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Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward

(exploratory opinion requested by the Belgian Presidency)

(C/2024/2481)

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as the home of organised and representative civil society at EU level welcomes the request from the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for an opinion on civil dialogue and citizens' participation in democratic life. The EESC has specific experience and expertise as a forum for civil dialogue⁽¹⁾. The implementation of Article 11 TEU, as a follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), is important in order to keep civil society involved in EU policy-making. As explicitly stated by the Belgian presidency, such a development might reflect and apply to national, regional, and local level needs for a structured dialogue with civil society.

1.2. Looking ahead to the Defence of Democracy package and the European elections in 2024, civil society must be treated as an important partner in strengthening and defending European democracy and in enabling participatory approaches, that are complementary to representative democracy. In this opinion, the EESC is seeking to explore what elements could be included in a more conducive framework that fosters direct citizen participation and dialogue with intermediate bodies, at both European and Member State level.

1.3. As the EESC has previously stated, the specific role of social partner organisations should be fully recognised and respected in social dialogue structures and processes, while acknowledging that civil dialogue, involving a broader set of stakeholders on a wider range of topics, is a separate process.

1.4. The Conference on the Future of Europe concluded that the future Europe must develop additional instruments of participatory democracy, and set out precise directions on how to build this⁽²⁾. Several of those recommendations go in the direction of building a conducive framework on civil dialogue. The EESC believes that two of them in particular stand out, which concern the EESC itself, the first which recognises its function and the second which broadens it to the possibility of becoming a real hub for citizen panels.

⁽¹⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'How to engage with the intended public and how to effectively use the results of the work of citizens' panels' (OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 69), paragraph 1.3.

⁽²⁾ Conference on the Future of Europe — Report on the final outcome, May 2022.

1.5. The EESC calls for a strategy for civil dialogue, resulting in an action plan, which could include a pillar as part of the European Defence of Democracy Package. Additionally, this could be aimed at considering seeking an interinstitutional agreement among the EU institutions, as the civil society networks Social Platform and European Civic Forum have been asking for since 2009 ⁽³⁾, that sets out actions and the *related resources* to be used. This could be facilitated by the EESC, with the participation of civil society networks at EU level. This strategy must be the first step in strengthening the role of civil society and further developing a civil dialogue.

1.6. The EESC believes that it is essential that certain standards be applied across EU institutions in order to make Article 11 TEU effective. This could cover issues such as the meaning of civil dialogue, its results-orientation, the regularity and timing of activities, the sharing of the policy agenda and priorities, the inclusiveness of vulnerable groups, as well as feedback and outcomes. The EESC underlines that this strategy implies the real possibility of improved implementation of European policy measures in the day-to-day lives of citizens.

1.7. The Council organises systematic consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs) concerning its legislative and policy work. These consultations may take the form of inviting CSOs to its working party meetings. Moreover, the rotating presidencies of the Council may organise meetings with CSOs regarding their priorities.

1.8. As the home of organised civil society, the EESC has specific expertise and constitutes a unique and permanent forum for civil dialogue, where solutions are put forward based on consensus between various stakeholders. Its members have mandates from their respective organisations ⁽⁴⁾.

1.9. A Commission vice-president should continue to take on the task of civil dialogue with civil society, and the role of the European Parliament vice-president in charge of relations and dialogue with civil society should be strengthened. Clearly, improving the implementation of Article 11 TEU, in order to improve CSO engagement in the EU policy-making process, while strengthening the role of the EESC, can lead to more targeted and effective policies. The EESC has previously called for a coordinating unit within the Commission's general secretariat, under the direct management of the relevant Commission vice-president. This unit would also provide support to all directorates-generals as regards the overall approach and strategy of consultations, the drafting and implementation of quality requirements and procedures, quality guidance, information and follow-up ⁽⁵⁾.

1.10. The EESC calls for an annual civil dialogue (or civic space) scoreboard setting out when CSOs have contributed through consultation processes whether their contributions have been taken on board and if not, explaining the reasons for that. This would be valuable in assessing what works and what does not work. The impact assessment through an annual scoreboard could result in a biennial Civil Dialogue Report, tracing the successes and failures of the EU's engagement with civil society in general, and evaluating the state of play of civil dialogue and the effectiveness of CSOs.

1.11. As a follow-up to the Roadmap adopted by the NGO Forum in Riga in 2015, the EESC Civil Society Liaison Group drew up an action plan in 2018 for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2) of the Treaty ⁽⁶⁾. One of the proposals was the establishment of a European Observatory on Civil Dialogue. The EESC takes due note of this request.

1.12. As stated in the opinion on citizens' panels, the EESC, as the established institutional voice of organised civil society, must be at the heart of moves to strengthen participatory democracy in and between the European institutions. It is therefore proposed to consider through experimentation the range of participatory instruments, such as citizens' panels, that the EESC can make use of in its advisory work. In this case, the EESC's Rules of Procedure will need to be adapted to incorporate this procedure ⁽⁷⁾. By analogy with what is set out in the opinion on citizens' panels, this task would highlight the special place of the EESC as the institutional guardian of civil society consultation and civil dialogue in general.

⁽³⁾ <https://www.socialplatform.org/members-area/working-groups/civil-dialogue/>; <https://civic-forum.eu/civil-dialogue>.

⁽⁴⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'How to engage with the intended public and how to effectively use the results of the work of citizens' panels' (OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 69), paragraph 4.5.

⁽⁵⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Evaluation of European Commission stakeholder consultations' (OJ C 383, 17.11.2015, p. 57).

⁽⁶⁾ Action Plan for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2) TEU.

⁽⁷⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'How to engage with the intended public and how to effectively use the results of the work of citizens' panels' (OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 69), paragraph 1.4.

1.13. CSOs must be founded on internal democracy, autonomy, and transparency; they must take the form of a not-for-profit model, working in the general, and/or specific interest of their constituents. The EESC considers it important that CSOs be legitimate and representative. It, therefore, calls for an accreditation mechanism based on the principles mentioned above using existing frameworks such as the CoE ⁽⁸⁾ and UN, considering the legitimacy of the mandate of the members, the areas of interest, and the factual dimension of legitimacy and representativeness except for those already recognised as social partners in accordance with the Commission Communication of 1993 ⁽⁹⁾ and decision from 1998 ⁽¹⁰⁾.

2. Context and background of the opinion

2.1. In order to safeguard, strengthen and foster democracy in the EU, and as a tool to bring the EU's decision-making process closer to citizens, the EESC welcomes the request from the Belgian presidency for an opinion on the topic of *Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: the way forward*. The subject is broad, and encompasses issues such as activism, volunteering, joining movements and other forms of direct active participation by citizens, which serves as a complement to representative democracy. Therefore, the primary focus of this opinion is on assessing what elements could be included in a more conducive framework that fosters direct citizen participation and dialogue with and through intermediate bodies, both at EU level and within individual EU Member States.

2.2. As stated by the EESC previously, the specific role of social partner organisations should be fully recognised and respected in social dialogue structures and processes, while acknowledging that civil dialogue, involving a broader set of stakeholders on a wider range of topics, is a separate process ⁽¹¹⁾.

2.3. The EESC has a special place as an advisory body comprising representatives of employers' organisations and trade unions and other representatives of civil society, and ensuring that its consultation procedures take place in accordance with the Treaties (Article 304 TFEU).

2.4. The EESC set up the Liaison Group in 2004 — setting an example among EU bodies — to provide a framework for dialogue and cooperation between the EESC and the European organisations and networks the Group liaises with on cross-cutting issues of common interest. The Liaison Group provides civil society umbrella organisations with a unique institutional structure, enabling civil dialogue and promoting participatory democracy. It is a channel through which civil society can discuss and influence the EU agenda and decision-making processes (as envisaged under Article 11 TEU).

2.5. Independent and free civil society is a safeguard for democratic societies, and specifically for fundamental rights and freedoms and against rising populism. Civil Society Europe ⁽¹²⁾ and a large number of CSOs underlined that a **Civil Society Strategy** ⁽¹³⁾ is key in their open letter to the President of the European Commission in June 2022.

⁽⁸⁾ Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process.

⁽⁹⁾ COM(93) 600 final.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Commission Decision 98/500/EC of 20 May 1998 on the establishment of Sectoral Dialogue Committees promoting the Dialogue between the social partners at European level (OJ L 225, 12.8.1998, p. 27).

⁽¹¹⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union (COM(2023) 38 final — 2023/0012 (NLE)) and on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions (COM(2023) 40 final) (OJ C 228, 29.6.2023, p. 87), paragraph 1.7.

⁽¹²⁾ <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/>.

⁽¹³⁾ Open letter from Civil Society Europe to the President of the European Commission, 2022. This does not include social partners.

2.6. The CoFoE brought about new discussions on participatory democracy, introducing new forms of direct citizen deliberations in the context of the EU⁽¹⁴⁾. These new forms remain under scrutiny and discussion but are a new way for citizens to influence and participate in decision-making. Citizens' panels are in fact one of the many tools that can be used to bring the voice of citizens closer to policy-making to increase the legitimacy of government policies in democratic institutions. Proposals 36 and 39 of the CoFoE recommendations⁽¹⁵⁾ call for the EESC to be given a specific role and mandate, as the established institutional voice of organised civil society.

2.7. As it has stated previously⁽¹⁶⁾, the EESC must be at the heart of moves to strengthen participatory democracy in the European institutions (Article 300 TFEU). It is therefore proposed to consider through experimentation, the range of participatory instruments, such as citizens' panels, that the EESC can make use of in its advisory work. These reflections should also consider the budget and human resource implications, among other things.

2.8. The results of the CoFoE⁽¹⁷⁾ conclude clearly on the importance of civil society as a key player in mobilising citizens' participation in democratic life. It refers to structured dialogue in its recommendations, mainly in the youth sector. The EESC has started a pilot project to make the voice of youth better heard at EU level through the EESC⁽¹⁸⁾, which might serve as a source of inspiration for the other institutions.

2.9. In its Communication⁽¹⁹⁾ following up on the CoFoE, the Commission stated that it will consider new areas of action, such as helping to create deliberative and decentralised citizen dialogues, developing a European Charter for Citizens' Participation, and allowing citizen observers to closely follow the EU decision-making process to make the latter more transparent.

3. Definitions of civil society, civil dialogue, and the legal basis

3.1. Participation is a crucial component of European democracy, as a prerequisite for the legitimacy of EU policies in the eyes of citizens. The concept of participatory democracy is explicitly embedded in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), framed as the right of every EU citizen to participate in the democratic life of the Union and as an institutional engagement to take decisions as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen⁽²⁰⁾.

3.2. CSOs channel the expression of collective engagement, which adds to forms of direct citizen participation that convey individuals' opinions. In fact, organised civil society is an important participatory channel for citizens. Its expertise is necessary for ensuring that decisions are of the highest quality and respond to the needs, which is particularly relevant at EU level where complex issues are decided, as well as at national, regional, and local level.

3.3. Organised civil society serves the public interest through democratic procedures and can play the role of mediator between public authorities and the general public. It serves as a platform for members of the public to voice their concerns, defend their rights and engage in peaceful activism. It is based on values. It represents the interests of different groups in society, including those in a vulnerable position, but more needs to be done for the latter according to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)⁽²¹⁾. The results of its activities are specific help and sometimes even systemic changes in society.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The EESC resolution on the Conference on the Future of Europe (OJ C 286, 16.7.2021, p. 1).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Conference on the Future of Europe — Report on the final outcome.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'How to engage with the intended public and how to effectively use the results of the work of citizens' panels' (OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 69), paragraph 1.4.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Conference on the Future of Europe — Report on the final outcome.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Youth engagement at the EESC, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/youth-engagement-eesc>

⁽¹⁹⁾ Commission Communication on the Conference on the Future of Europe (COM(2022) 404 final).

⁽²⁰⁾ Article 10(3) TEU.

⁽²¹⁾ Annual reports on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and FRA: Charter 2022 consultation report.

3.4. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union provides that ‘the institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action’. It adds: ‘The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society’. It includes within this framework the tradition of consultation (Article 11(3) TEU). At the same time, the provision calls for ‘an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society’ to be maintained.

3.5. In accordance with Article 11(2) of the TEU, institutions have a joint responsibility to ensure that organised civil society, which unites and engages people on a voluntary basis and embodies the aspirations and interests of citizens, is actively involved in the formulation of EU laws and the related processes. Following intense advocacy and mobilisation of civic organisations across Europe, the implementation of civil dialogue was for the first time explicitly included within the mandate of a European Commission vice-president in 2019.

3.6. Three complementary components of EU civil dialogue ⁽²²⁾ have been identified: a) civil dialogue in specific policy areas between CSOs and their interlocutors within the legislative and executive authorities at EU and national level, referred to as ‘sectoral dialogue’ ⁽²³⁾; b) structured and regular dialogue between EU institutions or their national counterparts and civil society on the development of the EU and its cross-cutting policies, referred to as ‘transversal dialogue’; and c) dialogue between civil society organisations themselves on the development of the EU and its cross-cutting policies, referred to as ‘horizontal dialogue’.

3.7. The EESC compendium about participatory democracy raises the importance of the concept of citizen participation, highlighting the important role played by CSOs ⁽²⁴⁾. The compendium addresses the new threats civil dialogue and democratic and social models face nowadays.

3.8. The European Parliament has called on the EU institutions and the national, regional and local authorities in the Member States to make the fullest possible use of existing legal provisions and best practices in order to step up dialogue with the public and CSOs ⁽²⁵⁾. The EESC notes that Civil Society Europe has called for a shift to a more formalised and structured EU civil dialogue framework ⁽²⁶⁾. A comprehensive review of such efforts and a critical analysis of their value is set out in the EESC study on *Civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the practice of the European Union institutions* (2015) ⁽²⁷⁾.

3.9. No universal definition of civil society has been adopted by any European or international institution. The EESC Liaison Group recently looked at a possible definition and proposed the following: ‘Civil society organisations are the expression and result of a society’s power to self-organise distinctly and independently from public institutions and the state’. ‘Non-governmental and grassroots organisations are characterised by a high diversity representing the richness of the social tapestry of Europe. Trade unions and employers’ organisations form an integral part of civil society. However, they are distinct from civil society organisations in their capacity as social partners’.

4. Principles of good governance

4.1. Meaningful civil dialogue requires the right conditions for parties to engage with clear roles and responsibilities. This includes institutions’ responsiveness and accountability within and outside dialogue mechanisms, in accordance with standards governing the right to good administration. Civil dialogue at European level cannot function well without well-managed civil dialogue at national level. Therefore, to create an enabling environment for effective and constructive civil dialogue certain conditions must be in place. These include building trust, accountability, transparency and the right conditions to participate. The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process adopted by the Council of Europe summarises key principles and conditions which can act as a guide.

⁽²²⁾ These were first set out, albeit using a partially different terminology, in EESC opinion on ‘The Commission and non-governmental organisations: building a stronger partnership’ (OJ C 268, 19.9.2000, p. 67).

⁽²³⁾ To be distinguished from the “sectoral dialogue” in social dialogue. Here it refers more to specific sectoral issues.

⁽²⁴⁾ Participatory Democracy — A success story.

⁽²⁵⁾ EP Resolution on the perspectives for Developing civil dialogue under the Treaty of Lisbon (OJ C 46, E, 24.2.2010, p. 23).

⁽²⁶⁾ Open letter from Civil Society Europe to the President of the European Commission, 2022. This does not include social partners.

⁽²⁷⁾ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/qe-02-15-397-en-n.pdf>.

4.2. Civil society organisations are fundamental to representing the general and specific interests of groups of citizens and encouraging participation in social life and defending the rights of the groups of citizens that they represent.

4.3. It is important to point out that civil dialogue should be intended as a structured, long-lasting, results-oriented, and meaningful process enabling a genuine and substantive exchange of information, consultation, dialogue, co-creation of solutions to common challenges and long-lasting partnerships between public authorities, CSOs and civil society at large, which is designed to take place at all stages in the political decision-making cycle, from the framing of orientations and priorities to evaluation.

5. The way forward for civil dialogue and the role of EESC

5.1. The EESC calls on the EU institutions to take the lead and develop a strategy for civil society, which could be included in the European Defence of Democracy Package, with a clear **Action Plan**. The elements below should be considered in this work.

5.2. Referring to civil dialogue, the EESC believes that it is essential that certain standards be applied across the EU institutions in order to make Article 11 TEU effective. Since 2009, some Civil Society Organisations (for instance Social Platform and European Civic Forum) have been calling for an **Interinstitutional Agreement** to be considered in order to frame civil dialogue⁽²⁸⁾. It could also look into how the EESC could play the role of facilitator of citizen panels.

5.3. The continued and effective implementation of Article 11 TEU at EU level is a legal obligation of the EU institutions. This can include all types of civil dialogue, including the transversal dialogue, vertical/sectoral dialogue, and horizontal dialogue for civil society among itself. The latter — horizontal dialogue between citizens and representative associations as opportunities to make known and publicly exchange views in all areas of Union action — needs additional attention and special support measures that might be an important part of an EU Civil Society Strategy. Dialogue includes the EU and national level, whereas the latter should be a particular focus and might partly include the local and regional levels.

5.4. As regards implementation of Article 11 TEU by the EU institutions, they should provide clear standards, provisions or guidelines on certain principles such as ‘civil dialogue — for what’ and ‘civil dialogue — how’, to make sure that it is meaningful, oriented towards results, regularly including jointly designed priorities and programmes, and inclusive towards vulnerable groups, and ensuring that CSOs are involved at an early stage of the conception of policy and legislation since that is paramount for its success in terms of implementation and reception on the ground, and for the preparation of the target groups. Among the standards, there must be clear commitments to make sure that CSOs receive feedback on the follow-up given to the proposals as well as clear timelines for the consultations.

5.5. The Council organises systematic consultations with CSOs concerning its legislative and policy work. These consultations may take the form of inviting CSOs to its working party meetings. Moreover, the rotating presidencies of the Council may organise meetings with CSOs regarding their priorities.

5.6. A Commission vice-president should continue to take on the task of civil dialogue with civil society, and the role of the European Parliament vice-president in charge of contact with civil society should be strengthened. Clearly, improving the implementation of Article 11 TEU, in order to improve CSOs engagement in the EU policy-making process while strengthening the role of the EESC can lead to more targeted and effective policies. The EESC has previously called for a coordinating unit within the Commission’s general secretariat, under the direct management of the relevant Commission vice-president. This unit would also provide support to all directorates-general as regards the overall approach and strategy of civil dialogue, the drafting and implementation of quality requirements and procedures, quality guidance, information and follow-up⁽²⁹⁾.

5.7. It would be useful to consider developing of criteria and establishing an annual civil dialogue scoreboard setting out — when CSOs have contributed through consultation processes — whether their contributions have been taken on board and if not, explaining the reasons for that. This could be valuable in assessing what works and what does not work. The annual scoreboard could result in a biennial Civil Dialogue Report, tracing the successes and failures of the EU’s engagement with civil society in general, and evaluating the state of play of civil dialogue and the effectiveness of CSOs.

⁽²⁸⁾ <https://www.socialplatform.org/members-area/working-groups/civil-dialogue/>; <https://civic-forum.eu/civil-dialogue>.

⁽²⁹⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Evaluation of European Commission stakeholder consultations’ (OJ C 383, 17.11.2015, p. 57).

5.8. As a follow-up to the roadmap adopted by the NGO Forum in Riga in 2015, the Liaison Group drew up an action plan for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2) of the Treaty⁽³⁰⁾ in 2018. One of the proposals was the establishment of a European Observatory on Civil Dialogue. The EESC takes note of this request.

5.9. The special place of the EESC as the institutional guardian of civil society consultation procedures and civil dialogue in general needs to be highlighted and improved, as mentioned in the opinion on citizens' panels.

5.10. Regarding citizen panels, as mentioned in the opinion on citizens' panels, the EESC is convinced that it can play a specific role in the direct participation of citizens through general and specific panels. The opinion on citizens' panels proposed considering, through experimentation the range of participatory instruments, such as citizens' panels, that the EESC can make use of in its advisory work. Civil society panels, as proposed in the EESC Liaison Group's reflection paper on citizens' and civil society panels, could also be considered.

5.11. Flagship initiatives such as the Civil Society Week could be used to take stock of the civil dialogue process but most importantly be a laboratory of ideas for instance for the action plan and its implementation.

5.12. Such civil dialogue only works with robust support for CSOs. It requires a strong supportive framework, which includes awareness raising, resources, education and training to build their capacities and enhance their access to decision and policy making. In fact, education and training can play a pivotal role in fostering civil dialogue by equipping individuals with the knowledge, critical-thinking skills, and empathy necessary to engage in meaningful and respectful consultation, policy- and decision-making processes. It empowers people to understand complex issues, appreciate diverse perspectives, and form well-informed opinions. By promoting lifelong learning that emphasises the value of respectful, evidence-based discussions, society can build a foundation for constructive dialogue, encouraging cooperation and progress, even in the face of deeply divisive topics. Ultimately, education serves as a cornerstone of civil discourse, ensuring that individuals are better prepared to engage in the democratic process and contribute positively to their communities and the broader world.

5.13. EU funding programmes such as Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), Erasmus+ etc. could facilitate the development and strengthening of tools and mechanisms for the implementation of the dialogue, including by providing better operational support to key CSOs representing, among others, the difficult to reach and vulnerable groups.

5.14. Including non-state actors, other than trade unions and employer organisations, within the definition of CSOs represents a courageous and innovative act in the international framework. At the same time, it is necessary to preserve the identity of associations, movements, volunteering organisations and so on. The EESC therefore considers it important that CSOs be legitimate and representative. The recognition of these in daily work at every level therefore requires its own defining framework following the principles of internal democracy, autonomy, and transparency, a non-profit model, and at the service of the general interest and/or specific interest groups. The EESC calls for an accreditation mechanism based on the principles mentioned above, considering the legitimacy of the mandate of the members, the areas of interest, the factual dimension of representativeness and accountability, this should exclude those already recognised as social partners in accordance with the Commission Communication of 1993⁽³¹⁾ and its decision from 1998⁽³²⁾.

5.15. The EESC set representativeness criteria back in 2006, applied to the membership in the Liaison Group⁽³³⁾. The civil society landscape, composition, and role (from the supplementary reinforcement of representative democracy to the safeguarding of it has changed. The Liaison Group is currently reconsidering the criteria with the full involvement of CSOs. This should also lead to the in-depth examination of the issue of qualitative representativeness.

Brussels, 15 February 2024.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Oliver RÖPKE

⁽³⁰⁾ Action Plan for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2) TEU.

⁽³¹⁾ COM(93) 600 final.

⁽³²⁾ Commission Decision 98/500/EC.

⁽³³⁾ Liaison Group operating rules, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/operating_rules_lg.pdf.

ANNEX

Examples of civil dialogue at EU level

1. The EU Youth Dialogue ⁽¹⁾ is the most advanced structured civil dialogue at EU level. It serves as a forum for continuous joint reflection and consultation on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the field of youth. Organisations like the European Youth Forum are an integrated part of the process, supporting its implementation at national level.
2. In the past, the Civil Society Contact Group led by CONCORD Europe and several EU-wide networks (CONCORD, Green8, The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and Social Platform) was another attempt at horizontal civil dialogue. Its aim was to represent the views and interests of rights and value-based CSOs across the EU on major issues. Its objective was to encourage and promote a transparent and structured civil dialogue that is accessible, properly facilitated, inclusive, fair and respectful of the autonomy of CSOs.
3. The next step in recognising the need for organised civil society representation at EU level was the establishment of Civil Society Europe ⁽²⁾, which was officially created with the aim of establishing permanent coordination between CSOs at EU level, calling for a meaningful structured civil dialogue with all EU institutions. The Civil Society Convention was created to help the CoFoE process remedy the lack of inclusion of CSOs in the official process.
4. The 'Agricultural Civil Dialogue Group' ⁽³⁾ is another example of the Commission's regular dialogue with stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Civil Dialogue Groups are Commission expert groups specific to the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. They provide a single legal and procedural framework for consultation of non-governmental stakeholders.
5. Another example is the DEAR ⁽⁴⁾ programme (Development Education and Awareness-Raising) under the Directorate-General for International Partnerships. The EU DEAR Multi-Stakeholder Group brings together major programme beneficiaries (NGOs) for a regular dialogue on the implementation of the programme.
6. The Commission has also organised a civil dialogue group under the former CERV programme 'Europe For Citizens'. It has discussed all matters related to the 'Europe for Citizens' programme and its implementation. It encourages exchanges of experiences and good practices and helps to disseminate the programme's outcomes. It also monitors and discusses policy developments in related fields.

⁽¹⁾ https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthdialogue_en.

⁽²⁾ <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/>.

⁽³⁾ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/committees-and-expert-groups/civil-dialogue-groups_en.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/projects/dear>.