

Ursula von der Leyen
Věra Jourová
Didier Reynders
European Commission
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Brussels, 10 April 2020

**CSOs MUST BE ABLE TO KEEP ACTING IN RESPONSE TO SOCIAL EMERGENCIES
STATES MUST INTEGRATE THE NEEDS OF CSOs INTO THEIR POLICIES.**

Dear Ms Ursula Von Der Leyen,

Dear Ms Věra Jourová,

Dear Mr Didier Reynders,

Our societies are going through an unprecedented crisis in Europe in times of peace. The institutions of the European Union and the Member States have taken decisions dictated by the urgency to slow down the spread of the pandemic. Production is disorganized. Workers' incomes are already massively affected. Support measures are being taken, aimed at companies and employees. This is necessary and must continue. It must be generalized where institutional intervention is still awaited.

For decades, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the third sector have played an essential role in supporting vulnerable communities and populations. From one country to another, our organisations have different status and modus operandi. The tasks they perform also vary. But everywhere they are in the front line to witness the precarious situations people suffer from, trying to respond to people's needs for effective access to rights, to alert on the limitations and adverse consequences of public policies.

This onset of crisis shows how diverse and fundamental civil society organisations roles are. **The crisis has increased the vulnerabilities experienced by those who were already vulnerable.** New populations are being added to those who are already fragile. **The CSOs need to see their means of action strengthened. Many are already in difficulty.**

The CSOs need the authorities to listen to them so that their alerts are taken into account without delay. In some Member States this is often the case, in others not at all. And often, not because of a lack of will but because of a lack of capacity, the institutions do not react with the necessary urgency. Like the health workers in hospitals, they have too many problems to solve at once.

The CSOs are there. They know what is going on in the field. They have the confidence of the people. They must be supported and given the means to better address vulnerabilities in our societies.

We call on the European Commission to pay attention, in all the initiatives it takes, to including the CSOs in order to give them the place they deserve. This concerns in particular:

- **Ensuring that CSOs benefit in all Member States from all measures taken to help maintain the capacities of companies, and in particular so that they can keep their premises and staff.** This is important during the crisis. And it is equally important in the post-crisis period. **Our societies must not lose the unique expertise and capacity of CSOs in dealing with vulnerable groups.**
- **Ensuring that CSOs have access to public authorities, at all levels, in all Member States, so that their alerts, analyses and proposals are included in the decision-making process, both during and after the crisis.**
- **Taking action vis-a-vis public authorities where they do not conduct this civil dialogue with CSOs.**

The management of the crisis has changed the way in which many States considered their role. More than a regulatory role, States play a direct role. Rather than organizing individualization in society, States take direct responsibility and action aiming at general economic and social cohesion. There is a very good reason for this change: it is **to act for the common good**, which is not the sum of individual interests.

CSOs have always been the actors whose action is guided by the objective of the common good. **The States**, which seek to act in this direction **in the context of emergency, will find experienced partners in the associations**. Provided they take measures that prevent the collapse of the fragile world of CSOs.

We are counting on the European Commission to act swiftly and publicly in support of the CSOs' role and action capacities during the crisis and in the reconstruction of the social fabric beyond the present moment.

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