

The cover features a background image of a modern glass building with a grid-like facade. On the right side, the European Union flag is visible, showing the blue field with twelve yellow stars. The text is centered on a white rectangular area.

CONTRIBUTION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL NON-STATE ORGANIZATIONS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE COUNCIL OF THE EU 2022

**UPDATED DOCUMENT, 17 JUNE 2022
AFTER THE JOINT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE EU
AT THE WORKING LEVEL AND THE CO NON-STATE NON-
PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS HELD ON 31 MAY 2022**

OVERVIEW OF MAIN ISSUES AND MESSAGES

- 01 Managing the refugee crisis and Ukraine's post-war recovery must be based on principles of responsibility and solidarity in migration management, and a long-term refugee integration to unlock social and economic potential of migration.
- 02 Accumulated crises increase the pressure on food security and migration of people from the Middle East and Africa. Europe needs to enhance the resilience of people living mainly in the vicinity of EU through humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and by supporting human rights and good governance.
- 03 The Czech Presidency has an opportunity to prepare a path to a secure and decarbonised energy for all by increasing the targets, accelerating their implementation and acquiring sufficient funds for the use of other renewable resources and energy savings, and for finding solutions to the structural causes of energy poverty.
- 04 Strengthening resistance against the Russian influence and cyber threats should be also based on the involvement of private and non-governmental sectors and experts.
- 05 Instruments to mitigate economic and social impact of the pandemic and migration wave provide an opportunity to popularize Europeanism and strengthen social cohesion.
- 06 Strategic resilience of the economy cannot be enhanced without a support to the well-being of children and young people with an emphasis on their mental health and meaningfulness of learning – their capacity to react to the challenges of quickly changing world.
Cultural and creative industries have a great potential for improving social cohesion, creation of new jobs, especially for the young generation, as well as their employment and competitiveness.
- 07
- 08 The Czech Presidency has a unique opportunity to actively contribute to the European Framework of the rule of law through a dialogue on the rule of law with the Member States and through a European strategy on the support of civil society.
- 09 Threats in the information space must be faced by ensuring the protection of civic freedoms and plurality of media.
- 10 At the strategic level, gender equality represents EU priority contributing to the quality of democracy, prosperity of the society and peace.
- 11 NGOs have interest in the quality implementation of the conclusions of the Conference on the future of Europe and involvement of citizens in improving democratic legitimacy of the EU policies.
- 12 The Czech Presidency can significantly contribute to declaring 2025 European Year of Volunteering.

The Czech Republic takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in a very critical period. It is in the interest of the democratic community, all citizens, governments and non-governmental as well as private actors to search jointly for sufficiently ambitious, realistic and effective solutions to the challenges faced in the long term by society. Russia's war against Ukraine and de facto against all democratic countries lends these challenges a new urgency.

Cooperating non-governmental non-state organisations (NGOs) and their networks offer their expertise, experience and contacts during the preparation and implementation of the Presidency of the Czech Republic in the Council of the European Union 2022. NGO representatives can participate in the Czech Presidency events by offering their expertise (for example, as speakers, moderators, participants), they can serve as intermediaries in the involvement of European NGO networks, which have a deep knowledge of European legislative processes, and they can support the communication and awareness dimensions of the Czech Presidency.

This document is launched as an invitation to share knowledge, expertise and issues that resonate with the political priorities of the Presidency of the Czech Republic in the Council of the European Union and whereby the NGOs can contribute to initiating broad and constructive debate. Under individual key government priorities we state the particular aspects that are considered crucial by the cited networks and organizations.

This document was created in cooperation of the members of the Committee for the EU at the Government Council for Non-State Non-Profit Organizations, representing non-governmental sector, and organizations associated in the informal platform of networks NeoN. The creation of the document was coordinated by Glopolis.

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MANAGING THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND UKRAINE'S POST-WAR RECOVERY

- **Responsibility and solidarity in migration management and refugee integration**

The conflict in Ukraine has had an unprecedented impact on the scale of migration to the European Union, which has already been experiencing an increase in migration of people from all over the world amounting to hundreds of thousands annually. By May 2022, the current migration crisis from Ukraine included almost 7 million people crossing the border of Ukraine as a result of war, mostly to EU countries. It is estimated that two-thirds of Ukraine's population has been impacted by the war, and it can be therefore expected that the influx of refugees from this country will continue in the months to come.

In reaction to this conflict, the European society united in a surge of solidarity and support. The action taken up by European leaders was also quick. Among other things, they activated the **Temporary Protection Directive**, allowing the quick introduction of uniform protection status for refugees across the EU, and issued [the 10-Point Plan](#) for stronger European coordination in welcoming people fleeing the war against Ukraine. However, the reality has shown that the most exposed EU Member States in our region **lack sufficient experience** in this field, and new challenges appear every day. However, crisis management itself is not sufficient to ensure an effective welcoming of migrants. It is also crucial to **plan a long-term perspective of integrating** the refugees into the societies of the Member States. This requires the EU to pay greater attention to the issues of migration and integration, both on the level of adopting EU strategies and legislation, and by adopting harmonized mechanisms for their implementation in the Member States, including ensuring financing from the European funds.

Priority actions include the need to initiate a discussion on revisions of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and [the EU Temporary Protection Directive](#) so that they comply with the elements of responsibility, solidarity and respect for human rights and observance of the principle of equal treatment by all Member States. This means engaging in **open discussion on regularisation and return policies** (i.e., which residence schemes will follow when temporary protection expires, and how to prevent Member States from lowering the minimum standards stated in the Directive); and discussing the issues of **applying double standards** to different groups of refugees (not only those from Ukraine), discrimination in the asylum processes and attitudes to refugees from vulnerable groups (especially Roma people), as well as clarifying the positions of the Members States on **visa policy for Russian Federation and Belarusian citizens**, especially in humanitarian cases and cases of **political opposition**.

The main concerns of the EU should also include the successful reception of refugees in our society and a focus on their long-term integration, as well as **exploitation of social and economic potential of migration** for European societies. For this to happen, it is essential for the EU to insist more strongly on the implementation of local and national measures in line with the **new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum** and the **EU Action Plan on Integration and inclusion**, and also to participate in the transfer of experience and know-how in implementing the necessary processes.

It is also necessary to clearly define the rules for the allocation of funds within the [Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe \(CARE\) policy](#), the Asylum, Migration and integration Fund (AMIF) and [other EU financial sources](#) for the development of solutions for timely and long-term integration of migrants. It is also essential to **support local governments and non-governmental sector in their capacity to use available EU financial mechanisms**.

There is also a gender dimension to the Ukraine refugee crisis as it is mostly women with children who are coming here and need our support. If **the specific needs of women and the primary importance of care in migration** are not taken into account immediately, the support provided by the European countries will not be sufficiently effective.

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- **Strengthening the resilience of people living mainly in the EU's neighbouring countries through humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and by supporting human rights and good governance.**

The accumulated impact of climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine undermine decades of efforts to build the capacities and capabilities of developing countries to react better to crises and long-term challenges. Among other things, Russian aggression intentionally aims at threatening food security. The Middle East and Africa represent the most vulnerable regions that face long-term crises.

The current migration wave from Ukraine may therefore be followed by a subsequent wave of migration from the Middle East and Africa, the traditional source regions of migration to the EU. The destination countries of migrants from Ukraine need assistance with integration in order to unlock the social and economic potential of migrants. Strengthening the resilience of the inhabitants of the Middle East and Africa through humanitarian assistance and long-term development cooperation is also essential.

Europe, and the Czech Republic in particular, contribute in the long term to the development of democracy and civil society and the rule of law and good governance in third countries. It is not only in our interest, but in the interest of all that we must encourage this kind of cooperation. It is necessary for the EU and the Member States, including the Czech Republic, to show their solidarity by providing humanitarian assistance in acute crises and to deliver long-term development cooperation, which help to prevent these acute crises.

The protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, together with the support of democracy and the rule of law, are among the key objectives of the Czech Republic's foreign policy. Within the framework of what is called transition policy, these are priorities of the current government and as such also reflect the priorities of the Czech Presidency, mainly in the issues of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, the support of independent media, tackling disinformation and support of memory institutions (such as the Russian Memorial).

The need for humanitarian action at the level of the EU and its Member States was stressed by the European Commission in its communication to the European Parliament¹ even before the Russian aggression in Ukraine. This is related to the need to increase the contribution of the governments to the Official Development Assistance (ODA), that is, mainly humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. This also applies to the Czech Republic, which due to the cuts of the last few years and with its contribution of 0.13% ODA/GNI fell behind the EU Member States as well as the Member States of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC), a club of major donor countries.

¹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles, COM(2021) 110, 10.3.2021

As a comparison, the contribution to the ODA by Sweden, a country with a population similar in size to that of the Czech Republic, is twenty times higher than the Czech Republic's contribution. We appreciate the Czech Republic's responsibility with regard to the humanitarian needs of Ukraine. However, it should be also followed by a responsible approach to its commitments in the area of ODA. There is also a need to dramatically scale up climate finance for the developing world by contributing to the Green Climate Fund, created by the Paris Climate Accord in 2015. This is also a challenge for the Czech Republic, because to date no funds have been allocated for the period 2020-2023.

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ENERGY SECURITY

- **Safe, decarbonised energy for all**

In order to ensure energy security, the use of energy and raw materials imported from other continents and from hostile regimes must be reduced. Energy security and energy transition therefore do not represent two separate priorities from which we should choose, but rather one indivisible area, in which the decrease of gas imports from Russia goes hand in hand with the decarbonisation of the economy. The issue of energy transition provides yet another opportunity to show that, as in the area of providing assistance to refugees and European cooperation, the Czech Republic is a progressive country leading the EU toward a common goal of carbon neutrality in 2050. Energy security during the Presidency must not become merely a cover-up for further expensive imports of gas or for nuclear projects with an implementation horizon of decades.

The Czech Presidency is taking place at a crucial time for the adoption of legislation in the areas of renewable resources and energy savings, as well as for the solution of social issues related to the high energy prices. The attack against Ukraine adds significance and urgency to the implementation of the European Green Deal. The Presidency must ensure smooth discussion of the Fit for 55 package and implementation of the proposed REPowerEU plan without any further delay. If energy security is to be a long-term strategy, the Czech Presidency needs to prepare a path for increasing the targets, accelerating their implementation and acquiring sufficient funds for the use of other renewable resources and energy savings. For the credibility of the Czech Republic in this area, the government also needs to accept the increased targets for the Czech Republic, which is shamefully lagging behind in both these areas. If the use of natural gas is really to be replaced with hydrogen, and not extended, the capacity of renewable resources must also be scaled up.

Energy prices are a pressing issue for all Europeans today. The Social Climate Fund from the Fit for 55 package should be launched as soon as possible and separated from the new and controversial part of the package, the system of allowances. The finances should be channelled not only to compensation, but mainly to the following solutions to the **structural causes of energy poverty**:

- improved energy performance of vulnerable households,
- available zero-emission public transport,
- community renewable resources.

The Czech Presidency should therefore search for other sources of financing for a just transition and should also initiate a debate with the Member States on the carbon tax and the taxation of excessive incomes of energy corporations and other sources. However, this is not merely an issue of financing. Responsibility for the improvement of the energy conditions of households should also be set for the owners of rental flats and for energy and heating enterprises.

Mining and the processing of materials, fuels and food are responsible for 90% of biodiversity loss. The Czech Presidency should work for the creation of **binding goals and rules for the decrease of the material footprints of the European economy** and add this issue to the agenda of the European Commission in 2023.

Apart from investments and rules, the Presidency should also communicate the importance of green transition and make sustainability a key issue of education. Here the Czech Republic can build on the vast experience of environmental education centres.

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STRENGTHENING EUROPE'S DEFENCE CAPABILITIES AND CYBERSPACE SECURITY

- **Strengthening resistance against Russian influence and cyber threats with the assistance of private and non-governmental sectors and experts**

In reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Czech Republic should lead a debate on the improvement of current measures and the introduction of new system measures to foster the resistance of the EU states against Russian influence or alternately against other undemocratic regimes, mainly in the following areas:

- thorough mapping of Russian-linked property,
- improving the quality of data in the registries of beneficial owners,
- fight against tax havens, and
- other anti-money laundering measures.

These measures are demanded by a number of organizations from all over the EU which deal with the issues of transparency and responsibility in politics.²

Apart from this, we should not forget conventional and unconventional threats, as well as the need to strengthen our resilience in the face of them. In this regard, it is essential for the Czech Republic to make use of its good reputation in the area of defence and security policy, which has been built through its strong transatlantic relations, NATO membership and willingness to strengthen significantly its arms production and to support Ukraine in the Russian war against it and against the West in general.

2 <https://www.access-info.org/2022-03-09/act-now-open-company-registers/>

It is these basic characteristics that allow the Czech Republic credibly and consistently to moderate a European debate on these key issues, including the future of European security architecture and its related strategic autonomy (or sovereignty), which should ultimately be closely linked to the security within NATO. Among other issues, **implementation of the Strategic Compass** and its translation into practical projects in cooperation with NATO, also in exchange with Ukraine, should also be promoted.

Beyond the conventional area, the Czech Republic also needs to enhance its resilience to hybrid threats, including cyber threats, which represent a long-term challenge not only for the Czech, but also for European society. **Involving the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the expert community** in this area will be of crucial importance for the Czech Republic. It should contribute mainly to boosting European resilience to both cyber threats and crime. These should, however, be perceived as separate areas. Last but not least, the Czech Republic should serve as a bridge for contact between the EU and Ukraine, which has substantial experience in this area due to the war with Russia. In this sense, the forthcoming programme of the Czech EU Presidency is moving in the right direction, while it must be borne in mind that, in terms of building unity in the EU, this will represent a considerable challenge.

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STRATEGIC RESILIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY

- **Mitigation of the economic and social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the migration wave**

Economic resilience must not be strengthened outside its social and environmental context. Recovery and improving the resilience of the economy and society after the Covid-19 pandemic are specifically addressed by the European [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF), with an emphasis on green transition and digitalization.

The Czech Presidency of the European Council provides an opportunity for dialogue by the EU on the effectiveness of reforms at national level. Simultaneously, the impact of the war against Ukraine has to be tackled. The implementation of the RRF must be opened to European and civil society, mainly to its expert structures, on the level of planning and overall modifications, as well as on the level of solutions and evaluations of individually implemented projects. The participation of civil society in the planning and implementation of European programmes is a precondition for reaching the goals set by these programmes.³ Moreover, it also represents a natural instrument to popularize Europeanism and strengthen social cohesion.

The period in which the Czech Republic will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union should be used to present the citizens of the Member States with this new instrument, the scope (the funding and programme) and content (reforms and investments) of which will influence their lives for at least the whole of the next decade.

³ See for instance the ECNL analysis: [Civil Society & The National Recovery And Resilience Plans: A Reality Check](#)

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• Well-being and mental health of young people

In the context of the pandemic and its related restrictions, climate change and even more importantly the impact of the war in Ukraine, it is necessary systematically to increase and improve support of the well-being of children and young people, with an emphasis on their mental health and the meaningfulness of their learning, that is, their capacity to react to the dynamically changing challenges of the world. Measures in this area should focus on developing the competence of pedagogical workers and other professionals who work with the youth, as well as on increasing the availability of health and psychosocial services in the area of mental health. The impact of the current crises will be felt in the long-term. It is therefore crucial that greater attention be paid in (both formal and informal) education to the issues of well-being and mental health, as well as to building the resilience of young people to cope with the impact of current and future crises, and to encouraging their participation in building a sustainable future.

This theme has a basis in the EU Youth Strategy,⁴ recommendations of the European Commission (Proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability,⁵ Conclusions of the Council on fostering engagement among young people as actors of change in order to protect the environment and the European sustainability competence framework). As part of the European Year of the Youth 2022, this is also strongly accentuated at the meetings of the Council and in its recommendations.⁶

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4 https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_cs

5 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0011&qid=1647944342099>

6 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/cs/policies/european-year-youth/>

• Cultural and creative industries

During the Czech Presidency, a new Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 should be finalized and approved. It should not only take into account the Creative Europe programme 2021–2027, but also react to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cultural and creative industries have considerable potential for strengthening social coherence, generating new jobs, especially for the young generation, as well as their employment and competitiveness.

Thanks to National Recovery Plans, the majority of EU countries now implement recovery and development reforms in cultural and creative industries, which were significantly affected by the Covid restrictions.⁷

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7 <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-member-states-support-culture-and-creative-industries-through-their-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans>

RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

- **Support of the rule of law, democracy and civil society in Europe**

The transition to a more social, green and digital European economy must go hand in hand with the **support of fundamental EU rights and principles**: solidarity and human rights, democracy, social justice and equality. A society based on European values, democracy, inclusiveness, openness and solidarity is a precondition for shared and sustainable prosperity and resilience. Greater inequality, on the other hand, would open up a space for populism, racism and other forms of discrimination, leading up to division and conflict between social groups. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in defending European values. The EU and the Member States should ensure **meaningful participation of civic and other actors in public policies** and effective social and citizen dialogue, using different forms of NGOs and civic participation.

On 13 July 2022, the European Commission will present the **Rule of Law Report**, which, for the very first time, will also include recommendations for the individual Member States on how four key areas for the rule of law could improve: **justice systems, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and freedom**, and other institutional issues linked to **checks and balances**. The Czech Presidency therefore has a **unique opportunity to give active support** to the European framework of the rule of law by **organizing a dialogue on the rule of law** with all involved actors at the national level, and on the findings of the report with the Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as to support the Member States in the implementation of the recommendations and to involve the actors at national level in this dialogue.

The **European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP)** will be another key document, which will also develop processes linked to the fight against disinformation (for example by the introduction of sanctions, restriction of space for third parties like Russia and China, and eventually the development of media literacy and support for journalists and the media).

In order to support thriving civic space both at the EU and at national levels and in response to the current challenges and deficiencies in the EU legislative, the European Commission should propose a comprehensive European strategy to promote open civic space and a resilient civil society, as a follow-up to the European Parliament's resolution of 8 March 2022 on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe⁸ and to the conclusions and recommendations of the working group for European democracy at the Conference for the future of Europe. As requested in the European Parliament's report, the European Civil Society Strategy should bring together existing EU instruments and link the monitoring and reporting instruments with the EU mechanisms for the promotion of the rule of law.

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⁸ [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2021/2103\(INI\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2021/2103(INI))

- **Protection of civic freedoms and plurality of media, including when facing threats in the information space**

Digital platforms – mainly social networks, but also applications and online marketplaces – have a major impact on the information and media space today. This is so far a mostly unregulated area and as such poses two major risks: firstly, it creates space for **online criminality and hybrid threats**, and, secondly, multinational giants have uncontrolled power to restrict **the digital rights of citizens, such as freedom of expression and protection of privacy**. Regulation of digital platforms is one of the priorities of the European Commission in its Action Plan for Democracy, and given that the key Act on Digital Services (DSA) will probably be approved in the second half of 2022, it might also be one of the key issues of the Presidency. DSA has the potential of curbing the influence of monopolizing corporations on democratic processes and public information space, but there is **a danger of an extension of the powers that could be abused by states and state actors**, which violate the principles of the democratic rule of law. As the civic sector, we can contribute with analytical outputs and recommendations, as well as through awareness activities in the area of regulation of digital platforms.

The onset of digital platforms has also affected the European media space or media market. The lawmakers in the major portion of the EU, for example, in the Czech Republic, have not yet reacted to the transition from traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers, to online media, which have a significant impact on society today. However, in comparison with traditional media, their operation is only minimally regulated or monitored. Across Europe, **there are many problems with political interference in public media, oligarchization of media, the disappearance of independent local journalism and the great influence of disinformation scene**, which has become an even more intense issue in the past months of the war in Ukraine. The European Commission has committed to improving European media space by demanding more forcefully, for example, **transparency of media and the fixing of standards for the allocation of state resources**. In the third quarter of this year, the proposal for the Media Freedom Act will be presented. **The independence of the media is and will therefore be an issue in Europe, and the Czech Presidency should make use of this opportunity to promote the matter.**

Contact details of partners for the issue of Protection of civic freedoms and plurality of media, including when facing threats in the information space

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• Gender equality

At strategic level, gender equality represents a priority for the European Union. It is a question which demonstrably contributes to prosperity in society and to peace. The COVID-19 pandemic confirmed that societies in a number of the EU Member States do not pay sufficient attention to this issue, and for this reason the crisis has had a much greater negative impact on women than men. Women are the ones who work in professions that were almost completely paralyzed (services and trade, tourism), in sectors under the biggest pressure (care and social services, nurses and educators), and it was mostly women who stayed at home with children when schools were closed. Women are also at a higher risk of poverty and more often victims of domestic violence, which also increased during the pandemic. Moreover, most of the Ukrainian refugees are women, often accompanied by children. It is therefore all the more important for solutions to be found immediately not only for the successful integration and effective protection of female refugees, but also for the general improvement of the status of women and for providing them with better opportunities in the economy and other areas of life across European societies.

As far as the impact of the pandemic and the refugee crisis on women is concerned, the issue of **equal representation of women in institutions** which decide on the solutions of current society-wide problems is more than ever a top priority. In terms of legislation, the Czech Republic should adopt an active position during its EU Presidency and promote an accelerated discussion of the proposals of the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, as well as of the Directive on pay transparency. It is also necessary to **make progress in negotiations on the adoption of the European care strategy**. The issues that merit special attention include the availability of institutional childcare for children under 3 years of age, or other ways of improving the balance between work and family, the availability and standard of residential services and informal care for close relatives and the elderly, and support for single parents.

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- **Implementation of the conclusions of the Conference on the future of Europe and citizen participation**

The Conference on the future of Europe (COFOE) has set itself a goal of providing citizens with a greater opportunity to participate in the formulation of EU policies and ambitions by creating, in close cooperation with civil society, a new forum for open, inclusive, transparent and structured discussion with Europeans on the key issues influencing their lives. The Czech Presidency should deal with individual recommendations which will arise from the conclusions of COFOE and its working groups. Czech NGOs have been actively involved in the discussions from the very beginning and have an interest in quality implementation of the conclusions and the continuing involvement of citizens in improving the democratic legitimacy of EU policies.

Contact details of partners for the issue Implementation of the conclusions of the Conference on the future of Europe and involvement of citizens

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• Support for declaring 2025 European Year of Volunteering

Following the success of European Year of Volunteering 2011, the NGO networks working with volunteers are intensifying their efforts to declare the year 2025 with the same priority. They wish to emphasize the role of volunteers in society, especially at the present time of crisis, to acknowledge their indispensable work and to learn how to measure the impact of their activities. The Czech EU Presidency 2009 significantly contributed to declaring the year 2011 a year of volunteering and now it again has a chance to contribute by finding political consensus in the Council. In view of the long tradition of volunteering activities in our country, we have a great opportunity to promote volunteering, with its strong support from the NGOs, as one of the issues of Europe.

Contact details of partners for the issue Support to declaring year 2025 the European Year of Volunteering

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