

EN

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Answer given by Mr Serafin
on behalf of the European Commission
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The Commission is fully committed to supporting civil society, including by financing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in line with the rules of EU financial programmes, as adopted by the co-legislators. The new Commission guidance¹ does not restrict the work of these organisations but clarifies the types of activities which should not be supported by EU financing. Civil society entities financed by EU programmes remain fully autonomous and free to establish their own views.

Certain references in annexes to grant agreements under the EU programme for the environment and climate action (LIFE programme)² were brought to the Commission's attention by the Committee on Budgetary Control in 2024. The Commission acknowledged that it is not appropriate to enter into agreements which foresee that NGOs lobby the European institutions for a specific political content, as part of their work programmes. Before issuing the guidance, the Commission carefully weighed the importance it attaches to a vibrant civil society and the reputational consequences of such references. The objective is to take an approach that balances the need for a healthy and independent civil society while protecting the EU's financial interests and avoiding reputational risk.

Independent civil society organisations are an essential part of the EU's democracies and instrumental for putting into practice fundamental EU values. The Political Guidelines for the Commission 2024-2029³ include a clear commitment to step up engagement with civil society organisations and to ensure that civil society is empowered and better protected in its work. The Commission will present in 2025 a Civil Society Strategy which will include actions to foster the engagement with civil society.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/guidance-funding-dev-impl-monit-enforce-of-eu-law_en.pdf

² https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life/life-operating-grants_en

³ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf