



ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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2022

the year of solidarity

The disturbing news of war shattered the hopes of many in 2022. European democracies felt shaken. It is undeniable that the war in Ukraine will have an impact on democracy in Europe. To what extent, it is still to be determined.

Amid it all, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and independent media took a central role, reacting quickly where governments fell short. Our grantee and foundation partners adapted their work to respond in solidarity with civil society in Ukraine.

Some of our grantees mobilised their networks and coalition members to engage in ad-hoc volunteer activities, assisting people escaping the war with free legal consultations, humanitarian help, shelters, or refugee assistance. Many provided coverage about the military, political, humanitarian, economic situation in Ukraine in local languages, or integrated Ukrainian as a reporting language. At the same time, others started collecting, authenticating, and archiving digital material to document the conflict, ensuring that it can meet the standards to be used in potential future prosecution of war crimes. These are only some examples.

Elsewhere in Europe, civil society (CS) and independent public-interest media have stood strong in the face of continuous obstacles. We have seen pro-democracy actors contributing to shaping public policies that protect and uphold democracy. For instance, CSOs contributed to shaping digital policies at national and EU levels. These actions changed our digital public sphere, promoting democracy, ensuring citizens' safety online and their access to reliable information.

In the past years, CSOs have been exposed to a constant state of urgency, but in 2022 their challenges amplified. The war and the inflation have brought uncertainty, and the longer the

uncertainty lasts, the bigger the impact on our grantees and on their resilience.

Actors defending democracy cannot do it alone, they need support in terms of funding, capacity building and networking. This is where philanthropy comes in, with a track record in supporting CSOs and independent media. Civitates is only one example of such efforts. Many private foundations and other philanthropic actors have embraced this responsibility and will continue to do so.

In the next years, we will continue to support civil society actors to come together, revitalise public discourse, and ensure that all voices are heard. We would like to see our grantee partners becoming more resilient, impactful, and better connected. In this light, we will continue to provide flexible funding for civil society actors, strengthen their capacity, connect local and European actors, creating space and opportunities for cross-organisational learning among all the organisations supported by Civitates. Our goal is to contribute to building resilient and open democracies in the face of new emerging challenges.

CIVITATES TEAM

Elisa PETER, Director

Roy VIRAH-SAWMY, Programme manager

Ekaterina MANDOVA, Programme manager



A word from the Chair

The war in Ukraine has made our world an even more unstable place. As a collaborative fund, we at Civitates responded by further supporting our grantee partners and enabling them to develop their activities in solidarity with Ukraine. I would like to thank all foundation partners and our secretariat to have made this happen.

The work of civil society and independent public-interest journalism remains essential in creating a more united and equal democracy in Europe. For civil society to be resilient, philanthropy needs to step in: it has a role in supporting CSOs in Europe, connecting them to relevant actors, and fostering collaborations.

Civitates and its partners remain committed to the goal of strengthening democracy and encouraging cooperation and solidarity in Europe. In 2022, we started reviewing our strategy and identifying lessons learnt, to prepare a strategy for the future. As needs are evolving, we need to monitor developments, especially regarding how the war in Ukraine will affect democracy in Europe. Civitates will coordinate efforts among partners so that they stand strong and united. It is a good time to expand our collaborative and act together to support resilient democracies everywhere in Europe.

Stefan SCHÄFERS,

Civitates Chair and Director at King Baudouin Foundation

2022



Civitates in numbers



22 Foundation
partners



3 Calls for
proposals



1.4M€
attributed in new grants

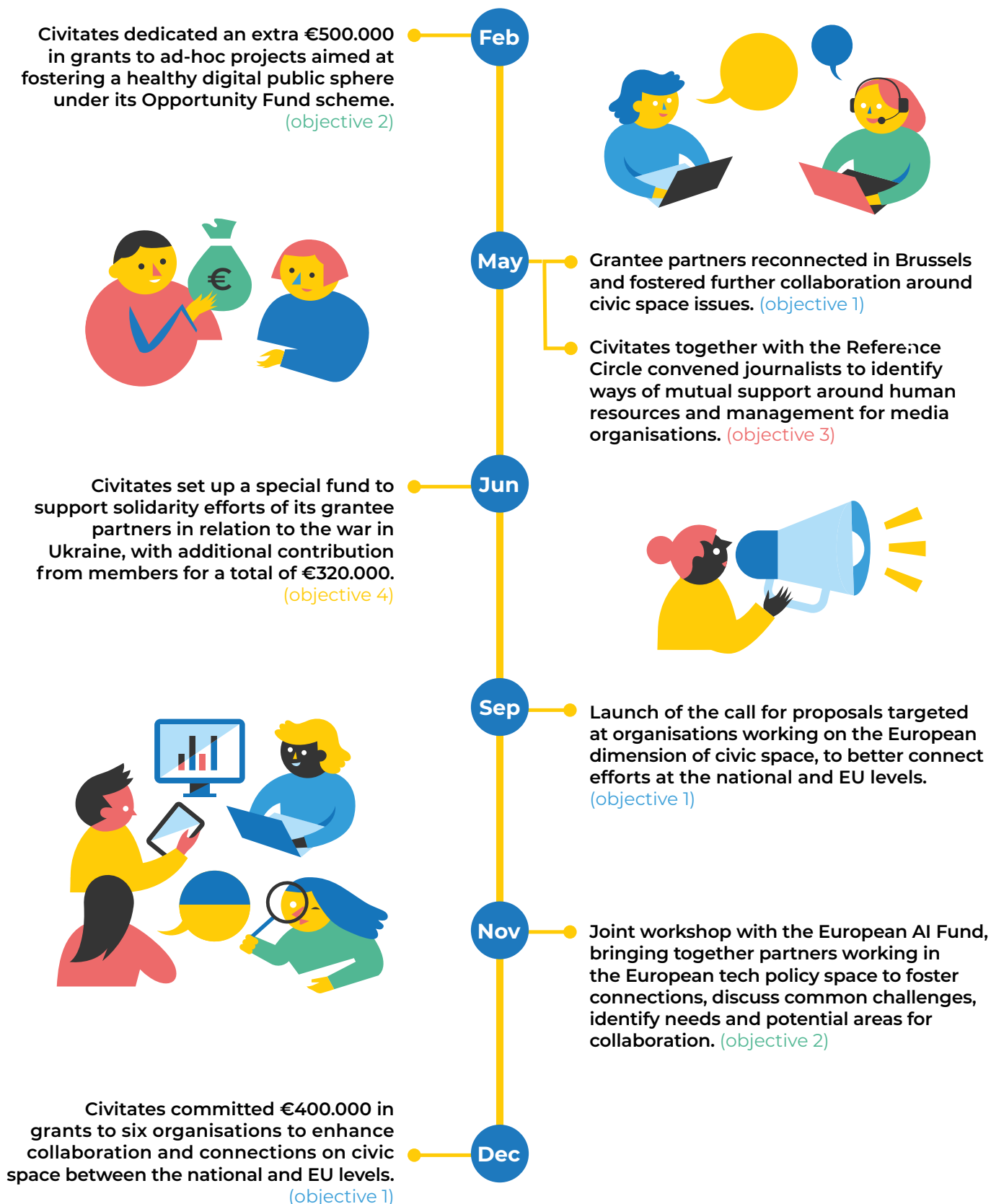


41 Project and
organisations
supported



in **18** countries
in the EU

Our Highlights



Progress made



Strong and resilient Civil Society

At Civitates, we support collective action, coalition building and initiatives – at local, national, and European level – that seek to respond effectively to the shrinking space for civil society.

For civil society to become more resilient, its actors have to be able to come together, strengthen their capacities and build common strategies to address the challenges affecting the environment in which they operate. In this way, CSOs can play their indispensable watchdog role.

● What we did

Grant making

The issue of the shrinking civic space in Europe is gradually gaining momentum in Brussels, with several consultations, policy proposals actions and other instruments that seek to address different aspects of civic space and the role of civil society. In light of these developments, and in line with our objective to empower civil society and enhance civic space, in December 2022 Civitates has committed €400.000 to six organisations for a period of one year. The grants will start in January 2023 and the goal is to support actors whose core mission is to help civil society better coordinate, carry the advocacy efforts in Brussels and offer opportunities for networking and convergence at a pan-European level. This is a valuable addition to supporting a strong and resilient civil society in Europe.

The six organisations that Civitates has selected act as intermediaries that coordinate the work of national civil societies, have them participate in the debate at the European level, and make their voices heard. In this way, they urge the institutions to take stronger actions to protect and support civil society across Europe. Our new group of grantees has good knowledge of the EU policy landscape, the capacity to follow the policy debate, identify the right opportunities, and

have well-established lines of communication with relevant policymakers.

Civitates also renewed its commitment to the coalitions in Poland and Croatia for two more years for a total of €400.000. Civitates started supporting the work of those coalitions with a one-year grant in 2021. Having established a trusted relationship with those coalitions and having seen the progress they have made in just one year, the Civitates approved a second grant phase for those partners.

Capacity building

→ **Supporting our grantees' monitoring and evaluation**

In 2022, we worked with a monitoring, evaluation and learning consultant who was tasked to help grantee partners refine how they track, assess and report on their progress towards fostering an enabling environment for civil society. The consultation enabled grantees to communicate better about the impact of their actions.

→ **Post-Covid meeting in Brussels**

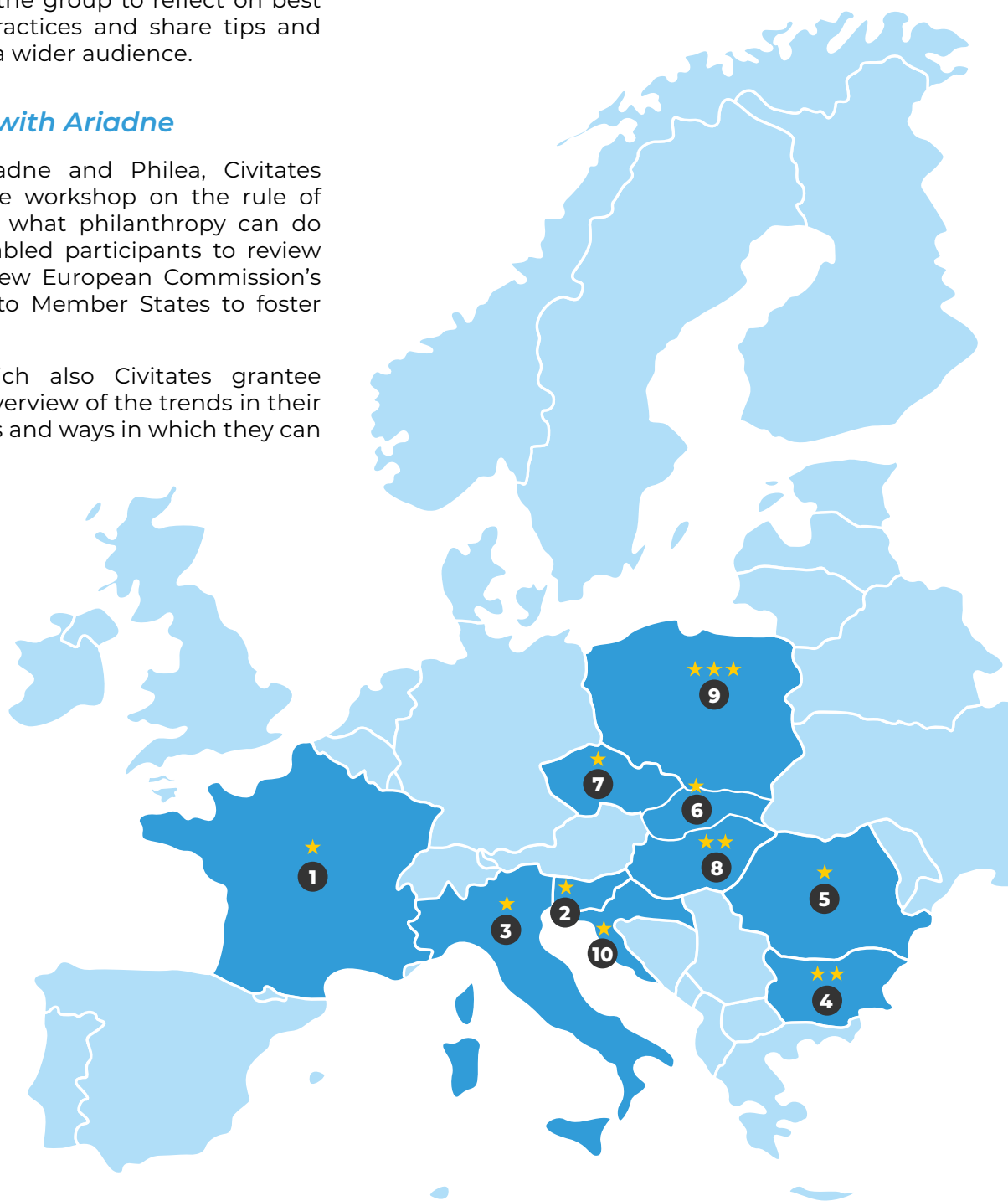
Due to Covid-19 restrictions, our grantee partners did not have an opportunity to meet in person for two years. In the meantime, Civitates had started supporting four new coalitions at the end of 2021, so we invited all our grantees to join us in Brussels for a two-day workshop in order to reconnect with and learn from one another. The second day of the workshop, facilitated by the Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties), focused on communications and the main takeaways of the guide *“How to talk about civic space.”* As our grantees work to influence public perception about civil society, the

workshop enabled the group to reflect on best communications practices and share tips and messages to reach a wider audience.

Joint workshop with Ariadne

Together with Ariadne and Philea, Civitates organised an online workshop on the rule of law in Europe and what philanthropy can do to protect it. It enabled participants to review and discuss the new European Commission's recommendations to Member States to foster the rule of law.

CSOs, among which also Civitates grantee partners, gave an overview of the trends in their respective countries and ways in which they can be reversed.



1 VoxPublic France

2 Peace Institute Slovenia

3 Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD) Italy

4 Bulgarian Fund for Women Bulgaria
Civic Participation Forum Bulgaria

5 Resource Centre for Public Participation (CERE) Romania

6 Via Iuris Slovakia

7 Glopolis (NEON coalition) Czech Republic

8 Ökotárs (Civilisation coalition) Hungary
Marom Klub Egyesület Hungary

9 OFOP- equal participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees Poland
OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative Poland
Association 61 Poland

10 Centre for Peace Studies Croatia

★ Number of organisations supported

● Grantees' progress

All coalitions are making progress towards their objectives. In 2022, they have focused on:

- safeguarding space for civil society through their activities as explained in the following paragraph
- identifying and highlighting pressing rights issues, as well as writing recommendations to officials about those subjects
- creating stronger and more diverse communities of civil society actors
- engaging in different solidarity actions such as providing legal information to incoming Ukrainian refugees, organising volunteers, shelters, etc.
- human rights and civic education

In the next pages we offer reflections of our grantees' progress based on their reports, online interviews and in-person meetings.

Safeguarding space for civil society

While 2022 brought significant challenges to our grantee partners because of the war in Ukraine, national elections, and changes in each country's political environment, we have seen a number of them reinforcing their positions as legitimate actors to defend civic interests.

While the 2022 parliamentary elections in **Hungary** did not result in a much-anticipated change, the ones in **Slovenia** reached a turnout of around 71% and brought in a new government. Slovenian civil society saw this as a result of their past efforts to mobilise the public to vote. In previous years the Slovenian coalition supported by Civitates has mobilised, together with other civil society actors, to defend the independence of the country's public media. United, they countered the attempts of the former government to cut off funding for the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) in 2021, and to change the appointment procedure and composition of the governing and management bodies of national radio and television (RTV Slovenia) in 2022. As our partners phrased it:

“...journalists and civil society demonstrated historic resilience and connection, but also managed to raise and mobilise exceptional public support.”

Bulgaria saw another year of unsuccessful elections in 2022 and, as to date, the country continues to be without a parliament, which intensifies the work of civil society organisations.

The coalition led by the Citizen Participation Forum shares that, even though the political situation has been difficult, they could mobilise their members and successfully opposed the implementation of ‘foreign agents laws’ similar to the Hungarian ones, that endanger the work of CSOs.

Italy has seen a major shift to the right after its general elections in 2022. There are new decrees being discussed targeting CSOs that work predominantly with migrants and refugees. As our coalition partner in Italy put it:

“the new security decree aims to build a hostile environment for safe and rescue operations and legal assistance, putting many lives at risk. However, new progressive movements are emerging this time and we have been able to engage with most of them so far, thanks to the activities of this project.”



In **France** our coalition partners report that the results of the presidential and legislative elections of 2022, where the right wing party led by Marine Le Pen obtained 42% of the votes in the second round of the presidential elections, and the arrival of 91 far-right deputies in the National Assembly, caused fear among CSOs for the future of associative freedoms in France.

In the last years, civil society actors in France witnessed funding cuts from public bodies and local government, stigmatisation of CSOs and activists, and personal attacks towards activists. Legislation has been adopted criminalising the help to migrants and led to repression and intimidation towards organisations and individuals working on this topic. The coalition developed a booklet with some tips and tricks in which they classified the attacks in four types: political, police-related, judicial, and financial and **outlined strategies to counteract those**.

Using these strategies, the coalition could raise awareness on the issue of the restriction of associative freedoms in France, among civil society organisations but also in the media and among political leaders. Their recommendations have been taken up by other organisations such as Le Mouvement Associatif in their advocacy work.



Identifying and highlighting pressing rights issues in policy recommendations

In **Slovakia**, the coalition has been successful in implementing an advocacy campaign to promote policy recommendations for the Government's Manifesto. They have been engaged in developing the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Facility Plan. In addition, the coalition

has been active in public discussions and in promoting the achievements of CSOs through a broader communication campaign targeted at the general public. The coalition was also seen as a trusted partner when the government drafted and subsequently approved strategic documents framing the relations between the state and civil society.

Our coalition partners in **Poland** had a troubled 2022 with the influx of refugees from Ukraine and Belarus, upcoming elections in 2023, and the challenges related to the potential corruption in the distribution of the fund for the National Recovery Plan for Poland.

The project Civic Monitoring of EU Funds, hosted by The National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP) has established a permanent working relationship with the European Commission. Through regular engagement, this cooperation led to changes in the provisions of the Partnership Agreement between Poland and the European Union (a strategic document of the Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 providing directions to programme EU funds in the country). They have been especially successful in insisting on the mandatory involvement of non-governmental organisations in the observation of European Funds.

Creating stronger and more diverse communities of civil society actors

Despite the economic and political deterioration, our coalition partners in **Hungary** have made good progress in starting activities in regions outside Budapest. After mapping initiatives among citizens' groups and CSOs already active in more remote areas, the coalition led by Okotars, launched a micro-grants scheme for those local actors to work on common projects. It is important to engage such groups, to provide them with guidance and mentoring, as citizens' groups are vulnerable to political and economic pressure.

The **Czech Republic** held the Presidency of the Council of the EU from July 2022 until the end of the year. The coalition in the country seized this opportunity to engage governmental and international actors on the topic of cooperation with CSOs in a conference organised by the coalition and partly supported by Civitates with an additional contribution of €15.000. A few government reformers (ministerial officials) were identified as a direct outcome of the conference, with the ambition to intensify the collaboration and find ways to support the meaningful participation of CSOs in public decision-making.

In **Bulgaria** there have been some positive steps towards consolidating civil society's voice in the country with the establishment of the

Civil Society Development Council. In this way, CSOs can coordinate and advocate together towards the governmental institutions. Still, the work of the Council has stalled due to the shaky political situation and the lack of permanent institutions to advocate towards. Yet the two coalitions that Civitates supports in Bulgaria have remained strong and dedicated to building a better infrastructure for civil society. They have continued engaging their members, encouraging partnerships, and developing targeted joint campaigns. The Bulgarian Fund for Women, leader of the coalition RavniBG, is soon to pass the baton of its presidency of the Council. They are hopeful that the Council will further expand and become

“even more representative of the interests of the civil society at large thanks to the wide geographic reach of our advocacy efforts.”

The coalition led by Association 61 in **Poland** started working on a “Citizens’ Pact for Education”, issuing a set of priorities and solutions for positive changes in the Polish education system. Bringing a large consortium of NGOs, teachers’ trade unions, local governments, school principals, teachers, students, and parents on board. The goal is to take advantage of the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2023 in Poland and convince politicians to adopt those recommendations in their respective programs.

The coalition has been especially reactive to the educational needs of the incoming Ukrainian

children in the country. They have managed to gather and publish methodological and didactic materials on a new website, especially created to support Polish educators in teaching students from a different linguistic background. Since the beginning of the war, the coalition has also been active in networking with domestic and foreign entities that support the education of Ukrainian children in Poland such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, Plan International, Norwegian Refugee Committee and other humanitarian organisations.

● Challenges and recommendations

Civitates has identified the following challenges for our grantee partners but also for civic space defenders at large. The observations are based on conversations, reports and meetings with different civil society organisations working on the national and the European level.

- ➔ Legal threats are a main concern for a lot of organisations. CSOs have no legal, financial, or other means to protect themselves against harassment, threats, and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).
- ➔ Recruiting and retaining talent is a main challenge as the civil society sector provides traditionally lower salaries than others. Thus, to support the field in a meaningful way, there is a need to provide fair salaries and good working conditions (such as eligibility of sick and maternal payments, etc.), so that self-care and community care are at the heart of internal working cultures.



- ➔ There is a huge need for capacity building on existing protection mechanisms, legal defence, and public awareness campaigns and framing, organisational and individual resilience, organisational development and digital and physical security.
- ➔ Funding for CSOs is often available in regions and countries where shrinking space is already an issue. Recognising early signs of deterioration of civic space in the different European countries and funnelling funding there could be crucial for protecting democracy.

● Lessons learnt

Financial sustainability

The main challenge identified among the grantees is the financial sustainability of the coalitions. Liaising and conducting joint advocacy with EU-wide civic networks have allowed some of our partners to gain recognition about their work and thus be able to get funding from bigger philanthropic and institutional donors. Others, however, share that the unrestricted long-term funding provided by Civitates has been crucial for the existence of their national networks. Our funding has allowed grantees to coordinate and engage civic actors on a larger scale, hence exploring “*uncharted territories*” of activism. This kind of “*support for civil society as a whole*” is still unique in the sector.

All the coalitions share that balancing long-term goals with immediate responses to pressing problems puts them in a challenging situation. There is a general concern about the constant reaction mode CSOs have been in, and how this affects the well-being, especially of organisations’ founders. The inflation may put certain grantee partners at risk, as they need to raise wages to meet the legal requirements in the country, but also to ensure that they provide fair salaries to their staff members.

Funding provided by a collaborative gives grantees a sense of security

Civitates’ role in generating cooperation by providing network opportunities for our grantee partners has been recognised as especially beneficial.

A number of the coalitions supported by Civitates share that they would have not been able to reach their goals and develop their projects in the same way without the long-term support provided over the past four years. The continuity of the support and the certain flexibility of our grant-making have enabled them to expand

The collaborative grant making approach of Civitates is also appreciated by the grantees, as they describe Civitates as a group of foundations “pioneers” in funding democracy. The collaborative gives them a sense of security as well as tools to defend themselves when attacked by populist politicians on the nature of their economic ties. As explained by one of the coalitions, “... [the fact that] that the funding is granted by more than one foundation makes it easier to avoid potential accusations of carrying out the agenda of a particular sponsor.

their members and adapt swiftly to the changing environment, nationally and internationally. As our coalition partner in Croatia shared,

“the funding allowed more people to work on key civil society and civic space issues, which would otherwise be hard to ensure, due to lack of funding for working on this sort of issue and having to work on projects on other issue.”



Coalition building efforts come to the rescue in times of crisis

Coalition building takes time, and our partners on the ground recognise that there is a need for cooperation, creativity, and solidarity to counter trends that undermine democracy. As the coalition in **Slovenia** observed: *“When our coalition was established, we could not foresee all the unprecedented events and challenges in defending democracy and civic space we have had to face. It was helpful that we were already functioning as a coalition at the point of the rise of authoritarianism and repressive government actions, because cooperation and joint actions were necessary for successful response to those challenges.”*

The coalition approach has strengthened CSOs' collective capacity. As pointed out by our grantee partner in **Slovakia**,

“the coalition is a key voice and a defender of civil society with strong legitimacy in the sector and the ability to act swiftly if there is any danger to the sector and its member.”

In the spotlight: Engaging local CSOs through participatory grant making

In **Bulgaria**, the coalition led by the Bulgarian Fund for Women has disbursed small grants to coalition partners in remote areas. The grantees were selected by the applicants themselves, following a collaborative grant-making model. Engaging partners through participatory grant making allow them not only to feel as fully-fledged members of the coalition, but also to build capacities through the process and through getting to know the work of the others. This is a step towards

“empowering smaller rural CSOs and grass root groups to participate in decision-making processes and advocate on local level.”

In the country, the participatory grant making mechanism is innovative, and aims to bring back decision-making power to the organisations applying for funding and other coalition members willing to partake. The coalition uses different processes to increase solidarity among its members, and the participatory grant-making mechanism is central to their work on engaging partners and strengthening their skills.

Healthy Digital Public Sphere

Civitates supports civil society organisations that advocate for improved checks and balances, accountability, and transparency through regulation at the EU and the national level, to shape a digital public sphere that is conducive to democracy and fundamental rights.

A healthy digital public sphere can be described as a space where citizens can inform themselves based on facts, where they are exposed to trustworthy and independent analyses and a plurality of views, where all voices are expressed and heard safely and freely, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation, without fear of abuse, violence, or hate speech. A space with adequate checks and balances, where accountability and transparency are applied, which upholds democratic principles, fundamental rights, and the protection of citizens.

● What we did

Grant making

In August 2021, Civitates committed a total of €1.65 million to support eight **organisations** over a period of two years. These core/programmatic grants are intended to strengthen and operationalise the grantees' advocacy strategies and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing policy debates.

In addition to the provision of these grants, in February 2022 Civitates allocated an extra €500.000 from its grant budget to ad-hoc projects aimed at fostering a healthy digital public sphere. This additional grant mechanism, commonly referred to as an 'Opportunity Fund' aims to complement and expand the work currently supported by Civitates (and its potential for impact on the digital public sphere), providing some flexibility to anticipate or react to developments in a fast-evolving field.

Under this scheme, Civitates invited organisations to apply for small grants of around €30.000 for projects that are complementary to the work of the main grantee cohort and the objectives of Civitates. The organisations are identified through recommendations of grantee and foundation partners, and by scouting the field. The proposals are collected on a rolling basis and are reviewed by a small committee of three partner foundations. In December 2022, around 20 organisations were invited to submit a proposal under this grant scheme and seven applications were received and approved for a total grant amount of €220.000. The Opportunity Fund is expected to run until the end of 2023.

The Opportunity Fund is a good way for Civitates to be able to react to emerging issues and address some funding gaps in a fast-evolving policy environment, in addition to our larger and longer-term grants to a few organisations. It allows Civitates to provide extra capacity to organisations to scale up their interventions when there is a need for it. The support granted, so far, has allowed, for instance, the Center for Democracy and Technology to keep working on the implementation of the Digital Services Act especially with the coordination of civil society input to the Council of EU, organising a round table with the Czech Presidency. The Irish Council for Civil Liberties has developed and delivered essential material to the European Commission to help it build capacity to enforce the Digital Markets Act. As noted by a grantee partner, *"the work would be reduced to analysis and basic advocacy without the grant."*

This grant mechanism also allows Civitates to support the development of pilot initiatives and networks that will last beyond the initial project period. For example, it has allowed SOMO to establish an anti-monopoly network of CSOs, in collaboration with the Balanced Economy Project and provide training for civil society to tackle corporate power through competition law. This will be highly relevant with regards to the Digital Markets Act. The Civitates grant allowed them to hire a part-time network coordinator to run the project, and the position has now transitioned into full-time. Another example is the Frank Bold Society, that has been able to expand its network with more experienced tech policy advocates at the European level. It is currently a leading CSO voice in the Czech Republic, raising awareness around the implementation and enforcement of the Digital Services Act.

Capacity building

In November 2022, Civitates and the **European AI Fund** (a sister pooled fund, also hosted by NEF) brought together around 60 people from their grantee partners that work on different aspects of digital and tech policy, as well as foundation partners to network and identify the best ways to support each other.

The meeting was also a good moment to celebrate various victories in terms of advocacy for numerous organisations in this group, take

stock of the work accomplished so far, draw lessons learnt and reflect on the way forward.

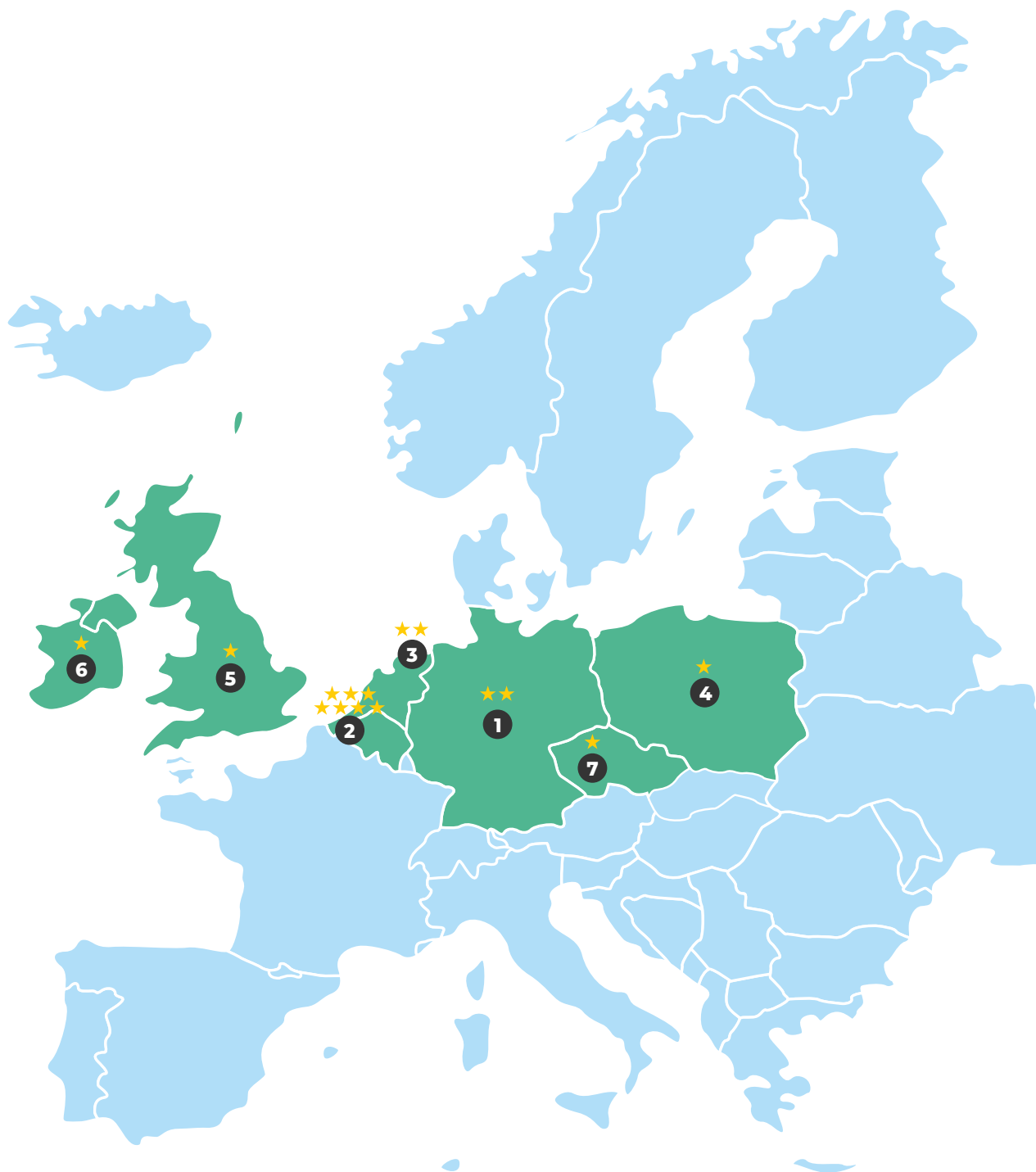
Participants exchanged inspirational ideas for collective action from other sectors like the climate movement, gained insights into EU advocacy strategies, and reflected on the infrastructure that is needed to work better together. The discussions generated a multitude of ideas to be further developed.

One of the conclusions of this two-day convening is that, in the battle to shape digital technologies so that they serve the public interest, civil society has to fight against the vast resources and the strong influence of the tech industry. This is a daunting challenge for a sector that is still small and emergent. To meet this challenge, civil society needs to collaborate.

This meeting was also a very concrete example of successful collaboration between the two collaborative funds (Civitates and the European AI Fund), with a considerable overlap in terms of foundation partners and missions of our grantees. Both funds will continue to closely cooperate over the coming years, as we further shape and implement our respective strategies.

For more reflections on this joint convening, we recommend you to read the following article: **Mosquitoes can take on elephants: Reflections from Civitates' and the European AI Fund's ecosystem building workshop.**





- 1** AW AlgorihtmWatch gGmbH [Germany](#)
Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V. [Germany](#)

- 2** Access Now Europe [Belgium \(BE\)](#)
EU DisinfoLab [\(BE\)](#)
European Digital Rights (EDRi) [\(BE\)](#)
European Partnership for Democracy [\(BE\)](#)
Transparency International EU liason office [\(BE\)](#)
Center for Democracy and Technology EU [\(BE\)](#)
The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) [\(BE\)](#)

- 3** Institute for Information Law (IViR)-
University of Amsterdam) [the Netherlands](#)
SOMO [the Netherlands](#)

- 4** Panoptikon Foundation [Poland](#)

- 5** Who targets Me [UK](#)

- 6** Irish Council For Civil Liberties [Ireland](#)

- 7** Frank Bold Society [Czech Republic](#)

★ Number of organisations supported

● Grantees' progress

There have been several EU policy developments in 2022, with pieces of legislation such as the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) finalised by co-legislators (the Council of the EU and the European Parliament). There has been a revamped code of practice on disinformation, and other proposals such as the Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, the Media Freedom Act or the AI Act, that are currently being discussed in the European Parliament and in the Council. All these laws will be interacting with each other – hopefully in a complementary way – and are supposed to set up rules and standards to limit artificial amplification and dissemination of harmful content or practices; ultimately, to impact positively the public sphere online, and, by extension, the democratic sphere. Civitates grantee partners have been able to promote considerable progress in the policy space to foster a healthy digital public sphere.



The advocacy “wins”

The cohort of grantee partners have been heavily involved in advocacy work around these policies, contributing with research, following the negotiations and debates in the European Parliament (EP) and the Council. But also leading and participating in campaigns to raise awareness and mobilise CSOs and public opinion on specific topics, providing input to legislators and organising policy events. While this work is still ongoing, it emerges from the reports that the finalised texts of the DSA and the DMA represent a considerable positive step towards addressing some challenges of the digital public sphere.

When it comes to the DSA for example, “the text has been substantially enhanced by the co-legislators to safeguard the digital public space, by strengthening key articles on online advertising, risk assessment, risk mitigation, data access and scrutiny and recommender systems...”¹, and grantee partners along with other CSOs have contributed greatly to this outcome. As one of them highlighted, “The work on the Digital Services Act, proved that civil society has an impact on EU bodies, and we can successfully deliver our messages. Even though the arms are uneven, the money and manpower spent on campaigns are incomparable with Big Tech lobbying. However, bringing the human rights approach to the discussion was valid, and we could push back some last-minute modifications in the law.”²

One example of such last-minute modifications is the **media exemption clause**, which was added by the European Parliament. This clause, pushed by the publishing industry, would have excluded any content moderation by platforms coming from any “media”: a vague definition that could include pretty much anyone who would self-identify themselves as a media organisation. This kind of proposal would reverse years of progress in the fight against hate speech and disinformation online, offering a motorway for any “media”, including state-influenced media, to dis-inform without any supervision and with a legal protection by default on all content published. This amendment was not retained in the final version of the DSA, partially thanks to the advocacy actions led by grantee organisations such as EU DisinfoLab, supported by others such as EDRi, Liberties, Panoptykon or Access Now. The campaigns to get this amendment struck down gained considerable attention both on social media and in traditional media, with statements of support from influential voices such as Facebook whistle blower Frances Haugen or Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa. The Commission Vice-President Vera Jourova also aligned publicly with this position, describing the media exemption as a case of “good intentions that are leading to hell”.

¹ Extract of the report of the European Partnership for Democracy

² Extract of the report of the Civil Liberties Union for Europe

Other aspects of the DSA, such as access to data for researchers and civil society organisations to audit the practices of big tech companies, or regulating surveillance-based models of advertising are, to a certain extent, the result of an intense evidence-based advocacy by CS, that contributed to raising awareness and shifting the narratives around tech regulation in Brussels. As one grantee put it,

“In the early days of the negotiations, no one was keen to address online advertising in the DSA text. The fact that we could even put a reform of the advertising business model on the agenda, being discussed by decision-makers – and feared by Big Tech – is a big achievement.”³

As part of this narrative building work towards policymakers, it is also worth noticing that a lot of grantee partners received coverage by influential media in the EU policy landscape such as *Politico*, *Euractiv* or *Financial Times*, with whom some of them partnered up for specific projects⁴. As a grantee partner declared, “This influence on the legislative process in the EP was noted by *The Parliament Magazine*, which reported: ‘EDRi and its partners call for alternatives to the commercial tracking and surveillance ecosystem that fuels this kind of content amplification and targeting. EDRi member Panoptikon has developed proposals where the platform’s problematic recommender systems are not based on data inferred from pervasive tracking but instead empower users to decide what kind of online content they want to see, how and by whom’. In the last weeks before the plenary vote our policy arguments, at that point also endorsed by European digital companies, were amplified by *TechCrunch* and *Politico*.”⁵

They have also affirmed their legitimacy as a credible, valuable, and public-interest voice with policymakers in the EU Commission, the European Parliament, and sometimes in Member States as well. This **accrued legitimacy of civil society organisations** in tech regulation will certainly be very useful on other pieces of legislation as well.

Collaboration, coordination, and coalition building

Through this intense and crucial legislative period for digital policy, civil society organisations in this space have **mobilised, collaborated, and shared their resources**. We have seen several coalitions and informal gatherings emerge or become more active over the past one and a half year, with different levels of organisation and mobilisation as well as on different topics such as the “People vs. Big Tech” coalition or the “Reclaim your face” campaign. Grantee partners have established working relationships between themselves, that range from signing letters initiated by one partner or informal update meetings to explicit and more detailed agreements on who of the policymakers to contact and what topics address with them. Some have co-organised events together and others have invited each other to their high-level meetings/round tables, creating a de facto pool of civil society expertise to draw on. This **acknowledgement of each other’s expertise** also allowed for organisations to really focus on their area of expertise and become more impactful with the support of an **aligned community of practice**. As pointed out by EU DisinfoLab,

“we noted that other partners were already covering the other points we wanted to push, such as the complaint handling system. We strategically let them lead this process and provided support and took more space on the media exemption discussion.”



³ Extract of the report of EDRi

⁴ For example Panoptikon and the Financial Times on the “Algorithms of Trauma”. See [story](#).

⁵ Extract of the report of Panoptikon



While this level of collaboration and coordination is certainly accentuated by the urgency of the situation, including the wide array and bulk of legislative proposals, the Civitates support has provided resources and flexibility needed for the different organisations to engage with each other and coordinate their actions. Various grantees have explicitly mentioned this point in their annual reports and a few of them have expressed the **wish to be more connected to the Civitates community of grantee partners and foundations**, also beyond this sub-fund. There were already some exchanges organised throughout the grant period between organisations such as: EDRi and the cohort of journalistic organisations on how to report on tech policy in Brussels or with the cohort of civil society coalitions on the topic of surveillance. Several grantee partners working on digital public sphere have also asked us to connect them with partners in specific member states, where they were organising events such as training workshops or where they were conducting research. Feedback on these connections has been positive, and we will foster those exchanges even more over the remaining grant period.

Some grantee partners have also been very **active at the national level**, trying to influence their government's position in the Council of the EU on the different legislative proposals. AlgorithmWatch has been very active in Germany, providing input to high-level officials in the Justice Ministry, being present in German mainstream media and participating in round tables and other discussions between civil society and policymakers. Panoptykon also engaged with Polish policymakers in the European Parliament, but also with the national government. As stated in their report, *"Interestingly, the most tangible effects of our work have been reflected by the evolution of the position of the Polish government – from very much focused on 'digital sovereignty' issues only – to one of the most active advocates among the MS for restricting the use of data in*

*personalised advertising and – more generally – a need to challenge VLOPs (Very Large Online Platforms)" harmful business model. We have literally seen e-mails sent by the Polish Minister responsible for digital affairs to other MS (disclosed in response to FOI), advocating for more progressive regulation on online ads, using exactly Panoptykon's arguments and language. Even though Panoptykon usually needs to confront and criticise the Polish government when it comes to national legislation, maintaining working relationships with public officials who represent Poland in the EU Council in the area of digital policy – paid off this time."*⁶ As we enter the implementation phase of the different pieces of EU legislation on digital policy, organisations with a strong hold in member states will play a strategic role. The Civitates team will explore in the coming months how to better support these efforts, fostering, for example, better connections among grantee partners and beyond.

● Challenges

Despite the considerable progress, grantee partners – and the field in general – face several challenges. These range from **structural issues in EU policymaking processes to more practical concerns**, such as adequate staffing, or the increasing inflation. As we reflect on some main challenges across the grantee cohort below, it must be noted that grantee partners have shown a great level of resilience and adaptability while facing these challenges, as the progress outlined above and their 'success stories' testify.

- ➔ **The amount of 'digital policy' proposals currently on the table of legislators is hard to manage for CSOs:** There are numerous pieces of legislation that have just been passed or that are currently being discussed, existing ones that are being revamped and ongoing enforcement issues both at national and EU level. These include the DSA, DMA, AI act, Data Act, the regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, just to name a few. There are also enforcement issues, including ongoing strategic litigation by some grantee partners on the GDPR. One way to partly mitigate this challenge is to coordinate and collaborate with like-minded, allied CSOs and other stakeholders, as outlined above. At Civitates tried to mitigate this challenge by supporting complementary actions, for instance on competition issues through the Opportunity Fund.
- ➔ **The level of corporate lobbying and the disparity in resources:** The tech industry has invested a lot of resources trying to influence various pieces of legislation. As one report

points out: “The level of corporate lobbying was probably even higher than anticipated. The NGO **Corporate Observatory Europe** documented the level of lobbying around the European Parliament committee vote in December 2021. Facebook held a gigantic offline and online advertising campaign, which is estimated by the **Lobby Control** as being worth 6.8m€ on print advertising in Germany alone since December 2020.” Recent journalistic investigations, such as the **Uber files**, have confirmed this point. While grantees have been able to establish themselves despite the resources gap and the power difference, the entries that such stakeholders have with high-level policymakers is a constant threat to the work of civil society. One example of this is Facebook, threatening AlgorithmWatch with legal action for a data donation project they were running on Instagram. Although this episode ended up raising the profile of AlgorithmWatch, the risk of a worse outcome is real.

- ➔ **The opacity of EU legislative process:** several grantees have expressed challenges related to the EU legislative process such as the lack of transparency of the Trialogue negotiations, last minutes amendments that have a negative impact of a piece of legislation (e.g., the media exemption) or the lack of transparency in the lobbying process. The opaqueness of negotiations greatly affects civil society, which needs to be constantly on the lookout and ready to react to negative developments that have been carefully planned. This is often detrimental to their planned (forward-looking) activities. Grantee partners have so far managed this by being well-prepared, adaptable, and flexible in their approach. The flexibility of the Civitates grant is highly valued in this respect. The legitimacy accrued, connections established, and trust built over the past years in policy circles by civil society helps them to mitigate challenges. However, this raises questions about the integrity of the legislative process and puts civil society in a perpetual reactive mode.

Another mitigating factor would be building strong advocacy capacity, skills, and know-how in as many member states as possible, to push for the civil society positions in the Council.

- ➔ **Connecting beyond the field of ‘digitally savvy’ organisations:** While there has been some progress in engaging organisations working with affected communities, traditional watchdogs or human rights organisation on digital policies, there is still a lot of work to do. Several grantees have been involved in this effort, engaging with minority rights groups impacted by hate speech and disinformation on specific advocacy actions. Others have organised workshops and trainings for other CSOs on specific files.
- ➔ **Communicating the challenges of the digital public sphere to the public:** similar to the point mentioned above, the challenge here is that it takes a lot of time to set the foundations for this work, through narrative building. Several grantees have scaled up their communication efforts, reaching out more and more to the public and not just policymakers. They have expertly seized opportunities such as elections and bills in national parliament or popular topics in the public discourse at specific moments like **the Facebook Files** or **the Pegasus project** to push their message, build a narrative and mobilise citizens. However, there is a need to build and maintain a firm narrative on the importance of addressing the challenges to democracy and fundamental rights posed by digital spaces.
- ➔ **Human resources, inflation, and other organisational concerns:** It is not specific to this sub-fund only, but many grantees have expressed concerns about the rising cost of living, the war in Ukraine and other external events that impact their functioning as an organisation. Among other concerns were staff retention and the heavy workload in an intense legislative period.



Independent Public-interest journalism

At Civitates, we provide multi-year core support to independent public-interest journalism organisations for general operations and transformation, while building the case for bringing more funding to the sector by sharing our learnings with the philanthropic community in Europe.

The sustainability and existence of independent public-interest journalism as a pillar of democracy is being challenged by economic, political, and societal factors such as changes in the advertising market, declining media freedom and eroding trust in media.

For the sector of independent public-interest journalism to grow, media organisations have to become more resilient, more networked and more impactful in reaching out beyond their usual audiences and informing the public's opinion on important societal topics. At the same time, they have to keep full editorial control in order to play their crucial role in the good governance of democratic societies ensuring transparency and accountability, as well as supplying the public with reliable, accurate, and balanced information.

Since 2021, Civitates has been supporting 11 independent public-interest organisations with core grants for three years with a total amount of €2.5 million.

What we want our grantees to achieve in the short/medium term:

- improve their viability, finding long-term sustainability models to be able to produce high-quality journalism
- develop strong connections within the cohort, while growing stronger together through mutual exchanges and peer learning
- contribute meaningfully and with impact to the public debate by covering stories of public interest
- contribute to funders' awareness raising and advocacy efforts in bringing more funding to the field

● What we did

Strengthening capacity

→ **Organisational assessments with Deutsche Welle Akademie**

Several Civitates grantees expressed the need for a follow-up to revisit their strategy and work on ways to overcome any obstacles they might have been facing since the organisational assessment (V-Sprint) they undertook in 2021.

Five of our partners signed up for such a follow-up in the first half of 2022. The V-Sprint allowed some partners to identify and address organisational knowledge gaps. At **Civio** in Spain, for example, the assessment helped to define a communication strategy where the whole team was involved. At **Pismo** in Poland, this translated in a strategic review of the organisation and a better understanding of teams' deadlines and workload, thus ensuring a smoother operation. For **Átlátszó Erdély** in Romania, the assessment was a steppingstone that led to a successful application with Google News Initiative.

The organisational assessment was mandatory for all grantee partners. While it allowed the Civitates team to better understand the grantees' organisational challenges where organisations, the assessment was time-consuming and not always targeted to the specific contexts. In the future, Civitates will adapt the capacity building offer so that it suits best the organisations and their trajectory in achieving their goals.

➔ **Joining efforts with the Reference Circle**

Civitates' grantees, together with members of the Reference Circle, – a self-organised journalistic network that aims to address the business matters of journalism together, as well as to advocate for infrastructural funding of independent media on a European level, - gathered to discuss the challenges they face in human resource management. Our grantee partners had previously shared with Civitates that this is one of the topics they would like further opportunities for exchange, as more and more journalists take on a managerial role. Having this – and the existing overlap of organisations between Civitates and the Reference Network – in mind, we decided to discuss these issues together. The meeting was meant as introductory to the topic, as the challenges around human resources are many.

Civitates and the Reference Circle organised an online meeting, diving deeper in the topic of finding and training editorial staff. It is a common challenge to recruit and retain staff due to the nature of the journalistic work and the difficulties many organisations face to stay competitive as employers.

➔ **Online coffee chats**

There was a lot of interest from the partners from our sub-fund on digital public sphere to meet the journalism grantees. We then organised two capacity building calls with them.

- EDRI approached us with a concrete suggestion – to address the following:

“What are the main tech regulation and digital rights issues that are relevant for journalists? What is the state of play at EU level on digital policy affecting media and journalists? How does this translate in the various countries?”

We used the format of online coffee chats to introduce the grantee partners to each other, present EDRI's expertise and how it can be useful to journalists and kick-start an exchange there.

- ***Election monitoring tool for journalists hosted by Democracy Reporting International (DRI).*** They have launched a user-friendly concept for a web-based toolkit to monitor social media during elections, and they have collaborated with different journalistic organisations to do so. The online exchange was focused on “How can we use social media data to provide tangible evidence for false and misleading information,

problematic speech – and their influence on political discourse?”

- ***We collaborated with the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) to talk about better fundraising and fundraising towards the EU institutions.*** Experts from the GFMD presented the Forum's fundraising guide and shared concrete practices in answering a call for proposals from the EU.

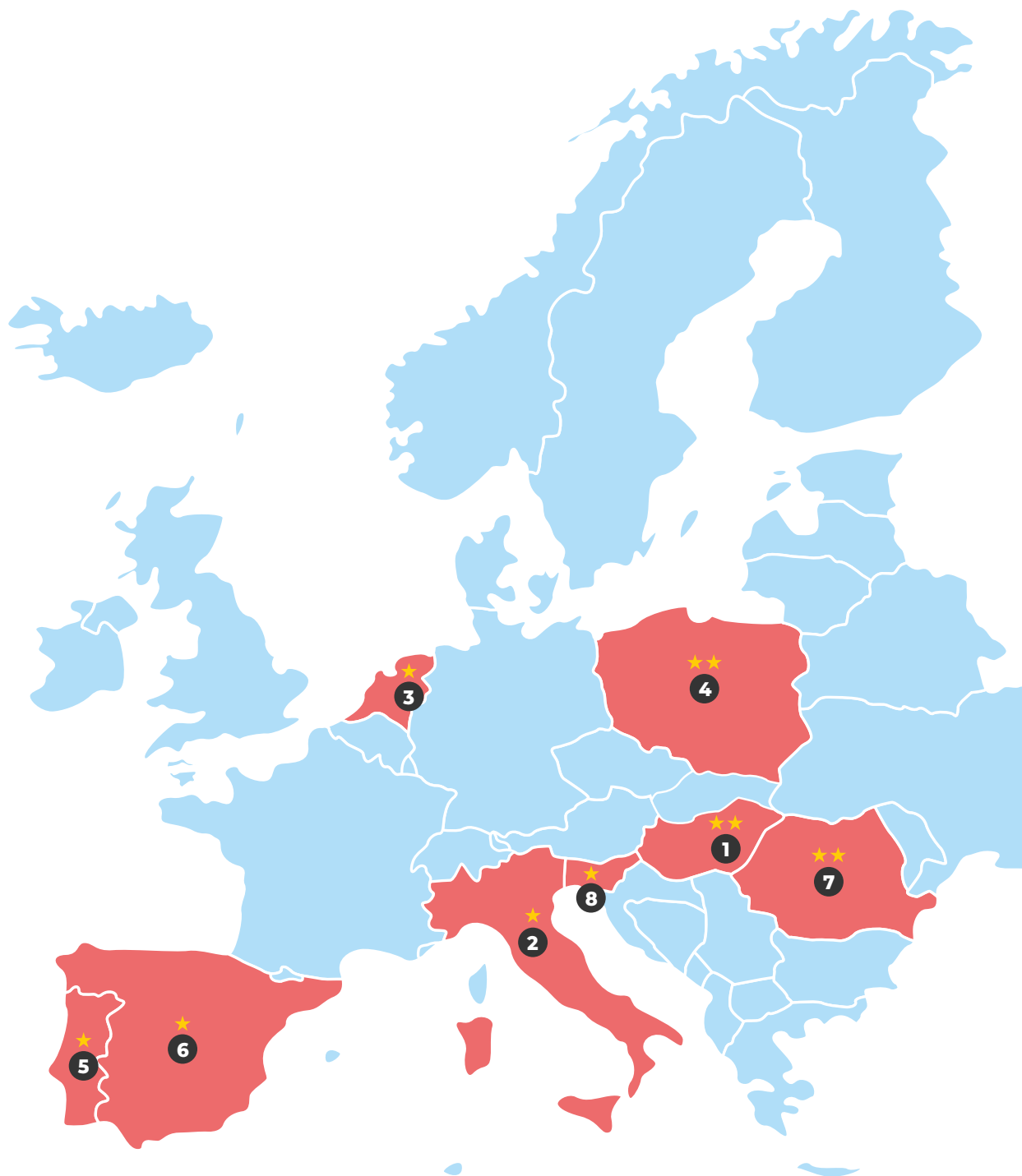
Encourage more funders to support independent public-interest journalism

As part of our objective to bring more funding in the media sector, Civitates encourages funders who are not yet active in this field to start supporting independent, public interest journalism organisations. In 2022, we had the opportunity to discuss the importance of core-support to journalistic organisations at the IJ4EU annual conference and DataHarvest, one of the largest journalistic conferences in Europe.

Together with Ariadne, Civitates organised a webinar on the topics of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which aim to silence critical voices including activists, whistle blowers, human rights defenders, civil society organisations, journalists, and independent media. SLAPPs prove to be an effective way for certain actors to silence such voices, as the legal, administrative, financial, and psychological burdens that they have to bear divert individuals and independent organisations from their valuable work.

While the European Commission released an anti-SLAPP package, and the Council of Europe is preparing anti-SLAPP guidelines for member countries, many civil society and public-interest organisations are still grappling with the issue. The webinar provided an opportunity to discuss strategies to counteract SLAPPs.





1 Magyar Jeti (444) Hungary
Direkt36 Hungary

2 Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI)
Italy

3 Stitching Bellingcat the Netherlands
Fundacja Pismo Poland

4 Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring
(OKO) Poland

5 Bagabaga Studio Portugal

6 Civio Spain

7 Átlátszó Erdély Romania
PressOne Romania

8 Pod črto Slovenia

★ Number of organisations supported

● Grantees' progress

In the first year and a half of the grant period, the grantees spent time and energy strategising, recruiting staff members, and “*professionalising their organisations*”, as some of them put it. This included the separation of managerial and editorial roles, which is crucial for better operating. It also entailed putting strategies and policies in place, whether for audience growth, reach or organisational development, such as strengthening digital security, fund-raising, etc.

Recruiting extra staff has been of utmost importance for most of them in 2021 and 2022. In many cases, the new members are journalists, who can explore more stories and take part in bigger investigations.

Our hope is to be able to cover more stories with the help of our newly recruited journalist. Over the long run, we hope to be able to replicate the success of this internship project, and slowly to grow a new generation of journalists in this community.

– Átlátszó Erdély, Romania

For others, new staff is recruited to support the organisational development (operations, fundraising, etc.). In 2022, their focus lied in rolling out their strategies for audience engagement, revenue diversification and creating contingency funds for emergencies.

Our grantee partners are trying to tackle the issue of news avoidance by organising public debates with their audience members, focusing on solution journalism, writing explainer articles on why the public should care about a problem, suggesting concrete actions that organisations and individuals could take, or engaging with



Divergente in Portugal received multiple awards in 2022 for their documentary “*For you, Portugal, I swear.*”

students through partnerships with universities. Some of them are experimenting with innovative ways in their audience engagement strategies that also help readers identify misinformation online.

Major change in our approach to the audience engagement was introducing gamification into our formats: we have implemented a tool called “False-o-Meter”: an interactive, 5-scale fact-checking tool. Answering whether a statement/myth is true or not allows readers to better remember the information while checking its credibility.

– OkoPress, Poland

The approach of directly engaging with their members have paid off: we can observe that our partners are progressing towards their goals, keeping their audiences engaged even when inflation may be affecting their paying members the most.

The percentage of our expenditures covered by member donations keeps growing from 15% in 2019, to 25% in 2020, to an estimated ~38% in 2022 (pending final Annual Accounts). We still aim to keep increasing it in 2023. Our audience appreciates our strategic litigation fights, our tools and visualizations, our concrete and thorough coverage of legislation, as well as our coverage of underreported topics.

– Civio, Spain

Grantees are all engaged in diversification of revenue streams: philanthropic donations, corporate partnerships, institutional or EU grants, etc.

In 2022 we have seen that the work of our grantees has received international recognition as some of them (Divergente (Portugal), Bellingcat (the Netherlands)) were nominated for and received prestigious awards. Others (IRPI (Italy), Direkt36 (Hungary), Pod crto (Slovenia)) got more and more involved in investigative consortia and due to the flexible funding provided by Civitates had the human and financial resources to take part in sensitive investigations.

Learning together through newsroom visits

Some of our grantee partners used the learning initiative budget to organise newsroom visits to other members of the cohort. On some occasions, these visits were coupled with covering a story in the destination countries. Very often, they allowed members of the newsrooms that would not typically attend events organised by Civitates to connect with the different media organisation. As supporting a cohort on their journey of becoming sustainable is one of Civitates' objectives in this sub-fund, we were particularly excited to see these relationships unfolding. The topics the newsrooms exchanged on varied from developing membership programmes, creative and innovative storytelling, to access to public information and data visualisation.

As **Civio** in Spain pointed out in their report, the newsroom exchanges *"have reinforced our international networking, which increases our capacity to overtake the journalism investigations with an international perspective."* For **PressOne** in Romania, the insights they got from 444 on building a community of audience members was eye-opening on how to build better trust with their readers through being open about their work processes.



● Lessons learnt

Providing breathing space for journalistic organisations is highly needed

Core-support is not a golden ticket, but a complementary funding that allows journalistic organisations to take time and think strategically. In the past year and a half, we have seen our partners re-strategising, experimenting with different methods for audience engagement, hiring journalistic and non-journalistic staff to support their mission and efforts. These developments are starting to show results, but more time is needed before the organisations Civitates has been supporting can stand alone on their feet. For some of them, journalism is a public service, and their business models are less focused on becoming fully supported by their members, and more on attracting local and international donors whether from public institutions, philanthropy, or corporate. This approach is also informed by the specificities in the different countries, as in some audience support is less popular than in others. This has to do also with country-specific factors – in countries where in the past media was owned by the state, the general public are still learning to trust, value and support independent journalism.

Connecting different media organisations strengthens them

Independent, public-interest journalism organisations need time and capacity to cope with the changing revenue landscape. Building networks of journalistic organisations is extremely valuable, especially in Europe where, due to the language differences, organisations do not compete for the same audience members. As such, they show great solidarity and understanding towards each other's problems and strive towards finding collective solutions.

Our grantee partners value the cohort element of the grant and appreciate knowing that they struggle with common issues and that there are ways to address them together. This is very tangible in the way the grantee partners already seek assistance from each other and proactively look for cooperation with their peers.

Being part of a network creates a structure for our grantee partners they can rely on even beyond the grant period. As our grantee partner in Portugal explained: "This has positive effect in different areas:

- ➔ legitimising Divergente between peers and external donors as an important journalism project in the European landscape

- creating real and immediate cross-border investigations opportunities that mean meaningful, impactful stories and potential revenue; benefiting from others experience and
- exchanging knowledge within different organisational areas with other projects of these networks to seek funds collectively and lobby for opportunities for independent public interest journalism.”

Having a broader overview of the sector of independent public-interest journalism in Europe, Civitates positions itself as a connector between the grantee partners and other journalism organisations. Our grantees appreciated the connection with the Reference network mentioned above. They are also reaching out to us to look for advice on whom to contact as potential consultants that can assist them on different topics. For Civitates, this is a good positioning, that further contributes to building trust with the grantee partners. At the same time, Civitates has been sharing approaches and experience in funding independent public-interest journalism in Europe with DG Connect from the European Commission and the EEA & Norway grants. The team is also in constant contact with Arena for Journalists, the International Press Institute, the European Centre for Media and Press Freedom and others.

● Challenges

Our partners have made a lot of progress since the beginning of the partnership with Civitates, at the same time internal and external challenges slowed the operations for some of them. Such challenges include:

- inflation worries our partners and the viability of their membership programmes in the long-term
- the war in Ukraine puts extra pressure on already strained resources (decrease in ad and tax revenues, extensive coverage with more staff involved)
- the operational environment for journalists and critical voices have worsened in Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, and Greece (**according to Reporters without Borders**)
- some of our grantee partners need to deal with lawsuits (SLAPPs) causing extra costs
- a lot of them are focusing on digital and physical security, as the overall situation for journalists in Europe is not improving
- the well-being of journalists and prevention of burnout has become central for some organisations Civitates supports; external factors such as ensuring stable revenue models, staff retention put additional stress on newsroom management

Our grantees' work

While Civitates is supporting organisational development, we would like to introduce snippets of our partners' work to shed a light on the topics they find important in their respective communities. The collection below is far from being exhaustive: more information can be found on the websites of the media organisations.

Átlátszó Erdély

*At the end of the campaign for the Hungarian parliamentary elections, in the evening of the 31st of March several journalists in Transylvania and people close to the Hungarian opposition received pictures of a plastic bag containing some wrinkled and partially **burnt ballot papers lying on an illegal dumping site** near Târgu Mureş.*

Divergente

*'**For you Portugal, I swear!**'* portrays a story of social and legal injustice, abandonment and lack of accountability from the Portuguese State and other governmental power structures through more than four decades.

Civio

One in five people in EU prisons are in pretrial detention: People waiting for a final sentence often suffer worse conditions than convicted prisoners, even if they're innocent.

Direkt36

Leaked documents show how Orbán's circle dictates the news at Hungary's state news agency

OkoPress

The Azov Regiment: Neo-Nazis, Football Hooligans or Defenders of Ukraine?

Pismo

*In 2022 we have moved Lenses to yet another level. In the first half of the year we published a 4-part series of Lenses called **Earth** (text in Polish). This was the most ambitious journalistic project developed by Pismo, with the objective to present in depth the challenges related to the climate crisis the actions needed and being undertaken to cope with it.*

IRPI

Cy4gate: the Italian surveillance company seeking to challenge NSO and Palantir, a cybersecurity company, Cy4gate sells its products worldwide, including to dictatorships, while competing with companies involved in scandals related to repression of opponents and journalists.

444

*We published a unique, elaborate **investigative series** unveiling the single most significant corruption scandal of the Orban-regime ever made public. It involves members of the government and the administration of justice. As a result, a number of official investigation processes were initiated, including the case against Mr. György Schadt, the president of the Hungarian Association of Judicial Officers. (text in Hungarian)*

Pod črto

Astroturfing - Twitter and the use of fake profiles for propaganda (podcast in Slovenian): With this podcast investigative series we have exposed the use of fake Twitter profiles within the largest governmental party, SDS. The profiles were used deliberately to attack anyone opposing government policies or actions, promote party SDS as well as to further disseminate fake news.

PressOne

Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă Plagiarized His PhD Thesis. Among the Sources He Copied from - Two Other Doctorates

Bellingcat

Inside the Secretive World of Irish Limited Partnerships

Robust funder collaborative

Civitates aims to offer the necessary space and solid infrastructure for long-term engagement, coordination of resources and abilities from foundations, allowing effective collaboration towards a shared ambition. As such, the collaborative provides a platform for funders to combine collective investment and think to enhance funding for democracy in Europe.

● What we did

Recent years have been signed by several crisis, that have exacerbated the democratic decline in Europe and beyond. 2022 was not different, marked by Russia's war on Ukraine and ramping inflation creating greater divides in society. This context clearly shows an ever-growing need for joint action from the philanthropic community and a robust funder collaborative defending and supporting democracy in Europe. Throughout the last year, Civitates played this role by supporting its grantees and partner foundations, contributing to the debate about philanthropy and democracy, and building connections with relevant stakeholders such as public donors.

We have provided spaces for exchanges between grantee organisations and foundation partners of Civitates through grantee convening and specific sessions during steering committee meetings. We also co-organised two webinars with Ariadne and had regular meetings with Philea and other representatives of institutional donors, such as the European Commission and the EEA Norway grants.

Throughout the year, Civitates has regularly published articles about the grantees' work and has communicated together with the foundation partners to make clear the necessity for philanthropic actors to join efforts in supporting democracy in Europe.

In solidarity with Ukraine

The response of Civitates to the war in Ukraine is one example of the robustness of the collaborative in 2022. At the beginning of the conflict, Civitates held several consultations with its partner foundations, grantees, and other actors in the field to shape potential interventions on this issue. Our response was two-folded: Civitates acted as a relay of information between what we were hearing from partners on the field and partner foundations, and as a platform for foundations to share what they were doing individually. We held a session at the steering committee in May 2022, where we invited representatives from Reporters Without Borders, Prague Civil Society Centre, the JX Fund and The Renaissance Foundations. In addition, with the support of some partner foundations, we launched a special fund for grantee partners developing solidarity actions for people affected by the war.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, there has been a tremendous demonstration of solidarity from European civil society, including Civitates grantee partners. Civil society organisations are at the frontline and have shifted priorities quickly to intervene when public authorities have perhaps been slower to react.

This unfolds in a context where the civil society sector is already strained. Challenges for the CSOs have amplified with the war in Ukraine: as the conflict lasts, this could have an impact

on the functioning of their organisations and their long-term goals towards more resilience. Furthermore, the situation in Ukraine will impact democracy in Europe, the effects of which are still to be seen. The creation of the solidarity fund came as a direct response to this challenge, and aimed at supporting solidarity efforts of Civitates grantee partners with Ukraine and its citizens, contributing financially to their ongoing or planned solidarity actions.

Seven partner foundations provided extra contributions to this solidarity fund, for a total of €320.000, and ten grantees have been supported through this scheme by December 2022. The solidarity actions ranged from media organisations scaling up their reporting to provide relevant and accurate information to Ukrainian refugees, coordination of Czech NGOs' efforts in response to the Ukraine crisis, providing digital security tools, monitoring the situation and the diplomatic developments regarding the war in Ukraine or supporting their peer organisations in Ukraine. This initiative was warmly welcomed by grantee partners and their networks, as it allowed those supported to not *"bear the burden of solidarity alone"*.

● A roadmap for Civitates beyond 2023

The year 2022 marked Civitates' five years anniversary. The Civitates team and the steering committee reflected on the way forward for the collaborative beyond 2023. Members of the steering committee were unanimous in expressing the added value of Civitates to strengthen democracy in Europe. Foundation partners also laid out a broad collective vision for Civitates, which will be explored further in 2023 and set out in a new and refreshed strategy.

The philanthropic sector is gaining recognition as a legitimate actor in the debate about democracy in Europe

"It's important for us as funders to collectively voice our concerns when democracy and solidarity in Europe are under pressure."

Throughout the year, Civitates has regularly published **articles about the grantees' work** and has communicated together with the foundation partners to make clear the necessity for philanthropic actors to **join efforts in strengthening and supporting democracy in Europe**.

Civitates has also gained visibility through various opportunities where we presented our collaborative work:

- In October, some Civitates' foundation partners participated in an online roundtable organised by Assifero (association of Italian grantmaking foundations). The roundtable aimed to provide Italian funders with a clearer understanding of the value of structural collaboration and of collaborative funds through testimonies from our partners.
- Some foundation partner took the opportunity to present Civitates to philanthropic civil society actors at events such as Biennale Democrazia in Turin, EFC Annual Conference in Vienna, etc.

It is necessary to act jointly in our support to strengthen democracy in Europe. As such, for Civitates it is of utmost importance to place our action in a wider ecosystem, where public institutions like the European Commission and EEA&Norway Grants are strongly involved in supporting civil society as a fundamental pillar for a well-functioning democracy.

In our November Steering Committee meeting, we invited representatives from both establishments to share with the partner foundations how their respective organisations are active in this field, and thus, help us better assess what Civitates' added value is in this broader landscape of donors.

During the discussion, it became clear that the flexibility in our grant-making processes, the possibility to engage in long-term collaborations with our partners through core grants, and the opportunities to address our partner needs in terms of capacity building fill an important gap.

● What's next

Civitates' partners would like to align more and reinforce the work of the Fund. As the next step for Civitates, we would go through a strategic review and prepare the Fund's priorities beyond 2023, which is the end of the current granting phase.

In the next months, Civitates would like to further promote our partners' shared goal to uphold democratic values and to support civil society actors in building resilient democracy in Europe. We would like to promote the positive contribution of philanthropy and civil society to the core EU values and engage in a dialogue with the institutions at the EU level.

Belgium

- ♦ Access Now Europe (2)
- ♦ EU DisinfoLab (2)
- ♦ European Digital Rights (EDRi) (2)
- ♦ European Partnership for Democracy (2)
- ♦ Transparency International EU liason office (2)
- ♦ Center for Democracy and Technology EU (2)
- ♦ BEUC (2)

The Netherlands

- ♦ Institute for Information Law (IViR - University of Amsterdam) (2)
- ♦ SOMO (2)
- ♦ Stitching Bellingcat (3)

Germany

- ♦ AW AlgorihtmWatch gGmbH (2)
- ♦ Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V. (2)
- ♦ Democracy Reporting International (Ukraine)

Poland

- ♦ OFOP- equal participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees (1)
- ♦ OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative (1)
- ♦ Association 61 (1)
- ♦ Panoptykon Foundation (2)
- ♦ Fundacja Pismo (3)
- ♦ Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (OKO) (3)

United Kingdom

- ♦ Who targets Me (2)

Czech Republic

- ♦ Glopolis (NEON coalition) (1)
- ♦ Frank Bold Society (2)

Ireland

- ♦ Irish Council For Civil Liberties (2)

Slovakia

- ♦ Via Iuris (1)

France

- ♦ VoxPublic (1)

Hungary

- ♦ Ökotárs (Civilisation coalition) (1)
- ♦ Marom Klub Egyesületn (1)
- ♦ Magyar Jeti (444) (3)
- ♦ Direkt36 (3)

Romania

- ♦ Resource Centre for Public Participation (CERE) (1)
- ♦ Átlátszó Erdély (3)
- ♦ PressOne (3)

Bulgaria

- ♦ Bulgarian Fund for Women (1)
- ♦ Civic Participation Forum (1)

Spain

- ♦ Civio (3)

Portugal

- ♦ Bagabaga Studio (3)

Croatia

- ♦ Centre for Peace Studies (1)

Slovenia













- ♦ Peace Institute (1)
- ♦ Pod črto (3)

Italy

- ♦ Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD) (1)
- ♦ Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI) (3)

Our finances

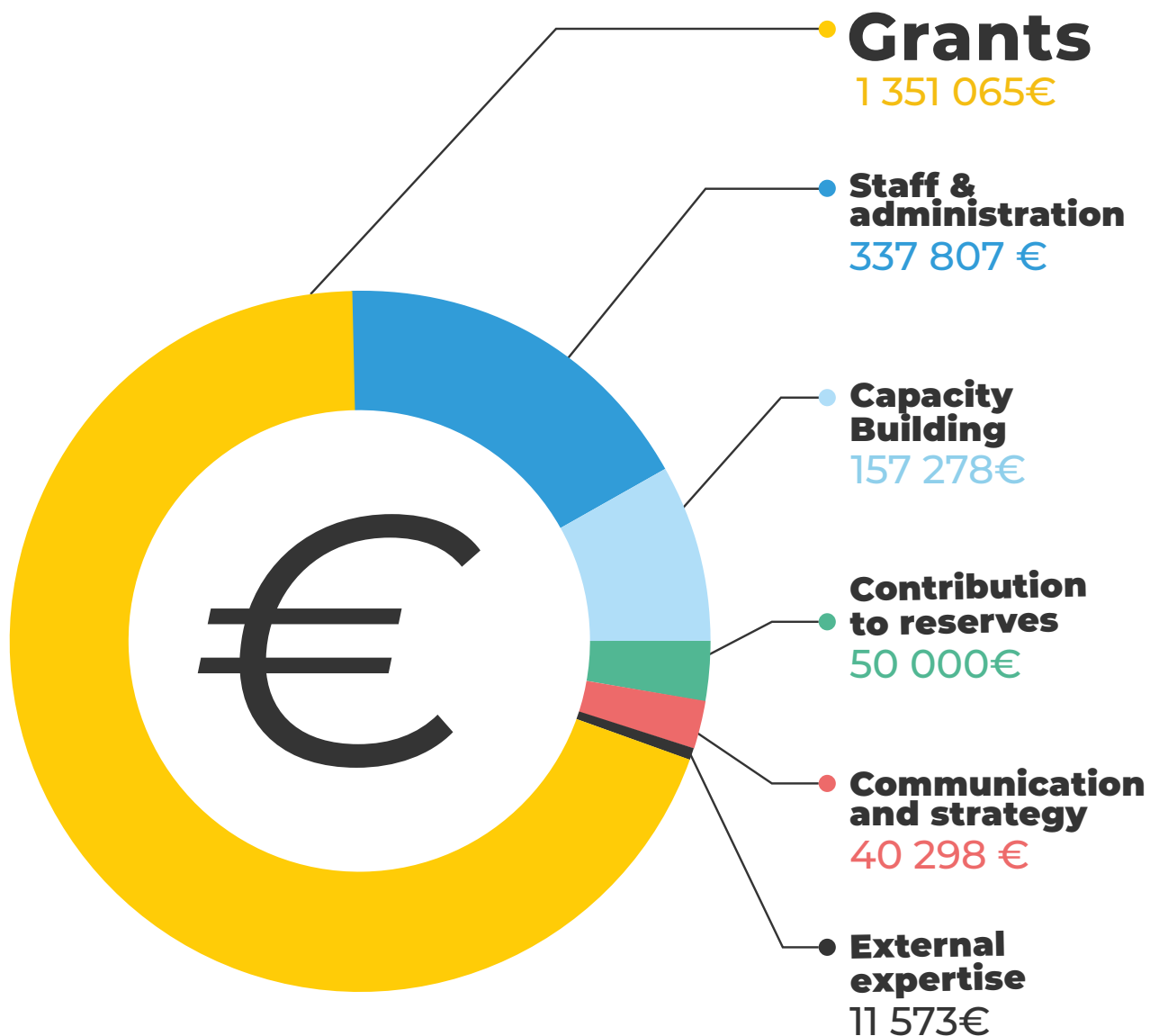
Contributions in 2022*

 Adessium Foundation	300 000€
 Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	134 672€
 Compagnia Di San Paolo	125 000€
 Erste Stiftung	75 000€
 Fondation de France	200 000€
 Fritt Ord Foundation	200 000€
 King Baudouin Foundation	350 000€
 Luminate	194 000€
 Mercator stiftung	300 000€
 Nicolas Puech Foundation	300 000€
 Oak Foundation	400 000€
 Open Society Foundation	434 622€
 Robert Bosch Stiftung	100 000€
 Stefan Batory Foundation	25 000€
 Rudolf Augstein Stiftung	45 000€
 Schöpflin Stiftung	50 000€
 Porticus	75 000€
 Limelight Foundation	150 000€
 Sigrid Rausing Trust	114 486€

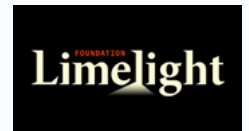
* This is just an indication of the funds allocated for 2022 by the above-mentioned foundations. For some partners, their multi-year contribution has been received in one installment.

Our finances

Expenses



Our foundation partners



THE SIGRID RAUSING TRUST

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