

11 AVENUES. 11 PROPOSALS

EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP VIS-A-VIS REGIONALISM, LOCALITY. COMPLEMENTARITY.

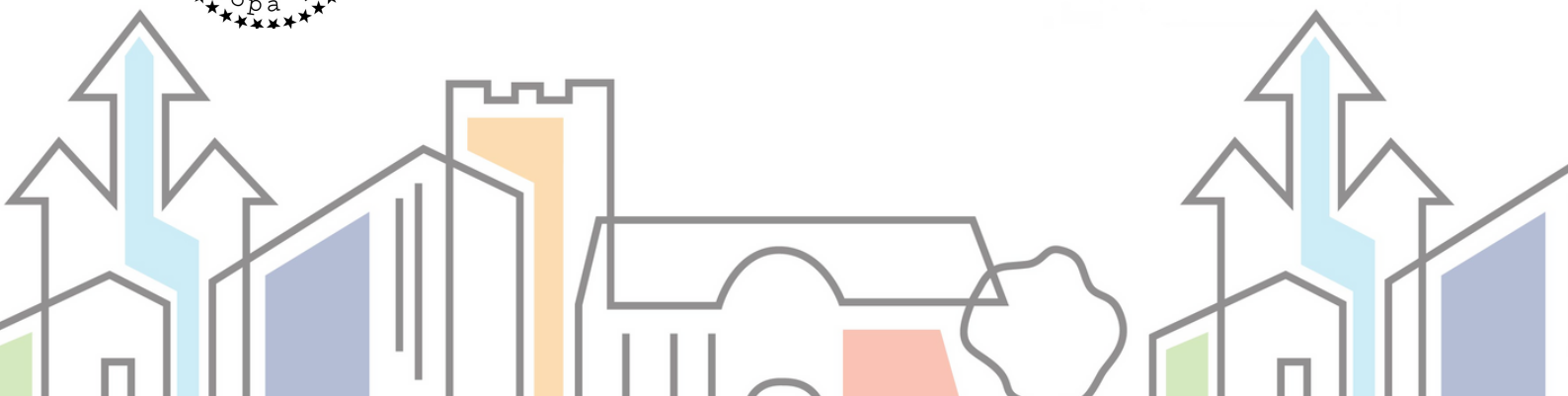
With the adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 accompanied by a unique Recovery Plan conditions have been created to develop a more just, resilient and sustainable Europe. A robust and new cohesion policy is one of the cornerstones of this ambitious endeavour.

The 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project of the European House covers 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CZ, HU, HR, RO and SK); all of them are massive beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Fund. Our 11 working papers indicate possible avenues how to use effectively these financial instruments in remote, less developed areas of these countries highlighting not only the importance of EU assistance in daily life of citizens but simultaneously contributing to reducing the still significant gap between the citizens and the EU institutions.

Each paper of ours offers not only a brief analyses of an important aspect of cohesion policy in Central and Eastern Europe but proposes also practical solutions for the involvement of citizens, their organisations and other stakeholders in practising partnership for making cohesion policy a success.



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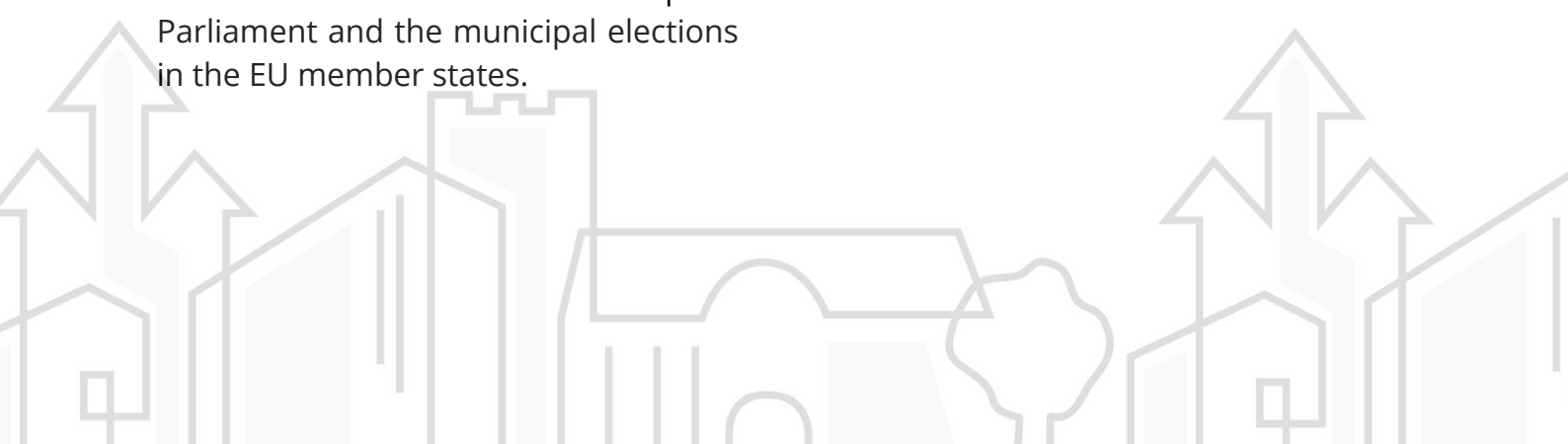
Culture, history and language express identities at many levels (local, regional, national, European or global). Within this complex framework, civil society actors should contribute to promoting European identity and European citizenship. The Cohesion Policy ensures support for this aim, particularly for actions that strengthen the sense of European identity among citizens.

Identity and citizenship cover very complex issues. Therefore, it needs to be made clear: What is European identity and European Citizenship? The dimension of European identity includes, among others, integration, common cultural heritage, historical ties, language, mindset, values such as personal freedom, human dignity, solidarity, active civil society, market economy, democracy and rule of law but also political, economic and human rights as well. Essential items like anthem, flag, Europe Day, cultural capital help to promote European identity among citizens. European Citizenship gives advantages such as mobility – no need for visas, full working and residential rights in the EU, subsidized higher education and scholarships – access to national health care benefits, setting up companies, right to consular protection by EU member states, privacy (data collection, storage and usage) and the right to vote at elections to European Parliament and the municipal elections in the EU member states.

As regards regional and local aspects of European identity and European Citizenship, the use of a territorial approach offers a suitable framework for elaborating future civil actions. Cross-border and macro-regional cooperation as well as regional, urban and local development programmes funded by the EU support a broad range of activities that strengthen identities of local and urban areas as well as of larger territories (regions, macro-regions). Best practices in Central Europe demonstrate in which ways the EU made its contribution to preserving historical heritage, diverse folk culture and traditions of local communities across the region. The European support has ensured that the achievements made by local identities are accessible e.g., in multilingual databases in the digital age.

All this has shown that diversity of identities across Europe is not contrary to strengthening European identity. On the contrary, the EU encourages different identities complementing each other and assists in creating a socially and economically sustainable environment for this intention.

Moreover, the Cohesion Policy has its new priority, namely, to bring Europe closer to citizens by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development.



Accordingly, a new instrument, “European Cross-Border Mechanism” of the new Interreg-programme for 2021-2027 has been designed which aims to bring Europe closer to its citizens by removing historical obstacles, legal and administrative barriers for different types of cooperation programmes between the border regions and countries.

As far as the Central European region is concerned, it faces a multitude of complex challenges and barriers of various kinds e.g., socio-economic and territorial inequalities, political culture etc. which hinder the efforts to strengthen the sense of European identity among citizens. However, a common identity, rooted in strong cultural and historical ties, brings citizens in the region closer together. This intangible “Central European identity” can also strengthen citizens’ sense of belonging to Europe.

Civil actors should develop new approaches and initiatives which would generate a long-term impact on European society and keep citizens in motion in order to shape the European identity and extend European citizenship to new policy fields. For these aims, concrete policy fields and different levels e.g., local, urban and regional, should be identified.

Follow-up, proposals

Civil stakeholders can take actions to promote European identity and European citizenship within the scope of the Cohesion Policy or outside of it. As regards possibilities offered by the Cohesion Policy, civil actions should also be connected to the new funding priority that aims to bring Europe closer to citizens by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development. All this means that future civil projects must be elaborated in a broad partnership with key stakeholders in the local and urban development policies.

Furthermore, relevant best practices exist in cross-border cooperation covering Central Europe (Interreg programmes). The evaluation of those practices e.g., extension of core ideas to all EU macro-regions, can generate innovative actions establishing a stronger link between European identity and European citizenship at transnational level. At the same time, there are opportunities to realise similar initiatives outside the scope of Cohesion Policy.



New pan-European communication campaigns or comprehensive actions such as launching new European Citizens' Initiative can be mentioned here. However, there are other domains for civil society actors to contribute in an innovative way.

School education offers civil actors a unique opportunity to start such actions. Professional civil organisations e.g., teachers' associations from the member state, could create a platform and adopt a single approach to writing a new textbook on Europe.

The book would include three chapters: history of the formation and development of a common European identity; European integration (1945-) and the meaning of European citizenship. The book would be translated into all the 24 official languages of the EU and used by students in the 9-12th grade across Europe. History, economic geography, introduction to politics, social studies or citizens' knowledge are subjects which are taught in the 9-12th grade at schools.

The students' new textbook on Europe would be used as a complementary study material connecting to the school subjects mentioned above. Support of European political actors e.g., the European Commission or the Parliament would be needed for a successful implementation of this project. The book would, among others, generate a continuous impact (education at schools) on the next generations who will shape European identity and thus the future of Europe.

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