

Empowering Anti-Racism Civic Space in Europe in the Run-Up to the EU Elections

We live in dire times across Europe. The recent findings in the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023 [report](#) on civic space highlights a worrying trend where CSO's and human rights defenders (HRD's) working with minority groups, especially those working to combat racism or with migrants and refugees are particularly affected by threats and attacks. These are not just numbers or abstract scenarios and observations. Attacks on NGOs, defamation, public smear campaigns, funding cuts, physical attacks, and the use of SLAPPs are becoming common place across Europe with little to no pushback from the EU institutions and Member States.

Despite positive steps taken by the EU; on the [European Parliament resolution on civic space in the EU](#) of March 2022, the [European Commission report on the application of the Charter and civic space](#) of December 2022, and the [Council Conclusions on the role of the civic space in protecting and promoting fundamental rights in the EU](#) of March 2023, as well as the political agreement reached on the [anti-SLAPP directive in November 2023](#), these political commitments have not necessarily translated to concrete actions to protect HRDs and CSOs.

A case in point is the recent bomb attack against ENAR member organisation KISA in Cyprus. But KISA is just one example. Other members of our network like CCIE, Alliance Citoyenne, VIAD, Doctors Against Racism, and many other organisations and HRDs across Europe who work on anti-racism have also been the subject of threats and attacks. To make matters worse, legislations being proposed and introduced across Europe such as the Migration Pact and the Facilitator's package criminalise migration to Europe and as a consequence criminalise the work of organisations that attempt to protect or support migrants including search and rescue NGOs.

Amidst these developments within the EU, the escalation of violence in the Middle East, particularly in Gaza [where the International Court of Justice has put in place provisional measures], and the subsequent European leaders' (in)action, has led to an alarming increase in hate speech and crimes targeting Muslim and Jewish communities across Europe, testing the EU's commitment to human rights and democratic values. Within this climate, some EU member states have begun putting in place [restrictive measures](#) such as: bans on protests, the characterisation and criminalisation of pro-justice movements as antisemitic, restrictions on freedom of speech, threats of deportations, and the close monitoring and surveillance of individuals and organisations calling for ceasefires.

In view of these concerns surrounding the shrinking of civic space across Europe, the upcoming EU Parliamentary elections serve as a crucial juncture to address these pressing issues. Against this backdrop, our proposed panel discussion aims to delve into the intricacies of safeguarding democracy and protecting civic liberties, particularly in the context of an increasingly challenging political landscape.

Structure of the Panel: 10:00-12:00

- The moderator introduces the topic and the panel: **5mins**
- Testimony video: **5mins**
- Each panelist has **8 mins** for their intervention
- Q and A: **45 mins**
- Closing Remarks: **10 mins**

- Moderator: Emmanuel Achiri (ENAR)
- Video with testimonies of Human Rights Defenders

Panelists

- **Doros Polykarpou, KISA organization:** “Protecting Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders: The Impact of Attacks and Threats on Anti-Racism/Migrant Organisations in Europe.”
 - **MEP Evin Incir:** “From Political Commitments to Concrete Action: Strengthening EU Responses to Threats Against Civic Liberties and Human Rights Defenders.”
 - **Rima Hassan, LFI candidate:** “Addressing the Impact of the war on Gaza on Human Rights and Democracy in Europe”.
 - **Michael Phoenix, Office of the UN Special rapporteur on HRDs:** “Empowering Human Rights Defenders and CSOs: Strategies for Strengthening Protections and Promoting Civic Space in Europe and globally.”
 - **Mila Paspalanova, Anti-Racism Coordinator ODIHR:** “Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in the Context of Shrinking Civic Space in Europe”
- Q and A with CSOs
 - Closing Remarks: **Kim Smouter** (ENAR Executive Director)