

Working Group on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights

Context

Citizens and civil society organisations alike have felt a shrinking of civic space over recent years. Whether it be through restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association, direct threats to civil society by government or intimidation by other parts of the public which prevent civil society from acting freely; there is an emerging trend towards limiting the possibility of action by citizens. This is a global trend and there is currently a risk that bad practice from different countries could be applied in Europe. It is therefore critical to ensure that core values of democracy and human rights, which are at the heart of the European project, and are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, are guaranteed.

Objective

To identify and draw attention to limits on civic space throughout Europe; to propose and call for actions by the European institutions; and to provide support for civil society on the ground in defending civic space and fundamental rights.

Activities planned in 2015-2016

- Preparation and dissemination of a survey on civic space in Europe, in order to gather positive or negative perspectives on the conditions for NGOs to operate freely in EU, EEA and accession countries.

- With evidence gathered from the questionnaire, drafting of a report on civic space in the European Union, with examples of restrictions coming from both national and EU levels. To be developed as a summary of existing reports and with direct input from 'front-line' members of Civil Society Europe. This report, targeted at EU decision makers in the Parliament and Commission will also be used as a contribution to the CSE report on the State of the Civil dialogue in the EU.
- In the framework of the Citi-rights project, led by European Alternatives with the European Civic Forum, a training program for civil society organisations throughout 2015 on how to use European citizenship rights and fundamental rights to advance their causes, on how to do advocacy at European level and campaign creatively, on how to use the media, online and also legal channels will be implemented. To be held in Hungary, Portugal, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Italy.
- Participation to a round-table event within the "Citizen-rights" project on fundamental rights and civic space
- Monitoring and follow up of initiatives at EU level having an impact on the implementation of fundamental rights and civic space
- Consider process for the establishment of a CSE observatory for monitoring civic space in Europe

Coordination of working group

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