

EU Civil Society Contact Group

EU Civil Society Contact Group Statement at the Occasion of the EU's 50th Anniversary

"Give us reasons to celebrate before 2057!"

United under the banner of the Civil Society Contact Group, representatives of the largest European networks of NGOs¹ challenge the EU to make the most of its 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. If European leaders are to regain the confidence of its citizens, they must close the gap between intention and action and enable the EU to deliver on its promises. Europe's domestic aspirations and the achievements made in the past 50 years should now be extended by an explicit commitment to strengthening Europe's role in the world.

I. Common challenges call for a clearer role of the European Union

Today's Europe and today's world call for a more coherent rationale to tackle major global challenges:

- Climate change, energy security and the increased pressure on the environment;
- Persistent poverty, inequalities and discrimination within and outside Europe;
- Human security as affected in large parts of the world by conflict, human rights abuse and failing rule of law;
- Globalization causing interdependence on all major fronts of human endeavour;
- Credible leadership to bring about effective democratic global governance.

The European Union, as the largest political and economic bloc in the world, needs to provide true leadership on these common challenges. To be legitimate, this leadership needs to rely on long-standing values that can inspire people within and outside Europe. These include respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, social justice, equality between women and men, non-discrimination, solidarity and protection of the environment.

The 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome is an opportunity to reaffirm these values but it should go much further than that. The Berlin declaration needs to provide concrete guidance on how these values can shape a more coherent European project to respond to common challenges both within and outside of

1

The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform), the European NGO confederation for relief and development (Concord), the Human Rights and Democracy Network, the Green 10 (environmental organisations), the European Women's Lobby, the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (EFAH), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL). Encompassing hundreds of European NGOs and thousands of national affiliates, they work together to develop the dialogue between civil society organisations and the EU institutions as an essential part of strengthening participatory democracy.

Europe. The global agenda in particular carries a great sense of urgency. Citizens want and expect Europe to provide moral and accountable leadership and the 50th Anniversary declaration provides a unique opportunity to re-connect Europeans to the EU.

II. How does this translate into the core EU agenda for the future?

In the perspective of these common challenges, the 50th Anniversary Declaration needs to be a credible stepping stone to institutional reform that will enable the EU to act effectively and to engage European citizens in active participation. It needs to set a European agenda that is appealing for citizens, responsible to future generations and shows solidarity with the global population.

This can only be achieved through tangible commitment to ensure that:

1. The gap is closed between values and action, promise and delivery, and internal and external interests;
2. Member States transcend the lowest common denominator of short-sighted nationalism to forge true European leadership;
3. Institutional reform allows the EU to enhance its collective strength and shape its global role;
4. The EU budget matches these aims.

III. What concrete measures are needed?

Beyond expressing commitment to principles, Europe needs to demonstrate its capacity to **act** on a common agenda.

The members of the Civil Society Contact Group expect the following concrete measures from European leaders as they celebrate the 50th anniversary:

- Rigorous adherence to fundamental rights within the EU and a comprehensive agenda for equality and integration;
- A strong social dimension to Europe's domestic policies to ensure effective protection and promotion of social rights;
- Increased quality, quantity and consistency of development aid with priority to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- Overarching priority to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in Europe and worldwide;
- The ecological footprint of the EU to be made compatible within one generation with the carrying capacity of natural systems and with an equitable allocation globally of resources within and between generations;
- Stepped-up reform of agricultural and trade policies into firm commitments for change as of 2009;
- Formulation of more precise goals and strategies in terms of the global human security agenda;

The implementation of these measures will require benchmarks for policy coherence within and between all the domains, and a new framework for transparency, accountability, and participation of civil society.

As EU leaders gather in Berlin to celebrate the EU's achievements of past decades, it is crucial that they commit to future initiatives that will provide cause for celebration in 50 years time.

March 2007