



# European Commission must guarantee a meaningful role for civil society in 'RebuildUkraine'

Statement by European and Ukrainian civil society organisations

*Published during the Ukraine Recovery Conference,  
Lugano (Switzerland), 4-5 July 2022*

European civil society has been **standing and continues to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and its people in the face of Russian aggression** and the horrendous war. Russia must stop its aggression immediately and withdraw its troops from the entire territory. We hope that peace will soon return to Ukraine.

Civil society across the EU **welcomes the agreement to grant Ukraine the status of candidate country** for accession to the EU. European civil society organisations are ready to work with their members, partners and friends in Ukrainian civil society to reconstruct the country, to strengthen civil society and to **ensure a strong, resilient, equitable and sustainable Ukraine**.

**Civil society organisations in Ukraine have been playing a crucial role** since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion and escalation in February 2022. They have been central in providing humanitarian and medical assistance, helping those fleeing the country, documenting atrocities and war crimes, reporting environmental and cultural heritage destruction as well as organising the spread of independent information and access to vital services.

In May, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced '**RebuildUkraine**', the platform for the reconstruction of Ukraine. 'RebuildUkraine' is led by both the Commission and the Ukrainian government with support from like-minded partners, such as EU countries and financial institutions.

The European Commission and its partners still need to pledge amounts for the reconstruction of Ukraine. The direct blow to Ukraine's economy from the damage and destruction of buildings and infrastructure has been estimated to be well above \$100 billion<sup>1</sup>. While seized Russian assets may be used for reconstruction efforts, lawmakers have mentioned a possible EU contribution of 50-60 billion EUR.

It is not yet clear **how the reconstruction funds will be distributed**, and **which conditions will apply**. The Commission has stressed that reconstruction funds will be made conditional on reforms in line with Ukraine's accession to EU membership. The Commission's Communication from 18 May<sup>2</sup> argues that rebuilding the country's infrastructure and energy resilience must be **in line with the most recent European policies and standards** including all of the European Green Deal policies, strategies and

<sup>1</sup> Estimate by the [Kyiv School of Economics](#) on 8 June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [COM\(2022\) 223](#) 18 May 2022.

initiatives (including the New European Bauhaus) and that the support for the recovery of Ukraine's economy must **promote a sustainable and inclusive economy** contributing to the **green transition** of the country. It emphasises that the reconstruction funds aim at supporting Ukraine on its path towards **good governance** and the respect of the **rule of law**. Ukrainian civil society has been calling for the reconstruction of its country to be based on the **principles of sustainable development**.<sup>3</sup>

As civil society, we welcome the setting up of 'RebuildUkraine'. However, what is absent from the set-up of 'RebuildUkraine' is **a role for Ukrainian and European civil society**. The Commission's Communication refers to Ukraine's National Council for Recovery in charge of the post-war recovery and development of Ukraine, which, according to its regulation, includes Ukrainian authorities at all levels, municipalities and civil society. The European Commission does not mention civil society and has not set out a clear role in the set-up of 'RebuildUkraine'.

Ukrainian civil society organisations and some of the European networks have already pointed in an open letter to the European Commission that **the success 'RebuildUkraine' is fully dependent on its real ownership by the Ukrainian people**.<sup>4</sup> In Ukraine's modern history, many decisive political and cultural developments have been driven by civil society. Therefore, we call on the European Commission to ensure proper governance structures for public participation by impacted communities and civil society groups from Ukraine and European civil society organisations. As argued by Ukrainian civil society, the financial instrument should apply the **partnership principle in line with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership** to ensure involvement of all stakeholders, including civil society organisations in all stages of decision-making and implementation. This includes the full-scale participation of Ukrainian civil society in steering and monitoring committees under the financial instruments as is also the practice in the EU with Cohesion Funds programming and management.

A close involvement of non-governmental organisations, both on the EU and Ukrainian sides, will help **increase the transparency and accountability** of how EU public funds are distributed and spent. As civil society, we have relevant expertise to bring in, and must be able to **play a watchdog role** to ensure that investments in new infrastructure are aligned with the goals of the European Green Deal - in particular, the path to carbon neutrality and a zero-pollution environment, and that reconstructive is nature positive. It will also ensure that investments benefit all diverse groups in society, and primarily the most vulnerable groups. Civil society must have a clear role in defining priorities, planning and programming regarding long-term reconstruction measures, as well as being part of implementation and monitoring efforts.

Furthermore, civil society organisations have been strongly active in providing support to fulfil the current needs and will be implementing some of the reconstruction measures which are being adopted. The **expertise that civil society organisations possess and have gathered on the ground** is fundamental to the success of the measures.

Finally, civil society organisations **will also need clear financial support** to be able to carry out their tasks of contributing to peacebuilding and reconstruction, service-delivery, acting as watchdogs and fighting corruption, also in view of the accession process of Ukraine to the EU. Strengthening civil society should be seen as an integral part of the reconstruction and accession processes.

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<sup>3</sup> See [statement from Ukrainian eNGOs on the green reconstruction](#) and Environment-People-Law's [statement on a green reconstruction](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Open letter to the European Commission](#) on the Strategic Reconstruction Plan for rebuilding Ukraine, 9 June 2022.

This is also **emphasised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** who recently called for a strong role for both Ukrainian and European civil society in the reconstruction process to contribute to rule of law reforms, the fight against corruption and the green transition<sup>5</sup>.

#### **We call on the European Commission to:**

- Guarantee a **clear role and functions within the governance of 'RebuildUkraine'**, including meaningful consultations and an official **observer status** in all deliberations, for European civil society organisations, networks and trade unions, as well as Ukrainian civil society and municipalities.
- Involve civil society and trade unions, including social, environmental, feminist and youth organisations, and those who work with most vulnerable groups, directly in the **programming and planning** of reconstruction measures, and ensure full transparency of this process.
- Grant **access to information on how the funds are distributed and under which conditions**.
- Involve the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and the EU and Ukrainian domestic advisory groups, set up under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, within 'RebuildUkraine'.
- **Young Ukrainians must be involved** in the decision-making process about their future at all levels, including but not limited to the traditional youth field.
- Ensure that the RebuildUkraine plan, as endorsed by the bilateral platform, is based on **green, social, sustainable, accessible and 'rebuild better' principles**.
- **Include direct funding for Ukrainian civil society organisations** through the reconstruction funds for the purposes of capacity building, organisational support and civil society activities within the framework of reconstruction efforts and the reform path towards EU membership, including to those Ukrainian organisations that have decided to leave the country during the war and will eventually want to return and need support to achieve this.
- **Encourage and financially support partnerships** between EU and Ukrainian organisations through 'RebuildUkraine' and funding programmes related to Ukraine's candidate status.
- **Set up a meeting between a civil society delegation** containing both Ukrainian NGOs and European networks with the cabinet of the Commission President to discuss the role of civil society in 'RebuildUkraine'.
- **Rapidly invite for a broad civil society consultation meeting** to ask for Ukrainian and European civil society's advice and input for the setup of 'RebuildUkraine', the programme and the conditionalities for funds to be dispersed.

European and Ukrainian civil society are ready to share their experience and to channel the voices of those active on the ground to contribute to the rapid reconstruction of Ukraine and to a bright future for a **strong, democratic, resilient, equitable and sustainable Ukraine within the EU**.

#### **Signatories:**

Civil Society Europe  
European Environmental Bureau  
SDG Watch Europe

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<sup>5</sup> [EESC Resolution: Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction](#) – proposals by the European civil society.

Hellenic Platform (Greece)  
Organization Earth (Greece)

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