

# Council Emphasises Civic Space in Protecting and Promoting Fundamental Rights

## News

Thomas Wahl

On 10 March, the JHA Council adopted conclusions on the role of the civic space in protecting and promoting fundamental rights in the EU. The conclusions emphasise the **essential role freedom of association plays in ensuring a democratic and pluralist society** and the proper functioning of public life. Unjustified restrictions to the operating space of civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders can present a threat to the rule of law. Member States are called on to do the following:

- Safeguarding and promoting an enabling environment for CSOs and human rights defenders;
- Providing CSOs with a range of opportunities to cooperate;
- Taking targeted actions against threats, attacks, smear campaigns etc. against organisations, staff and volunteers;
- Establishing the possibilities that CSOs and human rights defenders can act safely and independently in the digital space;
- Tackling challenges related to funding by ensuring fair distribution through transparent and non-discriminatory criteria;
- Ensuring meaningful participation of CSOs when legislation and policy measures are drafted and implemented.

The Commission is, *inter alia*, invited to continue providing adequate and accessible funding, simplify open calls and continue to use innovative approaches.

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ISSN: 1862-6947

<https://eucrim.eu>



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The project is co-financed by the Union Anti-Fraud Programme (UAFP), managed by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).



Co-funded by  
the European Union