



CIVIL
LIBERTIES
UNION FOR
EUROPE

2023

LIBERTIES **ANNUAL** **REPORT**



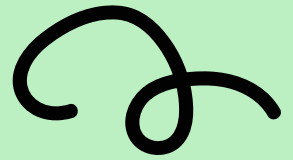


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FOREWORD

Balazs Denes
Executive Director



In this world, nothing is certain...

Except death and taxes, wrote one of the American Founding Fathers. To that, I would probably add constant change, which seems to be also certain. Change in the political landscape, in the funding environment, in organisational leadership, in staff, even in opportunities or responsibilities.

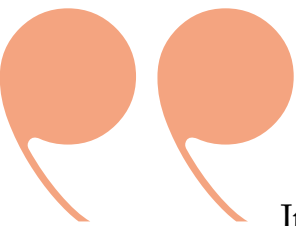
Liberties navigated through a challenging year in 2023 addressing constant changes with adaptivity resilience ... and calmness. With this change-proof skillset we pursued our vision and mission: protecting the rights and liberties of all Europeans by enabling our network and partners and making the most burning human rights issues more visible.

2023 was a year in which we grew bigger by launching new initiatives and platforms. For example, Liberties' 'Knowledge Hub' is now providing useful e-learning courses to interested rights defenders on various topics. 'Collab', our new collaborative tool designed for our members' network provides a safe space for colleagues to communicate, coordinate and manage joint projects. Last, but not least, the new regranting mechanism makes the life of Liberties member organisations easier and more sustainable.

Regardless, or rather because of, the challenges and the ever-changing circumstances, we firmly believe in our vision to protect the rights for everyone living in the EU. In fact, faith in our mission is probably the fourth thing in this world which should be considered as certain and constant.

A black and white portrait of Krassimir Kranev, President of the Board, is set against a background of orange polka dots. The portrait is framed by a white, hand-drawn style outline. The background of the entire top section is a solid orange color.

Krassimir Kranev
President of the Board

Two orange circles of different sizes, resembling speech bubbles, are positioned to the left of the quote.

It's not news when I say that rights defenders across Europe are facing challenges acquiring resources from independent sources. In addition, more and more governments are finding ways to turn NGOs into public enemies to distract their voters from livelihood crises, corruption and other systemic problems. In this situation, collaboration, cohesion and assistance among NGOs is of paramount importance.

This is why Liberties has a vital role to play as an umbrella organisation. Like an umbrella offering protection against the rain, it helps small local organisations defend themselves. It also offers them assistance, from financial support to training and knowledge sharing. The Liberties model can serve as a good example of how human rights organisations can build a more sustainable future for themselves and for the societies in which they operate.

ABOUT LIBERTIES

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a Berlin-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting human rights across the EU. Liberties, together with its members and partner organisations, has been carrying out advocacy, campaigning and public education activities to explain what the rule of law is, what the EU and national governments are doing to protect or harm it, and to gather public support to press leaders at EU and national level to fully respect, promote and protect our basic rights and values.

As an EU watchdog, Liberties has closely followed the development of the EU Rule of Law Report, the Media Freedom Act, the Digital Services Act, the Proposal on Political Advertising

& Transparency, the CSAM, the Anti-SLAPP Directive, and the AI Act, and frequently publishes reports on issues about privacy or surveillance and more.

As an umbrella organisation, Liberties coordinates campaigns through its expanding network of national civil liberties NGOs. Currently, we have member organisations in 18 EU Member States including Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

In 2023 we welcomed a new member PILP, formerly known as the Public Interest Litigation Project. It serves as the legal ally for a diverse group of stakeholders in the Netherlands, including NGOs, interest groups, movements, communities, activists, lawyers and academics. Together, they promote human rights, strengthen the rule of law and create a more just world.



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF LIBERTIES



CAMPAIGNS & REPORTS

PILP PILP joins Liberties' community of organisations

BEST OF LUCK FORMER BOARD MEMBER ADAM BODNAR AS POLAND'S MINISTER OF JUSTICE

WORKSHOPS

WE MADE THE NEWS.

BALAZS AT EU

Democracy Drinks by LIBERTIES

EVENTS



Georgiana Gheorghe

Vice President of the Board

“In 2023 we broke new ground and increased our impact. We met growing demand for our support by developing a new on-demand training programme, and a new summer school. We also deepened our work in the environmental field after being invited back by Greenpeace Netherlands and reached a new audience in government ministries promoting equality, which has in turn led to further requests for our support.”

1.

DEMOCRACY & JUSTICE PROGRAMME



We Work to Protect our Democracies Against Authoritarians

Liberties' Democracy and Justice Program tackles adverse trends affecting human rights, the rule of law in the EU, media freedom, and civic space, employing a multi-faceted strategy that includes comprehensive rule of law reporting, implemented for the fourth consecutive year, prioritising media freedom, monitoring of civic space and new policy developments, and proactive efforts to counter threats like Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

→ **The Rule of Law Annual Report Cycle**

In a comprehensive assessment of the state of the rule of law within the European Union, Liberties' Rule of Law Report 2023 highlighted a concerning trend: most EU countries have failed to adequately address documented rule of law issues, allowing existing deficiencies to persist or worsen across various key areas. The report, compiled by 45 human rights organisations representing 18 countries within the EU, exceeds the scope of the European Commission's (EC) annual rule of law audit by delving into critical developments surrounding justice, corruption, media freedom, checks and balances, civic space, and systemic human rights issues throughout 2022. The report, serving as an in-depth 'shadow report' on the rule of law, not only identifies pressing challenges but also offers recommendations for both national and EU policymakers to address these issues more effectively.

Additionally, as a follow-up to Liberties' report, a thorough gap analysis of

the European Commission's rule of law reporting process has been produced, highlighting several areas for improvement. These include the need for greater contextual analysis to recognise deliberate governmental actions undermining



the rule of law, an intersectional approach to understand the interconnectedness of various rule of law deficiencies, and a more robust acknowledgement of systemic human rights violations' impact on the rule of law environment.

In 2023, Liberties continued to advocate for the EC's enhanced engagement with civil society organisations, structured national dialogues on the rule of law, and the development of targeted, country-specific recommendations tailored to the legislative and political contexts of EU member states.

→ **Reactive monitoring of the Rule of law**

In 2023, Liberties dedicated itself to advocating for the rule of law within specific domains, directing campaigns aimed at strengthening these efforts, with contributions ranging from scrutinising media freedom to evaluating civic space, encompassing the online sphere.

Media Freedom Report

Liberties has intensified its efforts to combat the decline in media freedom across the European Union following the release of its Media Freedom Report 2023.

The 2023 report, published in collaboration with its members and partners, sheds light on concerning trends in media freedom and pluralism within the EU. Released in April, the report garnered significant attention from European media outlets and policymakers alike, as it highlighted a

disturbing rise in physical attacks on journalists, misuse of legal mechanisms to stifle dissent, and erosion of media pluralism due to concentrated ownership.

The report underscored the crucial role of media freedom in upholding democracy and provided key recommendations to EU institutions, including support for the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), transparency in media ownership, and protection of independent journalism.



In the wake of the report's findings, Liberties embarked on a series of follow-up activities aimed at advocating for stronger safeguards for media freedom in the EU. These activities included a comprehensive analysis of the EMFA proposal, co-drafting policy briefs on critical aspects of the Act and engaging with media freedom



Kersty McCourt

Senior Advocacy Advisor

“Innovation and ideas are created when people and organisations come together - it’s those connections and sparks that move us in new directions. Yet the spaces for exchange are increasingly under threat. I am proud to be working with Liberties where we and our members are leading new projects, forging connections and building solid bases for dialogue and exchange. As we head into a new parliamentary term in the EU protecting and expanding these spaces is ever more important.”

groups to amplify voices calling for robust protections.

Despite significant efforts, Liberties remained cautious about the potential dilution of key provisions within the EMFA during the legislative process. Concerns persisted regarding the protection of journalists' editorial independence and the effectiveness of measures to ensure media pluralism.

In October 2023, the proposal for the EMFA was adopted, marking a milestone in the quest for enhanced transparency in media ownership. Throughout the trilogue phase, Liberties remained actively involved, producing open letters and issuing joint statements. Despite the rejection of certain amendments by the European Parliament, Liberties remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the enactment of balanced rules that safeguard media freedom and pluralism across the EU.

Monitoring of Civic Space and Policy Developments

Throughout 2023, Liberties has been at the forefront of efforts to safeguard the rights of civil society organisations (CSOs) across Europe in response to the European Commission's 'Defence of Democracy Package'.

Introduced in 2022, the Defence of Democracy Package raised concerns within civil society regarding proposed rules that would subject CSOs to reporting and registration restrictions if they received funding from third-country donors. Liberties, alongside other CSOs, voiced apprehensions that

such measures could undermine trust in these organisations and jeopardise their crucial role in promoting human rights, transparency, social justice, equality, and environmental protection.

Liberties took proactive steps to analyse the implications of the EU Defence of Democracy Package, contributing to joint civil society statements and preparing submissions to the European Commission's public consultation. Working in collaboration with 40 other networks and organisations,



it emphasised the importance of crafting measures to tackle foreign interference with due regard for international human rights law and European policy-making processes.

Moreover, Liberties engaged in extensive advocacy efforts surrounding the EU directive countering foreign interference.

Through the publication of a policy brief titled ‘The Defence of Democracy Needs Free NGOs’, Liberties successfully advocated for a delay in the presentation of the Directive, highlighting the necessity to protect the autonomy of civil society organisations.

In addition to its advocacy on the Defence of Democracy Package, Liberties conducted a thorough analysis of the newly adopted Commission proposal on an EU directive on European Cross-border associations in 2023. While acknowledging the proposal’s potential to enhance the regulatory framework for cross-border non-profit associations, Liberties advocated for amendments to broaden its scope to benefit domestically operating organisations as well.

CIVICUS Monitor Contribution

Liberties continued collaboration with CIVICUS and provided regular updates on the state of civic space throughout 2023. The CIVICUS Monitor provides the latest data on civil society freedoms in countries worldwide. Liberties continued the research collaboration with CIVICUS as one of three EU-based organisations providing updates for the monitor. The research is updated every eight weeks in cooperation with Liberties’ members. Our contributions form part of a global overview of civic space, highlighting trends and flagging common threats and alerts.

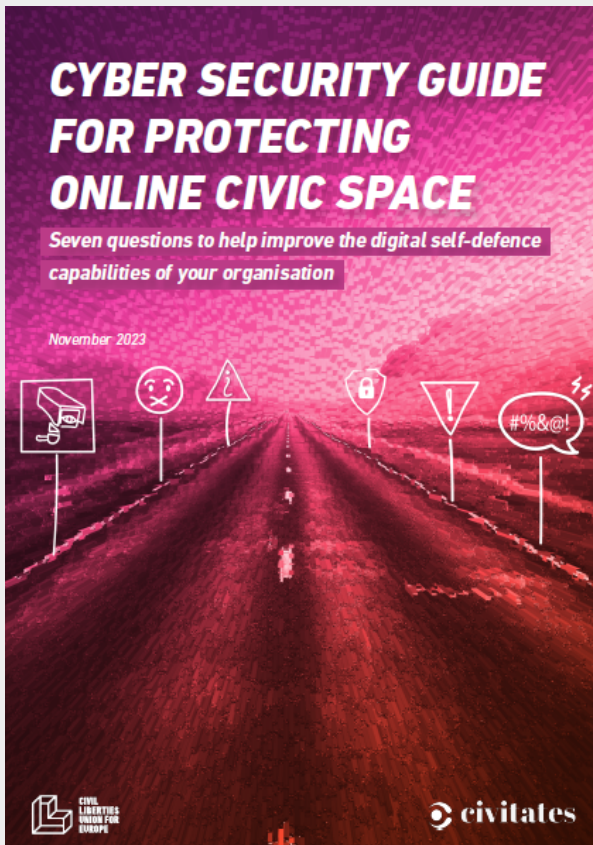
Online Civic Space Monitoring

In 2023, in collaboration with its members and partners, Liberties unveiled two significant reports aimed at addressing the evolving challenges faced by CSOs in the digital age. The first report offers a comprehensive analysis of the online civic space in 11 EU countries, while the second provides a tailored cybersecurity guide designed to enhance organisational resilience.

Titled ‘Online Civic Space: Navigating Challenges, Ensuring Rights’, the report presents a detailed examination of the digital landscape in Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden. It underscores the vital role the digital realm plays in facilitating citizens to exercise their rights of expression, assembly, and association. Furthermore, it highlights



the numerous challenges confronting civil society actors, including misinformation, harassment, censorship, and cyberattacks. According to the report, CSOs utilising the digital sphere for activism face unique threats inherent to their line of work. To



address these risks effectively, it is crucial for organisations to go beyond mere hardware and software solutions. The report emphasises the pivotal role of individual working habits in bolstering organisational resilience against cyber risks.

In response to these challenges, Liberties published the 'Online Civic Space Cybersecurity Awareness Guide', a comprehensive resource tailored specifically to the needs of civil society organisations. This guide focuses on three key aspects: people, processes, and technology. By addressing

these elements comprehensively, CSOs can fortify their defences and protect their vital work in the digital realm.

The release of these reports marks a significant milestone in Liberties' ongoing efforts to safeguard civic space in the digital age. By providing both analysis and practical guidance, the programme aims to empower civil society organisations with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate the complexities of the online environment effectively.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

Throughout 2023, Liberties spearheaded the engagement of the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) to influence the European Parliament's stance on the proposed EU anti-SLAPP directive. Liberties' contributions were instrumental in shaping the draft report and opinion, in the form of enhanced protections for journalists, activists, and watchdogs.

Despite concerted efforts, Liberties expressed deep concern over the Council of the EU's recent position on the EU anti-SLAPP directive. The Council's 'general approach', adopted on June 9, fell short of supporting critical safeguards proposed by the European Commission. Liberties contended that this diluted stance undermines the directive's effectiveness in safeguarding individuals against SLAPPs, thereby jeopardising press freedom and civic engagement across the European Union.

Liberties, alongside other civil society groups under the CASE umbrella, has consistently advocated for a robust EU anti-SLAPP directive. This advocacy culminated in the coalition's successful efforts to secure an ambitious agreement on the directive in early December. Liberties remains committed to ensuring that the final directive provides robust protections against SLAPPs, thereby upholding the principles of free speech and democracy in Europe.





Jonathan Day

Advocacy Officer

“In a democracy, we are bound by a common set of laws that apply equally to everyone. This principle forms the foundation of healthy, free societies where each of us has a place and the opportunity to succeed. When those in power decide that the rules don’t apply to them, the rights and freedoms of everyone suffer. Each year, Liberties works together with dozens of human rights organizations from across the EU to identify threats to democracy and the rule of law wherever they occur, and to advocate for solutions that bring abusive governments back into line and safeguard everyone’s fundamental rights.”

2.

TECHNOLOGY & RIGHTS PROGRAMME



Liberties Ensures Tech Innovation Doesn't Compromise Our Human Rights

Liberties takes a leading stance in advocating for rights-based approaches to emerging technologies, focusing on promoting data privacy and freedom of expression, as well as addressing issues that impact human rights such as mass surveillance and artificial intelligence. While acknowledging the potential societal benefits of technological advancements, Liberties highlights the risks posed by online surveillance, automated content curation systems, micro-targeted advertising and disinformation dissemination, emphasising the importance of safeguarding individual rights in the evolving technological landscape.

In 2023, we are proud to have successfully initiated and completed the following projects:

Digital Services Act Advocacy (DSA)

In response to the 2023 developments surrounding the European Commission's Digital Services Act (DSA), Liberties has been actively engaged in advocating for a human rights-centered approach to its enforcement.

The Digital Services Act, as outlined by the European Commission, is designed to safeguard citizens' fundamental rights in

the online sphere while modernising and harmonising digital services regulations across the EU. Additionally, the DSA aims to curb the growing influence of major tech corporations and prevent the imposition of rules solely dictated by these entities.

Throughout 2023, Liberties monitored the DSA developments, recognising both its potential benefits and threats. Various initiatives, including open letters, communication campaigns and reports, were undertaken to scrutinise the Act's implications.

Furthermore, Liberties joined the DSA Human Rights Alliance, a global coalition dedicated to addressing DSA enforcement and human rights concerns. In collaboration with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Liberties co-signed an open letter emphasising the necessity of a human rights-centred enforcement process for the DSA.

Expressing concern over recent remarks implying potential arbitrary blocking of online platforms under the DSA, Liberties collaborated with other key organisations to pen a letter to Commissioner Breton seeking clarity on this matter. The letter argued against actions that violate international human rights, particularly emphasising the risks during periods of civil unrest and protest.



Eva Simon

**Senior Advocacy Officer,
Tech & Rights Program Lead**

“Technology and innovation are intricately linked with our human rights. Engaging in EU policy work and advocating for fundamental rights and the rule of law standards can be daunting yet profoundly rewarding. My passion lies in fostering collaborations among civil society organisations and infusing the human rights perspective into discourse, urging public and private stakeholders to honour the rights of all. 2023 was an extremely busy year in which many digital files were finalised at the EU level. I’m proud to be part of the Liberties team, working with our member organisations and bringing a human rights perspective to the legislative and enforcement processes of EU laws. While success may be intermittent and setbacks inevitable, pursuing human rights remains paramount in our collective efforts to create a better world.”



Liberties also played a crucial role in educating stakeholders about the DSA through comprehensive posts and active participation in meetings with civil society, industry representatives and legislators.

We also drafted a policy paper on what platforms should look for and how they can mitigate risks, providing a structured approach. The paper was intended for and later used by the Commission officers when drafting their guidelines on how to mitigate systemic risks to elections concise summary of a paper on how the DSA can be used to protect public discourse elections for officials responsible for DSA enforcement and risk assessment guidelines at the Commission.

As the DSA continues to evolve, Liberties remains dedicated to advocating for enforcement measures that uphold freedom of speech, privacy, and transparency, while ensuring robust procedural safeguards and judicial oversight aligned with European human rights standards.

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Privacy ←

Throughout the year, Liberties continued our work on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and threats to privacy by legislative proposals to tackle Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Our efforts are driven by a commitment to safeguarding human rights and promoting ethical advancements in technology through close monitoring of policies on the EU and national level.

H3 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As AI continues to permeate various aspects of society, Liberties remains active in its mission to uphold human rights, promote the rule of law, and advocate for responsible AI governance. With ongoing efforts and collaboration, Liberties seek to shape

AI policies that prioritise the protection of individuals' rights and values.

Liberties, alongside a coalition of over 60 human rights organisations, intensified its advocacy efforts to safeguard fundamental rights amidst the rapid advancements in AI technology. Through meticulous analysis and research, Liberties has developed methodologies to assess the implications of national AI strategies on human rights, piloted on Polish and Hungarian strategies.

As the EU progresses towards formulating comprehensive regulations governing AI through the AI Act, Liberties has played a pivotal role in enhancing the protection of the rule of law during the triologue negotiations. An open letter, endorsed by a diverse coalition of human rights defenders, was shared with legislators, stressing the intrinsic link between AI and the rule of law.

Led by Liberties, the European Civic Forum, and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law, this collaborative effort underscores the importance of aligning the AI Act with robust rule of law standards, including transparency, accountability, and access to justice. The letter underscores the imperative of upholding democratic norms in the face of AI's expanding influence, while also advocating for mandatory fundamental rights impact assessments within the AI Act framework.

Expressing concerns about potential regulatory gaps and exemptions, the coalition advocates for greater transparency and scrutiny in AI use, rejecting amendments that



seek to exclude national security AI systems from the Act's purview. Emphasising the necessity of decisive action by the EU to safeguard fundamental rights and Union values, Liberties provided comprehensive recommendations on the Commission's AI Regulation proposal.

Through active engagement with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Rapporteurs throughout critical parliamentary negotiation stages, Liberties effectively communicated its stance on protecting fundamental rights in the context of AI regulation. Liberties utilised various channels, including open letters and blog publications, to amplify its concerns, ensuring that the voice of human rights advocates is heard.

Furthermore, Liberties raised the alarm regarding the privileged access granted to the AI industry by the Commission, as well as the targeting of advertisements using prohibited categorisation. These concerns were articulated in a joint open letter, signalling the signatories' commitment to upholding ethical standards in AI development and deployment.

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)

Liberties, alongside other human rights organisations, is actively monitoring developments concerning Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). The organisation joined EDRI's CSAM working group, supporting their statements regarding concerns about EURODAC and the proposed CSAM legislation. Additionally, Liberties engaged with MEPs in IMCO, advocating for amendments to restrict online mass surveillance.

Moreover, we crafted Freedom of Information Act requests, which were translated into national languages, and filed by six members. These efforts underscore Liberties' commitment to safeguarding digital rights and ensuring accountability in legislative processes.

Along with other human rights organisations, Liberties expressed concern to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen regarding the drafting of regulations to combat child abuse (CSAR). Questions have been raised about whether the Commission provided select AI companies with special access to the process, potentially compromising the rule of law and the Commission's independence.

An open letter sent by Liberties and other key human rights organisations to President von der Leyen also highlights allegations of unethical micro-targeting of advertisements by the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), potentially violating the Digital Services Act. These actions raise concerns

about the Commission's objectivity and credibility, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 European elections. Furthermore, Liberties emphasised the Commission's exclusion of CSOs from the decision-making process while involving AI developers, which contradicts principles of transparency, openness, and accountability.

Targeted Political Advertising ←

Liberties welcomed the 2023 vote by the European Parliament approving new legislation aimed at enhancing transparency and limiting targeting in political advertisements, both online and offline. The adopted mandate outlined requirements for political parties, online platforms and agents to provide greater transparency about political advertisements, as well as restrictions on the targeting of individuals, particularly minors, with tailored political content. Under the new law, political actors will be restricted to using only basic data for targeting, such as constituency, language, or first-time voter status, along with voluntarily shared data.

Liberties has long championed the principles of maximum transparency and minimum targeting in political advertising. Through initiatives like the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising project, Liberties advocated for a ban on the use of sensitive data and contributed to a civil society open letter emphasizing transparency, freedom of expression, and data privacy.

Liberties views the European Parliament's action as a significant step towards safeguarding democratic processes and protecting individuals' privacy rights. By promoting transparency and limiting the targeting of political ads, the new law helps ensure that citizens can make informed decisions free from manipulation.

Engaged in various activities to support these efforts, Liberties initiated a new project monitoring EP elections to kickstart in 2024, which involved conducting research to understand the political contexts and

regulatory landscapes in selected Member States and collaborating with national partners and Who Targets Me.





Orsolya Reich

Senior Advocacy Officer

“In the increasingly digitalized world we live in, our freedoms are entwined with our digital rights. Advocating for these rights isn’t just a job; it’s a commitment to ensuring that the liberties we cherish offline are protected online. This work resonates with me deeply, as it safeguards the foundation of our dignity in the present and in the future.”

3.

CAPACITY BUILDING



What do progressive campaigners tend to do now?

- Dedicate most attention to the harm.
- Even when we do talk about the cause we're promoting, we're not very good at connecting it to things people value.
- Don't explain that the problem is caused by (rules/systems created by) people for a particular reason, and that therefore we have the power to change that.
- Don't offer a solution or focus on technical side of solutions rather than explaining how the solutions deliver the things we value.
- Don't remind our audience of our successes and how we have changed things for the better by working together.

The Stronger Liberties' Network, the Bigger Our Collective Impact

Liberties' capacity-building initiatives and focus on building a stronger network are key strategic elements in realising our mission to promote and protect fundamental rights within the EU.

Liberties has actively curated online and offline capacity-building programs, focusing on three distinct areas. Firstly, we concentrated on supporting members in matters related to the enforcement of the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights at the national level.

Secondly, we offered support to develop value-based messaging by producing messaging guides and conducting training sessions to make communication more impactful. Thirdly, we prioritised network development actions, providing mentoring and regranting support to our members to foster stronger collaboration and cooperation within our network.

Strategic Litigation Capacity Building and Mentoring

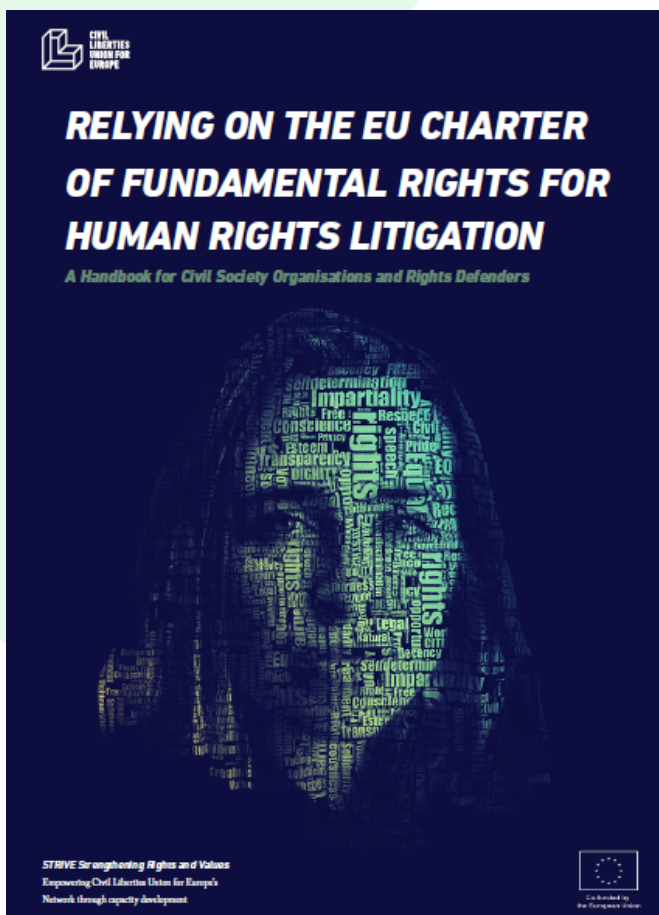
After the launch of comprehensive capacity-building programs in 2022 aimed at maximising the strategic potential of the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights, Liberties intensified these efforts in 2023.

The EU Charter for Fundamental Rights stands as a cornerstone for upholding and promoting human rights within the EU. Recognising its untapped potential, Liberties developed a suite of initiatives to enhance its utilisation and support member organisations in their efforts to fortify the rule of law within their respective nations. We rolled out a diverse array of

capacity-building programs that include both online and offline training modules tailored for member organisations and beyond.

Central to this effort was the publication of a comprehensive [Handbook on How to Use the Charter of Fundamental Rights for litigation](#). This resource serves as a practical guide to navigating the legal landscape and leveraging the Charter effectively in legal proceedings.

In 2023, two calls for participation were extended to members, culminating in the annual training and mentorship program. Through these initiatives, Liberties provided invaluable capacity-building and mentorship sessions to members in February and December 2023. Notably, the



training activities saw active participation from 12 Liberties members and attracted over 20 direct participants. The accessibility of [Knowledge Hub](#) ensures that the training resources remain open to any interested party, fostering a wider engagement with the Charter across diverse sectors and communities. In addition to training and mentorship, Liberties extended grant support to six member organisations, further facilitating their efforts to safeguard fundamental rights within their communities.

Values-Based Framing

The communication challenges faced by the EU's human rights sector hinder its goal to protect human rights, meanwhile, authoritarian leaders often generate public support by attacking civil society organisations, the groups they protect and the causes they promote. To counteract this, we empower organisations with values-based framing. Our capacity-building gives staff working in organisations the know-how they need to better explain the causes they are promoting to grow public support for human rights and environmental protection.

Workshops

Liberties ran a series of workshops to introduce or deepen the understanding of values-based framing among practitioners. These tailored workshops, together with follow-up support through consultations, were designed to enhance the effectiveness of communication within the human rights and environmental sector.

During 2023, Liberties hosted a variety of workshops covering diverse topics, with beneficiaries ranging from members and partners to civil servants working in national ministries. Notable collaboration included a series of workshops and follow-up mentoring sessions conducted for Greenpeace Netherlands, supporting campaigns related to climate change and environmental degradation. This initiative addressed pressing issues such as unequal prevention and mitigation of climate change, air pollution, and emissions from industrial activities.

Furthermore, Liberties extended its impact by organising workshops in collaboration with institutions such as Utrecht University and with members such as the Croatian Centre for Peace Studies and the Romanian APADOR-CH. These sessions trained future human rights activists and NGO staff to improve their messaging on issues such as civic space protection, migration and prison reform.

Libertes also delivered a multi-session workshop for EU civil servants organised by the Dutch Ministries of Education and Culture and Foreign Affairs on the topic of equality on grounds of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation and a workshop to INCLO (International Network of Civil Liberties Organisations) to support their communications on the use of facial recognition technology. Liberties believes that effective communication is essential for driving meaningful change in the realm of human rights. By providing practitioners with the tools and guidance they need to deliver their messages effectively, we empower them to make a tangible difference in their advocacy efforts and campaigning.

On-Demand Training

To meet the growing demand for training on values-based framing, Liberties developed a seven-module on-demand workshop, 'Foundations of Persuasive Progressive Messaging'. This has allowed activists to benefit from self-paced training and has also been used to supplement our extended in-person workshops to allow more time to go into depth on topics with beneficiaries.



Messaging Guides

Liberties further expanded its body of messaging guides on human rights topics. These guides, developed in collaboration with members and partners, offer practical advice, sample messages, and narratives practitioners can adapt for use in their communications. In 2023, this included a guide to support CSOs' advocacy efforts on the defending democracy package to resist reporting restrictions and a guide to support CSOs promoting equality for people from marginalised groups.

A further guide was developed in partnership with our Italian member, focused on modernising rules on access to citizenship. Additionally, Liberties' Handbook on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union featured a chapter on communication strategies and value-based framing.



Israel Buttler

Head of Narrative and Framing

“In 2023 we broke new ground and increased our impact. We met growing demand for our support by developing a new on-demand training programme, and a new summer school. We also deepened our work in the environmental field after being invited back by Greenpeace Netherlands and reached a new audience in government ministries promoting equality, which has in turn led to further requests for our support.”

Summer Camp Accelerator

In 2023 Liberties saw the success of its inaugural Summer Campaign Accelerator, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands. This intensive 3-day training program provided support and guidance to NGOs developing campaigns on different topics. Among the organisations and campaign topics were the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union focusing on environmental protection, the Stop Corruption Foundation from Slovakia addressing youth participation in elections, and Algorithm Watch in Germany advocating for workers' rights in the gig economy. Following a rigorous selection process, participants received expert training in campaign planning and messaging from narrative and framing specialists. By the end of the program, each organisation emerged equipped with a robust campaign plan, compelling messaging, and strategies for effective communication materials, poised to make a meaningful impact within their respective causes.



Network Development and Collaborative Learning

Throughout 2023 Liberties remained committed to nurturing network development and fostering collaboration and learning among its members. Embracing its newly adopted network development strategy, Liberties initiated a range of pivotal changes while engaging in ongoing consultations with its members.

Member visits were organised in six countries, including Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Germany, solidifying bonds and sharing insights across borders. Notably, Liberties convened a General Assembly in December 2023, convening members and the Liberties Board to deliberate on future strategic directions and thematic priorities, reinforcing the spirit of collective endeavour.

Amid these activities, several significant milestones were achieved, stemming from Liberties' network development strategy.

Foremost among them was the introduction of Liberties’ working groups model, designed to facilitate collaborative learning and mutual support among members. The successful launch of the Fundraising and Project Management Working Group stands as a testament to this approach, providing a platform for members to exchange knowledge and insights on fundraising strategies and project management practices. Numerous meetings of the Fundraising and Project Management Working Group convened in 2023, drawing participation from more than 12 members. Encouragingly, many others have expressed keen interest in this initiative, signalling a collective eagerness to engage in joint learning and resource sharing.

CERV STRIVE Regranting Programme

Liberties committed significant resources in the last few years to becoming a network driven by solidarity and a shared commitment to collaborate to achieve our common goals.

In response to this idea and as a milestone of the network development strategy adopted in 2022, a clear role for Liberties as an intermediary or ‘regrantor’ has emerged. With support from the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) STRIVE 2023 operational grant, the first large pilot program for regranting was rolled out in 2023. It offered sources of funding to member organisations to compliment the other tools we provide, such as capacity building and joint advocacy, while minimising the

administrative work of the members. This funding was available to further develop their internal capacities, improve public engagement or strengthen their impact lobbying national governments.

In developing a robust regranting program for our network, Liberties has risen to the occasion to manage large institutional grants and to entrust those funds to support member organisations in implementing their local goals. This acknowledges the national expertise of our members and recognises that they are best positioned to address local needs. The program was designed with principles of accountability, transparency, and impartiality. The active participation of Liberties’ team, the Board, and an independent evaluation committee allowed for a process that was both competitive in nature and respected the values of the spirit of the network.





Ilina Neshikj

Network Coordinator

“Access to funds through regranting opened the door to greater levels of freedom and stewardship for our members to work toward achieving our collective goals while simultaneously strengthening partnerships and facilitating deeper involvement of members within the works of Liberties and vice versa. This program has been seen as an essential tool for our effective way of working together.”

4.

COMMUNICATIONS





Eleanor Brooks

Communications Officer

“We want everyone to feel they have a place at the EU table. Starting a conversation about human rights that is inclusive is the first step, and is the bread and butter of Liberties’ comms team. From organising events, sending newsletters and posting updates on social media, we ensure our supporters have their finger on the pulse.”

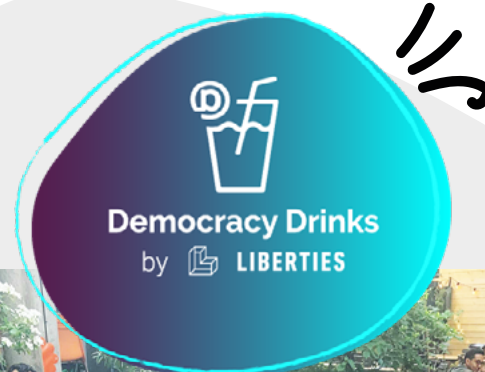
Making Human Rights Relevant in Today's Fast-Paced Media World

In 2023, Liberties' communications team aimed to maintain its support strategic goals, expand its outreach to new audiences, and enhance communication with member organisations through some minor restructuring efforts. Liberties' primary communication hub, the website, remains pivotal in our hybrid communication approach, drawing approximately 5,000 unique visitors daily. Educational content remains highly appealing to our audience, driving engagement and interest.

Democracy Drinks: Bringing People Together in Berlin

Based in Berlin, Liberties is committed to cultivating a safe space for international NGOs, activists, and engaged citizens within the vibrant German capital. The Democracy Drinks series emerged as a successful initiative in achieving this goal, fostering a welcoming environment where regular attendees return consistently throughout 2023. These recurring 'club' sessions serve as platforms for engaging discussions on diverse topics, featuring invited expert guests.

Among others, we spoke to Flora Cresswell and Jorge Valladares from Transparency International about the consequences of Quatargate and possible countermeasures to corruption, Pegah Maham from Stiftung Für Neue Verantwortung about the human rights implications of new technology, Dr. Maria Skóra from the Institut für Europäische Politik about the challenges facing the new Polish government, and



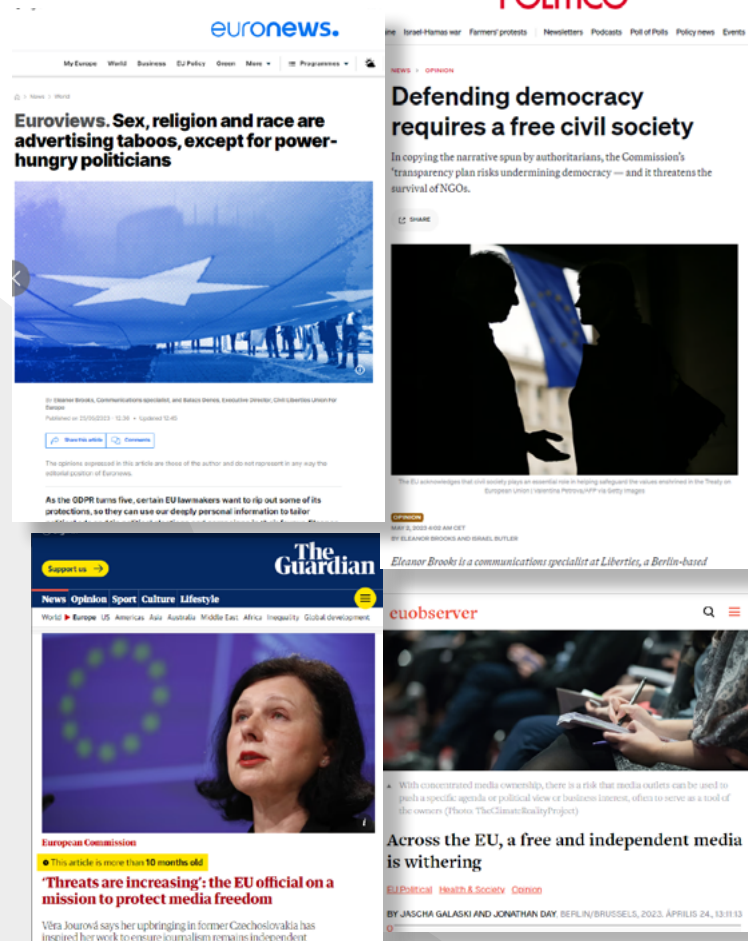
Paula Zimmermann from Amnesty International Germany about bans on protests in Germany.

Media Communications: Shaping a Global Agenda

Media communications continue to play a crucial role in driving Liberties' advocacy efforts forward. Throughout 2023, Liberties' reports and commentaries garnered significant attention from prominent global media outlets including [Reuters](#), [the Guardian](#), and [Politico](#). Notably, our Liberties Rule of Law Report 2023 received [coverage in media outlets](#) over 100 times, spanning ten languages across the EU and beyond. Beyond issuing press releases and statements, Liberties actively contribute op-eds to esteemed European newspapers such as [Politico](#), [Euronews](#), [EU Observer](#), and [Euractiv](#), further amplifying our voice and message within the public discourse.

Capacity building: Helping others make a difference

In 2023, Liberties focused more on helping others build their skills and knowledge. Our Knowledge Hub, with its online courses, was up and running and used by lots of people. We also published a messaging guide to help with communication campaigns. We even created a course dedicated to the use of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, based on personal training, which proved a hit. NGOs were really keen on them, and we saw a lot of people signing up and earning diplomas.



We also stepped up our communication training for other NGOs. We added new topics like campaign planning and audience targeting to our workshops, which NGOs found particularly valuable. (Read more details in the section 'Capacity Building'.)

We've also put a significant effort into engaging with our members. Our primary tool for communicating with member organisations is a collaborative platform named Collab. The communications team dedicates substantial time to this interface, which is designed to facilitate internal networking among members. It enables sharing of information, resources, project management, and tracking collaborative campaigns.



Valentin Toth

Head of Communications

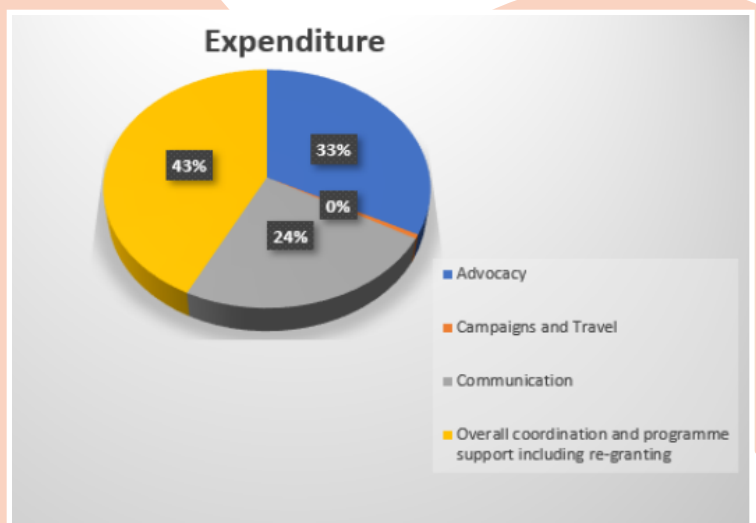
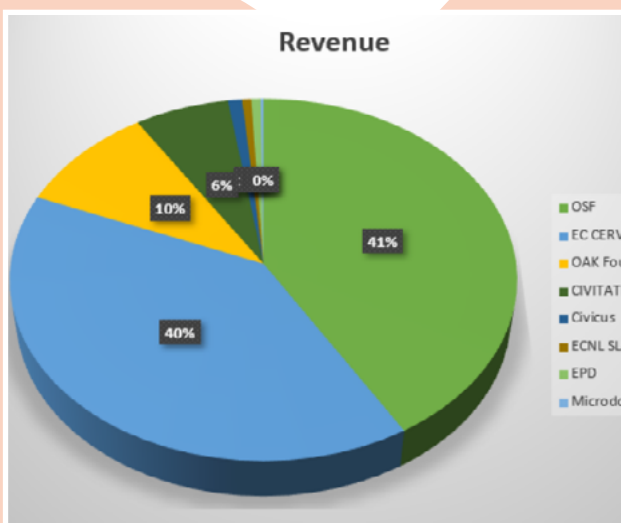
“At Liberties’ comms team, bringing human rights to new audiences is what keeps us awake at night. It feels like we’re in a creative think tank, where we’re constantly working on new ways to build bridges for society.”

FINANCES AND DONORS

Liberties is still a relatively young organisation and we rely on the support of Foundation donors whose mission and visions align with ours, including Open Society Foundations, CIVITATES and the Oak Foundation. Liberties is also supported by the European Commission, as a recipient of a grant from the CERV program. We actively seek funding from a diverse range of sources to ensure our sustainability. We also thank our individual donors who help us maintain our independence, making us stronger, louder and more sustainable.



Our work would not be possible without their generous support and the support of cooperation partners.





Csilla Budai-Sawalha

Development Officer

“Enabling my colleagues to deliver Liberties’ goals through a successful fundraising proposal is the most uplifting part of my role. I am the link between those willing to support a good cause, and the mission of Liberties. It’s challenging and highly competitive, but an unsuccessful proposal must not discourage us from trying harder.”

HOW YOU CAN HELP US



One-time or regular donations provide essential support to our campaigns.

You can easily and simply donate online on our website in a secure environment.

<https://www.liberties.eu/en/donate>

Any gift, no matter how small, helps us to continue our work safeguarding fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy in the European Union.

THANK YOU.



CONTACT

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting and protecting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU. Unless otherwise indicated, the opinions expressed by Liberties do not necessarily constitute the views of our member organisations.

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