

Forum 2020: Civil Society Priorities for the Republic of Croatia Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Croatian civil society organizations, gathered in the informal network Forum 2020, through in-person consultations in five cities (Rijeka, Varaždin, Split, Osijek and Zagreb) as well as online consultations, have come to an agreement on the priorities for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to June 2020.

We are cognizant that the Presidency of the Council of the European Union presents a challenge as well as an opportunity for the entire country. This is also a special opportunity to strengthen Croatia's reputation and change its image as a member state with weak coalition potential for cooperation with other EU member states. In order to do this, we believe that joint efforts are needed, from both governmental bodies as well as civil society organizations. Therefore, we see these priorities as an opportunity for collaborative work on shaping EU public policies.

Our priorities emerge from the current need for the EU to redefine and strengthen its public policies to respond to the real needs of EU citizens. Hence, the priorities are a clear reflection of the common interests of the EU and of the Republic of Croatia as a full member of the Union. They were inspired by the idea of putting emphasis on some of the critical points of EU policies that in the past have either failed to be realized or articulated in a way that benefits the majority of EU citizens.

In addition to the above mentioned thematic priorities, we emphasize the importance of youth participation in all areas and their inclusion in decision-making processes. Youth as a key social group represent the potential that is further strengthened through participation in political processes, creating the conscious, critical and socially active citizens that are the foundation of every democratic society. Furthermore, we consider it important to point out that all priorities need to strive for gender equality in decision-making and implementation processes to ensure equal representation and eliminate discrimination based on gender.

1. A democratic Europe of free and responsible citizens.

A Europe where rule of law and human rights are respected. A Europe of free, independent and critical civil society, and independent institutions and media.

For many years, the European Union has been recognized as a space for socioeconomic wellbeing, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. All three components make the European Union one of the most attractive places to live. Hence, it comes as no surprise that many people from failing states or countries that have not developed these three components want to live in the EU. The EU has made great efforts to develop the free market and the free movement of people – assuming that the rule of law and the protection of human rights were implied and guaranteed and hence that no additional effort or investment in these tenets of democracy was necessary amongst member states. Unfortunately, the evidence has shown that the rule of law and the protection of human rights are not sustainable if we are not continuously working on them. In this respect, the growth of anti-democratic political options that see the rule of law and human rights protection as a threat to their interests, instead of as an opportunity

to build trust-based social relationships in institutions that serve the benefit of all its members is particularly concerning. The rise of so-called illiberal democracies within the European Union that demote democracy to the bare minimum of multi-party elections, while at the same time destroying the key pillars of democratic control (independent judiciary, critical civil society, independent media and independent institutions) is a clear signal that the EU must proactively work on strengthening and protecting the mechanisms of checks and balances on government power.

This is possible by implementing and continually developing the following policies:

1.1. Strengthening responsible and independent democratic institutions within the European Union and its member states.

We expect from the Council of the EU that it initiate political processes aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, empowering independent institutions and facilitating civilian oversight over State repressive institutions. Strengthening judicial systems is the foundation of the rule of law and a necessary prerequisite for the preservation of the democratic order. At the same time, we must strongly oppose political groups trying to abuse the mechanisms, institutions and resources of the European Union and using them to weaken or disintegrate the European Union and have it turn away from its core values.

We call for a Europe of rule of law and stable, responsible and democratic institutions of government, which develops mechanisms for monitoring the functioning of the judiciary as well as civilian oversight of the police, army and security services, in particular by monitoring the effectiveness of policies aimed at combatting corruption. We call upon the EU legislative bodies to adopt the European Commission's [General Recommendations Against Racism and Intolerance to National Equality Bodies](#) to strengthen the Ombudsmanship Institutions throughout the European Union.

1.2. Introducing an instrument for the protection of EU fundamental values into the multiannual financial framework which would ensure long-term financing of civil society organizations and independent media who work on democratization and human rights protection.

Until now, the EU has invested significant financial resources for such activities only outside the EU (through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights - the so-called EIDHR mechanism), however, it has become clear that a similar mechanism must be activated within the Union's borders. A key prerequisite for more consistent, responsive and effective actions within the EU for the protection of European values is a robust, comprehensive and politically unbiased mechanism for monitoring the status of European values (including the rule of law) in all Member States, in tandem with a number of financial disciplinary instruments, enabled by the Multiannual Financial Framework and accompanying regulations.

The announced program "[Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#)" is a good step in this direction, but it is necessary to intensify the efforts for its adoption and inclusion in the Multiannual Financial Framework in amounts that are in line with the requirements of European civil society actors who have called for a new **European Values Instrument**. The European Union cannot afford to pursue austerity policies when it comes to the values on which it was founded. Particularly important is its sub-program for "Values of the Union" which could serve as an emergency fund to respond to the dangers of human rights defenders throughout the EU. We expect the program "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" to be adopted within

the next Multiannual Financial Framework, along with the European value protection instrument that responds to the real situation of people exposed to human rights violations in local communities across the EU. We consider these measures necessary as the health of the European Union depends on its ability to protect its fundamental values.

1.3. Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists within the EU – who must be recognized as one of the guardians of democracy, freedom of expression and human rights.

It is unacceptable that journalist and human right defenders are being killed, prosecuted and intimidated in the EU for being critical voices defending the democratic standards that have been achieved by EU Member States. That is why we expect the Council of the EU, in co-operation with other EU institutions during the Croatian presidency, to initiate a legislative initiative to protect these groups.

1.4. The development of an annual report on the state of rule of law and human rights in the EU.

Until now, the EU has not yet developed a methodology for monitoring and reporting on the state of human rights, instead relying on reports from international organizations, their delegations around the world or the thematic reports of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. In particular, attention was not focused on comprehensive reporting on the state of human rights within the EU. We **applaud** the activities carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency to date, publishing objective and high quality reports on individual segments of the violation of the rule of law and human rights in the EU. We believe that it is time to extend the mandate of the Agency so that, in cooperation with other independent EU institutions (eg the EU Ombudsman) and civil society, it can begin to publish regular annual reports on the state of human rights and rule of law within the EU, which can then serve as the evidence-base from which policies for strengthening the rule of law and human rights protection in the EU can be developed. The currently existing tool of the European Commission for tracking judicial systems, the Justice Scoreboard, is largely focused on the efficiency of judicial systems, but does not go into an analysis of the level of fundamental rights protection, the rule of law or the scale of violations. It is not enough to report only on individual cases of human rights. Systemic failures of institutions to protect these rights must also be adequately monitored and reported, and a uniform institutional framework developed for monitoring the situation in all Member States. We also propose that within DG DEVCO, in cooperation with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the launching of the publication of regular annual reports on the human rights situation in the world. We also propose opening consultations with the Ombudsperson institutions in Member States on their role in preparing this report. In this way, the EU will position itself as one of the leading global actors with a continued commitment to protecting the rule of law and human rights. Part of the report should also be a periodic review of the implementation of the European Parliament Resolution on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe, which called for a ban on neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups in the European Union, following the example of the good practice of the Report of the People's Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia entitled "Relativization of the Ustasha crimes violates the fundamental values of the Constitution, with a lack of reaction opening space for hatred."

In December 2014, the Council of the EU decided to undertake an annual dialogue on 'the rule of law' in member states; however, the dialogue is an informal conversation without specific feedback or

recommendations. In 2016, the European Parliament proposed an inter-institutional [EU Pact for Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights](#) adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee, but the Commission has so far not reacted to it. The proposed Covenant is part of the LIBE Report and includes a public presentation of the results, the annual interparliamentary debate and agreements on mitigating the consequences of possible risks and violations, and the activation of the preventive and remedial means of Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty. We hold that greater synergies between the different EU institutions are needed in order to provide comprehensive and effective mechanisms for the protection of the rule of law. We call upon the European institutions to strengthen the framework for the protection of the rule of law in the European Union, in line with [the recent announcement of the European Commission](#), and in this context we support [the recommendations of the Civil Liberties Union for Europe](#) for the promotion of the rule of law, the prevention of violations of the rule of law and flexible and strong responses to such violations.

During Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the EU, we expect the intensification of consultations on monitoring the rule of law, the launching of a consultative process with the Fundamental Rights Agency and Member States' Ombudspersons institutions, as well as beginning preparations for a review of good practices of monitoring the rule of law.

1.5. Linking the spending of EU funds with the quality of protection of the rule of law and the level of transparency in individual Member States.

The current situation where certain Member States use EU funds through corrupt agreements to serve particular private or political interests is not only unsustainable but a threat to the survival of the European Union. Even more dangerous is the fact that certain groups are utilizing EU funds to actively advocate against the very values at the foundation of the EU. It is high time that effective control mechanisms are introduced to prevent spending of EU funds in those Member States where they are spent through corruption and untransparent practices. The proposed ["Regulation on the protection of the Union's budget in the event of generalized deficiencies as regards the rule of law in a Member State"](#) aims to protect the Union's financial interests while at the same time providing an effective means of defending the rule of law. If a Member State violates the principles of the rule of law, it will be denied access to EU funding. We expect that during the presidency of the Republic of Croatia, the Council of the EU will make a clear political decision to end this practice and to adopt the Regulation to protect the rule of law in all Member States. At the same time, it is necessary that financial disciplinary measures aimed at governments that violate the rule of law do not carry with them adverse effects on the domestic organizations and independent media that warn of irregularities or corrupt practices. This requires an additional reserve of funds, through central EU programs such as the European Value Instrument or independent intermediaries.

1.6. Cease the trend of criminalization of solidarity towards refugees and migrants in the EU.

Over the last several years, numerous EU Member States have introduced legal provisions and practices to punish citizens who, for humanitarian reasons, help refugees on the territory of the Member State. This only serves to fuel fear and racism against newcomers, who are some of the most vulnerable people on

our planet. We believe that in the long-run, the principle of criminalization of solidarity is a threat to the very fabric of European society for whom solidarity ought to be one of the guiding principles of its activities and *raison d'être*. We expect the Council to make a political decision to stop and reverse this trend of criminalization of solidarity.

2. A European Union which continues to have the potential for expansion. A Europea that stabilizes the Western Balkans.

Although it may seem that Europe lost its potential for expanding and attracting new member states with the emergence of Brexit – it does not have to be this way. On the contrary, a European Union that is renewed, democratically-reformed and committed to protecting human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development can be a clear and resounding response to the crisis of the international global order. We deeply believe that even today, most people want to live in societies of socio-economic wellbeing, in which a good economy is as important as the rule of law and the protection of human rights. This inseparable link between socio-economic rights on the one hand, and the rule of law and protection of human rights on the other, is what makes the EU strong and attractive. The EU has shown that through its expansion, it can, to a certain extent, stabilize societies that are shaken by poor rule of law, under-developed economies and ineffective systems of human rights protection. That is why, after a seven-year pause, the EU must return to the enlargement policies with the objective of wider enlargement efforts in the Western Balkans. While achieving that, it should not, in any case, agree to compromises of close cooperation with those political leaders who obviously do not live by or want to live by democratic values, but should instead make efforts to ensure that the democratization process of potential member states takes place through all actors, within those potential member states that are committed to the values of EU. In addition, one of the lessons learned from the enlargement process for Croatia is the evident need to provide independent mechanisms for monitoring the achieved standards of rule of law so that they are not reneged on after entry into the EU.

During the Republic of Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the EU, we expect:

- 2.1. A clear political stance on the continuation of the Union's enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans.** The European Union must make a binding political decision on its enlargement to the Western Balkans in order to establish a clear foundation and structures for new joining members. Delaying this decision and passivity towards the Western Balkan countries only risks their turning away from the European Union and turning towards other geopolitical actors whose values and political goals are directed at destabilizing the EU and expanding nationalist, isolationist and authoritarian tendencies.
- 2.2.** That the Council of the EU supports the initiative for the establishment of a **Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts of All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia 1991 – 2001 (REKOM)** as well as all

other initiatives aimed at building trust and justice for victims. The Council of the EU should also support the work of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

2.3. All members of the Council, and especially the Republic of Croatia as its chairman, **must make a clear statement that regional cooperation in Southeast Europe is the key to stabilization.** This refers to cooperation in various functions of the judiciary, from joint regional seminars for exchanging and comparing experiences, educations and trainings of judicial officials, to various initiatives coming from civil society to improve judicial frameworks and processes. Among other things, support in advocating for victims' rights and common reference to the issue of victim discrimination, developing witness support systems and increasing the efficiency of war crimes prosecution, regional exchange of experience between courts, state attorney's offices / prosecutors' offices, and witness organizations that attend trials, facilitate witness transportation and provide other forms of support, such as free legal aid and so on. It is also important to continue working and collaborating on various forms of documenting facts about wartime events.

3. A European Union committed to the Sustainable Development Goals within and beyond its borders

The issues of climate change, biodiversity conservation and the other sustainable development goals are the foremost political issues of the 21st century. On a global level, it is necessary to declare a climate state of emergency in order to send a strong message and a warning that it is time to raise the alarm and call for action from stakeholders around the world. We are not uninterested observers of the sixth largest mass extinction on the only inhabitable planet we know. Modern civilization, the foundations of which Europe is proud to have contributed to, is not an autodestructive prospect at the end of three billion years of life on Earth, nor is it a cold-blooded killer of the majority of the climate-threatened populations in developing countries. Unlike the inhabitants of many other parts of the world, most of us Europeans today are well-fed and have excess food to share; we are educated, and can reflect on our own existence and get informed about its principles. This gives us a perspective from which we can see the importance of urgent and comprehensive action and unite our efforts to slow down/mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity through the policy of equitable degrowth.

Nevertheless, even in the EU, we have problems ranging from a rising number of people at risk of poverty, energy poverty, inequalities between urban and rural areas where in the latter people lack access to quality services and are poorly connected (lack of transportation means, infrastructure, broadband internet, etc.), and these important challenges must be addressed in tandem and within new policies to mitigate climate change.

3.1. Adopting a Comprehensive EU Strategy for Sustainable Development.

In light of the European Commission's Sustainable Development Consideration Document, we call on current and future EU leaders to adopt a comprehensive EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. On January 30th, 2019, the European Commission published the long-awaited document: "Towards a

Sustainable EU by 2030" which outlined three possible scenarios that could guide the European Union in implementing a just environmental, social and economic transition in order to become sustainable by 2030. Three years after the EU adopted the Global Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, a critical review of possible ways of implementing them is far behind. The Commission recognizes that much more needs to be done and recognizes that Europe has unsustainable patterns of consumption. It is commendable that the Commission promote a transition to a viable food system, as well as its stated goal that public policies must not adversely affect sustainable development beyond our borders.

Together with other civil society organizations in the EU, we expect the EU to adopt the first scenario outlined in the Comprehensive Strategy for a Sustainable Europe by 2030, including measures to be proposed in other key areas such as corporate responsibility, fair trade, people-focused investments and overcoming the current obsession with economic growth. Only in this way can we achieve the necessary transition for people and the planet. The [Declaration of Sibiu](#), of May 9th, 2019, in which the heads of EU Member States presented their 10 commitments for the future of Europe, affirms the goals of: 'reducing disparities between us' and 'helping the most vulnerable in Europe, putting people before politics', yet there is no mention of sustainable development or the Sustainable Development Goals. We expect that during the presidency of the Republic of Croatia, the issue of a comprehensive EU sustainable development strategy will be on the agenda and that commitment to sustainable development will be visible in the Multiannual Financial Framework.

3.2. The climate is the most important issue facing European and world politics of this generation, and Europe must be the leader of policies that seek to slow down climate change. In addition to respecting the Paris Accord and recognizing materially-demanding changes for achieving a global carbon neutral and just economy, Europe has a leading global position in keeping climate change below the tipping point. We must do everything we can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 60% by 2030. In the richest bloc of countries, we can introduce a progressive tax on carbon and non-renewable resources at their source and distribution, tax air transport for redistribution to better and low-budget public transport; as well as provide tax incentives for the use of recycled materials.

If the European Union at the end of the previous decade was able to find the resolve and the financial resources in the amount of one trillion euros to rescue a failing banking sector in order to preserve economic stability; it is immensely more important today to at the very least, find equal resources to mitigate devastating climate change. We do not purport that the necessary transformation will be easy, however for maintaining social stability and ensuring the wellbeing of both ageing and younger generations in the future, there is no alternative to reducing total energy consumption in Europe through economic transformation focused on durability and sharing, facilitating the transition to 100% 'green energy' and the application of agro-ecological practices for production of food that enrich, instead of impoverish soil and forests. It is urgent to adopt the [Strategy for a Long-term Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the EU](#). It is also necessary to increase our ambitions and revise existing Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, as well as increasing the share of funds in the next Multiannual Financial Framework for climate change.

3.3. Green energy. Due to the need for urgent action, it is necessary to raise the EU's goals and contributions to meeting the [Paris Agreement](#) by 2030, as well as the [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#), in order to secure an evidence-based and just contribution to keeping the average global temperature rise at 1.5C.

There is enough untapped potential for additional renewable energy sources in Europe whose activation—along with respect for human rights, equitable restrictions on mining exploitation for infrastructure development, as well as community ownership of installed capacity - can drive an industrialized European society without condemning tropical areas to climate genocide. It is necessary to stop the investment of public funds into fossil fuels and fossil infrastructure. Europe has enough financial and human resources and know-how to make a smart turn to green energy. However, this requires both the social and political will to implement a new European pact for sustainability and prosperity in the 21st century, instead of a narrow focus on economic stability and growth—both of which will be devastated by climate change this century anyhow. Hence, it is crucial to achieve consensus and win political support for sustainable policies from the Eastern European countries for policies that will involve citizens and invest in green energy.

3.4. Transport. [Transport currently accounts for 27% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the EU](#) and is primarily from air transport, which cannot be overcome with restrictions for fossil fuels. Europe has the oldest and most diverse rail network in the world, and it has the capacity to reconstruct and put into operation low-carbon transport. European banks can also be involved in this process, stimulating Member States to actively engage in the process. The advantage of this type of transport is that it acts as a link across the continent and with other continents (Asia and North Africa) and can facilitate the delivery of a sufficient number of people and goods to all parts of the continent, benefiting the majority of the population, as opposed to air transport which benefits a small number of high-income individuals. With the revitalization of the railways, the contribution to reducing the carbon footprint can also give rise to the imposition of an aviation tax. At the same time, it is necessary to encourage and promote efforts towards affordable electrification of road vehicles in order to enable the transition from fossil fuel-based vehicles to electric vehicles for as great a share of the population as possible, thus over time, building the foundation for the environmentally sustainable industrial branches of the future. Most Europeans live in cities that can substantially reduce their environmental footprint by integrating public transport and cycling, especially in the eastern and southeastern periphery. A united Europe requires a reasonable range of goods and services transported across the continent, however not to the extent and by means that endanger the future of young people, but instead through means that will best use existing technology and organizational knowledge for the sustainability and well-being of all European communities, from the icy North to the heated South.

3.5. Conservation of biodiversity must become one of the European Union's political priorities considering the growing threat of plastic pollution, the destruction of habitats and the extinction of many plant and animal species already documented by the scientific community as the sixth mass extinction in the geological history of the planet. As part of the preparations for the European Union to participate in the [15th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity \(COP15\)](#), to be held in Beijing in October 2020, it is necessary to define a strategy that would lead to the so-called "Parisian momentum"

in the field of biodiversity conservation. Strengthening global awareness and political support to preserve biodiversity is crucial for preventing further collapse of the global ecosystem.

3.6. Reducing inequalities. Inequality in today's world is not spontaneous, but the product of the political and economic system in which we live, that is, the policies aimed at deregulation and liberalization of the market. They are not only economic in terms of inequality of income and widespread poverty, but also social, political, gendered and environmental. Within the European Union, there is an increasingly visible difference between the center and the periphery that manifests as unequal levels of political influence and economic stability. Possible solutions to these structural problems lie in the new model of the circular economy, whose functioning and health will not only be measured by profit, growth and financial indicators, but by the overall impact on increasing society's well-being, sustainability and equity towards all its members. Starting today, we can set income tax rates above 80% on excessive management and similar incomes for redistribution to low and middle income families, and reduce VAT on labor-intensive services such as repairs. Ultimately, the role of inequality in European solidarity will be reduced by shifting from efficiency policy to sufficiency policy to ensure a sustainable lifestyle becomes the norm. **Through the Presidency of the Council of the EU we expect the Council to consider alternative indicators of development and prosperity that are not based on GDP, but instead on a range of indicators suitable for measuring equitable sustainability in the 21st century.**

4. The EU as a global peacebuilder - let us not forget that the EU is a "peace project"

The current unstable international order inflames ever-increasing uncertainty about the security of societies on our planet. It is as if there is less and less confidence that joint efforts of global actors can preserve the planet and reduce violence. It appears as though there is a vacuum where the leader of global peace-building ought to be - as the United Nations is under constant pressures- both in terms of reduced financing and attacks on its legitimacy. This is an opportunity for the EU to impose itself as a new global player of peace and stability that brings together those forces in the world who are prepared to work on the conservation of the planet and to bring new impetus to global efforts to reach wide-spread agreements and non-violent conflict resolution. At the same time, in the last three years, we have seen a sharp increase in investment in joint European defense even though there is no EU legislative framework that would be a direct basis for these decisions. In this case, the EU has strengthened its common defense through DG Growth - through the European Defense Fund - which aims to strengthen the military capabilities of the Member States, justifying this decision to invest in defense technology development and thereby allegedly affect the growth of jobs in the EU. In parallel, the members, outside the EU budget, independently fund EU missions beyond the EU's borders through the rapid growth of the European Peace Facility. We hold that this growth is not accompanied by an adequate growth of policy and financing in the field of peace building. That is why we hope that a turnaround in EU Council policy will move towards global multilateralism and peace-building policies.

4.1. Protecting multilateralism. The EU must take on the role of protector of international institutions, and dedicate itself to their strengthening. While to date, certain members have had proactive

roles in international bodies, now is the time to put collective efforts and stand in defense of the international democratic order, preserving institutions that are not perfect but have contributed to global dialogue in the past. The EU, ie.. its Member States, must invest more in the work of the United Nations and the Council of Europe to bring them a new spirit and hope for international cooperation.

4.2 Peace-building as an inseparable part of EU foreign policy.

We expect that during Croatia's presidency of the Council of the EU, the Council will bring back the memory of the EU as a peace project, integrating peace building into foreign policy through a separate strategy and a separate funding line (within the NDICI Fund). We expect the Council to take the view that the EU must work harder on conflict prevention and be more active in terms of peacekeeping in areas of conflict. We see this in particular through strengthening of volunteering through the instrument of peace building, dealing with the past, resolving armed conflicts, judicial processing of human rights violations, peace education, and the use of human losses lists in armed conflict in order to prevent manipulation of the past. Furthermore, including "unusual suspects" in the peacebuilding process (i.e. veterans and victims), as well as constantly promoting an inclusive culture of remembering, and developing the preconditions for dealing with the past education. The EU must have a set of "cookbooks" applied in conflict areas.

4.3. Raising awareness within the EU about the EU as a "peace project".

In order for the EU to proactively pursue peace-building policies outside its borders, it is necessary to first strengthen the awareness of its citizens about the EU as a "peace project". We expect the Council during the Croatian Presidency to make a political decision to strengthen the culture of peace within the EU. This can be done through the promotion of **peace and global education** within the EU and support education that **promotes a critical understanding of historical as well as current events**, multiculturalism and multiperspectivity that enables young people to use the adopted knowledge in the future. It is also necessary to use the EU barometer for a comparative longitudinal **study on how young people see war**, how different generations view war, and how they have come to terms with the past, the relations with members of majority and minority ethnic and religious groups, and so on, in order to be able to track and compare changes in the social realities of individual states. Finally, the Council must initiate the process of adopting a definition of the Holocaust at the level of all EU Member States as proposed by the International Holocaust Reconciliation Alliance (IHRA) and developing a strategy of countering the distortion of facts about the Holocaust in individual Member States, following the European Parliament Resolution on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe, which calls for a ban on neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups in the European Union.

4.4. Asylum and migration.

According to strategic documents, the aim of the European Union's asylum policy is to afford adequate status to third-country nationals seeking international protection and to ensure full compliance with the principle of non-refoulement. From the Council of the EU, we expect that During the Croatian Presidency, we expect the Council of the EU to **show initiative and persistence regarding the necessary reform of the [Common European Asylum System \(CEAS\)](#)**, which must be based on human rights, have clear goals and eliminate the dysfunctionality of the current system. Although initiated, CEAS changes have not yet been adopted. Any sustainable solution must include **a thorough re-examination of the Dublin system** with a permanent division of responsibility and procedural safeguards to protect asylum-seekers from violations of fundamental rights. Also, through a series of legislative changes, it is extremely important to ensure that any reform of the CEAS **protects and expands - and does not diminish- the rights of asylum seekers and refugees**. It is necessary to establish procedures to ensure timely disembarkment of rescued persons from ships and the allocation of responsibilities for their acceptance among the EU Member States, which should be facilitated by the European Commission. It is important to use **sanctioning measures for those Member States that violate human rights** and do not want to participate in the equitable allocation of responsibilities. It is equally important to ensure that resources are channeled into integration and measures to include and ensure equal opportunities, and to reduce the investment of resources to equipping the border and returning migrants to so-called "third countries". The EU Council must play a key role in ensuring **a sufficient level of funding to ensure dignified living conditions** for immigrants, and require Member States to use this funding for that purpose during and after the next legislative period.

In the area of migration, we expect the Council of the EU **to ensure and facilitate safe and legal pathways** as a key contribution of the EU to the global response to migration trends, greatly reducing the risks and uncertainties faced by people who are forced to leave their homes. The resettlement program is a step in this direction, however such a separated mechanism and considering the number of people involved makes it far from achieving its purpose. The EU should continue **to find solutions for the acceptance and protection of people based on a humane and dignified approach**. Proposals that lead to the instrumentalization of relocation, that support migration control or introduce grounds for exclusion of certain individuals on the basis of their prospective successful integration, undermine the essence of relocation and thus it is necessary to reject them. In addition to increasing the number of persons covered by the resettlement program, the EU should **extend other safe and legitimate routes for refugee**. An important step in that direction would be to abolish family reunification restrictions, i.e. extending rights to regulate family reunification to make them less restrictive.

Given the very worrying situation at the EU's external borders, we expect the Council to reduce and limit the jurisdiction of Frontex and to **establish an efficient, independent border control mechanism**. Numerous testimonies and reports speak of violations of human rights at land and sea borders, and the statistics on the number of deaths confirm the impenetrability of borders and the inability to secure safe entry. It is necessary to **ensure monitoring mechanisms and to promptly respond** to all confirmed cases of misconduct. Also, it is important to prevent any legal reduction of rights or the legalization of unacceptable, violent and dehumanizing practices in the European Union.