

Brussels, 20th June 2018

Vice President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans
To the attention of Commissioner Vera Jourova

Dear Vice-President,

On 19 April the European Parliament has overwhelmingly adopted a resolution calling on the EU to set up a new funding instrument to support civil society organisations (CSOs) which promote and protect European values, such as democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights within the European Union on local and national level. The decision was based on a conviction that a strong civil society is a prerequisite for upholding our values and that it constitutes the surest safeguard against democratic backsliding, populism, and anti-EU propaganda. We consider empowering the civil society as crucial to meeting the many challenges to the European integration. Hence, we welcome the Commission's proposal for the creation of the Justice, Rights and Values (JRV) programme, which includes a plan to open some new channels of EU support for civil society organisations.

We believe, however, that the proposal is too modest to meet the needs of the civil society, and to significantly increase its capacity to promote and protect European values. In particular, we believe that the resources allocated to the JRV programme are insufficient to overcome the increasing difficulty of CSOs to secure independent sources of financing. It is hard to understand why we should spend less on protection and promotion of our common fundamental values within the EU than beyond our borders. Second, the thematic scope of the JRV programme is very wide. Notwithstanding the importance of each theme included in the programme, it creates a high risk of the resources spreading thin and leaving very little funds for CSOs promoting democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. The risk is even greater, given the wide list of potential beneficiaries of the JRV programme, which includes not only EU-based CSOs but also many other actors, including from third countries. Third, we reiterate the need to set up new flexible funding mechanisms to ensure that the funds are easily accessible to local grassroots organisations. The EU Financial Regulation leaves enough space to apply such innovative solutions.

We look forward to cooperating with the Commission and the Council in the next steps of the legislative process regarding the Justice Rights and Values programme. We hope we will be able to jointly establish a robust funding mechanism, that will truly empower the civil society to foster European values.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament: