



**European Economic and Social Committee  
Information Centre**

Brussels, 23 October 2018  
IF & CV-18/21

**Subject:** **Shrinking civic space in the EU** (what exists already within the institutions and outside).

**Deadline:** 26 October 2018.

**For :** Fausta Palombelli

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*Introduction:*

5 documents out of the list below are mentioned with **->** : those are important.

**->** [Civic Space in Europe 2017: Report](#)

Civil Society Europe (22 June 2018)

*Civil Society Europe's second report on civic space in Europe 2017*

"The survey objective was to map out key trends on civic space in Europe, based on the perception of civil society organisations. Civic Space is understood as the ability to enjoy civic freedoms: the freedoms of association, assembly and expression which give people the freedom to form and join groups, peacefully protest, and advocate for the things they desire – and to counter the things they do not want. These freedoms are an essential part of a vibrant democracy; where debate and discussion thrive, and where people are able to contribute to important decisions that affect them. The questions were developed based on feedback from the previous survey carried out in 2016 by Civil Society Europe jointly with Civicus and from members of the Civil Society Europe working group on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights. "

-> [The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030](#)

European Economic and Social Committee, Study (December 2017)

See p. 26, chapt. 2.6 'Shrinking civic space'

See p. 48, chapt. 4.5 'Shrinking civic space'

-> [People Power Under Attack](#)

CIVICUS Monitor (4 October 2017)

Updated ratings from the CIVICUS Monitor, released 4 October 2017, provide further evidence that the space for civil society - civic space - continues to close around the world. The findings show that this phenomenon extends to a wide range of countries - from established democracies like Belgium and the Netherlands, to economic powerhouse China and conflict ridden Yemen. The report outlines how civic space ratings worsened in eight countries, improved in two and remained unchanged in 185 countries. These changes are based on a review of quantitative and qualitative data on the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression undertaken between July and September 2017.

-> [Shrinking space for civil society: the EU response](#)

European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, Study (April 2017)

Abstract: The EU has developed an impressive range of policy tools for pushing back against restrictions on civil society across the world. It has gradually improved the way it deploys these instruments and has helped protect many activists at risk. Notwithstanding this, the EU needs to sharpen its 'shrinking space' strategy. This study suggests a range of precise policy changes it should contemplate to this end. It advocates a number of strategic guidelines that could help make the EU's responses more proactive; better able to tackle the broad structural elements of the shrinking space; fully balanced between political and development approaches; and geared towards building more inclusive alliances against new restrictions on civil society.

-> [Civil society reports show evidence of Shrinking Civic Space in Europe](#)

Civil Society Europe (26 October 2016)

A survey of civil society organisations in Europe conducted in early 2016 by Civil Society Europe and CIVICUS shows evidence of shrinking civic space in Europe.

The survey aimed at assessing civil society's perception and confidence in key civic space freedoms such as freedoms of assembly, association and expression; as well as their views on key challenges and wider political trends.

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## A. EESC Opinions / Reports

### [Justice Rights & Values Fund - EESC-2018-02950-AS](#)

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Rights and Values programme - [COM(2018)383 final – 2017/0207 (COD)]

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Justice programme - [COM(2018)384 final – 2017/0208 (COD)]

European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (4 October 2018)

Rapporteur: Jean Marc ROIRANT

"[...]2.2 The Fund's objective is to help sustain open, democratic, pluralist and inclusive societies, as well as to empower people by protecting and promoting rights and values and by further developing an EU area of justice, which is a key priority in the current EU context with the upsurge in extremism and radicalism, increased polarisation, reforms challenging the rule of law and shrinking civic space."

### [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Financing of civil society organisations by the EU' \(own-initiative opinion\) - \(2018/C 081/02\)](#)

European Economic and Social Committee, Plenary Session (30 March 2018)

Rapporteur: Jean Marc ROIRANT

### **->** [The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030](#)

European Economic and Social Committee, Study (December 2017)

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## B. European Parliament

### [AMENDMENTS 1 – 90 –](#)

Amendements aux projets d'avis FEMM\_AM(2018)628515

Amendment 78: Julie Ward, Draft opinion, Paragraph 11 a

European Parliament, Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (3 October 2018)

Amendment 11a : "Highlights the need for the EU to politically and financially support independent civil society organisations and ensure the protection of human rights defenders under attack; notes that women's rights organisations and defenders are specifically targeted and suffer particularly from the **shrinking civic space**; calls the EU to take into account the specific protection needs that women human rights defenders have;"

### [VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS](#)

European Parliament (2 October 2018)

Chapt. 17 (p. 166): *Rise of Neo fascist violence in Europe (debate)* – "We expect Member States to act forcefully against crimes committed by neo – Nazi groups – whether in the streets, in football arenas or in the targeting of places of worship or asylum shelters. However, we also have to look at where

this violence comes from. Societal polarization has increased, not least in the social media. We read and talk to the like-minded, and this increases the polarization of our societies. As a society, we need to step up action against racism, intolerance and the toxic narratives which are **shrinking the space for well-informed and democratic discussion in the public sphere and are polarizing our societies.**"  
(Věra Jourová, Member of the Commission)

[European Parliament resolution of 31 May 2018 on the implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document \(SWD\(2015\)0182\)–Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020 \(2017/2012\(INI\)\)](#)  
Text adopted, Provisional edition P8\_TA-PROV(2018)0239 (31 May 2018)

[Le soutien de l’Union aux défenseurs des droits de l’homme dans le monde](#)  
European Parliament Briefing (December 2017)

### -> [Shrinking space for civil society: the EU response](#)

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[Annual Report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter 2015 \(2016/2219\(INI\)\)](#)  
European Parliament (14 December 2016)

"EU Strategic Framework and the new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

[...] 13. Considers a free civil society to be one of the foundations for the protection and support of human rights and democratic values, and is therefore concerned that the **public space for civil society is shrinking, and that HRDs and journalists are increasingly under attack worldwide**; welcomes the inclusion in the Action Plan of an objective to address threats to civil society space, and urges the EU to implement outlined actions; encourages all parties involved in EU external action to identify and address existing gaps in the protection of human rights and democratic freedoms, and to step up cooperation with civil society, parliaments, political parties and local authorities, and with regional and international organisations on the ground; draws attention to the fact that the Action Plan does not include a separate objective on fostering democratic standards in partner countries; calls on the Commission to develop EU guidelines for democracy support;"

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## **C. European Commission**

[COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Evaluation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights Accompanying the document REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Mid-term review report of the External Financing Instruments](#)

European Commission (15 December 2017)

Note 37: "shrinking space of civil society": Civil Society Organisations in many countries have been experiencing a shrinking space in which they cannot operate freely. A number of governments interpret the role of civil society organisations in a more restrictive way, limiting their input in policy-making and curbing freedom of speech and opinion. Other governments have led efforts to bar, restrain, or control the work of civil society. Restrictive laws have emerged, imposing arbitrary procedures for the registration of associations or restrictions to their funding, in particular from foreign sources. Harassment of international and domestic NGOs is also increasing either from the authorities or by their failure to protect them from attacks coming from extractive industries pressures, illegal trafficking, or land issues disputes.

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## **D. European Agencies**

[Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017)

Civil society organisations in the European Union play a crucial role in promoting fundamental rights, but it has become harder for them to do so – due to both legal and practical restrictions. While challenges exist in all EU Member States, their exact nature and extent vary. Data and research on this issue – including comparative research – are generally lacking. This report therefore looks at the different types and patterns of challenges faced by civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU. It also highlights promising practices that can counteract these worrying patterns.

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## **E. Think Tank papers**

[How is the EU responding to the shrinking civic space?](#)

Euroalter (European Alternatives), 26 June 2018

A comment of the *Civil Society Europe's* report on civic space in Europe 2017

-> [Civic Space in Europe 2017: Report](#)

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[Statement on Shrinking Civic Space in Europe in advance of the European Parliament Plenary discussion on 6 February 2018](#)

Civil Society Europe (6 February 2018)

[CSO ACCESS TO EU FUNDING: EXTERNAL INSTRUMENTS](#)

CONCORD Europe (2018)

Concord is the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development.

"Study on the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)' access to EU development funding instruments constitutes a joint effort of CONCORD structures to analyse thematic, geographical as well as general trends in external funding in the span of two Multiannual Financial Frameworks (2011-2014, 2014-2016). The report elaborates on the statement that CSOs receive more and more funding, while indicating cross-cutting patterns and room for improvement. Being only a starting point for discussions, the study spells out a set of feasible recommendations to be implemented in the future."

[...] *CONCLUSION, 6<sup>th</sup> point*: "The EC's funding patterns should not exacerbate the shrinking space for CSOs in Europe and partner countries. EC development cooperation has a secondary effect, or "European Added Value", of bolstering support for the EU among citizens, while European CSOs channel citizens' solidarity. Partnering with a diversity of CSO shapes and sizes in Europe helps to maintain trust in development cooperation as an EU policy area.

*Recommendation to the EC*: Be aware that limitations to partnership with European CSOs may adversely affect solidarity among citizens. As a matter of European Added Value, consider the interconnectedness of values-based development cooperation and citizenship when identifying funding modalities and implementing partners."

[Why Shrinking Civil Society Space Matters in International Development and Humanitarian Action](#)

European Foundation Centre (1 November 2017)

Closing civil society space is a growing trend, impacting civic actors in countries throughout the world. This paper examines how the trend effects development funders and actors, and how they are responding. Questions explored include: what are funders doing to engage around re-opening space for civil society? How are they adapting? What are the impacts of the development community's approach to civil society as a whole? The European Foundation Centre and the Funders' Initiative for

Civil Society have come together to develop better insight into these questions and to increase awareness of the threats to civil society.

## -> [People Power Under Attack](#)

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## [How State Restrictions Are Reshaping Civic Space Around the World](#)

Saskia Brechenmacher

International Peace Institute, The Global Observatory (19 May 2017)

Around the world, newly assertive illiberal regimes are becoming increasingly adept at restricting civil society through legal constraints, forcing civil society groups to rethink the way they operate.

*This article was based on the Carnegie report "[Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia](#)."*

## [Shrinking Space for Civil Society: The EU Response](#)

Richard Youngs, Ana Echagüe

Carnegie Europe (21 April 2017)

*A comment of the European Parliament's Study.*

"The European Union (EU) has begun to design a multi-faceted response to the shrinking space for civil society. This response is beginning to have an impact. The EU is now one of the international actors most strongly committed to protecting human rights defenders (HRDs) from regimes' increasingly draconian attempts to quash civil society. Yet there are ways in which the EU's policies could be sharpened and broadened, so as to help the EU to address the more structural dimensions of the shrinking space problem."

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### [The Shrinking Space for Civil Society : Philanthropic Perspectives From Across the Globe](#)

The European Foundation Centre (15 April 2016)

The shrinking space for civil society and reported violations to fundamental and democratic rights are a global phenomenon. Foundations and other philanthropic organisations have reported problematic laws in Algeria, China, Columbia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Russia, Syria and Zimbabwe, just to name a few. And EU countries are hardly immune. Of serious concern have been ongoing challenges to civic rights in Hungary, UK surveillance programmes, anti-protest laws in Spain, counterterrorism measures in France, and attacks in Poland on the freedom of public media and the independence of the judiciary. In this publication, a group of European Foundation Centre members working across the globe share their thoughts on and experience of the shrinking space for civil society. This publication signals the EFC's ambition to scan the landscape on developments important to its members in an effort to contribute intelligence and capture the experience of foundations to make sense of the increasingly complex and interconnected world in which we all live. The insights from foundations and other philanthropic organisations on this issue are particularly valuable as these organisations, due to their funding practice and policy work, are often ahead of the curve in terms of what's happening on the ground.

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## **F. Research / Experts articles**

### [Squeezing civic space: restrictions on civil society organizations and the linkages with human rights](#)

Antoine Buyse

*The International Journal of Human Rights*, Volume 22, Issue 8, p. 966-988 (published online 12 July 2018)

ABSTRACT: In many countries civil society is under pressure. Collective citizens' efforts, especially when they have political salience, seem to be regarded with increasing suspicion and even to be actively countered. Anti-NGO laws, arbitrary inspections, harassment, and criminalisation all strike at the roots of civic space. Is this part of a trend of 'reverse transitions', in which countries slide away from democracy? Or is this maybe an even wider shift, manifestations of which can also be observed in more established democracies? What are the possible causes of this shrinking or closing civic space, how does the closure manifest itself, and what are the linkages to human rights? This article will focus on anti-NGO measures as part of a broader global trend.

### [SIM Peter Baehr Lecture: Shrinking space for civic space: The countervailing power of NGOs](#)

Eduard Nazarski

*Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, Vol 35, Issue 4, pp. 272 - 281 (First Published December 1, 2017 )

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## **G. To be alerted....**

[Civic Space Watch: Monitoring and sharing resources on Civic Space in Europe](#)

European Civic Forum

See [Resources and Newsfeeds](#)

Subscribing to the [Newsletter](#)

*includes sections "Under the spotlight: initiatives worth supporting" and "Under scrutiny: developments worth monitoring"*

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