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New Directions for EU Civil Society Support: Lessons From Turkey, the Western Balkans, and Eastern Europe

Richard Youngs

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Introduction

As the European Union (EU) debates its new post-2020 funding instruments, EU civil society support faces a pivotal moment. The union has been fine-tuning this support in recent years and is now contemplating further reforms. Civil society around the world is undergoing far-reaching changes as new types of informal activism emerge, governments try to constrict civic activity, and digital technology has major political implications.

Against this backdrop, this analysis proposes ten practical ideas for how EU civil society assistance needs to evolve. It focuses on the countries that fall under the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)—Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans—and the six states of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. This research examines how EU funding mechanisms need to change and assesses whether current financing proposals are likely to be beneficial or damaging. It suggests how the EU can overcome the main challenges of supporting newer forms of activism. And it explores how the EU can best help civil society to resist the heightened repression it faces in most IPA and EaP states.

To improve its civil society assistance, the EU should:

1. tie critical measures to civil society support;
2. set minimum thresholds for mainstreaming;
3. engage with unfamiliar civil society partners;
4. define clearer rules on government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs);
5. focus on systemic resilience;
6. help local fund raising;
7. widen support networks;
8. better connect civil society to politics;
9. assess the civil society impacts of other EU policies; and
10. link civil society to foreign policy.

This publication does not attempt to give a comprehensive or detailed account of all aspects of EU civil society support—something Carnegie has covered elsewhere.¹ Rather, it offers a snapshot of the current state of play in this area of policy at a moment when the EU is debating significant changes and is set to make decisions that will affect the future course of its civil society support.

Trends and Dilemmas

Several factors make this an especially crucial moment for the redefinition of EU civil society support. Three general areas are relevant: the EU's institutional cycle, operational tactics, and the wider political context.

EU Leadership Changes

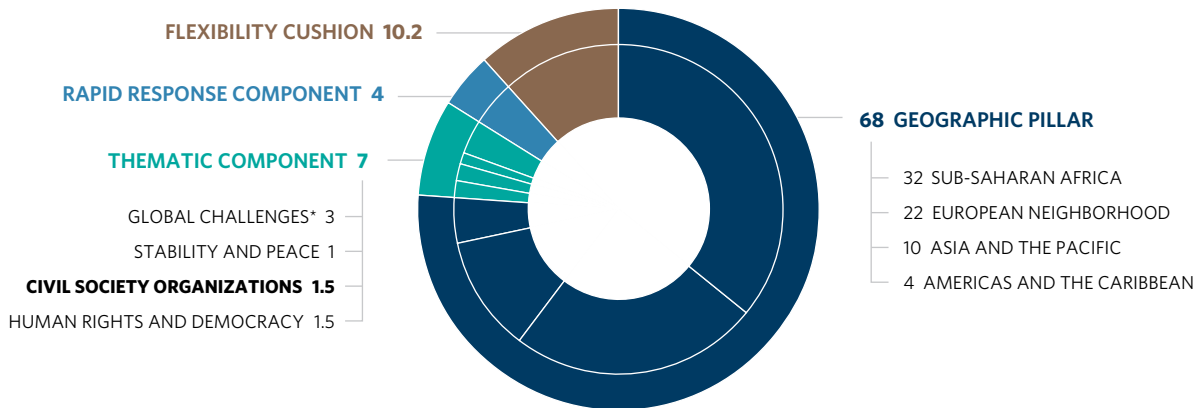
The first reason why the redesign of civil society support is such an important issue for the EU relates to the union's institutional cycle. The changes in EU leadership that occurred in late 2019 may bring a shift in priorities. The new European Commission has made a particularly strong commitment to bolstering the EU's external actions. Many observers expect the changed arithmetic of seats in the European Parliament produced by the 2019 election to politicize some areas of foreign policy. This could make it challenging to agree on ambitious new funding initiatives.

More specifically, the EU's new budget package for 2021–2027, known as the multiannual financial framework (MFF), will have an impact on civil society support. Under the commission's MFF proposal, a new Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) worth 89 billion euros (\$98 billion) will set aside 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) specifically for civil society organizations (CSOs) and the same amount for human rights and democracy (see figure 1).² Member states have not yet agreed on this budget; several governments are keen to revise the commission's proposals downward.

After some internal debate, the EU is likely to retain the basic features of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)—the union's dedicated budget line for civil society actors working on democracy and human rights. This will continue to exist as a self-standing thematic area, and it should benefit from a slight increase in funding. The EU will be able to finance projects without the consent of governments through flexible emergency calls and will be able to fund nonregistered entities.

The commission insists these changes will benefit democracy funding in general and civil society support in particular. Policymakers maintain that the single instrument should allow for quicker dispersal of pro-democracy funding and for money to be shifted around. They also suggest that the new democracy and human rights envelope will inform bilateral aid programs for recipient countries more strongly than it does now.

FIGURE 1
Proposed Allocation of the EU's 2021-2027 Budget for the Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (€ Billions)



SOURCE: "EU Budget for the Future," European Commission, June 14, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-neighbourhood-development-cooperation_en.pdf.

NOTE: *Includes health, education, empowering women and children, migration and forced displacement, inclusive growth, decent work, social protection, and food security.

There are outstanding concerns, however. Some civil society actors still fear that the new structures may not guarantee civil society funds quite as reliably as is currently the case, when governments are pushing for money to be diverted to other priorities like migration control and counterterrorism. As of early 2020, the NDICI is in doubt still, and its governance arrangements are not yet finalized. Some in the European Parliament want to ensure that funds cannot be diverted away from civil society for security and migration control.

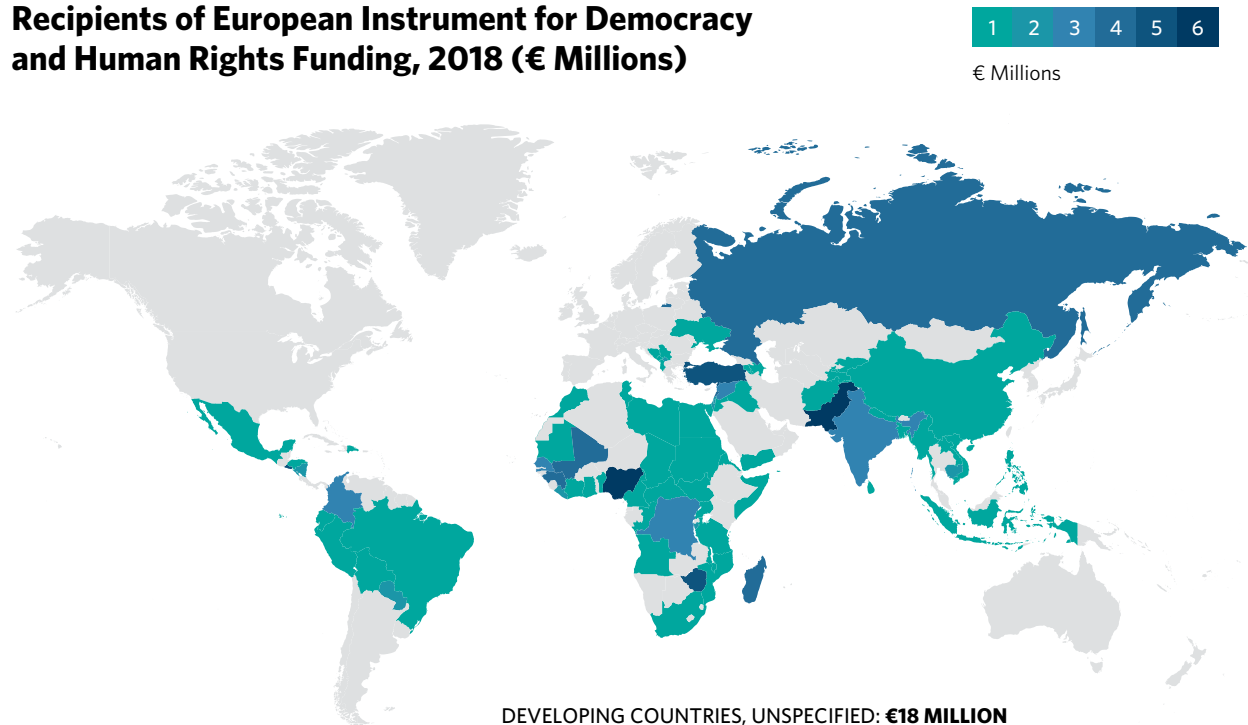
The prospective changes are still in flux; their impacts on civil society could be far-reaching or relatively limited. There is a reasonable chance that the upcoming changes could be positive for civil society support. But there is still uncertainty, and many CSOs are concerned that the reforms could disappoint.

Operational Tactics

A second important consideration is that, while political negotiations progress over the MFF and the future direction of EU foreign policy, the union has been gradually fine-tuning its civil society support at a more operational level. With several potentially significant changes just being introduced or still in the pipeline, this is an important moment in the evolution of EU policies. The union now needs to bring these changes to fruition and build on them, or the quality and effectiveness of civil society support will suffer.

The EU has several instruments, including the EIDHR, that provide civil society support for partner regions and countries across the globe (see figure 2). In recent years, these different parts of the EU funding apparatus have begun to address several long-standing concerns over civil society support. CSOs have called for a familiar set of reforms over many years, even as analysts have been pointing to the same weaknesses for well over a decade.

FIGURE 2
Recipients of European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights Funding, 2018 (€ Millions)



SOURCE: "2019 Annual Report on the Implementation of the European Union's Instruments for Financing External Actions in 2018," European Commission, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/devco-annual-report-2019-en-web.pdf>.

In the last several years, donors have made some progress on addressing these concerns, and the commission has played a prominent part in this evolution. Since 2015, a center of civil society expertise in the European Commission's Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations has tried to fashion a more standard approach to civil society across different countries and regions.

The EU's use of subgranting—the practice by which an organization makes a grant using funds previously granted to it by another organization—has increased several times over. Vitality, this technical change has helped funds reach smaller CSOs outside capital cities. The EU is now regularly willing and able to channel funds easily to relatively large, mainstream nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which in turn move money on to other bodies.

The EU has sought to broaden its support beyond highly formalized NGOs to reach individuals and nonregistered entities. In Turkey, for instance, the innovative Sivil Düşün Program has epitomized this approach. The EU has introduced several innovations to get funds to CSOs more quickly. Under a rapid-response mechanism for civil society, which has been piloted in the Eastern Neighborhood since 2018, the union can now get funds of up to 60,000 euros (\$66,100) out to CSOs within two months.³ The commission has begun to listen more to local civic actors before defining its calls for proposals so as to make its core funding procedure less top-down. It has also been exploring ways of providing CSOs with more core support and helping them avoid having to turn their campaigning work somewhat artificially into projects.

The EU has done more to mainstream civil society support. This entails increasing backing for CSOs as part of the union's other areas of funding, for things like economic, social, health, or education programs. More of the EU's funding now goes directly to protecting activists from state repression. This has been achieved through the EIDHR's Emergency Fund and the ProtectDefenders.eu initiative, which provides round-the-clock support to human rights defenders facing immediate risks.

Some of these changes are well advanced and have had significant impacts on EU policy. Others are more speculative and would benefit from stronger political support. In each area of change, CSOs complain that reforms are still tentative and do not go far enough toward fundamental and qualitative change in the way that the EU engages with civil society.

Monitoring Civil Society Restrictions in the Western Balkans

Biljana Spasovska, Balkan Civil Society Development Network

The EU's IPA is the means by which the union supports reforms in the Western Balkans and Turkey with financial and technical help. The IPA Civil Society Facility, launched in 2008, developed a framework for monitoring the enabling environment for civil society in these countries. Yet the EU has still not implemented consistent monitoring and reporting of all aspects of an enabling environment in the Western Balkans. The rigorosity of its monitoring varies from country to country.

In the absence of adequate monitoring, the EU failed to heed the early warning signs of emergent threats to civic space in the Western Balkans. The desire for convenient political messaging has often compromised the need for critical reporting on civic space. Only in 2019 did the commission note in its country reports and enlargement package—a set of documents explaining its policy on EU enlargement—that there was an increasingly hostile environment for civil society in the region.

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network's monitoring has found that CSOs in the EU enlargement countries face three notable challenges. First, there are restrictions on basic freedoms and shrinking space for core CSO operations. Attempts in some countries to change key laws, adopt new security and anti-money laundering regulations, and employ burdensome registration procedures are affecting citizens' freedom of association. As restrictions on people's rights to assemble and protest are becoming more severe, governments are engaging in smear campaigns, exerting political pressure on critical CSOs, and establishing GONGOs that aim to undercut CSOs' legitimacy.

Second, even where conditions are not completely restrictive, the environment is not conducive to CSOs' financial viability and sustainability. Western Balkan civil society still depends heavily on donors; there is little local philanthropic culture and a lack of legislation that incentivizes donations and volunteering or provides favorable tax treatment for CSOs. Public funds for civil society bodies are either very limited or distributed in an opaque way. Many CSOs do not have the capacity, or do not meet the demanding criteria, to apply for EU funding—and many of those that are eligible for EU money cannot secure the required matching funds. Montenegro and North Macedonia have established public funding mechanisms that provide matching funds for EU projects, but such instruments do not exist in the other pre-accession countries.

Third, CSOs have limited involvement in decisionmaking. Dialogue between governments and civil society remains underdeveloped. Most governments across the region are still reluctant to recognize and treat civil society as a necessary and legitimate component of a democratic system. The European Commission has yet to take these constraints on civil society operations into account when planning its future civil society funding.

The Wider Political Context

A third crucial set of factors are the political changes that have an increasing impact on civil society. A creeping politicization of civil society means that CSO support can no longer be isolated from broader EU foreign policy—or at least not to the same extent that it traditionally has been.

Civil society is under threat in many countries, and these threats are often related to geopolitical recalibration. This is the case in many of the IPA and EaP countries (see figures 3 and 4 for aid amounts to these countries). In these places, much civil society support was designed to be an integral part of the EU accession process. That support was based on an assumption that alignment with EU law and standards would go hand in hand with democratization. Today, it is clear that the situation is more complicated, as several governments resist or challenge democratic norms. This poses the conundrum of how to further delink civil society support from the accession issue.

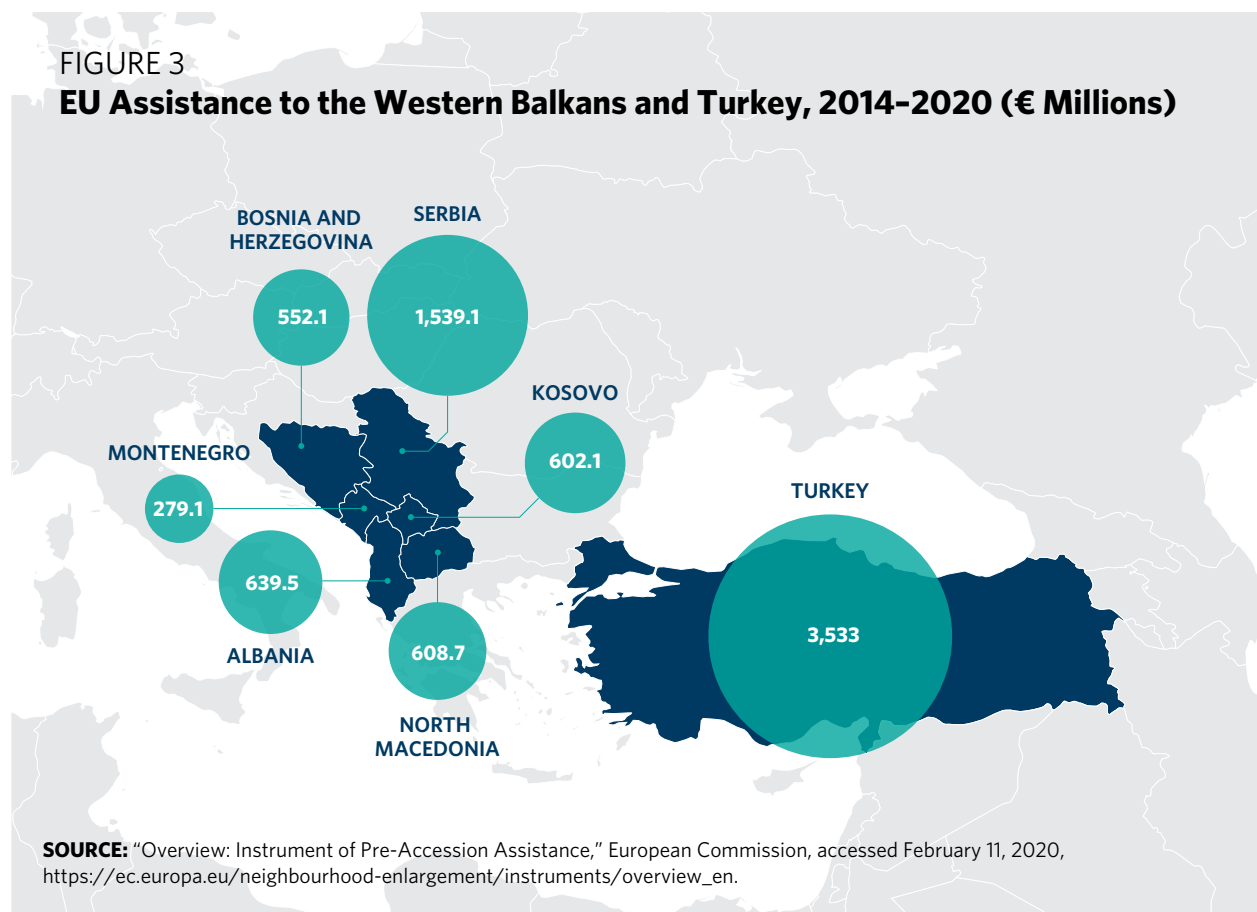
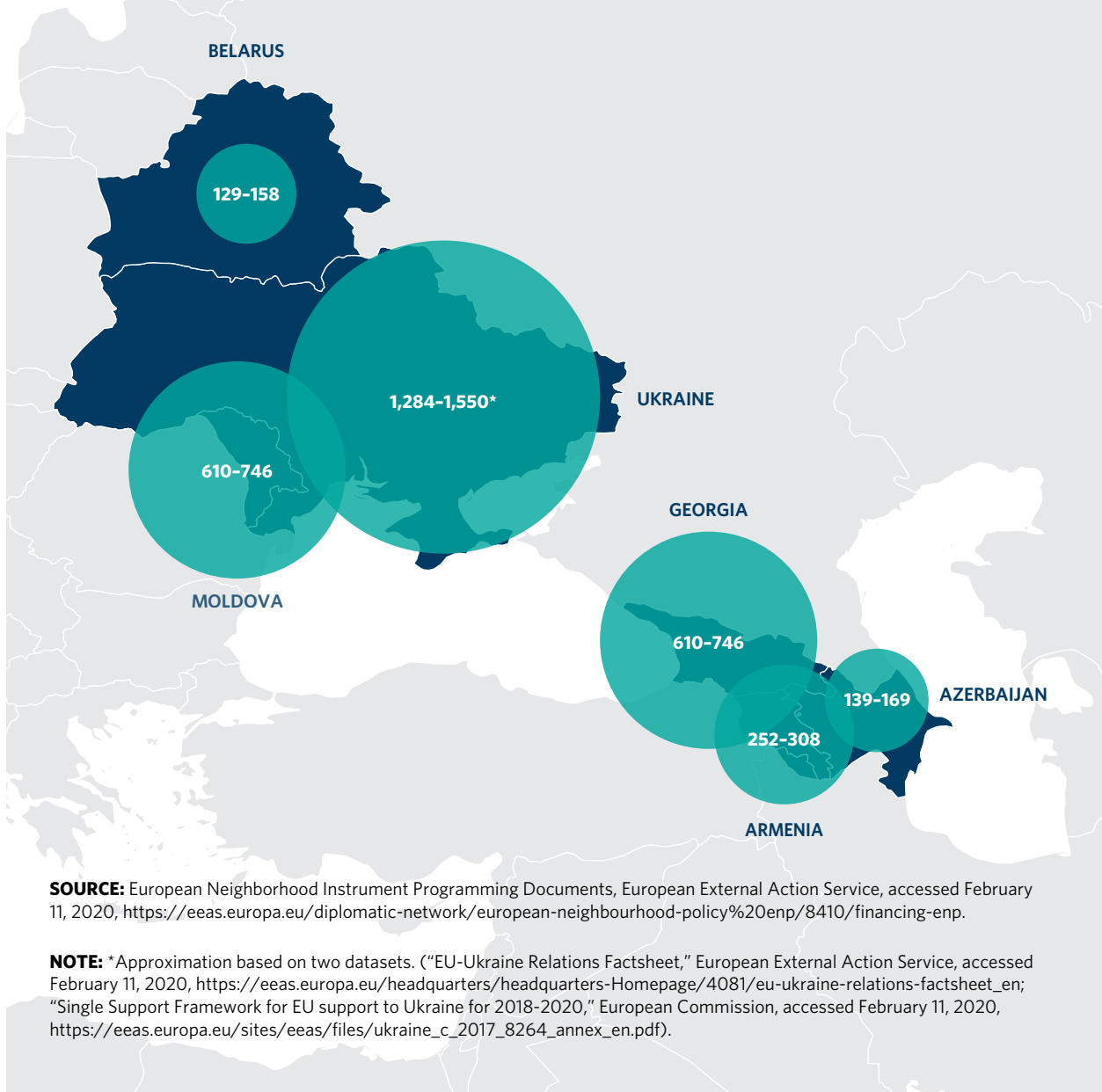


FIGURE 4

Allocation of European Neighborhood Instrument Funds to Eastern Partnership Countries, 2014-2020 (€ Millions)



The EU has been committed to supporting civil society actors in third countries for many years, but civil society itself has become more of a moving target in recent times. In most countries, civil society is no longer the same preserve of formally structured and registered, pro-European CSOs. There is a general trend toward more informal activism and more explosive mass protests. Many emerging civic groups are neither liberal nor especially pro-European, yet they undeniably enjoy widespread local support and cannot be discounted as a legitimate part of civil society.

These civic trends are related to geopolitical shifts. Increasingly, other powers act expressly to counter EU influence and often try specifically to neuter the union's civil society support. They can do this through targeted support for governments in the IPA and EaP states, funding for their own civil society initiatives, or disruptive tactics like disinformation campaigns. This challenge pulls EU foreign policy in opposing directions. On the one hand, the union needs to add a more political edge to its own civil society funding if this is not to be eviscerated. On the other, the EU feels it needs to engage with autocratizing regimes and other powers for geopolitical reasons—in a way that clearly risks undermining the union's civil society projects.

Georgia's Protests: The Birth of a New Form of Civil Society

Mariam Tsitsikashvili, Georgia's Reforms Associates, and Elene Panchulidze, Georgian Institute of Politics

The persistence of an extremely polarized political landscape is one of the biggest obstacles for Georgia's democratic consolidation. For many years, the country has been split by the rivalry between the United National Movement and the Georgian Dream political parties. Although this polarization has little ideological basis, the political players find it difficult to come to a consensus even on overarching national issues that transcend party politics. Apart from making political decisions hyperpartisan, this polarization also splits wider society into hostile camps.

Against this backdrop, many were surprised in the summer of 2019 to see thousands of Georgians from different walks of life, especially youngsters not previously politically active, marching together to hold the government to account. In a country divided into two blocs led by household names, it was striking that these protests were led by activists whose names were barely known to the public.

Although demonstrations are not new to Georgian politics, the recent revolts pointed to the emergence of a new form of civic activism with no fixed institutional structures. This activism depends heavily on symbolism, like the slogan “We dance together, we fight together” against police raids at Georgian clubs or the antioccupation motto “Don't make me blind.”⁴ The mostly liberal and anti-populist members of the new social movements are pragmatically protesting for change on specific issues, not revolutionary change. The group that organized the protests was diverse, bringing together

both traditional NGOs and new civic activists with different political preferences, ideological affiliations, and professional backgrounds. This diversity made it hard for the government to portray the protests as part of the political opposition.

Initially, the protests seemed relatively successful. They cut across Georgia's duopoly and united people behind a common goal. In response, the government agreed to introduce a fully proportional electoral system for the 2020 parliamentary election—a key means of reducing polarization. However, the ruling party, Georgian Dream, then reneged on this promise, triggering another round of protests.

This experience shows that time and sustained effort will be needed to produce well-formed civic movements. But Georgia's 2019 protests might just represent the beginning of a healthy reshaping of the country's binary politics. The emerging movements look to the EU for inspiration and support, operational tactics, financial sustainability, and more explicit political backing against government repression.

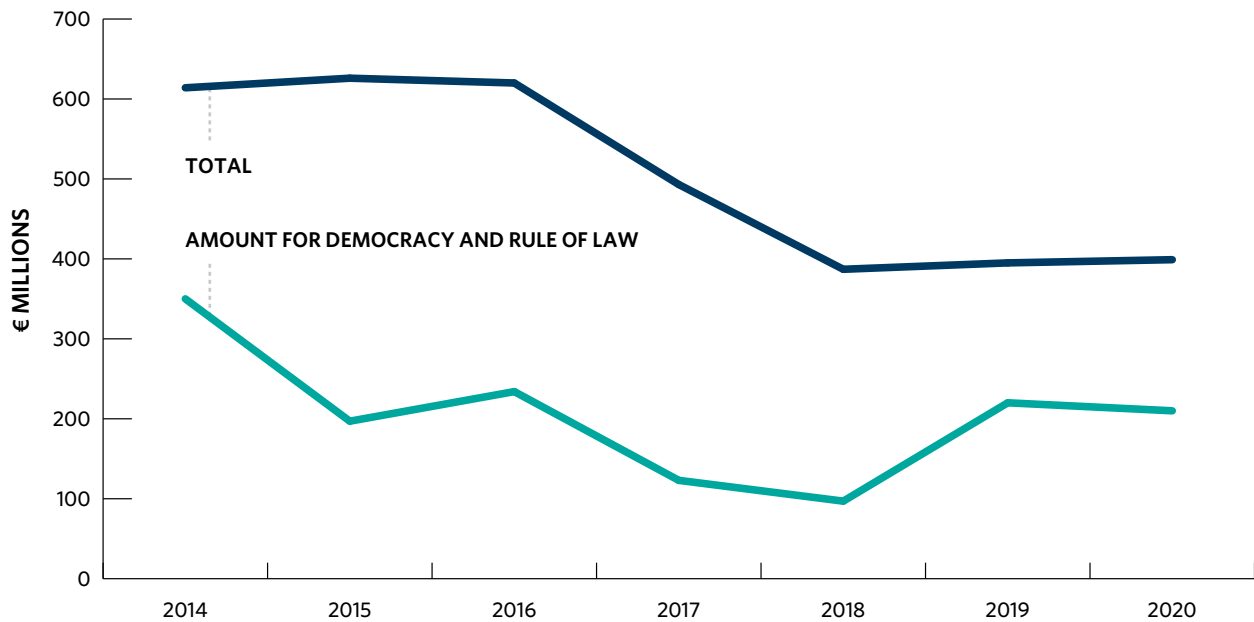
Ten Ideas for Policy Change

Policy changes need to flow from ongoing trends in all three of these areas. Reforms must further improve CSO support while making sure that risks are neutralized and wider political concerns are factored in more systematically. Despite all the recent improvements to EU civil society support, there are still notable blind spots that the union has failed to account for and areas where it is actively resisting reform. The ten ideas suggested here relate to the three areas outlined above. Some ideas would extend changes already being developed, some would ensure the EU's new financial arrangements have a positive impact, and others speak to the challenge of dovetailing civil society support with other areas of EU external action.

1. Tie Critical Measures to CSO Support

As democracy regresses in many of the EU's partner countries, the union is grappling with how to find the right balance between critical pressure and positive engagement. In its 2019–2024 institutional term, the EU is likely to discuss further aid reductions to Turkey, whose IPA allocations have already been reduced over the last several years (see figure 5), and possibly other autocratizing states, too. While many CSOs have been pressing the EU to take firmer action of this kind, they are also concerned about suffering from funding cuts.

FIGURE 5
**Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance Allocations
 to Turkey, 2014–2020 (€ Millions)**



SOURCE: “Revised Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014–2020),” European Commission, August 10, 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180817-revised-indicative-strategy-paper-2014-2020-for-turkey.pdf>.

NOTE: The above numbers reflect the budgeted allocations to Turkey according to the European Commission’s 2018 “Revised Strategy Paper for Turkey.” Disbursements actually received by the country have been lower.

The EU could commit to diverting aid from governments to civil society in countries whose governments breach core democratic norms. The union has intimated support for this kind of switching strategy in recent policy documents, but in practice this does not yet happen on a uniform or systematic basis. One concrete move would be to shift governance-related aid allocated for state institutions to CSOs if a recipient government is responsible for a significant deterioration in democratic quality.

The EU should tighten the link in the other direction, too—from problems with civil society projects to overall EU measures. The union funds many CSOs to monitor regimes critically. Yet, when these organizations report back on their EU-funded watchdog work that democratic standards and civic space are under serious threat, the union invariably does not react in a tangible way. To change this, the EU could have procedures to ensure that such monitoring assessments trigger a shift in where the union’s funding goes.

Supporting Turkey's Resilient Human Rights Defenders

Meltem Aslan, Truth Justice Memory Center

Turkey's independent civil society groups have suffered several blows in recent years. The government declared a state of emergency after the failed coup in 2016 and used this pretext to intimidate opposition groups. Many prominent human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers have been arrested, prosecuted, convicted, or jailed with no credible public evidence to support the charges against them. Many NGOs have been closed down by way of emergency laws on the grounds that they were connected with terrorist organizations. And many media outlets have been shut down and had their assets confiscated.

Human rights defenders' quest for justice is made harder by the shield of impunity that surrounds state officials and human rights violators. This impunity is deeply entrenched in the Turkish legal system and was strengthened by laws passed during the state of emergency. The 2015 killing of Tahir Elçi, a prominent human rights defender, is still unresolved. Elçi's case is only one among hundreds of such cases and points to the dangers facing human rights defenders in the country.

One of the most pressing problems is Turkey's definition of terrorism and its antiterrorism law. The government continues to portray human rights organizations and campaigners as dangerous internal enemies. The authorities manipulate the antiterrorism law, which is written in vague and general terms, to criminalize legitimate human rights work.

In response, the EU and its member states should use their political dialogue with Turkey to raise concerns about Turkish pressure on civil society and human rights violations. Brussels and individual EU capitals need to continue to urge Ankara to honor its obligations and implement international agreements that it has signed and ratified.

Despite the oppression that activists face, Turkey still has a vibrant, resilient civil society and a well-established human rights movement. The union should address the most urgent human rights problems, such as impunity, the lack of a right to a fair trial, and restrictions on the freedoms of expression and assembly. Turkey needs effective civil society work, based on research and data-driven analysis, to continue the struggle against impunity and challenge the questionable independence of the country's judiciary. There are well-established institutions to carry out such work.

Enhanced EU support for Turkish civil society would go a long way toward strengthening the country's CSOs and emboldening them to push for human rights.

2. Set Minimum Thresholds for Mainstreaming

There is a long-running debate over what the right balance is between direct and indirect support for civil society. The EU programs dedicated to aiding civil society directly aim to enhance general civic capacity and, in particular, to defend rights-based activities. In addition, the EU has increased more indirect support for civil society by funding CSOs under its other types of aid. For example, Brussels sometimes supports these groups under its social development programs to deliver on other objectives.

However, the amount of overall EU development aid that goes to civil society is still relatively limited. While EU efforts to mainstream civil society support have advanced, the union could do more to secure and formalize them. Often, it is all too easy to neglect the civil society component of mainstream development aid. The EU could set a minimum percentage for the amount of its sectoral aid that should be channeled through civil society. This would help demonstrate that the union is genuine in its insistence that civil society is a partner in advancing all core policy objectives.

3. Engage With Unfamiliar Civil Society Partners

Policymakers acknowledge that while subgranting has enabled them to reach smaller and newer organizations, these recipients still tend to fit within a standard template of rights-based advocacy work. The EU needs to find other ways to reach previously unsupported forms of civil society, as these actors have gained importance in recent years. It could set a target for how much of its support goes to such groups: if the EU could promise that half of its support would go to new organizations each year, this would help rebut the persistent criticism that the union funds a cozy network of the usual suspects.

Engagement with newer civic actors may not take the traditional form of direct grant funding, but rather could involve alliance building, advice, and support. A key factor in many countries is how well newer and older civic groups work together. Where they do not, democratic reform suffers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU-funded civil society sector came out against the newer, informal networks that organized protests in 2015; the protests failed. Future EU civil society support will need to focus far more on building better links between the old and new parts of civil society.

The union should also commit to bringing into its initiatives the parts of civil society with which it has a less natural affinity. This is important in places like Turkey and the Western Balkans, where a key challenge is to temper growing polarization in civic space. Where the EU engages with religiously oriented civic groups, it tends to do so on the assumption that they represent a potential problem—actors to be made more moderate or deradicalized—rather than possible partners to be empowered.

Of course, this does not mean funding illiberal or nationalist groups that overstep the EU's legitimate redlines of democratic tolerance. But it does require the EU to be more receptive, or less dismissive, of civic groups whose beliefs fall within these redlines but that may not be especially pro-EU or natural proponents of a standard liberal policy agenda. One concrete idea for putting this idea into operation would be to contract a network of CSOs from the candidate and EaP states to compile an annual report on how well the EU is meeting its promise to broaden its civil society support.

Harnessing New Social Protests in the Western Balkans

Igor Bandović, Belgrade Center for Security Policy

New social protests and movements in the Western Balkans are a result of the slow pace of European integration and disillusionment with parties across the political spectrum. Citizens' low levels of trust in public institutions—levels that have hardly improved over the last two decades—and the highest levels of corruption in Europe have also created fertile ground for these movements.

These demonstrations share common features across Western Balkan countries. Activists mobilize against austerity measures, the privatization of public spaces, rising poverty, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, environmental degradation, and authoritarian trends. These issues are responsible for triggering protests that, at times, have shaken the bases of established political systems in the region. Large citizen uprisings have occurred in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia against incumbent strongmen.

This new wave of civic activism is usually directed not only against the government but also against traditional political parties, both those in power and those in the opposition. Campaigners' concerns are often practical rather than partisan: activists may run in local elections to focus on community issues such as schooling and citizen security. They are not primarily engaged with foreign policy or EU-related issues.

To harness the energy of new social protests and movements, the EU needs to help foster interactions and dialogue between them, political parties, and older CSOs across the Western Balkans. The union should not give overt preference to any one of these sets of actors. Instead, it should help create channels of communication between them, support media freedom, and foster independent media outlets that can be a bridge in these dialogues. Donors should also be brave in terms of opening up to new social movements and helping them organizationally, tactically, and financially with pro-democratic, pro-European, and nonpopulist initiatives.

4. Define Clearer Rules on GONGOs

CSOs tend to agree that the EU has not improved much in its funding of GONGOs. It has been clear for years that the union funds many CSOs that are not fully independent of national governments. Although the EU has been widely criticized for doing so, it has failed to move decisively away from this practice. Decisionmakers often argue that there are few realistic alternatives to supporting CSOs that have some kind of link with regimes. Policymakers also stress that even when support is channeled through civil society entities they know are not genuinely independent, the EU can still address important nonpolitical issues with such bodies.

Yet the EU's support for GONGOs undeniably angers genuinely democratic reformers and sullies the union's reputation. It is doubtful that GONGOs help achieve any significant improvement in nonpolitical issues, like development or the environment, in authoritarian settings.

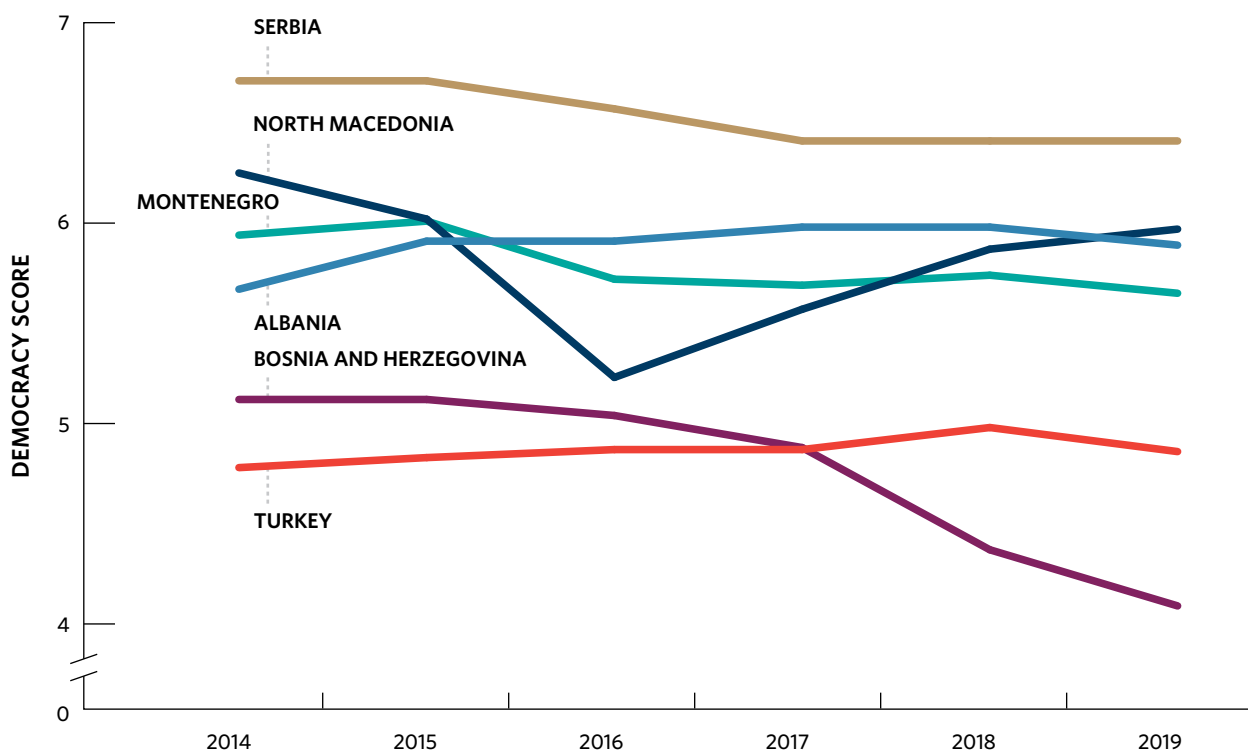
Over its 2019–2024 institutional term, the EU should be pressed to demonstrate that it has moved away from GONGO funding and report back on how it has done so. Even if it is unrealistic to expect the EU to entirely cease its support to GONGOs, the union could at least define clearer rules against financing bodies that infringe basic democratic and human rights norms. This would be challenging because it would require the EU to change the way it evaluates project proposals, but the union could take at least some small steps to exclude those organizations most strongly and obviously under the sway of autocratic regimes. A yearly assessment could be part of the aforementioned annual report designed to show the shifts in EU civil society support. Local CSOs should cooperate to compile a list of EU-funded GONGOs with antidemocratic positions.

5. Focus on Systemic Resilience

The European Commission and several EU member states have put much effort into dissecting and responding to the challenge of closing civic space. This has been one of the most notable and clear-cut changes in EU support in recent years, as the protection of individual human rights defenders has become perhaps its highest priority. Yet the problem facing civil society is shrinking democratic space, not merely closing civic space. The latter term has become unhelpful because it separates out problems in the civic sphere and gives the impression that these can be isolated from other policy concerns. In the next phase of its evolving approach to civil society support, the EU therefore needs to move beyond protecting activists to beefing up the resilience of whole democratic systems.

The EU should make this a systematic and prominent part of its annual progress reports on the accession process. In this way, the union would help provide a clearer and more expansive checklist of what constitutes democratic space and an enabling environment for civil society. This could

FIGURE 6
Democracy Scores in the Western Balkans and Turkey, 2014-2019



SOURCE: The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2019," accessed February 11, 2020, <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

NOTE: The Democracy Index 2019 classifies each country as one of four types of regimes according to its democratic score (0-4: authoritarian regime; 4-6: hybrid regime, 6-8: flawed democracy, 8-10: full democracy).

provide a useful reference point for CSOs in candidate countries that are pushing back against closing space. The EU should draw up this checklist with the input of independent experts from the candidate and EaP states; EU civil society bodies and foundations should use it as a methodologically robust tool for moving the debate on closing space into a new phase.

This should also be the future focus of the EIDHR (whatever this instrument is renamed). Although this initiative funds a wide range of impressive and admirable human rights work, it should concentrate on a more tightly defined mandate of resisting systemic threats to democracy, which has been in decline in many partner countries (see figure 6). This would entail prioritizing countries and instances where democratic space is being grievously narrowed, because these are the places where the instrument's distinctive added value of being able to furnish funding without governments' consent is most relevant.

The EIDHR has become a funder of generic human rights work in all regime types around the world, including in relatively democratic environments. The instrument would be better used mainly in more challenging national contexts, where democratic space as a whole needs most urgent protection. A concrete proposal would be for the EIDHR to show that a certain share of its work is dedicated to helping activists against new instances of government repression.

6. Help Local Fund Raising

The EU should do more to enable CSOs to seek their own funds and raise money from local, rather than international, sources. Among other things, this would help make these organizations more resilient against government restrictions on external funding. In recent years, there has been much debate about CSO business models; the EU could develop an initiative focused on helping these organizations provide a range of services to generate their own resources. The EU should also press governments to consider tax incentives for CSO donations and other ways to develop a stronger philanthropic culture in recipient states.

More indirectly, the EU should look for ways of helping the ethos of volunteerism that is becoming more prominent in civil society. This is one of the most significant developments in Ukrainian civil society, for example. New volunteer groups gain strength from being funded by local resources, but the EU might seek to back up these groups and offer in-kind support. In concrete terms, the EU could oversee a new network with private donors of civil society designed to draw up a toolbox for promoting greater self-sufficiency and alternative income streams for civil society.

How the EU Can Support CSO Monetization

Rostislav Valvoda, Prague Civil Society Center

NGOs, independent media outlets, and other civil society groups in Eastern Europe have shown their dynamism by inventing new ways to generate funds in response to governments' attempts to restrict access to international donors and weaken civil society as a whole. More and more, CSOs are experimenting with ways to generate revenue and support from local communities by using their business acumen.

CSOs that are making a foray into income-generating activities have had varying levels of success, but the gains are almost never enough to replace sustained international donations. Nevertheless, the EU should encourage these moneymaking experiments, even if they contribute only a modest tranche to each organization's overall budget.

Especially in repressive environments, where international donations are becoming harder to access, any diversification of income sources increases an organization's stability. Diversifying also fosters autonomy because groups are not totally beholden to patrons abroad funding all of their activities. Beyond increased stability and freedom, local income generation has the added bonus of strengthening an organization's communications and outreach among its constituents. By donating money or buying a product or service offered, members of the community not only provide financial support but also express their solidarity with, and ideological investment in, an organization's work.

To encourage these ventures and counter the government pressure that is causing civic space to shrink, international donors can take three concrete steps. The first is to celebrate and promote successes in CSO monetization when they happen. The second is to remove administrative barriers to income-generating activities by grantees. The third is to develop special financing instruments, such as matching funds, to incentivize experiments.

In addition, civil society as a whole would benefit from engaging with a broader array of actors, including commercial enterprises like cafés, hubs, and other innovative spaces that serve as venues for open discussions, cultural events, and other elements of civic life. One of the most successful examples of this type of space in Eastern Europe is a restaurant in Ukraine that is a trusted forum for civic activities and can redirect a large share of its profits to support social projects in the local community. Especially in repressive environments, such spaces are fertile ground for cultivating communities of civically minded people and may be worthy investments for donors.

These efforts should not overshadow the fact that donors have leverage over some undemocratic states—and should use it. For instance, a donor can provide financial resources to a government on the condition that the country's civic sector has unhindered access to international funding. As exciting as new monetization strategies may be, international funds are still essential to the development of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in unfree societies and democracies alike.

7. Widen Support Networks

The EU should promote innovative partnerships between local authorities, civil society, and the private sector through networks, platforms, and alliances to ensure a substantive and continued policy dialogue. The European Commission could also coordinate with member states to strengthen the support networks available to civil society, especially in contexts where it is under threat.

Support for CSOs needs to be less isolated from other areas of support in the future, as the need to build wider societal support for reform packages becomes more urgent. A concrete policy move would be for the EU to invite not only members of civil society but also representatives of these other partners to have their say on CSO support projects.

8. Better Connect Civil Society to Politics

A notable trend across Turkey, the Western Balkans, and Eastern Europe is that members of CSOs can often move into government posts at moments of opening or change. This is happening now in Armenia and Ukraine, where new leaders have chosen many members of their government teams from civil society. The EU needs to define a clearer policy toward this crossover phenomenon. The union should help in this process because, in many instances, activists' moves into politics can provide an important fillip to democratization and human rights. Few of the EU's programs work specifically on helping such individuals transition from being protesters to political actors.

At the same time, the EU could do more to mitigate the risks of crossover, such as the hollowing out of civil society and the blurring of necessary dividing lines between civil and political society. Some form of dedicated initiative on this question would be extremely valuable: several of Europe's democracy foundations would be well placed to undertake an EU-supported initiative to engage with protesters as they demobilize, informing and preparing them on issues related to party politics.

9. Assess the Impacts of Other EU Policies on Civil Society

A deeply unsatisfactory situation is that the EU's trade and security policies often undermine or even threaten the same CSOs that the union is funding. The EU effectively gives with one hand and takes away with the other. Although it is unrealistic to expect such tensions between different areas of EU external policy to be resolved entirely, the dissonances have become much more severe in the last several years.

Concretely, the EU could usefully commission independent external assessments on the impacts of its foreign and security policies on civil society in each country. This should lead to the obligation to demonstrate positive synergies in overall EU foreign and security policy reporting. This could be the way to include CSOs themselves in the monitoring and evaluation of EU support.

10. Link Civil Society to Foreign Policy

The EU needs to find more concrete, predictable, and meaningful ways to ensure that its overarching foreign policy instruments function consistently with civil society support. The EU often has rhetori-

cally stressed the need for such coordination, and policymakers tend to argue that the union has made improvements. Yet, to most civil society representatives, the inconsistencies between high-level diplomacy and on-the-ground projects seem to have intensified in the last several years.

The EU still needs to shift from worthy projects of civil society funding to a more comprehensive foreign policy strategy of political support for civil society through all available means. In an era in which the EU is drawn to engagement with nondemocratic regimes, Brussels should commit to using this engagement for leverage over civil society issues. For example, the EU has pursued deeper engagement for geopolitical reasons with Belarus; in return for lifting sanctions against the country, the union insisted, among other things, that CSOs be given seats at the table in several new areas of engagement.

This kind of linkage is still rare. It should become the norm and be incorporated more formally into overarching foreign policy practice. This could fall within the remit of the annual report on the widening of civil society support.

Citizen Journalism and Open-Data Activism

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Since the EU published its 2015 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the digital revolution has reshaped civic activism. As public administrations in developed and middle-income countries have digitized their archives, massive amounts of data covering key aspects of public policy have become open to scrutiny and reuse. This change has coincided with the emergence of a new generation of digital-native civil society actors, often referred to as civic technologists or open-data activists.

These new activists view their role as rebooting democracy through the use of open data and solving political problems as though they were engineering challenges. In some areas, existing civil society groups have adopted the newcomers' methods. For instance, domestic election observers now use data analytics to comb through the provisional results of thousands of polling stations—when these results are available in digital formats—and detect patterns that indicate irregularities or fraud.

However, in most areas of citizen advocacy, the new generation of civic technologists and social innovators still operates in isolation from the more traditional civil society sphere. This is due in no small part to the generational gap that sets the two groups apart in terms of working methods and political culture. An added challenge is whether open-data activism can function in shrinking democratic spaces. Illiberal governments often restrain the flow of public data while extracting vast amounts of private data from their populations through digital surveillance systems.

Yet the open-data movement has shown qualities that have proved useful in such contexts. Its focus on defending individual digital rights has made the new digital activists precious allies for traditional civil society. They often dispatch specialists in hot spots, such as Hong Kong in the summer of 2019, to help protesters better protect themselves.

Wherever democratic space is rapidly shrinking, civil society must access the data that governments are trying to conceal. Aggressively exerting their right to know, activists access information through a combination of online hacks and leaks by whistleblowers. With recent progress in artificial intelligence, massive amounts of raw data can now be analyzed and brought to the public as advocacy material.

To remain relevant in highly challenging political environments, civic activists must keep their private data protected while learning the fundamentals of investigative journalism and adapting it to a digital environment. The recent growth of adversarial journalism platforms is an important and promising trend in civil society that deserves to be supported.

Conclusion

In recent years, EU civil society support has improved in many crucial ways, and the union has maintained relatively high levels of funding. This record is significant in a period when other elements of EU foreign policy have drifted away from backing democracy and human rights toward a clearer prioritization of old-style security and realpolitik considerations.

The EU's 2019–2024 institutional term will usher in changes to the union's external financing instruments. Strong efforts will be needed to make sure civil society support does not slip down the union's list of priorities. More positively, the EU could use the redefining of its financing to improve backing for civil society.

Three different kinds of change to CSO support are needed. First, the EU should make further valuable improvements to extend the kind of adjustments the union has already started to make in the last several years. Second, the EU needs to grasp the nettle of some difficult challenges facing civil society that it has so far failed to take on board. And finally, the EU should link its civil society support more tightly with the more political dimensions of its foreign and security policies. Taken together, these steps could help realize the EU's numerous formal commitments to prioritize more clearly its support for civil society and place this support more firmly at the heart of the union's foreign policy.

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This working paper is connected to the work of *Carnegie's Civic Research Network*, a global network of leading experts on civic activism dedicated to examining the changing patterns of civic activism in their countries and analyzing the implications for a new generation of civil society assistance.

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Notes

- 1 See "Civic Activism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/programs/democracy/civicactivism/>.
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