



Civitates
The European Democracy Fund



Civitates Annual Report 2023



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A Word from our Chair

Stefan Schäfers



Democracy eroded in parts of Europe in 2023. Threats to civic space, press freedom and pluralism intensified, as disinformation continued to spread at alarming rates.

Yet the bigger picture was not entirely bleak: while once-fringe political parties with populist, authoritarian tendencies gained strength in some countries, they lost support, or were thrown out of office, in others.

The overall trend, however, is concerning. Evidence shows that vast numbers of Europeans are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries, believe it to be in decline, and think that radical change is needed to improve their political systems. This follows a global pattern.

This discontent comes against a backdrop of concomitant crises: economic slowdown, the ongoing wars in Ukraine and in the Middle-East, growing tensions between the US, Russia and China - and attempts by external forces to weaken Europe's democracies for their own advantage.

All of this underlines the importance of our grantees' work on the frontlines of the battles

for stronger democracies and civic space, less polarisation, and better informed societies. Their inspiring achievements in 2023 are detailed in the following pages.

For Civitates, 2023 was a year of reflection, a time to renew our team, build our resilience and hone our focus for the challenges ahead. We were pleased to welcome Elisa Peter as director, and we conducted a Strategy Review [see p. 5]. The next step is to make it work, including by using key legislation, such as the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which aims to curb the spread of online misinformation and conspiracies [see p. 16].

The stakes could hardly be higher. In 2024, half the world's population from 80 countries will go to the polls, including those voting in the European Parliament elections.

At a time of instability and acute geopolitical uncertainty, defending the pillars of democracy is a matter of urgency - and will remain so for many years.

Vision, Mission, Goals



Our vision

Europe is home to thriving, inclusive and resilient societies that uphold democratic principles and in which all are able to participate.

Our mission

Civitates is a collaborative philanthropic initiative that supports organisations to protect and promote civic space (offline and online) and the freedoms to assemble and associate and to enable access to trustworthy information and hold power to account.

Our collective goals

1. To strengthen the ecosystem for and space in which independent civil society and media operate as a means to promote collective engagement in public life.
2. To foster a pluralistic public debate (online and offline), counter disinformation and address the impact of new technologies on democracy.
3. To act as a catalyst for effective private and public funding for democracy and civic space in Europe.

Our values

Solidarity: by committing to multi-year, flexible partnerships, we act in solidarity with civil society organisations who resist democratic backsliding and closing civic space and with journalists who hold power to account and face threats as a consequence of their work.

Collaborative spirit: as philanthropic foundations, we strive to collaborate openly and strategically with each other and to support broad-based civil society coalitions for change to enhance collective success and learning.

Openness: we are open to new ways of addressing the root causes of democratic decline and we believe that experimentation led by civil society can produce unexpected and potentially game changing results for democracy and civic space.

A Fresh Vision

Elisa Peter



How can Civitates help tackle Europe's deepening political polarisation, its shrinking civic space and its rising tide of disinformation? These questions were at the heart of the Strategy Refresh our director Elisa Peter carried out in 2023. Here she charts its painstaking process - and explains why Civitates' mission is more vital than ever.

My first mission when I became the director of Civitates in January 2023 was to take stock of where we were. This re-evaluation came at a critical moment: with autocracy and populism rising in a Europe where politics is increasingly polarised.

At the heart of this **Strategy Refresh** lay fundamental questions.

What lessons should Civitates draw from our first five years of existence? And how could we use our unique position as a pan-European philanthropic pooled fund, to promote civic space, boost pluralism and defend democracy in places where they are under siege?

I began by listening to our donors and grantees, as well as experts in democracy, civic space and independent media. In April, I presented the evidence I'd gathered to our Steering Committee, and together we agreed on a refreshed vision for the future, as well as three collective goals for the next five years. Since we were founded in 2018, we have supported 50 organisations in 18 countries to the tune of 10 million EUR.

Our first goal, we concluded, is to protect civic

space, so that civil society organisations and independent media are free to perform their vital roles as societies' watchdogs.

Our second goal is to tackle the disinformation that's undermining democracy and driving political polarisation, and the role that new information technologies play in exacerbating these trends.

Finally, we decided that we want to be a catalyst for spurring public and private donors to give a lot more funding to defend and promote democracy in Europe.

Democracy's lifeblood

But how can we achieve these collective goals? And more specifically, what organisations doing what work and where, should Civitates support?

To answer these questions, we hired experts in civic power, tech, democracy and the media, consulted with donor partners and grantees, and immersed ourselves in the nitty gritty of exploring where our focus should lie, producing three papers for the Steering Committee's consideration.

As a result, we decided to continue supporting the same three portfolios (or sub-funds): **Civic Power**, **Tech and Democracy** and **Media**. Each is a vital component of democracy's lifeblood. Yet each is desperately underfunded.

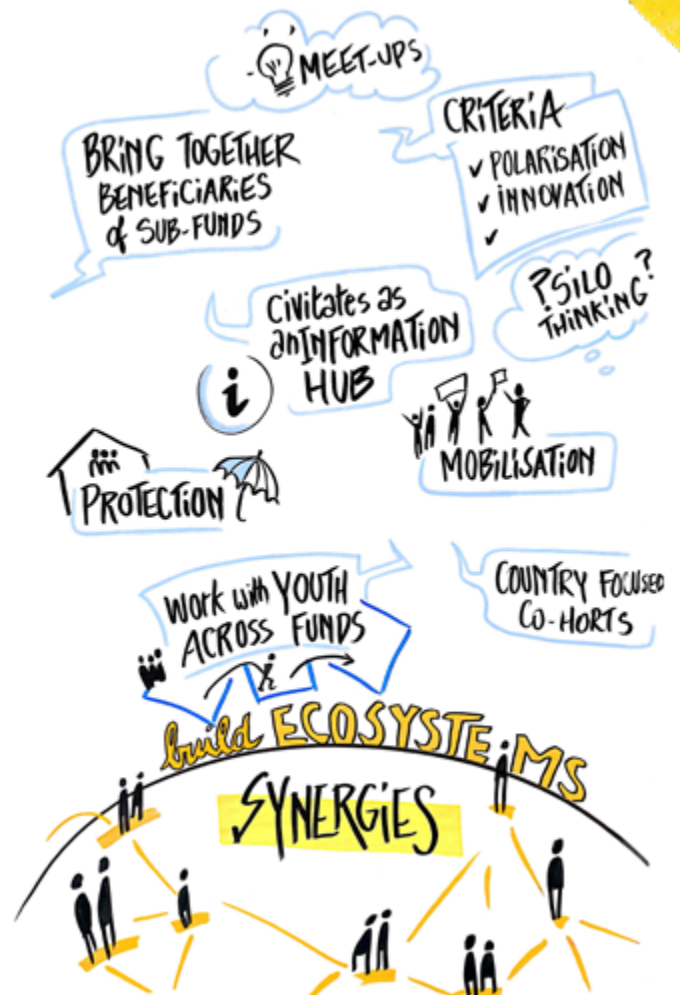
An independent civil society is a safeguard against untrammelled state and corporate

power, and helps foster public debate and the flow of ideas.

Even in countries where civil society's capacity to act is curtailed, support is crucial. In such places, civil society is a bulwark against even greater constraints; and when things change for the better there, they will have the skills, the connections, the funding, knowledge and the expertise to be able to shape their societies.

Democracy in the 21st century is increasingly digital. From public participation to collective organising, the way we connect with each other is online. In countries where civic space remains open, the well of public discourse is still being poisoned by social media platforms who are saturated in disinformation, conspiracy theories and hate.

Yet very little funding goes to organisations countering this: those holding big tech to account, tracking the algorithms and artificial intelligence which increasingly shape our lives, and providing new, more positive visions for what a 'good internet' could look like.



Independent public-interest media is a central pillar of a functioning democracy. It provides citizens with the information they need to make informed choices. However, the business model which has sustained it for generations is collapsing. New, innovative ways of financing journalism are evolving, but most remain in their infancy. We consider it essential therefore, to keep supporting independent, fact-based reporting and investigative journalism with long-term, core funding.

Warning signs are flashing

More broadly, we have decided to rebalance our geographical focus.

The warning signs of Western Europe's growing political polarisation are flashing - and we need to direct our support there before it's too late

This will not, though, be at the expense of helping organisations in Poland and Hungary who have seen how deeper polarisation quickly leads to tighter constraints on the space in which they operate.

Of the 55 billions of euros philanthropists give every year, a minuscule amount goes towards organisations working to strengthen democracy and open civic space. We are determined to act as a catalyst for a substantial increase in public and private funding in these areas.

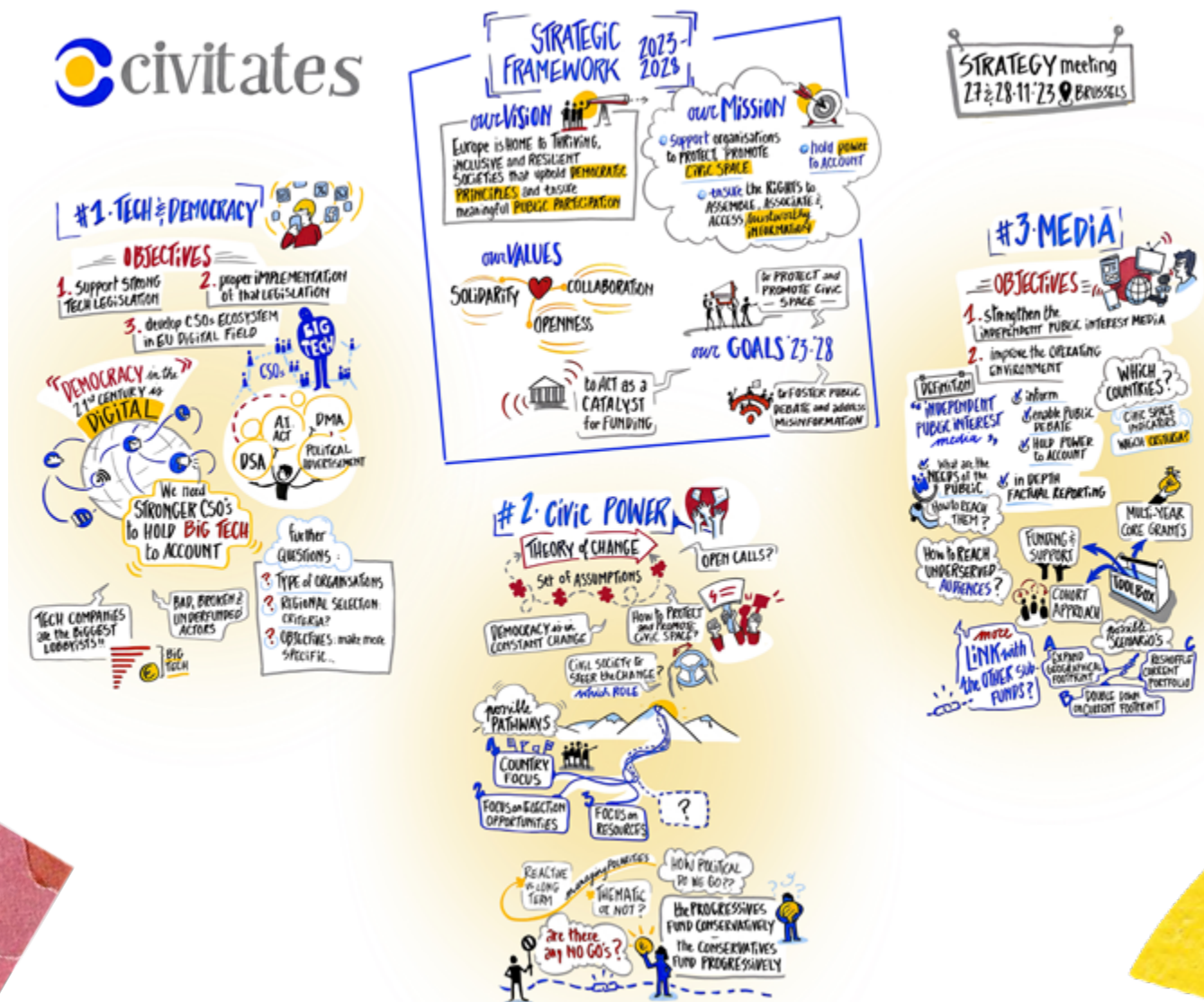
Support for organisations fighting against climate change and for social justice is at an all-time high, yet democracy is the battleground where victories in these areas, and much else, will be won or lost.

Civitates' great strength is being able to provide multi-year, flexible core support to organisations working to protect and promote the key pillars of open democratic societies.

Our strategy refresh took a little longer than envisaged, but the process created the space for people to hash out their differences and have in-depth conversations around what Civitates is and what we should be doing.

Our strength - that we are a large group of donors with different institutional cultures and priorities - can also be a weakness. But while we disagree on some things, we are united on the most important: that democracy is in danger and we need to pull together to defend it.

Civitates began life as an experiment in 2018, but the resounding message from our donor partners is that they remain committed to working together. And because of that, we are here to stay and expand.



In Numbers:

Democracy, civic space and press freedom in Europe

1. Intimidation
2. Censorship
3. Detention

of protesters are the **3 biggest restrictions on civic freedoms** in the EU in 2023.

Source: [Civicius Monitor / European Civic Forum](#)¹

4/5

of the EU's most populous countries have **hard-right populist parties in government or polling above 20%**

Source: [Politico Europe](#)²

12

the number of European countries where **civic space has deteriorated** in the past six years

Source: [Civicius Monitor](#)³

17

the number of European countries in which **democratic rule eroded** in the five years to 2021

Source: [International IDEA](#)⁴

820

number of **SLAPPS (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation)** in Europe in the past 11 years.

Source: [The Case Coalition](#). SLAPPS are often framed as defamation or privacy cases and are aimed at silencing critics by stopping public scrutiny⁵

€97 million

Big Tech's annual lobbying budget in Brussels

Source: [Corporate Europe Observatory](#)⁶

36%

of news consumers say they **avoid news**, often and sometimes, across the EU. Greece and Bulgaria have the highest levels of news avoidance, while Finland and Denmark have the lowest.

Source: [Reuters Institute](#)⁷

Civic Power

The hallmark of a healthy democracy



Civil society serves as a check on state and corporate power: it creates a space for open debate, where different ideas and policies can take root and flower. A flourishing civil society is a hallmark of a healthy democracy.

In recent years, however, civic space in many European countries has shrunk. Autocratic leaders elected on populist agendas have clamped down on the space in which independent, public interest groups and the media can operate, and democracy has declined. And this decline is happening in western, as well as central and eastern Europe. According to the Civicus Monitor, less than 20 EU member states have “open” civic space.

Despite the pressures they faced, in 2023, our grantee partners continued to contribute to vital, open public debate across Europe.

In Hungary, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) [see box: p. 12] challenged the abuse of power by giving expert advice to the public on education, health care, the environment and peoples’ rights. They collaborated on this with our media grantee partner, 444.hu, an inspiring

example of the symbiosis between media and civil society. In Italy and Slovakia [see p. 11 and P. 13] our partners did vital work with young people on civic engagement. And in Poland, the National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP), guaranteed that civil society’s voice was heard in the monitoring committees of the EU Recovery and Cohesion Policy programmes – ensuring that EU funds wouldn’t bolster authoritarian rule in their country, as happened in Hungary. The subsequent election of a more ostensibly civic society-friendly government in Poland, presents civil society there with a fresh challenge: working with the government, while maintaining their role as a watchdog.

This work is just the tip of the iceberg of 2023’s achievements: throughout the year we worked with 19 organisations in 13 member states and provided funds of 980,000 EUR.

Civitates is the only pooled fund that was set up with the sole purpose of addressing democratic decline and closing civic space in Europe, and the case for it is more compelling than ever.

Our 'Civic Power' Grantees

Supported in 2023

-  **Belgium**
 - European Policy Centre (EPC)
 - Social Platform
-  **Bulgaria**
 - Bulgarian Fund for Women*
 - Citizen Participation Forum*
-  **Croatia**
 - Human Rights House Zagreb
-  **Czech Republic**
 - Glopolis (NEON coalition)*
-  **France**
 - European Civic Forum (ECF)
-  **Germany**
 - Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V.
-  **Hungary**
 - Hungarian Helsinki Committee
 - Marom Klub Egyesület*
 - Ökotárs (Civilisation coalition)*

-  **Italy**
 - Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD)*
-  **Poland**
 - Association 61
 - OFOP- equal participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees
 - OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative
-  **Romania**
 - Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe)*
-  **Slovenia**
 - Peace Institute*
-  **Slovakia**
 - Via Iuris*
-  **The Netherlands**
 - European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL)



* renewed for 2024

Grantee Spotlight

CILD (Italy)

– Andrea Menapace



Pressure is mounting on Italy's civil society. Andrea Menapace, Executive Director of the Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD), says they're resisting it by working for the common good - and by challenging the divisive narrative which portrays human rights defenders as enemies of the state.

Our government is trying to concentrate power and silence criticism. They're fuelling culture wars, finding new enemies to fight - be they migrants or environmental defenders - in order to strengthen their power.

Judges who uphold human rights are portrayed as enemies of the people. Nuns, priests and others who show solidarity with migrants by supporting or feeding them, are being criminalised.

The authorities are cracking down on protests every day. It's deeply concerning when you see police beating peaceful protesters. There are currently around 200 legal cases against young environmental activists, who face the harshest possible sentences.



This is the context we - a coalition of more than 30 Italian civil society organisations - are operating in. We're tackling Italy's most pressing human rights issues, including protecting migrants' rights, prisoners' rights, LGBTI peoples' rights, and access to information and freedom of expression.

As long as civil society is strengthening the government narrative based on fear and hatred, the doors are open for them. It's the pro-democracy, pro-human rights groups who are suffering.

But I must praise the bravery of Italy's young activists. If we want to keep civic space open, no matter the external threats, we need to support new young leaders.

Our project is to build the enabling structure for them: to provide the capacity building and infrastructure support for them to thrive. We want to enable them from behind the scenes. Civil society is a means to an end. We aren't an end in itself.

Given the smear campaigns against civil society organisations and vulnerable people, we're trying to change the narrative - both on the issues and the organisations working on them. For example, our narrative is that the same organisations who helped people during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing PPE kits and other community support, are helping migrants and vulnerable groups. We're working in prisons, working with homeless people. We're all working together for this country and its people, whatever their status: citizens, non-citizens, migrants, irregulars.

This is having a concrete impact on people's lives. In the past two years, we've trained more than 100 young advocates, and we've been part of a pro-bono legal defence initiative protecting the human rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants in Europe, which has given more than 4,000 hours of free legal assistance to over 500 people, and which received an international award.

As long as we keep talking inside our own bubble, we won't make an impact on the mainstream debate.

However good the message is, it's not going to spread if we only speak to ourselves. We need a plurality of voices, not just for the sake of democracy, but for Italy's economic prosperity but for Italy's economic prosperity. We need to build broader coalitions for change.

Despite the current worrying situation, I am optimistic that if we keep creating an enabling environment for the next generation, positive change will come.



– Stefánia Kapronczay

Defending human rights in a restricted space

The Defence of Sovereignty Act tightens the already constricted space in which independent journalists, civil society organisations and opponents of Viktor Orbán's government operate in Hungary. It was passed at the end of 2023 despite a chorus of criticism at home and abroad, including from the European Commission - who say that the Act violates several fundamental rights enshrined in EU law. The Act has created a new body with sweeping powers to investigate activities that 'threaten the country's sovereignty', including by gathering information on any groups or individuals who receive foreign funding. In this restricted environment the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) is working to keep the public informed on their fundamental rights, says director of strategy Stefánia Kapronczay.

"This Sovereignty Act fits the stream of government actions seeking to limit participation in public life and a free press. We're concerned that the bill furthers the government's narrative that any sort of foreign funding goes against Hungary's national interest.

We have a real issue with the smear campaigns against civil society and increasingly, journalists. Solidarity is crucial in this situation and we can prepare ourselves by sticking together and increasing cooperation.

Everyone is important in a democratic ecosystem and having an independent media is important for NGOs and vice versa. My organisation's mission is that people get to know their rights and exercise them. We believe that if people feel the power of rights in their everyday life they are more willing to protect them, thus contributing to lasting democratic change."

Civil Society prepares for crucial EU elections

In 2024, more than 400 million Europeans will be eligible to vote in the European Parliament election, choosing who represents them for the next five years. With populist, nationalist parties gaining popularity in many countries, this is a pivotal moment in the EU's democratic history.

In advance of these momentous polls, in 2023 Civitates' grantee partners, [Social Platform](#) and [Civil Society Europe](#), mobilised their members and partner organisations to support civic space and civic dialogue across the EU. The coalition jointly developed the Civil Society for EU campaign, aimed at making sure the next Parliament and Commission supports and recognises the crucial role civic society plays in healthy democracies. In June, a year before the

elections, the coalition launched its manifesto for better civic space and civil dialogue, which has been widely promoted across the EU. Their call for a stronger civic space and civil dialogue was picked up and included in the EU election manifestos of many partner civil society networks.

Social Platform and Civil Society Europe also promoted the campaign through more than 10 events in Brussels, as well as in Spain, Romania and France, reaching out to hundreds of attendees including policy makers, CSOs and other stakeholders at the EU and the national level.

For more information on the campaign:
<https://civilsocietyforeu.eu/>

Grantee Spotlight

VIA IURIS (Slovakia)

– Katarína Batková



Political disenchantment runs deep among young Slovaks, and they've been leaving the country in their droves in search of a brighter future. But in 2023 a campaign encouraging them to shape their society through voting and build a future in which they can fulfil their potential, had a remarkable reach and impact, says Katarína Batková, Executive Director at VIA IURIS.

With other Slovakian NGOs, VIA IURIS founded the Civic Platform for Democracy - a coalition of 60 civil society members - because civic space was deteriorating in countries in our region, and we wanted to protect the freedoms that are inherent in democratic countries.

Our mission was to make Slovakia a country where people aren't powerless against the powerful and all are equal before the law. Our members work on everything from preventing conflict to protecting the environment, democracy and the rule of law, as well as education and youth.

Young people in Slovakia are deeply disillusioned with the political process, and whether it can

improve their lives. Many are desperate to leave the country in search of a better future. This brain drain is one of Slovakia's biggest problems.

That's why, after a snap election was called in 2023, we carried out extensive polling to find out the concerns of 18-25 year olds. Our subsequent campaign was called Chcem tu zostať ('I Want to Stay Here').

We used Influencers to reach more than one million people through Instagram. Our campaign was political, but not partisan.

It was designed to send a positive message for young people to be proud of their country, not in a nationalistic way, but to have a vision for how they can help build a modern, functioning society where everyone can fulfil their potential. And voting is a key part of that: a way for people to change the things around them. Voter participation is key to the quality of democracies.

Our campaign featured on billboards, in festivals and on commercial TV, and its overall recognition among the public was 40%. One measure of its success is that 70% of young people turned out for the election, according to exit polls – way above the expected 52%. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to prevent a return of the populist party that ran the country a few years ago.

Without Civitates, organising such a campaign would not be possible, and the support is a tremendous help for the coalition's members.

Slovakia's civil society is very vibrant, but the new government is putting it under real pressure, so we need to be ready and focused on the challenges that lie ahead.



Tech and Democracy

Holding big tech to account



The impact of online platforms on democracy is among the most urgent issues of our age. They hold a vast sway over where we get our information, how our opinions are formed, and how we reach democratic decisions.

At their best, these platforms offer the tantalising prospect of being tools for civic mobilisation, giving a voice to the marginalised, and enabling pluralistic debate to flourish. In their all too common reality, however, they fuel polarisation, increase censorship and surveillance, and spread falsehoods at mind boggling speeds.

In 2023, concerns over generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) swept the world. This acceleration will exacerbate the damage created by big tech and social media that Civitates is already tackling. Last year, our grantee partners deepened and shared their analysis of the architecture driving online harms, and worked on groundbreaking EU legislation aimed at making platforms transparent and legally accountable.

The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) are designed to put big tech under proper scrutiny and clamp down on the anti-competitive practices which blight the industry.

In 2023 our grantee partners spearheaded efforts to make Europe's digital public sphere a place that's conducive to healthy democracies. From a large ecosystem of grantees (incl. EDRI, Access Now, EU Disinfo Lab, IViR see box: p. 16)

overseeing the first enforcement efforts of the DSA and DMA, to the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) complementing the work by leading the debate around the transparency and targeting of political advertising regulation. From AlgorithmWatch and AI Forensics conducting vital work to expose how Microsoft's AI-driven chatbot generated false information about elections in Switzerland and Germany [see box: p. 17], to Panoptykon prototyping alternative, safer designs for recommender systems [see box: p. 18], our grantees have provided a vital check on big tech's monopolistic, unaccountable power.

Now that these essential pieces of legislation are in place, our focus is on making them work: through advocacy, research, strategic litigation, awareness raising and others. Throughout the year we worked with 18 organisations in 8 member states and provided funds of about 915,000 EUR. Our grantee partners are increasingly working on different legislations in combination, treating them as part of an armoury of tools at their disposal, and our focus will be on harnessing them at both national and EU levels.

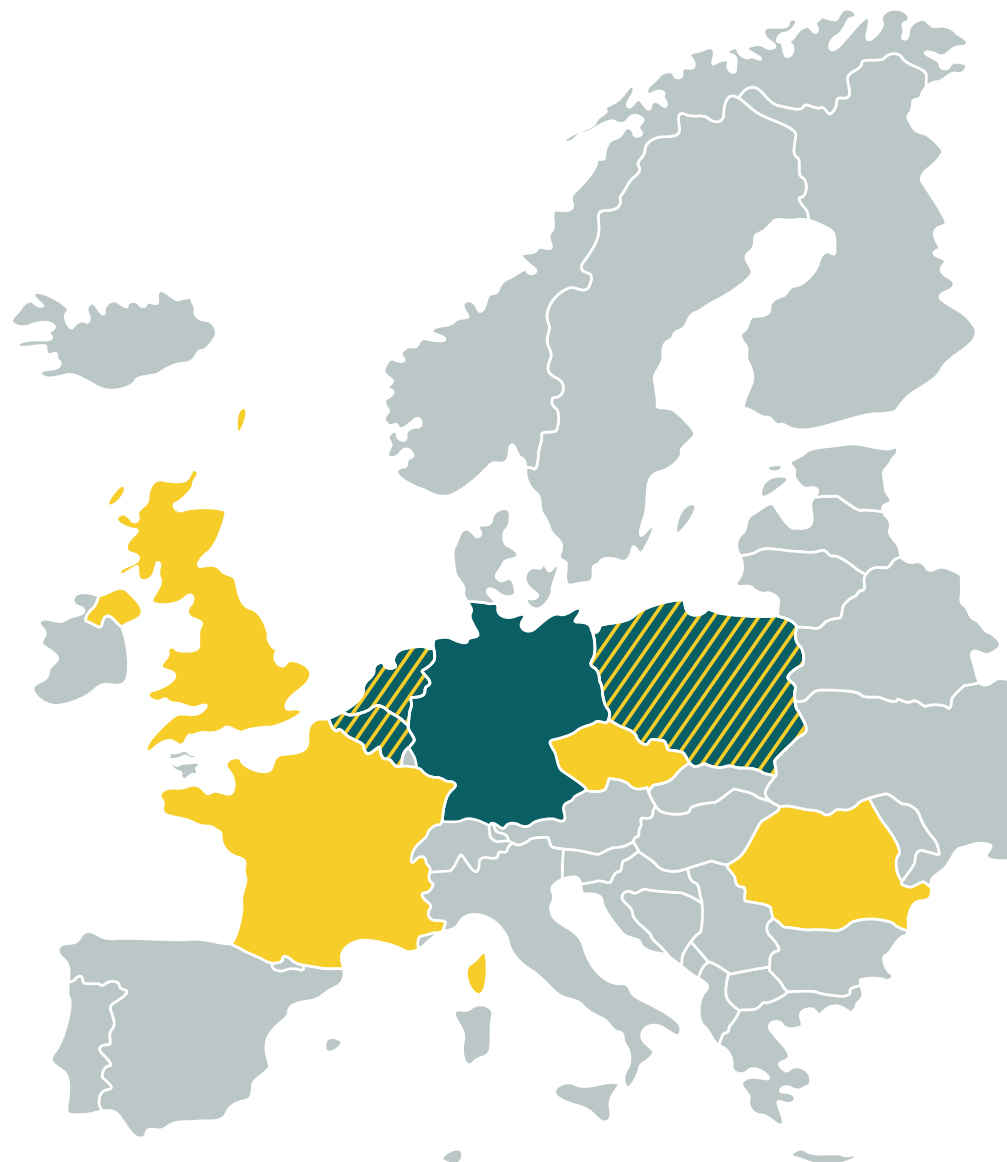
We will continue to critique and challenge the harms technology can pose to democracy. We will also expand our work: trying to look at technology in a holistic way and supporting positive solutions and alternative visions for technology that are centred on users rights and serve rather than undermine democratic public debate.

Our 'Tech and Democracy' Grantees

Opportunity Grants

-  **Belgium**
 - The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC)
 - Center for Democracy & Technology Europe (CDT Europe)
-  **Czech Republic**
 - Frank Bold Society
-  **France**
 - AI Forensics
-  **Germany**
 - Democracy Reporting International
-  **Poland**
 - Panoptikon Foundation
-  **Romania**
 - Expert Forum of Romania
-  **The Netherlands**
 - Corporate Europe Observatory
 - Bits of Freedom
-  **United Kingdom**
 - Who targets Me

Opportunity grants are small project grants (up to 30,000 EUR) given by Civitates to organisations to anticipate and address critical and emerging issues that intersect with their work.



Core Grants

-  **Belgium**
 - Access Now Europe*
 - European Digital Rights (EDRI)*
 - EU DisinfoLab*
 - European partnership for Democracy*
-  **Germany**
 - AW AlgorihtmWatch gGmbH*
 - Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V.*
-  **Poland**
 - Panoptikon Foundation*
-  **The Netherlands**
 - Institute for Information* Law (IViR)-University of Amsterdam*

Core/programmatic grants are grants given by Civitates to organisations to cover basic organizational and administrative costs.

* renewed for 2024

Grantee Spotlight

The Digital Services Act (DSA) Observatory / Institute for Information Law (IViR) – Paddy Leerssen



The EU's Digital Services Act can put a brake on the damage big tech is inflicting on democracy. Paddy Leerssen, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam's DSA Observatory, outlines how they are trying to utilise its potential in unprecedented times.

The Digital Services Act i.e. (DSA) is the first major attempt by governments to exercise democratic control over big tech, making social media services and platforms legally accountable for the harmful and illegal content they host - such as hate speech and sexual abuse imagery.

The DSA tackles issues that until now have been largely outside the ambit of regulatory or even democratic control. It has an incredibly broad scope, and draws on lots of different perspectives, including civil society's.

In essence, it's about power: about who controls what we see online.

Until now, that power has largely been vested in a small monopoly of huge American platform companies.

If they decided something should be prohibited, legally very little could be done to counteract or question it. The way in which these companies enforce their rules is difficult to understand or predict - and the ways of challenging them are limited.



The DSA - especially in combination with the other tech regulations that the EU approved - takes the first steps in constraining this power, and creating safeguards so that platforms have to be clearer and more consistent in the ways they exercise it.

Diverse and inclusive

The DSA is like an information generating machine: it will force platforms to release information enabling the public to have more informed discussions about the ways that platforms govern public discourse. My specific expertise is in transparency and access to data, which is one of the main things that the DSA focuses on.

The DSA's power isn't solely concentrated in the government, but in dispute resolution bodies, people called trusted flaggers, and vetted researchers, who are going to have an important role to play in shaping how effective it is.

We've moved from the legislative phase of the Act, to implementing and enforcing it.

The DSA Observatory, which is run by the Institute of Information Law (IViR) at the University of Amsterdam, acts as a hub of expertise on the DSA and a point of reference for researchers and civil society on platform regulation. Throughout 2023 we've monitored the DSA's early implementation, carried out legal research and organised events to advance the debate and analysis about the transformation it can make. The key challenge has been keeping up with developments as the DSA covers a very broad range of issues.

Our core focus, however, has been scrutinising the ways in which the regulation can create

meaningful accountability, and access to justice for those suffering a variety of online harms, as well as questions of regulatory insight. We're particularly interested in how the new risk-based approach can work in a democratic and inclusive way, which means making sure that it helps create safer online spaces without curbing fundamental rights, like freedom of expression.

Right now, we're in a moment of institution building: we're trying to ensure that the DSA's various enforcers - from the new dedicated team in the European Commission to the national-level Digital Services Coordinators - are robust

and well-funded, as well as diverse and inclusive. For instance, there's an ongoing debate on how regulators should interface with civil society bodies and some countries, like Germany, are working on building advisory bodies.

I think the problems that we as societies are facing with tech are unprecedented. The DSA can be an important tool in tackling them.

But it's up to us what we make of it.



– Marc Faddoul

Wrong polling numbers and election dates, outdated candidates and fabricated controversies: exposing the flaws in generative AI's election information

AI Forensics holds major technology platforms accountable through high-profile, technical investigations uncovering the harms their algorithms cause. AlgorithmWatch is a human rights organisation fighting for a world where algorithms and AI strengthen rather than weaken justice and democracy. In 2023, they collaborated on an investigation to test the quality of information about elections provided by Microsoft's AI-driven Copilot chatbot, formerly known as Bing Chat. Their findings were alarming.

Over three-months, researchers systematically prompted Bing Chat about the October 2023 federal elections in Switzerland and the state elections in the German states Hesse and Bavaria. They found that a third of Bing Chat's answers to election-related questions was factually wrong, including on election dates, polling numbers and candidates. Marc Faddoul, Director of AI Forensics, outlines the implications:

"The reason why we chose to investigate how a generative AI chatbot system responds to election-related questions is because of online platforms' potential impact on democratic processes. We've seen with Brexit and the 2016 US election how they can tip a result one way or another.

We focussed on Bing Chat because it was the first mainstream web-browsing chatbot. Our investigation was preliminary work for the 2024 European elections, where we're going to be conducting a lot of election monitoring work, and we were able to test our methodologies.

Policymakers are taking algorithmic systems' impact on democracy seriously. They're targeting a handful of companies who are extremely powerful, and agile at circumventing regulations and finding loopholes in the regulations to maintain their monopolies. But we now have powerful regulation which can enact major progress if we invest enough means and political willpower in its enforcement."

Grantee Spotlight

The Panoptykon Foundation / Recommender Systems Task Force

– Katarzyna Szymielewicz



Katarzyna Szymielewicz, co-founder and president of the Panoptykon Foundation, says the Digital Services Act can help neutralise big tech's threat to democracy and society.

Under the Digital Services Act (DSA), very large online platforms have to assess the risks their core services pose to individuals and society.

Have they become powerful launchpads for trolls and bullies to spread disinformation and hate? What impact do they have on public health, on the quality of public debate, on electoral processes? And how do they plan to mitigate these risks?

One of the key design-layers of big tech's platforms which systematically risk causing harm, are their recommender systems. The role of these algorithmic machines is to rank, filter and target content to individual users. There is nothing bad about filtering and targeting content per se. In fact, without such algorithmic filters we would be entirely lost on the internet. But dominant platforms chose to prioritise user engagement over safety, and designed their recommender systems to keep us clicking and scrolling as long as possible.

There's growing research showing that engagement-driven recommendations push people towards political extremes by fuelling outrage, drive social media addiction, amplify polarising content, and risk vulnerable people's mental health.

My colleagues and I founded the Panoptykon Foundation in Poland 15 years ago to defend humans from the threats of rapidly-changing technologies and growing surveillance. Recommender systems are one such threat, which has been neglected by policy makers until the situation became critical.

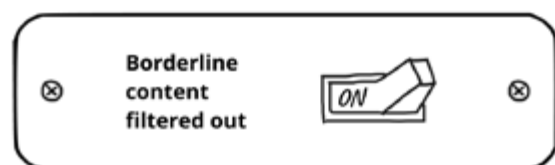
It's clear that for the DSA to neutralise some of the harms related to the social media business model, then recommender systems need urgent and special attention from the European Commission and national regulators.

At Panoptykon we know that to make this happen we need to pool expertise and campaigning power from across the network supported by Civitates. This is why in 2022 I came up with the idea of a Recommender Systems Task Force – an informal platform to coordinate our projects and share intel from Brussels. Initially it was hard to transform this idea into an operational structure, capable of delivering concrete products. But in 2023 everything came together, from targeted research to campaigning, and as the group we had leverage in talking to the European Commission.

In our research, we first named design features of large platform recommender systems that prove harmful. And then prototyped alternative designs to prove that these powerful algorithmic machines can be made safer. We developed a novel approach to what used to be called “user settings” – but failed to give users' meaningful control over their feeds. We believe that authentic personalisation in recommender systems can be achieved without tracking and profiling users' behaviour. This technology can be designed to serve humans, instead of manipulating, enraging and addicting them. But for that the EU will have to challenge big tech's business paradigm. We are not talking about cosmetic changes here.

Part of the challenge we are facing in this battle – for a better, healthier online public sphere – is denial. This is the attitude of the ordinary internet user, who might experience mental health issues, problems in relationships and compulsive use of social media, or be lured towards extremism, but still accept that “it is how it is”. Nobody ever told them that their harm comes from intentionally bad design and a different kind of online experience is possible. This is why in 2024 we will push the message: with the DSA in place, healthier and safer recommender systems are within our reach. We “just” need regulators to do their job and tech companies to comply.

I think the importance of our work is that we do not give up even though these battles are extremely complicated and very long-term.



Media

Supporting independent media in uncertain times



An independent media is essential for a functioning democracy. It holds power to account, guards against disinformation, and brings vital public interest stories into the public domain. It exposes corruption, scandals and official wrongdoing; it acts as a voice for the marginalised and underprivileged, “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable”, as the old adage puts it.

Yet throughout Europe, independent media is being assailed from different directions: its old business model is collapsing, as readers and advertisers migrate to the wild west of social media. Meanwhile, regressive laws and state influence over the media grow.

Countering this disturbing pattern, Civitates has supported 11 dynamic European media organisations in eight countries since 2020, with a total of 2.5 million EUR. We have also acted as an easy entry point for new donors wanting to support independent journalism.

Our 2023 learning review showed that our grantees have pioneered new ways to adapt to the shifting media landscape and strengthened their financial sustainability. Many have developed innovative models for generating revenue, consolidated their editorial and operational teams, engaged more diverse audiences, and built networks to defend against legal and other attacks. Critically, they also produced groundbreaking, revelatory public interest journalism, as the snapshots below of two from our grantee partners, Press One and 444.hu, show.

The fact that these outlets - and our other grantee partners - continue to thrive against the odds, is a testament to the skills of their journalists and their determination to keep giving the public the information it needs to make informed decisions.

Our 'Media' Grantees

Supported in 2023 & Renewed for 2024

- **Hungary**
 - Direkt36
 - Magyar Jeti (444)
- **Italy**
 - Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI)
- **Poland**
 - Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (OKO)
 - Fundacja Pismo
- **Portugal**
 - Bagabaga Studios
- **Romania**
 - Átlátszó Erdély
 - PressOne
- **Slovenia**
 - Pod crto
- **Spain**
 - Civio
- **The Netherlands**
 - Stitching Bellingcat



Grantee Spotlight

Press One (Romania)

– Adrian Mihaltianu



Press One is producing public interest journalism that's a catalyst for social change and using an innovative business model to do so. Managing Director Adrian Mihaltianu discusses how they're achieving this against the odds.

We founded Press One in 2015 because there was a huge need for independent media outlets in Romania. We wanted to help people understand the reality around them, and provide the quality, public interest journalism that was lacking by reporting on subjects that were being ignored. Over the years we've added an investigative layer to our work, which of course is the essence of public interest journalism.

We're not activists; we're objective journalists. But we act as a bridge between civil society and the general public, covering a lot of NGOs' work, focusing on the disenfranchised and the vulnerable.

We produce a lot of immersive journalism, using multimedia to reach different audiences.

What differentiates us from other Romanian media is that when we find a problem, we follow up by reporting on solutions: we highlight issues and then act as a catalyst for people to act on them. This is something that we've had great success in.



To take just one example, we reported on an abandoned railway in a densely populated but derelict industrial zone, which was full of garbage, in western Bucharest. After we published a series of articles and video reports, the local mayor surveyed residents about how they wanted to rescue the area. Today, it's a beautiful park.

Our main audience is civil society, and we have around 150,000 readers a month, although our audience is much bigger, as we reach people with our native content on social media. Around 400 - 500,000 people watch our videos every month, and our content gets widely shared.

We don't have a very robust media landscape in Romania. The sad thing is that most of the main communications' channels - TV, radio and online media, because the print media is not as important now - are either controlled by companies or people who are very close to the government.

A lot of things are stacked against us: politicians are pumping huge sums of money into mainstream media outlets, while social media algorithms don't lead people to our website. But over the past four years, Civitates has allowed us to survive and even flourish. Without them we would still exist, but in a much smaller form. They provided money and networking, and didn't require a huge amount of bureaucracy. This allowed us to actually grow and learn how to finance ourselves, so it was vital.

We are working with the Ethical Media Alliance, which provides an innovative model for smaller media outlets to work together and attract funding and business partners.

Without Civitates, we wouldn't be where we are right now: with 14 reporters and a strong team that is on the right track to being self-sustainable.

Grantee Spotlight

444.hu (Hungary)

– Gábor Kardos



Gábor Kardos, CEO of independent Hungarian media publisher Magyar Jeti Zrt, explains how his organisation continues to produce vital, public interest journalism in a hostile political and economic climate.

The media is reeling from the same pressures around the world. The old funding model is dying. Yet the need for accurate, fact-based journalism that informs people about the world we live in and holds power to account, could hardly be greater.

In Hungary, we face the same pressures as the media elsewhere – but in a more extreme form.

Since 2010, when Viktor Orbán's government returned to power, media pluralism and independence has been under assault, and independent journalists like us face constant attacks and smears by the pro-government press and online troll factories. Reporters without Borders has called Orbán a 'press freedom predator'. At the same time, advertising revenue for independent media has fallen dramatically, in an economic climate made even harsher by Hungary having the highest inflation in the EU.

At 444.hu, the online news portal we founded in Budapest in 2013, and its publisher Magyar Jeti Zrt, we've had to find alternative sources of income to survive, including receiving grants from Civitates and other sources.

During the three years that we've worked with Civitates we've undergone tremendous changes: 444.hu had a purely advertising based business model, now it's predominantly subscription-based. Most of our spendable revenue comes from our readers.

Since the Civitates' grant started, a major change is that we launched Lakmusz, Hungary's first dedicated fact-checking site,

which is part of an international consortium led by Agence France-Presse (AFP). Lakmusz is now a respected force in the international fact-checking community, and its editorial team continues to grow in numbers, capacity and diversity.

Among our proudest journalistic achievements in 2023, was the release of our documentary, 'Untruthfully', which exposed the Orbán government's covert campaigns against NGOs and politicians. It's been viewed almost 800,000 times, was widely cited in other media, and in several major public protest events.

We also exposed how our prime minister's number one crony bought a yacht worth more than EUR 70 million - our drone footage of it resonated with the public.

We've also been closely monitoring and highlighting the dangers of Hungary's new Sovereignty Protection law, under which the most basic norms of law have been discarded with dire consequences for independent media, civil society – and democracy itself [see p. 12]

The need for fact-based journalism is so great because of the extremely high levels of disinformation, not just in Hungary but almost everywhere. The challenge is sky high, but there's no way forward for any society without strengthening its resilience to misinformation and disinformation.



Standing in solidarity with Ukraine



Supporting civil society's effort to tackle the multiple crises created by the war in Ukraine.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Civitates launched a time-bound Ukraine Solidarity Fund to assist organisations working in solidarity with the beleaguered country. Since then, a total of 320,000 EUR has supported 10 grantee partners with funds of around 30,000 EUR each. Among much else, these partners have helped disrupt Russia's cyber warfare campaign; reported on the war and its implications; provided logistical support for Ukrainian civil society and exiled journalists; and supported initiatives amplifying Ukrainian civil society organisations' demands. The fund is closing in 2024. The war, though, continues. Civitates will review the lessons we've learned

from running this fund and assess how we can most effectively support those working towards democracy and peace in troubled times. EP.

Cutting a financial lifeline to Russia's war machine

The EU imposed what it called "unprecedented" sanctions on Russia after it invaded Ukraine. Yet one resource was absent from the list – and able to provide a financial lifeline for Russia's aggression: rough diamonds, whose export earns Russia around US \$4 billion every year.

While devastation rained on Ukraine, the flow of Russian diamonds into the EU continued. This appeared to suggest that for some – particularly Belgium, the EU's largest importer of them – national interest was trumping efforts to halt the onslaught.

The Civitates' Ukraine Solidarity Fund supported a wide array of grantee partners:

Provided digital security:

Access Now

Helped to get staff or partners out of Ukraine:

European Partnership for Democracy

Set up fundraising campaigns:

Bulgarian Fund for Women

Collected and archived digital material to document the conflict:

Bellingcat

Provided assistance to refugee partners:

Citizen Participation Forum

OFOP

Okotars

Residency programmes for Ukrainian academics in peace studies:

Peace Institute

Called on European institutions to act decisively and advocated for the enforcement of sanctions:

Transparency International EU

Reported on the war and its implications while addressing disinformation:

OKO.press

Press One

Prismo

IRPI

Democracy Reporting International

In July 2022, Civitates grantee partner [Transparency International EU](#) (TI EU) called on the EU to rectify this. “The key aim of our advocacy was to overcome Belgian reluctance as a means of getting EU institutions to act,” recalls Roland Papp, Senior Policy Officer at Transparency International EU, who spearheaded the organisation’s sanctions work.

Working with colleagues in the Belgian chapter of TI, TI EU brought the issue to national and international prominence. Their work paid dividends. First the Belgian parliament adopted a resolution favouring an import ban on Russian diamonds, then

in December 2023, the EU followed suit: prohibiting Russian diamonds from the EU market, and choking off an important source of revenue for the Russian treasury.

“The ban showed how national-level pressure can lead to changes in EU policy,” says Papp.

Yet, after two years of war, it’s clear that sanctions alone have not curtailed the Kremlin’s capacity to wage war. “A fundamental problem is that

it's been easy for Putin's cronies to circumvent restrictive measures, in 'cat and mouse' games where front-end companies and sanctioned individuals continue to act in full impunity," explains Papp.

At the end of 2023, a new EU directive criminalising violations of EU sanctions was agreed. Once the new provisions are transposed into national law, prosecutions should rise.

"Criminalising violators is only part of the answer," says Papp. "Only through a comprehensive approach to end the systemic threat of financial secrecy and opacity in asset ownership can the EU ensure justice and accountability for the suffering of the Ukrainian citizens." The EU has been working tirelessly to this end. "We will continue to advocate for bold actions to close remaining loopholes that enable dirty money to fuel this terrible war," adds Papp.

Russia is fighting both a cyber and physical war against Ukraine

Russia's war is not just being waged on Ukraine's land: in Bakhmut, Kherson, Mariupol and elsewhere. It's being fought online: through censorship, disinformation, propaganda, internet shutdowns, and cyber-attacks.

Vast suffering and human loss have been the essence of war throughout history. What marks this conflict out however, is that one of its frontlines is the internet.

"Cyber has joined land, air, sea and space as the fifth domain of military warfare" says Brett Solomon, Executive Director at Access Now.

"Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is first and foremost a story of violence and abuse against the civilian population. But it's also a tragic testimony to the dangers of digital abuses in times of crisis," adds Giulio Coppi, Access Now's Senior Humanitarian Officer.

[Access Now](#), a Civitates grantee partner, is one of the world's leading digital rights organisations. It's been part of the resistance to digital rights abuses, and is striving to ensure human rights are upheld in the digital sphere during the war.

Its Helpline is giving civil society the digital security needed to weather the cyberattacks that have come thick and fast since the war began, and which enables them to continue their crucial work:

- In 2023, Access Now handled hundreds of digital security cases related to Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.
- Its Helpline also created and updated two digital security resources in Russian and three in Ukrainian during 2023.
- The Access Now-led #KeepItOn coalition tracks and monitors internet shutdowns in collaboration with local partners. The coalition found that in 2023, there were eight shutdowns in Ukraine, six of which were imposed by Russia, and four separately in Russia. And in 2022, at least 12 of Russia's 22 shutdowns targeting Ukraine coincided with documented human rights abuses.

As Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, so does its targeting of the internet and basic civilian infrastructure.

"Russia-imposed internet shutdowns in occupied Ukraine are not isolated incidents, but just one tool in Russia's arsenal for digital occupation, wielded in pursuit of total informational control," says Anastasiya Zhyrmon, Policy Manager for Eastern Europe & Central Asia. "On July 6, Russian invaders blocked access to Instagram and YouTube in Kherson. On July 22, they disabled Google's search engine in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson on the pretext that the company was 'openly propagating terrorism and violence against Russians.' Russia also claimed to have shut down Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube in the occupied parts of the Zaporizhzhia region. Ukrainians in occupied territories are forced to use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to reach blocked platforms." Zhyrmon reports.

More broadly, the war has highlighted the urgency of addressing technology's rapidly increasing role in 21st century conflict.

Our 'Standing in solidarity with Ukraine' Grantees

- **Belgium**
 - Access Now Europe
 - Transparency International EU
- **Bulgaria**
 - Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD)
 - Citizen participation Forum
- **Czech Republic**
 - Neon Coalition/ Glopolis
- **Germany**
 - Democracy Reporting International
- **Hungary**
 - Ökotárs (Civilisation coalition)
- **Italy**
 - Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI)
- **Poland**
 - Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (OKO)
 - OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative
- **Slovenia**
 - Peace Institute



Our grantees in 2023



Civic Power

- European Policy Centre (EPC) (Belgium)
- Social Platform (Belgium)
- Bulgarian Fund for Women (Bulgaria)
- Citizen Participation Forum (Bulgaria)
- Human Rights House Zagreb (Croatia)
- Glopolis (NEON coalition) (Czech Rep.)
- European Civic Forum (ECF) (France)
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V. (Germany)
- Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Hungary)
- Marom Klub Egyesület (Hungary)
- Ókotárs (Civilisation coalition) (Hungary)
- Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD) (Italy)
- Association 61 (Poland)
- OFOP- equal participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees (Poland)
- OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative (Poland)
- Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe) (Romania)
- Peace Institute (Slovenia)
- Via Iuris (Slovakia)
- European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL)(The Netherlands)



Tech and Democracy

- Access Now Europe (Belgium)
- European Digital Rights (EDRI) (Belgium)
- EU DisinfoLab (Belgium)
- European partnership for Democracy (Belgium)
- The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) (Belgium)
- Center for Democracy & Technology Europe (CDT Europe) (Belgium)
- Frank Bold Society (Czech Rep.)
- AI Forensics (France)
- Democracy Reporting International (Germany)
- AW AlgorihtmWatch gGmbH (Germany)
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe e.V. (Germany)
- Panoptikon Foundation (Poland)
- Expert Forum of Romania (Romania)
- Corporate Europe Observatory (The Netherlands)
- Bits of Freedom (The Netherlands)
- Institute for Information Law (IVIR)-University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
- Who targets Me (UK)



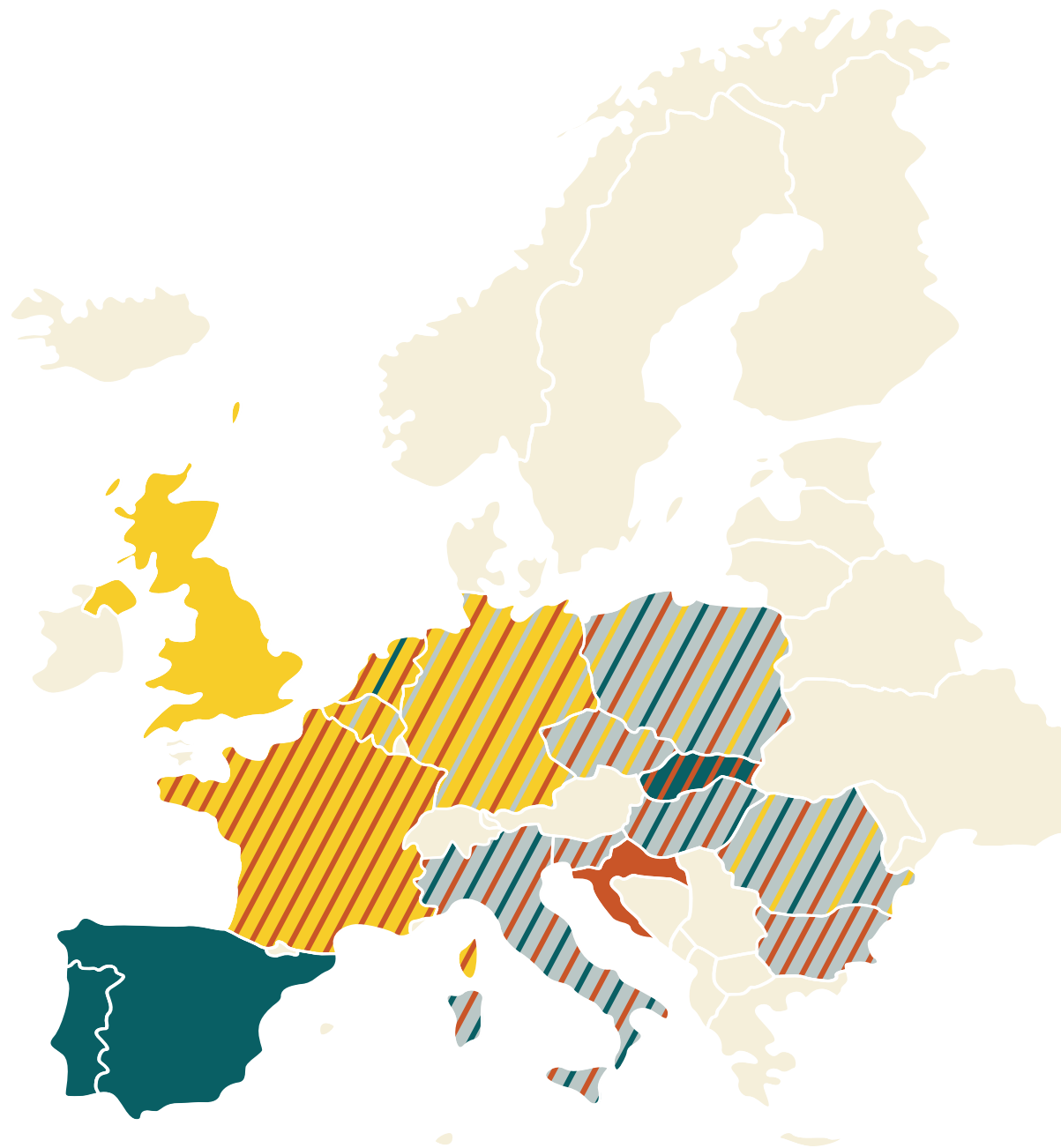
Solidarity with Ukraine

- Access Now Europe (Belgium)
- Transparency International EU (Belgium)
- Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) (Bulgaria)
- Citizen participation Forum (Bulgaria)
- Neon Coalition/ Glopolis (Czech Republic)
- Democracy Reporting International (Germany)
- Ókotárs (Civilisation coalition) (Hungary)
- Citizen Participation Forum (Hungary)
- Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI) (Italy)
- Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (OKO) (poland)
- OFOP- Our Ombudsman Initiative (Poland)
- Peace Institute (Slovenia)



Media

- Direkt36 (Hungary)
- Magyar Jeti (444) (Hungary)
- Investigative Reporting Project (IRPI)(Italy)
- Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (OKO) (Poland)
- Fundacja Pismo (Poland)
- Bagabaga Studios (Portugal)
- Átlátszó Erdély (Romania)
- PressOne (Romania)
- Pod crto (Slovenia)
- Civio (Spain)
- Stitching Bellingcat (The Netherlands)



Institutional development

A year of institutional renewal and consolidation

In 2023, Civitates welcomed our new Director, Elisa Peter, who started in January. We said goodbye to two long standing colleagues: Ekaterina Mandova and Roy Virah-Sawmy, who played a critical role in Civitates' growth and development since it was established. We thank them for their tireless dedication to our grantee and foundation partners.

In October, Samuel Sigere (based in Brussels) joined the team as Programme and Grants Officer – a new role created to oversee operations and to support the effective and efficient delivery of Civitates' grant-making and capacity building programmes.

By the end of the year, two new Senior Programme Managers were about to join the team: Eszter Szucs (based in Berlin), who will be leading on the civic power and media portfolios and Claudio Cesarano (based in Barcelona), who will be leading our work on tech and democracy. They will be overseeing the launch of a new grant-making round in 2024, informed by the refreshed strategy and our updated priorities. The new strategy is expected to be publicly available in the first quarter of 2024.

In 2023, we renewed 18 grantee organisations until December 2024 across our three portfolios.

Most Civitates' donor partners renewed their commitments to the pooled fund, and several made significantly higher pledges. We were delighted to welcome a new foundation partner: Mercator Switzerland [see p. 29]. A few foundations left the collaborative to pursue different strategic objectives (Mercator Germany, Shoepflin Foundation, Wille Finance) or because they were putting a halt to their operations (Isocrates).

Throughout the year, Civitates actively engaged with partners in the fields of democracy and media, participated in networks such as Ariadne, the Journalism Funders Forum and the Philea Democracy Network and reached out to other relevant stakeholders (e.g. Open Government Partnership) to strategically contribute to and consolidate pro-democracy efforts in philanthropy and beyond. We also commissioned research to analyse the current civic space donor landscape, including recommendations for public and private donors, which will be published in early 2024 [see p. 30].

In 2024, Civitates will embark on a new grant making phase informed by its refreshed strategy, so stay tuned!



The new Civitates team



**Elisa
Peter**

Fund
Director



**Eszter
Szűcs**

Senior Programme Manager
for Civic Power & Media



**Claudio
Cesarano**

Senior Programme Manager
for Tech and Democracy



**Samuel
Sigere**

Programme
and Grant officer



Donor Spotlight

– Flurina Wäspi

Last year, Civitates welcomed a new donor partner: Stiftung Mercator Schweiz. Flurina Wäspi, the Foundation's Head of Democracy, explains the reasons for their support, and how the two organisations' goals align.

Like Civitates, Stiftung Mercator Schweiz stands up for democratic values. We are committed to a vibrant democracy with citizens who are well-informed and actively involved in political decision-making processes.

While our main focus is on Switzerland, our country isn't an island: if we want to strengthen democracy in Switzerland, we need strong, democratic neighbours.

The same forces undermining democracy across Europe are at play here. Next to the global rise of authoritarian systems that are putting democracy everywhere under pressure, we are also faced with eroding trust in political actors and institutions, increasingly difficult access to information and the media,

and the exclusion of ever larger sections of the population from political participation. Pan-European initiatives such as Civitates, which promote democracy across the continent, are crucial to address these issues.

While Switzerland is part of Europe, its relations with the EU have stagnated, and Swiss organisations struggle to identify and connect with possible European partners. So, it's invaluable for us to have this platform with Civitates, which we see as a conduit for deepening our understanding of the root causes of democratic decline and for transferring knowledge between us and our European partners. We want to share our best practices and learn from strategies used in different countries.

What also makes this relationship special to me is that it represents a change in the way we fund projects, with an emphasis on long-term grants for bigger projects that are more focused on coalition building, rather than smaller, more isolated ones.

There are so few philanthropic organisations that explicitly work to strengthen democracy, so our partnership with Civitates makes sense on multiple levels.

Insights from our Grantees

The EU's evolving donor landscape

As part of our strategy refresh, Civitates commissioned a study to better understand the funding landscape for civil society organisations working to protect and advance civic space in the EU. It aimed to identify which countries, groups or kinds of activities which defend civic space, receive the most and least funding. The mapping looked at private foundations as well as public donors, such as the EU's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. The study confirmed major changes and disruptions to funding, which included a number of donors changing priorities. The impact of this on the sector is likely to be significant, with one key private donor potentially leaving it altogether. The study also revealed an absence of actionable data tracking what is being funded and by whom in this space.

This makes it difficult to understand precisely the levels of funding going to different geographies, activities and types of organisation, in a way that can help identify gaps and refine strategies. There is also a need for greater coordination and cooperation among donors, particularly between public donors and private foundations. Information sharing and cooperation largely seem to happen on an ad hoc basis. This means that learning and analysis is not shared in a way that would help develop the field of civic space grant making generally. Interestingly, this was a need identified not only by funders but also by civil society.

The report, which will be published in early 2024, includes several recommendations for donors, including:

- To expand spaces for sharing and coordination, especially among public and private donors.
- To find ways to map, track and analyse funding data (to defend and advance civic space and democracy).
- To balance efforts that defend/protect civic space (reactive) with efforts that open/expand civic space (proactive).
- To support civil society where threats to civic space are beginning to emerge and where there may be opportunities to prevent further deterioration, rather than limiting support to countries where civic space is in full crisis.
- To ensure that grantmaking practices reflect the strategies needed and the context in which civil society is operating and the resilience that they need to achieve success.
- To move to a form of partnership with civil society to better understand the impact of these practices but also the actions that are needed to advance civic space.



Grantee survey

Civitates aspires to be a responsible donor, attuned to our partners' needs. So in 2023 we invited our grantee partners to participate in an anonymous survey to understand what aspects of our relationships work well, and where we can do better. Here's a snapshot of what we found:

Thirty-seven out of the 41 Civitates grantees surveyed responded. Their feedback was generally very positive. Grantees clearly expressed their appreciation for Civitates, with specific references to our light procedures, our flexibility, and their trusted relationship with us. Some grantees expressed interest in being more regularly in touch with Civitates' foundation partners and the team. They would also welcome a greater focus on peer-learning.

"The team provides opportunities to learn in a safe environment, which in terms of philanthropy is not so common. It also takes good care for the grantees to let them know each other - this was surprising and very useful." – Anonymous survey respondent

"Thanks to the core funding, we can focus on our everyday job to provide our audience and the general public quality journalism, free of charge and political interference (....) Civitates serves as a good example of how to provide core grants and to cooperate with the grantees while limiting as much as possible the usual bureaucracy."

– Anonymous survey respondent

87%

of grantees mention Civitates' **support to other organisations and initiatives**

54%

of grantees have been supported by Civitates for **more than two years**

78%

of grantees think that Civitates' selection process is **transparent and fair**

80%

of grantees think that Civitates' funding is **flexible**

50%

of grantees mention the importance of Civitates' **support to journalists**

Finances

**Stefan Batory
Foundation**
€ 25 000

**Adessium
Foundation**
€ 150 000

Porticus
€ 75 000

Erste Stiftung
€ 75 000

**Open Society
Foundation**
€ 361 883,53

**Fondation
de France**
€ 160 000

**Isocrates
Foundation**
€ 300 000

**Fritt Ord
Foundation**
€ 225 000

**Charles Stewart
Mott Foundation**
€ 136 471

**King Baudouin
Foundation**
€ 350 000

Mercator Stiftung
€ 300 000

Limelight
€ 125 000



*Contribution in 2023. This is just an indication of the funds allocated for 2023 by the above-mentioned foundations. For some partners, their multi-year contribution has been received in one installment.

Capacity Building
€ 88 281,19

Communication
€ 4 841,91

**Staff &
Adminstration**
€ 432 331,80

**External expertise
& Strategy**
€ 134 150

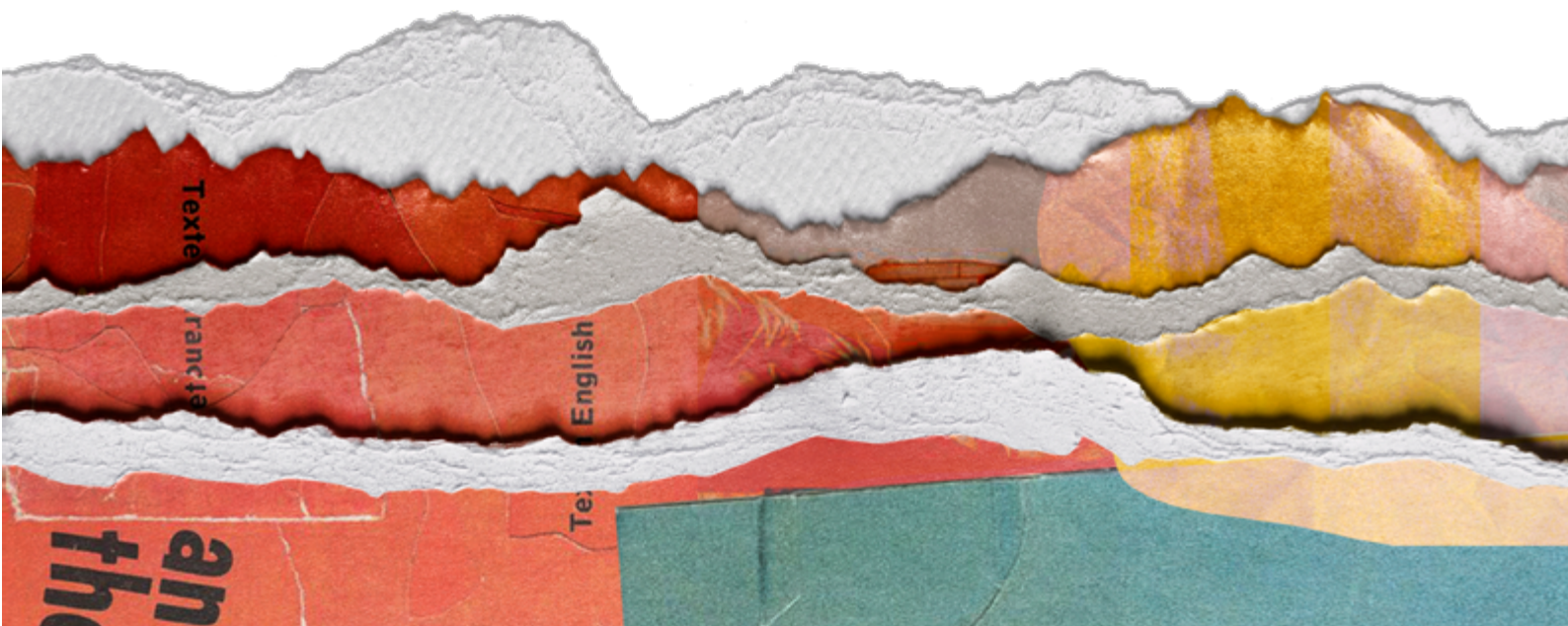
Grants
€ 3 133 641,52



Our foundation partners



THE SIGRID RAUSING TRUST



civitates-eu.org

secretariat@civitates-eu.org

Civitates is an initiative hosted by the Network
of European Foundations.

