Restore Funding for Democracy under AgoraEU

An open letter from Irish Civil Society Organisations to the President of the European Council and the EU Heads of State or Government, ahead of the European Council summit on 15-16 October 2026

Dear Presidents, Prime Ministers and Members of the European Council,

As you meet in Brussels to discuss the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), we, the undersigned civil society organisations (CSOs), urge you to reject the proposed 30% cut to AgoraEU and to restore its funding to at least the level originally proposed by the European Commission.

The negotiating box presented by the Irish Presidency on 10 October 2026 proposes a reduction in funding for CSOs and cultural and media organisations through AgoraEU from €7.606 billion to €5.324 billion. This represents a cut of roughly 30% compared to the European Commission's original proposal; a significantly disproportionate cut when compared to the reduction of around 8% proposed to the overall EU budget. In other words, the EU's main instrument to fund democratic participation, civic engagement and fundamental rights would be cut nearly four times more than the budget as a whole. Its already marginal share of the MFF would fall to 0.33% (from 0.42% under the Cyprus Presidency's negotiating box). In contrast, the European Parliament – representing the will of EU citizens – proposed a budget of €10.7 bn for AgoraEU in its interim report in April 2026.

These proposed funding cuts come at a time when European civil society already faces significant funding pressures. According to a 2023 Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) consultation, 65% of survey participants responded that they experienced difficulty finding funding to support their work.

Democratic institutions, the rule of law and fundamental rights – the values on which the Union is founded under Article 2 Treaty on European Union (TEU) – are under pressure across Europe. Despite the vital role of civil society in sustaining open and vibrant democracies, civic space is shrinking in a number of Member States, making it increasingly difficult for NGOs, human rights defenders and smaller grassroots and community organisations to operate. With the growth of the far-right in Europe risking further erosion of fundamental rights and undermining of democratic institutions, a supported and enabled civil society is more vital than ever. Cutting dedicated funding now would signal that the EU is retreating from defending these values just as they are being tested and would also raise serious concerns about the future of EU democracy.

Civil society helps citizens understand how the EU affects their lives, counters disinformation, promotes respect for human rights, rule of law and democratic participation and holds public authorities to account. In short, **civil society builds the trust on which the EU's legitimacy depends**. Europe's security and its democratic resilience are inseparable: protecting our institutions and values requires investment not only in our physical and digital security, but also in the organisations and initiatives that promote active citizen participation, respectful public debate and European cooperation. As civil society actors working on these issues for decades, we know that this crucial work cannot be sustained without predictable and adequate funding. While the EU currently faces considerable structural and geopolitical challenges, including the need to strengthen its competitiveness vis-à-vis other global powers, engaged, informed and cohesive societies are fundamental to economic stability, innovation and long-term growth and competitiveness.

The European Commission has expressed recognition of the important role of civil society and the need for adequate and sustained funding through a range of initiatives, including the Commission's 2023 Recommendation on Participation, the Commission President's Political Guidelines for 2024-2029 and in the EU's Strategy for Civil Society. Robust and ambitious funding for AgoraEU is essential to deliver on the priorities set out by the Commission.

We therefore call on you to:

1. **Reject the proposed 30% reduction** and restore AgoraEU to at least the €7.606 bn originally proposed by the European Commission (taking into account the Parliament's position of €10.7 bn).
2. **Protect dedicated, ring-fenced funding** for civil society and democratic participation, including through CERV+.
3. **Ensure sustainable, accessible support** for organisations at local, national and European level, including smaller and grassroots groups.

Coordinated by,

European Movement Ireland, The Irish Council for Civil Liberties and The Wheel

Supported by,

BelongTo

Black & Irish

Comhlámh

Conradh na Gaeilge

CyberSafeIreland CLG (CyberSafeKids)

Dóchas

Disability Federation of Ireland

Down Syndrome Ireland

Environmental Justice Network Ireland

INOU

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Irish Penal Reform Trust

Irish Refugee Council

Irish Rural Link

Irish Traveller Movement

Irish Wheelchair Association

LGBT Ireland

MOVE Ireland

National Voter Registration Day

National Women's Council

National Youth Council of Ireland

Rape Crisis Ireland

Simon Communities of Ireland

The National Adult Literacy Agency

Adelaide Health Foundation

ADHD Ireland

Amal Women Ireland

AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

ASTHFI

BALANCE Charity and Summer Camp

Ballyfermot Advance Project

Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education

Ballymun Job Centre

Bohemian Cooperatives

Brighter Communities Worldwide

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CAP Ireland

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Children's Books Ireland

Churchfield Community Trust CLG

Clanmil

Coalition 2030

Create

Cumann Geinealais na hÉireann : Genealogical Society of Ireland

Deaf Village Ireland

DLDC

Donegal Women's Centre

Dream Big Space & Science Communications

Dublin Community Mediation

Dublin Marathon

Dublin Youth Theatre

East Galway & Midland Cancer Support

eco unesco

Eden FM Community Radio

EDIC Blanchardstown Library - Fingal County Council

Educate Together

EIL Intercultural Learning

EPIC Empowering People in Care

EUROPE DIRECT Clones

Five Lamps Arts Festival

FLAC- Free Legal Advice Centres

Forbairt Fhánada CTR

Friends of the Elderly

Glaslough Development Association

Hand in Hand Children's Cancer Charity

High Function Films

Ibtidaa Welfare Foundation CLG

Intercultural Language Service

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Irish Heart Foundation

Irish Homeless Street Leagues

Irish Sudden Infant Death Association t/a FirstLight

Kerry Parents and Friends Association

Kildare County Employment Centre

Kildare PPN

Leslie Foundation

Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership (LEDP) CLG

Lisacul Tidytowns

Mayo Rape Crisis Centre CLG

Muintir Na Tíre

Mums Hub CLG

Muslim sisters of Eire

New Communities Partnership

Oakfield Trust

Oecumene Spaces for Dignity

Pallas Projects/Studios

Project Espwa

Project Orbis Ireland

Rosslare Harbour Kilrane Environment Group

Saint Aidans CBS

Síolta Chroí

Sli Nua

Social Action Group Rathmore CLG

SOSAD Ireland

Spirituality Institute for Research and Education (SpIRE)

St Fechins Gaa Club/Community Centre, Termonfeckin. Co Louth.

St Matthews Family Resource Centre

Suaimhneas Chaoimhin Glendalough Hermitage Centre

Suas Educational Development T/A STAND

Tabor Group

The Ballinglen Arts Foundation & Museum

The Meath Foundation

The Sexual Health Centre

The Spelling Alliance of Ireland

The Three Sisters Women's Shed

Third Age Foundation

Thriveabetes

Ukrainian Volunteers of Ireland

Vincentian Lay Missionaries (VLM)

Virtual Utopia

Voluntary Creativity CLG

Walkinstown Greenhills Resource Centre

Waterford Leader Partnership CLG

Whitebarn Consulting

Young Social Innovators