): Presentation of the key takeaways
- Anu Juvonen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Civil Society

Closing Reflections and Next steps by the moderator

16.50 – 17.00 | Group photo

