



European Economic
and Social Committee

Ideas and proposals

for the Working Group on Values and rights, rule of law, security of the Conference on the Future of Europe

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The EESC, as an active partner on the Conference on the Future of Europe representing the organised civil society, has identified concrete proposals regarding nine topics on Values and rights, rule of law, security, as listed below.

1. Civil society participation

The EESC, as a body representing European organised civil society, wishes to open a dialogue with the Council, the Commission and the Parliament, in order **to improve governance and strengthen policy coordination between the EU institutions and the Member States**, and to put in place an early warning system.

The Committee stresses the importance of **Titles I, II, III and IV of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** for drawing up indicators, taking into account that fundamental economic, social and cultural rights are "indivisible" from civil and political rights.

It is important that both Member States and the institutions, bodies and agencies of the EU respect fundamental rights, including social rights, especially in times of crisis. This should also apply to relations and agreements with third countries, not only in terms of complying with these rights but also ensuring that they are enforced.

The EESC proposes to

- Establish **an EU annual Forum on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law** to allow EU decision-makers to receive early warning about emerging challenges to Article 2 TEU directly from grassroots organisations. This forum would also facilitate mutual learning, confidence-building and transnational collaboration between all relevant stakeholders.
- Create **a specific pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan for the involvement of civil society and social partners** and the promotion of labour democracy. Part 6 of the opinion (SOC/672) proposes a model for such a Pillar on "Promoting active and democratic participation beyond elections".
- **This pillar should cover** the promotion of a culture of active participation, giving citizens and their organisations a real say in EU decision-making processes, and the strengthening of support structures for social dialogue and collective bargaining.
- Create **a comprehensive European civil society strategy** to strengthen the capacity of CSOs and human rights defenders, through training, organisational and financial support, and

protection from attacks and smear campaigns. A mechanism for identifying and reporting attacks and harassment should be created. The EU should also adopt a European Statute for Associations and strengthen civil dialogue.

Related EESC opinions: [SOC/627](#) – Further strengthening the rule of law; [SOC/672](#) – The European democracy action plan; [SOC/671](#) – The Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; [SOC/639](#) – Creation of a European statute for associations and NGOs; [SOC/536](#) European control mechanism of the rule of law and fundamental rights .

2. Awareness raising on EU values

The EESC proposes an ambitious **Strategy on communication, education and citizen awareness of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy**.

The EESC:

- considers that the Commission **should strengthen the culture of fundamental rights at EU level, especially by monitoring to ensure that its legislative proposals and the whole legislative process, as well as all acts it adopts**, comply with the charter and that they are observed in Member States. Given that there have been cases of serious violation of the charter, it is urgent to establish a strategy for monitoring and for rapid reaction.
- highlights **the legally binding obligation to promote fundamental rights**, which has to become one of the most important elements of the implementation strategy, inter alia by means of new, targeted initiatives; also underlines the dynamic nature of fundamental rights, which are a cornerstone of our societies and a hallmark of the European Union.
- considers that **fundamental social rights are "indivisible" from civil and political rights** and therefore require special strategic attention; believes that the content of the relevant clauses is already binding and must be upheld.
- strongly **encourages the Commission to act effectively in its role as guardian of the Treaties** and to use the infringement procedure without taking political considerations into account.

.Related EESC opinion: [SOC/627](#) – Further strengthening the rule of law; [SOC/401](#) – Strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the EU; [REX/297](#) – Transatlantic relations and the international promotion of the European social model.

3. Independence of the media and media literacy

The EESC proposes to:

- Create a **fully independent European public service broadcaster**.
- Set up a **European Agency to bolster media skills** of EU citizens through educational programmes.

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/635](#) – Securing media freedom and diversity in Europe

4. Economy, the budget and the rule of law

The EESC suggest to **integrate the rule of law in the European Semester** as one of the key elements underpinning a competitive and sustainable economy.

The EESC:

- Highlights that there is a need **to involve civil society to a greater extent in the European Semester at both national and EU level**. This way, a balanced economic policy can be established, where all interests are reconciled. This is particularly the case for the governance of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, where civil society involvement has not been satisfactory. The partnership principle, which has long been a tradition in the governance of the European Structural and Investments funds, should serve as a blueprint for an effective mechanism of civil society involvement.

Related EESC opinion: [ECO/511](#) – the rule of law and its impact on economic growth; ECO/553 – Reshaping the EU fiscal framework for a sustainable recovery and a just transition; EESC Resolution on the involvement of organised civil society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – What works and what does not? (2021).

5. Public services

The EESC proposes:

- Member States to work on **common European principles to make public services operate as a stabilising element for democracy and the rule of law**.
- **Common European principles** based on the "Copenhagen criteria", the principles of objectivity, integrity, neutrality, the application of law and order, and transparency, respect for others and commitment to the European Union and its citizens, the right to good administration, etc.
- **The EESC has also already stressed the specific role of public services in ensuring the effective application of fundamental rights. Furthermore, the Committee highlights the importance of "third generation" rights and principles included in the charter, in particular environmental and consumer protection. These rights and principles should be consistently observed and promoted, also when designing and implementing the external and commercial policy.**"

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/643](#) – Public services as stabilisers of democracy

6. Awareness raising on organised crime

Member States to carry out **public campaigns on organised crime**, so that citizens receive the necessary information on how organised criminal groups operate and how to avoid them. Cooperation with the European Crime Prevention Network is an excellent addition to this type of activity.

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/695](#) - Tackling organised crime

7. Mid-term assessment of the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime

The EESC proposes to Set up a **mechanism for a (mid-term and final evaluation) review of the implementation of the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025** in order to increase civil society's access to information.

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/695](#) – Tackling organised crime

8. Further strengthening Europol's mandate & mid-term assessment

The EESC believes that **Europol's mandate and scope may need to be further reviewed and adapted in the future**. Organised crime has become more sophisticated and transnational. An independent review of Europol's role and responsibilities should be carried at some point in time on how national law enforcement practices and data-gathering processes impact on the analyses provided by the organisation. Such a review would also take into account the views of civil society and social partners as well as other relevant stakeholders.

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/673](#) – Strengthening of Europol's mandate

9. Strengthening involvement of CSOs and social partners in combatting trafficking in human beings

The **EU Strategy on Combatting trafficking in human beings 2021-2025 must incorporate the involvement civil society organisations and social partners** and these organisations must be properly supported, including financially. Their role and activities over the years – especially in areas relating to trafficking for sexual, labour and child exploitation – in identifying, reporting and addressing these situations and actively supporting victims should be duly recorded and properly valued.

Related EESC opinion: [SOC/693](#) – EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025