



## **RULES GOVERNING THE 15th EESC CIVIL SOCIETY PRIZE**

*Rewarding excellence in civil society initiatives*

### **1. Aim and overall objective of the Civil Society Prize**

For the European Economic and Social Committee (the "EESC" or the "Committee"), the **aim** of the prize, which is awarded annually, is to reward and encourage initiatives by natural persons (i.e. individuals) and/or private law bodies (i.e. civil society organisations etc.) that have made a significant contribution to promoting the European identity and European integration.

The **overall objective** of the prize is thus to raise awareness of the contribution that civil society can make to creating a European identity and citizenship in a way that underpins the common values that are the foundation of European integration.

### **2. Theme of the 15th EESC Civil Society Prize: *Combating harmful polarisation of European society***

Polarisation refers to the sharpening of opinions or positions. It can be based on specific ideologies or refer to a specific issue. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, which is not negative per se.

Polarisation can be part of an open and pluralistic society which leaves space for the freedom of expression on issues which are relevant or sensitive for public opinion such as, for example, climate change, the COVID vaccination, the war in Ukraine or migration. As pointed out by the EESC, "open debate, not restricted in any way, is the foundation of a participatory society, without which democracy cannot function properly. The exclusion of any voice from the public debate can lead, and has in the past led, to social tension and violence"<sup>1</sup>.

An open dialogue is an essential characteristic of a living democracy. The formulation of different, even sharp opinions and of disagreement can enrich the democratic debate, foster activism and be a driver of

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<sup>1</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings ("Strategic lawsuits against public participation")', [OJ C 75 of 28.2.2023](#) (Initiative against abusive litigation targeting journalists and rights defenders ([SOC/734](#); rapporteur: Tomasz Andrzej Wróblewski; co-rapporteur: Christian Moos), point 2.5.

change. In a healthy democracy, this confrontation leads to a true and constructive dialogue and, eventually, to a consensus. The latter is the expression of a shared vision for the future and of a compromise which provides concrete answers to the most pressing societal issues and creates the conditions for a just transition, social cohesion and the wellbeing of all.

For this reason, it is important to "ensure real protection of freedom of expression for all participants in public debate, not only professional journalists but also environmental and social activists, human rights defenders, non-governmental organisations, whistleblowers in the broad sense, engaged citizens, trade unions and all other individuals and organisations that publicly speak out on socially significant issues"<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, as pointed out in a EESC study, both governments and civil society are becoming more confrontational, more polarised and less open to compromise. In some Member States governing parties tend to support mainly traditionally-minded and pro-government organisations and civil society organisations are experiencing increasing difficulty in engaging with state institutions impacted by polarisation<sup>3</sup>. Threats to media freedom and declining media pluralism are not confined to a few Member States, but a general trend across the EU<sup>4</sup>. Against this background, polarisation often leads to a growing mutual distrust between like-minded groups and even to hostility.

When polarisation is linked with hate, it does not leave room to an enriching confrontation. On the contrary, it leads to an impoverishment of the public debate and does not allow to find a common ground. It hampers consensus and makes it impossible to tackle critical issues, thus leading to political immobility. This polarisation is harmful for societal relations, increases social tensions, hampers cohesion, fosters mistrust in political institutions and puts democracy at risk.

Multiple crisis such as the pandemic, the energy crisis, the cost of living, the war in Ukraine, the increasing economic divide, together with social instability, economic decline, a decreasing importance of shared values, the feeling of not being heard and the widespread mistrust in public services and in the capacity of public authorities to provide effective, sustainable and fair answers, are a breeding ground for harmful polarisation. They give the opportunity to extreme groups or individuals to successfully spread polarising narratives which exacerbate underlying divisions in society and undermine the trust of citizens in democratic institutions<sup>5</sup>.

Monopolies on the media landscape and direct or indirect government interference in the media can be a threat to media freedom and plurality and foster even more the rise of polarised narratives, while media freedom and media pluralism are cornerstones of liberal democracy, foster critical thinking, thus

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<sup>2</sup> Idem, point 2.4.

<sup>3</sup> *Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation* (study commissioned by the EESC and carried out by the European Policy Centre), 2020, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> See Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on *Securing media freedom and diversity in Europe* (own-initiative opinion), [OJ C 517 of 22.12.2021 \(SOC/635\)](#); rapporteur: Christian Moos), point 1.3.

<sup>5</sup> See the EESC's own-initiative opinion *Safeguarding Democracy Against Disinformation* ([TEN/830](#); rapporteurs: John Comer, Carlos Manuel Trindade), point 2.15.

contributing to reduce harmful polarisation and de-escalate tense situations.<sup>6</sup> Technological developments play a major role in this context. "Over the past few decades, the development of technology has dramatically changed the form of public debate. Until recently, the main media for conducting this debate were television, radio, and newspapers, created mainly by professional journalists, and whistleblowers. Nowadays, an important role has been taken over by online media, which enables anyone to present their opinions and address them to a wide audience, including anonymously"<sup>7</sup>.

Social platforms are an easily accessible way to share anti-establishment sentiments and ideologic content. They are increasingly used as a tool to spread divisive narratives and extreme positions through short, not-nuanced messages, to connect and exchange often simplistic information among like-minded groups while hiding opposing opinions and excluding others, who are often considered "enemies". Specific algorithms contribute to the creation of "echo chambers". This results in an increasingly divided environment, in which polarised actions and reactions feed each other in a vicious circle. The lack of critical thinking reinforces stereotypes and prejudices and can lead to radicalisation. At the same time, influencers and other charismatic figures facilitate the recruitment of supporters across borders and increase the potential for emulation and radicalisation.

Disinformation is frequently used to discredit opposing viewpoints by the denial of facts and the deliberate promotion of false conspiracy theories, sometimes developed with the help of artificial intelligence or with foreign interference. Disinformation and misinformation jeopardise free public speech and instil a polarised debate where hate prevails over factual information<sup>8</sup>.

Undoubtedly, "the right to freedom of expression, as expressed in Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, includes the freedom to hold opinions and to communicate information and ideas without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers"<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, however, "the right to freedom of expression must not be used as cover for spreading hate and vice versa"<sup>10</sup>.

In his opinion on hate crime, the EESC has expressed its deep concern about the development of hate speech and hate crime in Europe over the last decade. In this context, the Committee has pointed out that specific attention should be paid to victims, but also to professions with an essential role in combating hate speech and hate crime, such as for example teachers, journalists and law enforcement personnel<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See opinion [SOC/635](#) and the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act) and amending Directive 2010/13/EU', [OJ C 100, 16.3.2023 \(SOC/742\)](#); rapporteur: Christian Moos, co-rapporteur: Tomasz Andrzej Wróblewski).

<sup>7</sup> Opinion [SOC/734](#), point 2.3.

<sup>8</sup> See opinion [SOC/742](#) and [TEN/830](#).

<sup>9</sup> Opinion [SOC/734](#), point 2.2.

<sup>10</sup> EESC opinion *No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred* ([SOC/792](#)); rapporteur: Cristian Pîrvulescu, co-rapporteur: Milena Angelova), point 2.10.

<sup>11</sup> See Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council — A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime*, [OJ C 323, 26.8.2022 \(SOC 712, Initiative to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech](#), rapporteur: Cristian Pîrvulescu, co-rapporteur: Milena Angelova).

Alongside public authorities, civil society also plays an important role in monitoring the hotbeds of online and offline polarisation and in preserving liberal democracy from authoritarianism<sup>12</sup>. For this reason, the EESC has decided to award its 15th civil society prize to non-profit initiatives which intervene effectively by implementing preventive, early-warning and, where needed, de-escalation measures which make sure that democratic values are respected, polarisation does not become harmful and thus a breeding ground for radicalisation, and that one-sided narratives are not translated into violence and hate.

### 3. Eligibility

#### 3.1 Eligible candidates

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open on equal terms to all natural persons (individuals) and private law bodies (civil society organisations etc.) under the conditions set out below. Public authorities, governmental organisations and other public bodies are not eligible.

##### 1) Natural persons

For the purposes of this prize, natural persons are individuals or groups of individuals acting jointly without contractual ties. EU citizens are eligible, regardless of their country of residence. Third-country nationals are also eligible, provided they are legally resident in the territory of the EU. Groups of individuals must designate one of the natural persons as a point of contact (the leader) for the administrative and financial aspects of the prize.

EESC members, CCMI delegates, staff of EU institutions and other EU bodies, members of the evaluation committee and their relatives, are not eligible to submit an entry.

##### 2) Private law bodies

Civil society organisations (hereafter: "CSOs") officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level are eligible. For the purposes of this prize, CSOs as defined in the EESC opinion on *The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe* are "organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens"<sup>13</sup>. They are actively involved in shaping public affairs on the basis of their own concerns, drawing on their own specific knowledge, abilities and scope for action. They act autonomously, and membership entails a commitment by members of the general public to take part in the work and activities of those organisations. This definition includes the so-called labour-market players, i.e. the social partners, organisations representing social and economic players, non-governmental organisations which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organisations, human rights organisations, consumer associations, charitable organisations, cultural organisations, and educational and training organisations, etc.; community-based organisations, i.e. organisations set up within society at grassroots

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<sup>12</sup> Own-initiative opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee *Communicating fundamental rights and the rule of law*, [SOC/725](#), rapporteur: Cristian Pîrvulescu, co-rapporteur: José Antonio Moreno Díaz.

<sup>13</sup> Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on *The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe* – CESE 851/1999 of 22 September 1999 ([OJ C 329, 17.11.1999, p. 30](#)).

level which pursue member-oriented objectives, e.g. youth organisations, family associations and all organisations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life; religious communities. CSOs set up by a legislative or regulatory act and/or to which affiliation is partially or totally mandatory (e.g. professional associations)<sup>14</sup>, are also eligible.

Companies or firms: For the purposes of this prize, "companies or firms" means profit-making entities constituted under civil or commercial law, including cooperative societies and other legal persons governed by private law. Companies or firms are eligible if they are formed in accordance with the law of a Member State and have their registered office, central administration or principal place of business on the territory of the EU. Eligibility of firms/companies is limited to their **not-for-profit** activities such as selfless initiatives, charity projects, individual or corporate volunteering etc.

## 3.2 Eligible initiatives

### 3.2.1 Formal eligibility criteria

To be eligible, initiatives must fulfil the four criteria listed hereafter:

- they must be **not-for-profit**, such as selfless initiatives, charity projects, individual or corporate volunteering etc.;
- they must have **already been implemented** or be **still ongoing on 7 November 2024 (closing date for submission of applications)**;
- they must **fulfil the thematic eligibility criteria** set out below;
- they must be carried out **on the territory of the EU**.

The following initiatives are excluded:

- commercial (i.e. for-profit) initiatives;
- initiatives which are planned but have not begun implementation by 7 November 2024 (closing date for submission of applications);
- documentation and/or information activities, journalistic, literary or scientific publications of any kind and in any format, audio-visual products, and any kind of artwork. However, non-for-profit projects which use journalistic, artistic or literary works as a tool to combat toxic polarisation of society are eligible.

### 3.2.2 Thematic eligibility criteria

The specific objective of the 15th EESC Civil Society Prize is to reward **effective, innovative and creative non-for-profit initiatives/activities carried out in the EU, which combat harmful polarisation of European society**.

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<sup>14</sup> This applies for instance to Austrian labour-market players.

The activities/initiatives proposed for the prize can cover a wide range of themes, such as the following (non-exhaustive list):

- identifying the individual and collective determinants of harmful polarisation and patterns that lead to de-escalation of tense situations;
- fostering transparency as regards the funding of organisations, and in particular those which polarise society, foster disinformation, violence or radicalisation;
- promoting plurality in all its forms; combating shrinking media plurality; protecting pluralist democracy;
- promoting media freedom, diversity and independence; shielding independent media from direct or indirect political control or government interference;
- countering strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), i.e. against fully or partially unfounded proceedings whose main purpose is to silence critics, intimidate the opposition, prevent, restrict or penalise independent journalism and participation in the public debate;
- engaging in open dialogue, based on tolerance and respect, and free of prejudices, preconceptions and ideologies; fostering constructive debate between representatives of antagonists political or societal positions; countering manipulation of public debate;
- promoting transparency of content moderation incl. on online platforms; impartiality and objectivity in the public discourse;
- countering disinformation and fake news; strengthening media literacy, fostering critical thinking and enhancing citizens' resilience to disinformation, taking into account the specific needs of vulnerable groups and elderly people;
- promoting narratives that are based on factual content and highlight controversial positions and diversity of opinions;
- promoting narratives and actions which combat racism and xenophobia and support an inclusive attitude towards minorities and disadvantaged groups of any kind; promoting mutual trust of all components of society;
- fostering civic, interfaith and intercultural dialogue; transform toxic polarisation into constructive criticism and democratic disagreement;
- combating hate speech while guaranteeing freedom of expression and media freedom; identifying and combating the "ecosystems" of hatred off- and online;
- combating hate in all its forms, intolerance and hate affecting public and educational spaces, businesses and workplaces; supporting individuals, groups and communities exposed to hate; promoting hate-free attitudes and behaviours in all areas of life;
- preventing vulnerable people from radicalising; bringing radicalised people 'back into society'; promoting mechanisms of conflict resolution that do not erode the political system;
- fostering compliance of all public and private bodies on the territory of the EU with the EU's fundamental values; undertaking an independent monitoring of the implementation of these values at all levels;
- implementing educational projects – both in formal and non-formal education – which foster critical thinking and build a culture of democracy, rule of law and tolerance, dismantle polarised thinking and break the hate pyramid from childhood.

#### 4. Application procedure and deadline

Applications are to be made by filling in the online application form ([www.eesc.europa.eu/15thcivilsocietyprize](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/15thcivilsocietyprize)). In duly justified cases linked to documented technical problems, the EESC may allow candidates to apply by email or post.

The application must contain all the information the selection board requires in order to:

- ascertain that the candidate fulfils the formal entry criteria;
- ascertain that the candidate complies with the non-exclusion criteria;
- ascertain that the candidate accepts the provisions concerning liability, checks, audits and applicable law;
- evaluate the substantive merits of each entry in relation to the award criteria.

Before the prize is awarded, the EESC will ask candidates to provide the duly completed and signed Legal Entity Form and Financial Identification Form, as well as the relevant supporting documents.

These forms are available at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/legal-entities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/legal-entities_en)

and the

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/financial-identification\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/financial-identification_en).

Applications can be drafted in any official EU language. However, to speed up the evaluation process, the EESC would appreciate receiving the application form in English or French.

Submission of an application implies acceptance of all the terms and conditions set out in the contest documents and, where appropriate, the waiver of the candidate's own general or specific terms and conditions.

The final deadline for sending applications is **7 November 2024 , at 10:00 (CET)**.

The EESC will disregard any application received after this date and time. **Candidates are strongly advised not to wait until the last day to submit their applications**, since heavy internet traffic or a faulty internet connection could lead to difficulties in sending in the application. The EESC cannot be held responsible for any delay due to such difficulties.

Candidates can only submit one entry. Entering the competition is free of charge. If preparing and sending the application entails costs for a specific candidate, these will not be reimbursed.

Candidates will see a message on the screen thanking them for the application and offering them the possibility of printing it or saving it in PDF format.

## 5. Evaluation and award

### 5.1 Evaluation steps

The evaluation will be carried out by a panel of experts composed of 10 members (the "evaluation committee"), who are subject to the requirements on conflict of interests laid down in the Financial Regulation<sup>15</sup>. The evaluation will be based solely on the information provided in the submitted application form.

The EESC reserves the right not to disclose the identity of the members of the evaluation committee.

Participants should not contact the members of the evaluation committee for any reason related to the prize throughout the whole procedure. Any such attempt will result in disqualification.

The decisions of the evaluation committee are final, binding and not subject to challenge.

The procedure will take place in five steps:

- (1) verification of eligibility of candidates;
- (2) verification of eligibility of the initiatives proposed for the prize;
- (3) verification of non-exclusion of candidates;
- (4) evaluation of the quality of the initiatives proposed for the prize on the basis of the award criteria;
- (5) award of the prize.

The EESC will assess eligibility, non-exclusion and quality in no particular order. The applicants must pass all steps to be awarded the prize. No feedback will be provided to candidates until the end of the procedure. Results will be notified to all candidates as soon as possible, and in any case within 15 calendar days after the award decision has been taken by the authorising officer (step 5), provisionally by the end of March 2025.

#### 5.1.1 Verification of eligibility of candidates

To be eligible, candidates must fulfil the requirements of point 3.1 above.

The EESC will evaluate the eligibility of candidates on the basis of the information provided in the application form. Before awarding the prize, it will ask the candidates to provide a duly completed and signed Legal Entity Form with its supporting evidence (see point 4 above).

The EESC reserves the right to require the above-mentioned form and supporting evidence from any candidate at any time during the evaluation procedure. In this case, the candidate must provide the form and the supporting evidence without delay. The EESC may reject the application if the form and the supporting evidence are not provided in due time.

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<sup>15</sup> Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 ([OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1](#)).



### **5.1.2 Verification of eligibility of initiatives**

Eligibility of the initiatives proposed for the prize will be checked on the basis of the online application form. To be eligible, the initiatives proposed for the prize must fulfil the requirements of point 3.2 above. Other activities carried out by the candidate will not be taken into consideration.

### **5.1.3 Verification of non-exclusion**

Compliance of the candidates with the non-exclusion criteria referred to in Articles 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation and listed in the application documents (see Non-exclusion Document, Appendix 1) will be checked on the basis of the online application form.

The EESC reserves the right to verify whether the candidates are in one of the situations of exclusion by requiring to submit supporting documents. In this case, the candidate must provide the documents required within the deadline given by the EESC. The EESC may reject the application if the requested documents are not provided in due time.

A candidate is not required to submit a specific document if he/she/it informs the EESC that the document in question can be accessed on a public database free of charge.

### **5.1.4 Evaluation of quality**

The evaluation committee will assess the quality of the applications on the basis of the award criteria set out below. The evaluators will only consider the initiatives proposed for the prize, not the candidate's other activities. There is no minimum threshold for each individual criterion. However, candidates that fail to obtain at least 50% of the maximum total score will be eliminated.

Prize award criteria	Points
<p><b>Criterion 1 – Impact</b></p> <p>This criterion will assess both the concrete results and impact of the proposed initiative and its potential to have a long-term impact and to inspire others in Europe, i.e. to be applied or adapted to the same category of beneficiaries or to another category of beneficiaries elsewhere in the same or in another Member State of the EU. In this context, the impact will be evaluated in light of the human and financial resources employed to implement the proposed initiative.</p>	<b>35 points</b>
<p><b>Criterion 2 – Participation and collaboration</b></p> <p>This criterion will assess, on the one hand, how far the proposed initiative actively involves participants and beneficiaries and, on the other hand, its ability to share good practice and raise awareness on issues related to the theme for which the civil society prize is awarded. In this context, the collaborative multistakeholder approach with other relevant actors and the ability to involve two or more opposing groups will also be taken into consideration.</p>	<b>35 points</b>
<p><b>Criterion 3 – Innovation and creativity</b></p> <p>This criterion will assess the creativity of the proposed initiative, its uniqueness and degree of innovation in its specific context. To this end, innovation is understood to mean both new ideas and new or improved ways to implement an existing solution or approach or to adapt it to a different context or target group.</p>	<b>30 points</b>
<p><b>Total points</b></p>	<b>100 points (minimum 50 points)</b>

### 5.1.5 Award of the prize

The prize will be awarded by the Committee, on the basis of the evaluation provided by the evaluation committee, who will be free to decide whether to recommend that prizes be awarded, depending on their appraisal of the quality of the entries.

The EESC may award a maximum of five prizes to the five top-ranked candidates.

## 6. Prize money

The Committee plans to award a maximum of five prizes. The first prize has a value of EUR 14 000. The amount of the second, third, fourth and fifth prize is EUR 9 000. If place one is shared among more than one winner *ex aequo*, the amount of each of the first prizes is respectively EUR 11 500 for two first prizes, EUR 10 600 for three first prizes, EUR 10 250 for four first prizes and EUR 10 000 for five first prizes. The Committee is not bound to award all five prizes. The EESC may decide not to award the Civil Society Prize.

The prize award ceremony is likely to take place during the EESC Civil Society Week in March 2025. Up to two representatives per winner will be invited to the ceremony, with travel and accommodation organised by the EESC according to the rules which will be notified to winners in due time. In addition to this, up to two representatives per winner may be invited to take part in a debate on polarisation of society during a subsequent plenary session of the EESC.

Prizes will be paid by bank transfer within 30 days of the award ceremony, provided that the winners have submitted all the requested documents. Winners are responsible for the payment of taxes and charges applicable when using the prize money.

## **7. Personal data**

Personal data contained in the application documents (such as name and address) will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data<sup>16</sup>. Unless indicated otherwise, the replies to the questions and any personal data requested to evaluate the application in accordance with the contest rules will be processed solely for that purpose by the Directorate for Communication and Interinstitutional Relations. Details concerning the processing of personal data are attached (Appendix 2).

The candidate's personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) if the candidate is in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation. For more information, see the Privacy Statement on [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm)

## **8. Disclosure requirements**

Without prejudice to point 7 above, candidates grant the EESC the right to communicate to the public, in any language, in any format and using any kind of technique, the name of the candidates, the activities proposed for the prize and the amount of the prizes awarded to the winners.

Any communication or publication by the winners about the activity for which the prize was awarded must indicate that the activity has been awarded the EESC Civil Society Prize. This obligation applies for one year from the date of the awarding of the prize.

## **9. Liability**

Candidates have sole liability in the event of a claim relating to the activities carried out in the framework of the prize.

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<sup>16</sup> Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC ([OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 93](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1725/oj)).

## 10. **Checks and audits**

The winners must accept the checks and audits by the EESC, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Court of Auditors referred to in Article 129 of the Financial Regulation and the publicity obligations in relation to the contest and the received prize, as detailed in point 8 above.

## 11. **Law applicable, complaints and competent court**

The Civil Society Prize is governed by EU law, complemented, where necessary, by the national law of Belgium.

Observations concerning the prize award procedure may be submitted to the authority awarding the prize using the contact details indicated in point 13 below.

If candidates believe that maladministration has occurred, they may lodge a complaint with the European Ombudsman within two years of the date when they become aware of the facts which form the basis for the complaint (see <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>).

The court responsible for matters relating to this prize is the General Court of the European Union:

General Court of the European Union  
Rue du Fort Niedergrünwald  
L-2925 Luxembourg  
Tel.: +352 43031  
Fax.: +352 4303 2100  
URL: <http://curia.europa.eu>

Information about the lodging of appeals may be obtained at the address indicated above.

## 12. **Penalties**

Financial penalties of 2 to 10% of the value of the prize and exclusion decisions from all contracts, grants and contests financed by the EU budget may be imposed on participants who have made false declarations, or committed irregularities or fraud, in accordance with the conditions laid down in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation.

## 13. **Further information**

For more information, please contact: [civilsocietyprize@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:civilsocietyprize@eesc.europa.eu)

If relevant to other potential candidates, questions and answers will be published on [the Civil Society Prize page of the EESC website](#). The EESC recommends that candidates check the prize website regularly in order to get the most up-to-date information.