



**International Conference**  
**Shaping democratic renewal: civic space and**  
**the path to a New Democratic Pact for Europe**  
Strasbourg, 2-3/02/2026



18 September 2025

## **Draft programme**

### **Monday, 2 February 2026**

#### **14.00 – 14.30 | Opening session: setting the scene**

**Introductory remarks** by a high-level representative of the Council of Europe

**Short video messages from civil society organisations:** civic space struggles in practice

**Welcoming**

- Representative of a member state
- Representative of civil society

#### **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:** Representative of civil society

**Speakers:**

- Representative of a national level civil society organisation
- Representative of European civil society and CINGO Expert Council on NGO law
- Representative of a national ombudsperson
- Representative of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (tbc)
- Representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) (tbc)

**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:** Representative of the Council of Europe Secretariat

**Speakers:**

- Representative of European civil society
- Representative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (tbc)
- Representative of a national human rights institution
- Representative of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) (tbc)
- Representative of national civil society

## 17.40 – 19.30 | Networking and reception

# 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 and regulatory measures impacting civic space, with a focus on laws 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:** Representative of civil society

**Speakers:**

- Representative from the European Parliament (tbc)
- Representative from Council of Europe member state
- Representative of a national civil society organisation
- Representative of an organisation engaging in strategic litigation on behalf of civil society
- Representative of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) (tbc)

## 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:** Representative of civil society

**Speakers:**

- Representative of civil society
- Representative of civic tech initiative or academia
- Representative of a national institution
- Representative of the Council of Europe

#### **12.20 – 14.00 | Lunch Break**

#### **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:** Representative of a relevant Council of Europe institution

**Speakers:**

- Representative of European Youth Forum
- Representative from the Council of Europe's Conference of INGOs
- Representative of CDDEM
- Representative of a member state
- Representative of International IDEA

#### **15.20 – 15.50 | Coffee Break**

**15.50 – 16.30 | Session VI: 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:** Representative of the Council of Europe Secretariat

**Speakers:**

- Moderators: reports from previous sessions
- Conference rapporteur: presentation of the key takeaways
- Representative of civil society: comments

**Closing Reflections and Next steps by the moderator**

**16.30 – 16.45 | Group photo**