

Follow up to VLGST lunch meeting on 13 November 2025: *Civil Society at the Crossroads of Europe's Sustainability Future* Opportunities for foundations for strategic interventions

Note submitted by the [European Environmental Bureau \(EEB\)](#) – Europe's largest network of environmental citizens' organisations, host of the SDG Watch Europe secretariat.

Executive summary

We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with foundations and civil society actors in Liechtenstein during the VLGST lunch event on 13 November 2025. The conversation confirmed how essential collaboration is at a time when democracy, civic space and progress towards long-term sustainability are facing growing pressures. With this brief note, we would like to follow up on our exchange and **present several ways in which foundations can meaningfully support the EEB and SDG Watch Europe as we work to safeguard Europe's environmental and democratic future.**

This follow up describes **opportunities for foundations for strategic interventions** in this pivotal moment of **environmental crisis and shrinking civic space**. Nature, pollution, climate and international cooperation are pushed off the political agenda, one by one. We are entering probably the first ever environmental policy recession of the EU, and declining support for global sustainable development. While policies across the board are rolled back, we experience an unprecedented attack on civil society organisations which are portrayed corrupted players, who work against the new political priorities.

The EEB and SDG Watch Europe are the watchdogs, the truth-tellers and the last line of defence against legislative backsliding, disinformation and democratic erosion. Our role is to build the capacity of our networks, mobilise public pressure, defend democratic space, face disinformation and push for progressive policy. **With the right support, we can turn the tide.**

I. How Foundations Can Help - Menu of Strategic Interventions for Impact

Your support can make the **difference between retreat and resilience.**

With your backing, we will be agile to react to a rapidly shifting political environment, to build resistance against far-right and authoritarian- narratives and backsliding of environmental and social protections, to scale our communications to re-own public debates, to protect civic space and democratic accountability and contribute that Europe remains a global leader in sustainability and human rights.

1. Activate SDG Watch Europe as the EU's Watchdog for the Last Mile to 2030

A major push to empower and reactivate SDG Watch Europe — the EU's broadest cross-sectoral sustainability coalition — to lead a united civil society effort through the final years of the 2030 Agenda.

Why it matters

As the SDGs risk being sidelined, the EU needs fierce pressure to recommit and accelerate action. SDG Watch Europe is uniquely positioned to connect national SDG networks, mobilise cross-sector advocacy, and shape global debates on the post2030 framework with inclusivity and ambition.

What the impact would be

A revitalised SDG movement in Europe: stronger national networks, increased public and political pressure on EU institutions, and a coordinated civil society voice influencing both EU implementation and the global sustainability framework beyond 2030.

Key elements to be funded: fund the SDG Watch Europe secretariat for EU-wide coordination; capacity-building and networking events for national SDG coalitions and local initiatives across borders; an advocacy campaign with key demands for the five remaining years to implement the SDGs across the EU including civil society driven SDG monitoring reports.

2. Scale Up Communications and Counter Disinformation

A targeted communications expansion: growing the EEB's reach to new and younger audiences, building rapid response capacity to counter disinformation, and using data-driven tools to deliver compelling messages on long-term sustainability, countering deregulation narratives and promoting the economic, social, and democratic value of strong environmental and climate protections

Why it matters

Antienvironmental narratives are gaining political traction, falsely framing sustainability as a threat to competitiveness. Without a proactive and unified narrative strategy, public support for environmental action risks eroding rapidly. The digital space is being shaped by far right and antienvironmental actors. Without a strong, agile civil society presence online, falsehoods spread faster than facts and public debate become polarised and misinformed.

What the impact would be

A steep change in civil society's communication power: more visibility, stronger engagement from younger audiences, and faster, coordinated responses to disinformation. This will help protect democratic debate and build broader support for environmental and social justice policies. Evidence-based messaging that resonates with policymakers and the public; stronger resistance to rollbacks; and a more hopeful, solutions-oriented narrative showing that protecting nature and climate is essential for Europe's economic stability, social cohesion, and long-term prosperity.

Key elements to be funded: more of the highly successful content the EEB has been generating to reach out to new target groups on social media including through viral TikTok and Instagram campaigns; capacity building for civil society across Europe to build up their social media outreach; resources to monitor and defend against disinformation campaigns; capacity-building for civil society to fend off disinformation.

3. Defend Civil Society and Strengthen Democracy

A coordinated effort led through Civil Society Europe, the Green 10 and SDG Watch Europe to safeguard civic space, expose repressive legislation and support where democratic freedoms are under threat.



Why it matters

Civil society is facing smear campaigns, restrictive laws, and shrinking funding at both EU and national level. Without a strong collective response, Europe's democratic foundations — transparency, participation, rule of law — are at serious risk.

What the impact would be

A safer, more resilient civic space: stronger protections in EU legislation, rapid mobilisation against repressive laws, reinforced international scrutiny, and practical support for NGOs working in hostile environments. This strengthens European democracy itself.

Key elements to be funded: support the EEB's Environmental Law and Justice team to monitor and engage in current debates at EU and national level concerning the regulatory environment for civil society as well as public funding for NGOs; support the CASE coalition which advocates for better protection against SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation).

4. Organisational Resilience & Capacity

A strategic investment in the EEB's and SDG Watch Europe's organisational backbone — strengthening policy and communications teams, upgrading data and evidence-based advocacy tools, improving network coordination, building capacity among our members and coalition partners, and supporting staff development in lean, high impact teams.

Why it matters

Europe's environmental movement is facing rising demands with shrinking resources. Without predictable and flexible funding, NGOs cannot retain expertise, respond rapidly to political shifts, or coordinate their networks effectively. This creates a dangerous imbalance between civil society capacity and heavily resourced industry lobbyists.

What the impact would be

A stronger, more resilient EEB able to deliver high-quality advocacy, shape EU policy debates, and empower its vast and diverse membership — ensuring that civil society stays a powerful actor defending environmental protection, justice, and democracy across Europe.

Key elements to be funded: flexible funding for staff costs in policy, communications, membership and events teams and an agile organisation that can adapt to a rapidly shifting political climate; core funding covering, inter alia, investments into lean and effective human resources and financial management, digital tools and trainings; investing in the EEB's new CRM (a centralised contact data base for advocacy, membership engagement and public outreach) and web presence for more visibility and rapid outreach to supporters and donors; seed funding for an EEB Individual Giving Strategy.

II. At a glance: the EEB and SDG Watch Europe

For more than five decades, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) has brought together citizens, communities and campaigners from across Europe around a simple belief: that people and nature can thrive together. What began as a small coalition has grown into Europe's largest network of environmental citizens' organisations — nearly 200 members in 41 countries, and around 30 million people who care deeply about the future of our planet.



Our strength lies in this diversity: grassroots groups working on local problems, national organisations shaping domestic policy and European networks influencing continent-wide transitions. We help them connect, amplify their voices and bring their knowledge to the places where decisions are made.

Throughout this journey, we have remained independent, nonpartisan and firmly grounded in science. That credibility has made the EEB a trusted interlocutor for EU institutions, governments and civil society alike. And it is this role — as a bridge, a convener, and a catalyst for change — that makes our work vital today. Learn more about the EEB, our network and our work [here](#), dive into our [Long-Term Strategy 2020-2030](#) – and get the best insights on environment and sustainability by signing up to our newsletter [The New Leaf](#).

SDG Watch Europe is the broadest civil society coalition in Europe dedicated to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Bringing together organisations from all sectors — environmental, social, human rights, development, equality, governance, youth and more — it creates a unique cross-sectoral space where diverse voices work together towards a fairer, more sustainable future.

The EEB is one of the founding organisations and has hosted the SDG Watch Europe Secretariat since its creation, helping to build the coalition into a strong and trusted platform for coordinated advocacy at EU and national levels. What makes SDG Watch Europe distinctive is its ability to connect issues that are too often addressed in silos: from climate and biodiversity to poverty, inequality, democracy and global justice. This broad alliance allows the coalition to speak with a unified and powerful voice on the full spectrum of the SDGs — ensuring that no dimension of sustainability is left behind.

Why we matter – our added value in shaping better policies



Policy leadership

influence on major EU laws including the European Green Deal, circular economy, chemicals, biodiversity, climate



European reach, global links

mobilising national NGOs and networks in coordinated actions, linking to global campaigns and coordination



Cross-sectoral approach

with SDG Watch Europe, we break down siloed policy-making & present holistic policy proposals



Bridging the local-EU-global gap

translating complex EU and UN processes and linking them to actionable national and local policy demands



High-level advocacy

engaging with high-level decision makers including Ministers, Commissioners, the European Parliament, the Council



Defending democratic space

playing a watchdog role safeguarding transparency, participation, and rule of law in environmental and sustainabil.ity

Why Philanthropic Partnership with the EEB Has High Leverage

As a Europe-wide network that is also highly active on global and regional level, your support can influence EU policy affecting 450 million people in the EU and beyond. We can shape laws and policies that can trigger billions in investments into the future. The EEB has a strong track-record of successful partnerships with various foundations, strong governance and transparency.

III. Next steps and contact

We would be pleased to deepen our conversations with interested foundations. We would be keen to co-develop ideas tailored to the foundations' priorities.

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