

# FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE: A LIVING CIVIC SPACE FOR A LIVING DEMOCRACY



**FRIDAY, 28TH FEBRUARY 2020**  
**10.00 – 17.00**

Council of Europe Office, Brussels  
Avenue des Nerviens 85, 1040 Brussels



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# PROGRAMME

## 10.00-11.00 INTRODUCTION

### **Welcome:**

Anna RURKA, President of the Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe

Zoltan TAUBNER, Director of External Relations, Council of Europe

**Keynote:** Richard YOUNGS\* - Senior Associate at Carnegie Endowment, Professor at University of Warwick, author of "*Civic Activism Unleashed: New Hope or False Dawn for Democracy?*"

## 11.15-12.30 PANEL 1 - CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR SEEN BY OTHERS

*How do policymakers, civil servants, academia, journalists, independent bodies or the private sector see the different methods, forms and expressions of civil society in terms of legitimacy, effectiveness or ethics, including of their funding, governance models?*

*Moderator:* Jade GLENISTER, Member, Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of INGOs

Adam BODNAR, Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland

Sandra BOUDJOULIAN, Fundamental Rights Agency, Vienna

Valerie HOPKINS, South East Europe Correspondent, Financial Times

Hanna SURMATZ, Senior Legal Affairs Officer, European Foundation Centre

Birgit VAN HOUT, Regional Representative for Europe, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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\*speaker was unable to attend the event

## **13.30-15.15 PANEL 2 - NGOs/CSOs/SOCIAL MOVEMENTS LOOK AT THEMSELVES**

*Do activists, change-makers and human rights defenders need NGOs? What can NGOs and social movements learn from each other and how can they work together? How do NGOs and umbrella organisations work with and approach non-formal citizen groups and social movements?*

*Moderator:* Susan WILDING, Head of Geneva Office, Civicus

Alfonso ALIBERTI, Policy and Advocacy Team Leader, European Youth Forum

Anna DAROCZI, Voluntary Service Coordinator, Youth Roma network Phiren Amenca

Krzysztof IZDEBSKI, Policy Director, Lawyer and activist, ePanstwo Foundation

Maryna KHROMYKH, Civic activist, co-ordinator of the initiative "Who ordered Katya Handziuk's death?"

Priscillia LUDOSKY, Activist, Yellow Vest, France

Alexandrina NAJMOWICZ, Director, European Civic Forum

Lejla ŠEHIĆ RELIĆ, President, European Volunteer Centre

## **15.30-16.45 INTERACTIVE DEBATE: WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?**

Which transformations are here to stay? What is the future of civil society as a sector? What is the role for governments, donors, institutions or communities supporting the sustainability of the CSO sector?

*Moderators:*

Sandra PERNAR, Senior Regional Coordinator Europe, Open Government Partnership

## **16.45-17.00 CLOSING REMARKS**

## CIVIL SECTOR SEEN BY OTHERS

*How do policy makers: civil servants, academia, journalists, see different methods, forms and expressions of civil society in terms of legitimacy, effectiveness, ethics, from funding to governance models?*

### PANEL 1

#### KEY POINTS

- *democracy, human rights and rule of law should not be dissociated and the civil society (in its broader understanding) is key player to advance the political agenda and increase the interest and sensitivity of public opinion in respect of fundamental rights*
- *the digital space presents great opportunities for connection, developing campaigns and raising awareness but it can also be an intimidating place as it is used for smear campaigns, troll attacks, fake news; equally the ever more polarising opinions leave less room for dialogue*
- *legitimacy was debated from multiple perspectives: 1) representation (how “representative” are some CSOs at national level given the membership base 2) independence from national governments 3) leadership in social movements: there seems to be a challenge to interact with leaderless movements: donors (private or public) find it difficult to support grass roots organisation, informal groups, social movement because of their leaderless nature (without a formal leader/s identified the granting and monitoring of the funding seems challenging)*
- *the role of diaspora influencing the political and civil space in the country of origin: its mobilising (political and civic) can be seen as support (e.g. crowdfunded campaigns) but sometimes it might come across as imposing without legitimacy a certain agenda*
- *youth participation in the civic space should not be taken for granted as there might be a generational difference in terms of prioritising causes (e.g. their understanding of the immediacy of climate emergency)*
- *seen from outside (a journalist view) the civil society has taken a hit in places such as Hungary where many people have left the sector*
- *international organisations are tempted to (re)launch broad coalitions to mobilise diverse actors to frame standards in defending human rights (good practice quoted: Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities)*
- *international organisations and private funders have difficulties funding/supporting social movements because of the difficulties to identify leadership and thus legal responsibility*

## WORRING TRENDS

- *the civic space is shrinking in many European countries, several of them European Union members; the FRA report confirms these trends; journalists and human rights defenders are also targeted by restrictive governmental measures*
- *defunding and self-censorship: governments reward “loyal organisations” and defund those critical to its actions this should be viewed in the broader view of the interactions with international governmental and nongovernmental funding agents (e.g. the Funding Mechanism of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein as well as international foundations as several receiving governments have tried to impose their bodies as national fund management; equally, the request to produce legal documents such as bylaws might come up as restrictive given some CSOs are harassed in courts and tac authorities given their critical position to power);*
- *self-censorship affect grantees and grant givers, and inherently, the relations between them and the results of their partnership*
- *the space is also shrinking legally: there are legal measures taken on several countries that are making funding more difficult*

## POSITIVE TRENDS

- *civic activism is growing as citizens are becoming more aware about the decreasing democratic standards;*
- *increased activism in social media, is changing the way organisations and nonformal groups work, as it is easier for them to reach out to citizens willing to engage*

## FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS/REFLECTIONS:

- *How can we support citizens, activists and organisations targeted by smear campaigns across Europe?*
- *How does self-censorship affect the capacity to serve citizens and causes?*
- *Is European Law an effective tool to defend civil society at national level?*
- *What is the relationship between the strength of the civil society and political parties?*
- *Can civil society organisations support social movements in their access to resources?*
- *What is the definition for the member states of a political activity (legislation on political parties should be considered when it comes to the equal treatment of CSOs)?*

## NGOs/CSOs/SOCIAL MOVEMENTS LOOK AT THEMSELVES

Key questions: Do activists, change makers and human rights defenders need NGOs? What can NGOs and social movements learn from each other and how can they work together? How do NGOs and umbrella organisations work with and approach non formal citizens groups and social movements?

### PANEL 2

#### KEY POINTS

- increased attention should be given to European countries; a potential solution could be extending the use of monitoring mechanisms that are now can be applied to third countries to all European states ;CSOs and social movements “have been nourishing each other (formal and informal) for a while; from ‘68 to Arab Spring to climate strikes” (AA)
- an issue of trust: grass roots movements are sometimes weary to CSOs due to CSOs being perceived as highly technical, even rigid: “we have to trust people before we work with them ; what make us going is the mistrust;
- the (dichotomic) role of technology: it supports civil society in restrictive environments while it also gives room and platform to smear campaigns and fake news
- the double sword of regulation: used by authoritarian governments to restrict fundamental rights while the lack of regulation is seen as a threat in consolidated democracies due to the outpouring of shady information/news/campaigns aimed at influencing/polarising societies
- “volunteerism is not a value itself; it has to have a cause; in order to have a social benefit (expression of active participation)” - LSR
- the need to learn deliberative and consultation tools from CSOs: informal groups and grass root movements might consider the deliberative processes and the support of CSOs when building decision making processes
- the need for movements to have an early win or a win of some sort/ to constitute a model for future interactions with power
- accountability to donors sometimes seems to be more important than to the constituency - the donors could be more loose in bureaucratic requirements
- the need to identify/redefine the relation between CSOs and HR international organisations (correlated the legitimacy and representation)

**STRATEGY TIPS FROM PANELLISTS:**

- *engaging from above national governments in order to avoid political vulnerabilities;*
- *introduce collaborative leadership with new movements to broaden the civic space;*
- *we are trying to support our members to act as mediators in their communities;*
- *we let ourselves be inspired by movements and maybe after try to translate movement demands to institution.*

**POSITIVE TRENDS**

- internationalisation of movements;
- the interconnectedness of digital rights with human rights;
- the need of "ordinary people to be listen to" (the large number of citizens that have answered the Yellow Vest survey)
- (Eastern Europe) a 'decolonisation of the civil sector" with CSOs less dependant on international donors and being able to draw on domestic support (crowdfunding, volunteers)

**NEUTRAL TRENDS:**

- NGOs are becoming more vocal and we see a movement-isation of the traditional civil society
- "the relations of trust is between citizens and NGOs is also changing/changeable" (comment from participants, round table)
- lack of trust between social movements and civil society organisations generated in part by the competitive environment of access to funding and the PR activities seen as an outreach of access to resources

**WORRYING TRENDS:**

- "a rise of discourses against solidarity"
- democratic deficit: the shrinking civil space is to be observed and experienced when it comes to interacting with European institutions not only with national governments or in countries such as Germany where NGOs involved in strategic litigations might lose their charity status (and therefore having access to taxes exemptions reduced/denied)
- the consent of the governed - freely given, continuous

**FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS/REFLECTIONS:**

- How can we build “bridges of trust” between grass root movements and CSOs? (asked by participants)
- “Are we too focused on tools and methods and not enough on the causes?”
- Can we effectively fight fragmentation and have a systemic approach to approach causes/defend values we believe in?/How can movements that can build on intersectionality?
- How are we going to engage with the ever more technical language of advocacy papers/call for funding? Is this a good time to advocate for a reduction of bureaucratic work as well as a simpler way to grant write?





### KEY POINTS

- challenging to be faced by our societies: aging population, migration, climate change
- providing services gives CSOs the need to compete on the market and lower prices for provided services
- values that were taken for granted might be re-evaluated
- digitalization and its caveats
- social platform challenge the existence of traditional NGOs (as it gets people together)
- the issue of representation - who are they representing in front of the government
- early involvement in public policy design - CSO or government addressing directly citizens
- reduced funding: (especially for advocacy organisations versus deliberative) when they disagree with the government
- reducing funding- illiberal trends within Europe; smear campaigns and fake news

### FOLLOW UP QUESTION/REFLECTIONS

- How can we/should we interact with CSOs with different/competing values?
- How can we broaden coalitions of different actors (advocacy groups, think tanks, grass roots organisations, informal groups, social movements)?

# SPEAKERS AND GUESTS

## OPENING

*Welcome and key note*



### **ANNA RURKA**

*President of the Council of Europe's Conference of INGOS*

Since 2015, Anna Rurka holds the position of elected President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University Paris Nanterre, Vice Chairwomen of the European Committee for Home-based Priority Action for the Child and the Family (EUROCEF, INGO with participatory status with the Council of Europe). Her professional and social engagement activities focus on participation of vulnerable people, access to rights and services, as well as systemic and institutional analysis of the power relations in public policies.



### **ZOLTAN TAUBNER**

*Director of External Relations, Council of Europe*

Mr Taubner began his career at the International Law Department of the Ministry of Justice of Hungary in 1990 before moving to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has been Director of the Hungarian Foreign Minister's Cabinet. He has been Deputy and Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Since 2008, he has been Director of External Relations, taking on the role in 2017 of Director of the Council of Europe Office in charge of liaison with the European Union in Brussels at the same time.



## JADE GLENISTER

*Moderator - Member, Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of INGOs*

Jade Glenister is a member of the Expert Council on NGO Law. She is an Australian qualified lawyer, currently working in an independent organisation which inspects the treatment of and conditions for detainees in the UK. She has worked across Europe providing legal and policy advice through projects on human rights, focussing on equality and non-discrimination and the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. Co-author of "Justice or complicity? LGBT Rights and the Russian Courts" and previous Assistant Editor of the Equal Rights Review. She has provided training on equality law to lawyers, paralegals, journalists and NGO and government staff.



## ADAM BODNAR

*Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland*

Adam Piotr Bodnar is a Polish jurist, human rights activist, vice-president of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (pl) (Helsinki Committee) from 2010 to 2015, since September 2015 Ombudsman for Civil Rights (pl) of the Republic of Poland.

## SANDRA BOUDJOULIAN

*Fundamental Rights Agency, Vienna*

Sandra Boudjoulian is Programme Officer in the Institutional Cooperation & Networks Unit of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). She facilitates and maintains FRA's cooperation with civil society and the Fundamental Rights Platform. The Platform is the Agency's core mechanism for engaging and sharing information with a variety of civil society actors, currently over 700. Her academic background is in sociology, political sciences and demography.



## VALERIE HOPKINS

*South East Europe Correspondent, Financial Times*

Valerie Hopkins is the South-East Europe correspondent for the Financial Times, covering Hungary, Romania, Albania and the former Yugoslavia. Before joining the FT, she worked as a freelancer as well as with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. She has a Master of Arts in Political Journalism from Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, and a B.A. in International Relations (focus on Russian and Post-Soviet Studies) from the College of William and Mary.



## HANNA SURMATZ

*Senior Legal Affairs Officer, European Foundation Centre*

Hanna Surmatz has been working towards a favorable operating environment for institutional philanthropy in the context of wider civil society space since May 2004. Her main responsibilities include monitoring and mapping/analysis of relevant national and European and international developments that affect foundations' operating environment; coordination of benchmarking exercises; and facilitating information exchange on foundation law matters through publications and events.



## **BIRGIT VAN HOUT**

*Regional Representative for Europe, UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)*

Birgit Van Hout is the Regional Representative for Europe of the UN Human Rights Office since 2017, leading the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe in Brussels. Previously, she worked to advance human rights, the rule of law, democracy and equality in Guatemala, Timor Leste, Bosnia, Central Asia, Palestine, Venezuela and Togo with various departments of the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organisation for Security and cooperation in Europe. She holds an LL.M., a M.A. in International Politics, and a postgraduate degree in International Human Rights Law.



## SUSAN WILDING

*Moderator - Head of Geneva Office, Civicus*

Susan Wilding is the Head of the Geneva Office for CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and individuals dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society for a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. Susan is a South African citizen, who previously worked for the South African government in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) as an assistant Director in the Human rights and humanitarian affairs Unit. Prior to joining DIRCO, Susan worked in the private sector doing Public affairs for large corporates and philanthropic foundations. Susan holds her MA in Politics.



## ALFONSO ALIBERTI

*Policy and Advocacy Team Leader, European Youth Forum*

Alfonso is currently working as Policy and Advocacy Team Leader at the European Youth Forum. He advocates for a stronger and more recognised youth civil society in Europe. He works specifically on advocating for a stronger and more accessible EU Programmes in the field of education, training and youth. He has extensive experience in the civil society sector and has been particularly active in promoting sustainable civil society models in Europe.



## LEJLA ŠEHIĆ RELIĆ

*President, European Volunteer Centre*

Lejla Šehić Relić (born 1971), civil society activist since 1993, President of European Volunteer Centre, CEO of Croatian Volunteer Development Centre, founder and managing director of Volunteer Centre Osijek, expert for the development of volunteerism and civil society organisations in policy and practice, trainer and consultant for organizational development, co-author of several publications on volunteering, civil society and conflict management. Lejla holds university degree in public administration.



## ANNA DAROCZI

*Voluntary Service Coordinator, Phiren Amenca International Network*

Anna Daroczi has been the coordinator of the voluntary service program of the Phiren Amenca International Network since 2016 where she is responsible for the exchange of young Roma and non-Roma between mainstream and Roma placements, and non-formal educational activities about various aspects of antigypsism. Earlier she was a program manager at a minority rights organisation in Hungary. She has an MA degree in Critical Gender Studies and a BA in Social Education.



## KRZYSZTOF IZDEBSKI

*Policy Director, Lawyer and activist, ePaństwo Foundation*

Krzysztof Izdebski is Board Member and Policy Director of the ePaństwo Foundation (EPF) and a Board Member of the Consul Democracy Foundation. He is a lawyer specialised in access to public information, re-use of public sector information and anti-corruption. He has wide expertise in relations between public administration and citizens. He is the author of publications on freedom of information, technology, public administration, corruption and public participation including "Transparency and Open Data Principles: Why They Are Important and How They Increase Public Participation and Tackle Corruption" and recently published "alGOVrithms. The State of Play. Report on Algorithms Usage in Government-Citizens Relations in Czechia, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia."



## MARYNA KHROMYKH

*Civic activist, co-ordinator of the initiative "Who ordered Katya Handziuk's death?"*

Maryna Khromykh is a communication consultant and project manager in the NGO sector in Ukraine. She is one of the founders and active member of the initiative group "Who is Behind The Murder of Katia Handziuk?"



## PRISCILLIA LUDOSKY

*Activist, Yellow Vest, France*

Priscillia Ludosky, owner of a small organic cosmetic e-shop, co-founder of the yellow vests movement, co-founder of the Citizens League (association), member of the "Gilets Citoyens" collective initiator of the French Convention for Climate.



## ALEXANDRINA NAJMOWICZ

*Director, European Civic Forum*

Alexandrina Najmowicz has been working for more than fifteen years in the third sector and not-for-profit organisations in France and at European level. She is currently Director of the European Civic Forum, a transnational network of over 100 associations across Europe, working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity and democracy in Europe. In this role, she leads different campaigns and initiatives aiming to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to stand and act for these values, defend citizens' rights and become influential in the decision making process. She represents the European Civic Forum in different stakeholders' groups within the European Commission, FRA and EESC.



**SANDRA PERNAR**

*Moderator - Senior Regional Coordinator Europe, Open Government Partnership*

Sandra Pernar is a Senior Regional Coordinator in the Open Government Partnership. She provides guidance and assistance to governments in Europe, facilitates exchange and learning between governments, as well as support to civil society organizations to push for open government reforms. Her previous work experience includes working for the Government and in the civil sector on democratisation, anti-corruption, good governance and civic participation.

# RAPPORTEUR



## MĂDĂLINA MOCAN

Mădălina Mocan is a civil society professional associated with the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD Cluj) at the Political Sciences Department of Babes Bolyai University. With a long experience in developing, coordinating and advising civil society initiatives, she maintains an academic and civic interest in human rights issues, particularly human trafficking, inequality, and public participation. She coordinates international partnerships such as LSE Ideas CSEEP Desk at FSPAC. She is an Aspen Institute Romania moderator, MMF Fellow (2014), and serves as a proud board member of Techsoup Romania and ELiberare.

