

*António Costa, President of the European Council
Presidency of the Council of the European Union
Permanent Representatives of the Member States to the EU (COREPER II)
General Affairs Council and Ad hoc Working Party on MFF
Ministers of Finances*

Brussels, 14 July 2026

Joint Civil Society Letter: Increase AgoraEU including CERV+’s budget in the next MFF

Dear Presidents, dear Ministers, dear Permanent Representatives,

As 32 European networks and organisations representing more than 2800 organisations working on rule of law, democracy, civic participation and education, fundamental rights, equality, children’s rights, disability, LGBTI equality, gender equality, combating gender-based violence, and combating racism and antigypsyism, we write to express serious concern regarding the proposed cut to the AgoraEU programme in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

We call on the Council to increase, not reduce, the AgoraEU budget. The first [negotiating box](#) proposed by the Cyprus Presidency and discussed at the European Council of 18-19 June proposes a €300 million cut (4%) to AgoraEU compared with the European Commission's initial proposal. We firmly oppose this reduction. In line with the European Parliament's position, we [urge](#) the Council to raise the total AgoraEU budget to €10.72 billion, which would still represent only 0.5% of the entire MFF.

Within AgoraEU, we call on the Council to safeguard the CERV+ strand. We welcome the Council's proposal to earmark funds per strand, to ensure predictable and adequate allocations. Within AgoraEU, we urge the Council to maintain the 41.9% share proposed by both the European Commission and the European Parliament in its draft Report (which would currently amount to €3.593 billion). This would represent less than 0.2% of the entire MFF, a modest investment in light of what is at stake and the growing challenges to the protection of EU values.

The case for protecting this funding is clear. A vibrant civil society is a cornerstone of the EU’s democratic life, enabling citizens' participation, upholding fundamental rights, restoring trust in institutions, and supporting underserved, discriminated, marginalized populations, and victims of violence. The CERV programme has been instrumental in sustaining this infrastructure through operating grants, action grants, and regranting schemes.

The European Commission's own [evaluation](#) shows that CERV is effective; it simply lacks sufficient resources to respond to increasing needs and fulfill all its objectives. Under previous calls, up to 92% of proposals were rejected despite receiving high evaluation scores, reflecting insufficient funding. As the Commission noted, "many excellent applications cannot be funded due to budget limitations." A 2023 [FRA survey](#) found that 75.4% of civil society organisations working on fundamental rights and democracy fear that funding cuts threaten their very existence. The Council of Europe [Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has similarly raised the alarm on the severe funding crisis facing civil society across Europe.

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EU values are under acute pressure. Democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and equality face growing challenges across the Union. Civic space is shrinking. Civil society organisations confront mounting hostility: disinformation, smear campaigns, judicial and administrative harassment, restrictive legislation including so-called ‘foreign agent’ laws, and sustained funding cuts. Human rights defenders are also increasingly targeted for their work, and are in crucial need of a protection mechanism in the EU. Anti-democratic, anti-rights, anti-gender forces, with growing resources, are actively working to roll back fundamental rights and undermine EU values and the EU itself. This represents not only a democratic threat, but a security threat and a destabilisation risk for the Union as a whole.

In this context, the EU has rightly made new strategic commitments to strengthening democracy, including the European Democracy Shield and the EU Civil Society Strategy, while renewing all of its Equality Strategies and acceding to the Istanbul Convention. Delivering on these commitments will depend on a sufficiently ambitious CERV+ budget. **Given the scale and urgency of the challenges Europe faces, this is precisely the moment to strengthen our investment in the EU's democratic foundations, not to weaken it.**

We count on your support.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories

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| 1 - AGE Platform Europe | 17 - European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) |
| 2 - Aidsfonds | 18 - Humanists International |
| 3 - ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy | 19 - IGLYO - The International LGBTQI Youth and Student Organisation |
| 4 - Balkan Civil Society Development Network | 20 - ILGA-Europe |
| 5 - Center for Reproductive Rights | 21 - FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights |
| 6 - Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) | 22 - International Planned Parenthood Federation - European Network (IPPF EN) |
| 7 - End FGM European Network | 23 - JEF Europe - Young European Federalists |
| 8 - Equinet | 24 - MenEngage Europe |
| 9 - Equipop | 25 - Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII Europe) |
| 10 - ERGO Network - European Roma Grassroots Organisations | 26 - Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea) |
| 11 - Eurocentralasian Lesbian* Community (EL*C) | 27 - Protection International |
| 12 - EuroClio - European Association of History Educators | 28 - Save the Children |
| 13 - European Civic Forum | 29 - TGEU - Trans Europe and Central Asia |
| 14 - European Disability Forum | 30 - Union of European Federalists |
| 15 - European Network Against Racism (ENAR) | 31 - Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network |
| 16 - European Network of Cultural Centres | 32 - Women's Funds Europe |