

# A CHANCE for Europe

## A review of policies on combating organised crime in the electoral programs for the 2024 European Parliament elections

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## A CHANCE FOR EUROPE

The European network CHANCE is a Civil Society Organisations' hub that gathers associations, movements, informal groups and activists from all over Europe. It was officially launched in 2019 within the European Parliament, with a clear objective: to foster cooperation among Civil Society Organisations from different countries in their efforts to combat organised crime, mafias and corruption. Additionally, it aims to promote principles of equity and solidarity across European society. Among many different partners around Europe, it is promoted by the association *Libera. Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie*.

Since its inception, CHANCE has engaged closely with the European Parliament and several of its Members. The network's concerted efforts have focused on representing the diverse realities of the territories within our network, advocating for values that stand against organised crime and corruption, and providing support to the victims. These multifaceted actions have been succinctly encapsulated in our political manifesto 'A Chance for Europe' launched at the European Parliament on December, 7th, 2023.

## POLITICAL MANIFESTO

The international nature of organised crime is a fact. According to Europol's 2024 Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks, EU Member States and third countries identified a total of 821 most threatening criminal networks active in the European Union, and affecting the region's internal security. The total membership of the identified networks exceeds 25,000 individuals.

These networks and the suspects they are composed of are active in a range of crime areas, such as drug trafficking, fraud, property crime, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, among others. 86% of the most threatening criminal networks make use of legal business structures. 34% of the most threatening criminal networks have been active for more than 10 years. 68% of networks are composed of members from multiple nationalities. 76% of the most threatening criminal networks are present or active in two to seven countries. 71% of networks engage in corruption to facilitate criminal activity or obstruct law enforcement or judicial proceedings.

Our Manifesto asked Europe and the European institutions to involve Civil Society Organizations as their role is crucial to combat organised crime which has ABCD (Agile, Borderless, Controlling, and Destructive) capabilities. Civil Society Organizations act as an efficient monitoring instrument of the EU rule of law and can provide string prevention and *ex-ante* and *ex-post* control procedures.

## FIVE PRIORITIES

It identified the following priority areas and declared the following as our ambitions:

### 1. Organised Crime: a European Problem

- For the European Parliament and other national and EU institutions to recognise that organised crime is a European problem stemming from inside its borders and with its roots in social inequalities and grey areas existing in our countries.
- For the establishment of a Permanent Forum of civil society on organised crime, between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European civil society.

### 2. Reclaim Common Good(s) from Organised Crime

- For the provision for social reuse of confiscated assets to be made binding alongside other forms of management in the new directive proposal on asset recovery and confiscation;
- For a review of the participatory mechanisms for inter-institutional meetings on the management of confiscated assets to ensure sufficient involvement and dialogue with civil society organisations;
- For the establishment of a special fund to support the projects of civil society organisations in confiscated assets.

### 3. Corruption, the Public Administration and Civil Society

- For a formal recognition of the role of the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) as an efficient monitoring instrument of the EU public expenditures.
- For explicit support for strong provisions for meaningful stakeholder access to beneficial ownership registers and to fight against opaque entities, as it was proposed by the European Parliament's discussions about the 6<sup>th</sup> Anti-Money Laundering Directive.
- For an extension of the creation of whistleblowers offices and enhancement of the measures to protect individuals, including licit entrepreneurs, that are encouraged to denounce criminal threats and corrupt pressures.
- For granting the involvement of CSOs in the programming and implementation of the initiatives foreseen in the nRRPs, in order to avoid political capture and improve social cohesion and mitigate the social impact of the crises.
- For support of monitoring communities of the RRF, since they contribute to the right use of public resources and catalyse the joint interest and effort of citizenships who want to be conducive to the common good and to the accountability of the NextGenerationEU plan.

#### **4. Protection, Justice and Reparation for Victims of Organised Crime and Human Trafficking and Their Families**

- For the establishment of a permanent round table among institutions, the victims and their families and civil society organisations.
- For the institution of a Defender for the Victims of Trafficking and Organised Crime at EU level, ensuring the full and comprehensive implementation of the EU Directives for the victims' rights and for the protection of victims of human trafficking.

#### **5. Protecting the Environment and Public Health from the Ecomafias**

- For speedy approval of the new directive proposal on the protection of the environment through criminal law, in the amended version as voted by the European Parliament before the end of its current mandate.
- For the start of the necessary adjustments for a quick ratification of the new Directive.

## REVIEW OF ELECTORAL PROGRAMS

With the European Parliament elections 2024 approaching, the electoral programmes of the various European political groups are reviewed in order to assess the extent to which they take into account the priorities of the CHANCE network and, where appropriate, the proposals they make in the fight against organised crime and corruption.

### Methodology

Since relevant references in the Electoral Programs under review are few and frequently only partially consistent with the proposals put forward by our Manifesto, we think that the benefits of a codified Content Analysis of the Programs would have limited utility and would require a disproportionate effort for the expected score of even the Program which includes most relevant references.

We are looking instead to conduct a Discourse Analysis, following the recommendations by Transparency International on 'Methodologies for the Analysis of Political Party Programs' (2018). To this end, we are not measuring the contents of the Programs against a fixed understanding of definitions of the relevant concepts (such as 'organised crime', or 'eco-mafias' for example) even if that is the definition we subscribe to in our documentation. At this early stage of dialogue between CHANCE and other stakeholders, where consensus on the meanings to be ascribed to terms used is yet to be secured, a stringent review within the confines of our preconceived understanding of terms is unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes.

We will be looking instead at the discourse used by political parties and allow for and analyse the wide range of narratives that orbit around the topics of the Manifesto.

We will look, therefore, to answer the following questions:

1. How are the concepts that are included in our Manifesto, referred to and described as in the Programs?
2. What is excluded from the meaning ascribed to these concepts in the Programs that was intended to be included by the Manifesto?
3. Are related concepts also addressed in the Programs?
4. Are the concepts that have been selected for inclusion by the parties a central or prioritised consideration for the Program, and if so to what extent can the parties' policies be seen to identify with any one or more of those concepts?

## REVIEWED PROGRAMS

At the time of writing the following Election Programs have been reviewed for the purpose of this analysis:

### ALDE

- [https://www.aldeparty.eu/the\\_manifesto](https://www.aldeparty.eu/the_manifesto)

### European Left

- <https://www.european-left.org/2024-eu-election-manifesto/>

### European Green

- [https://www.datocms-assets.com/87481/1708539548-egp\\_manifesto-2024\\_courage-to-change.pdf](https://www.datocms-assets.com/87481/1708539548-egp_manifesto-2024_courage-to-change.pdf)
- <https://www.datocms-assets.com/87481/1708092100-priorities-2024-as-adopted-lyon-4-february-2024.pdf>

### EPP

- [https://www.epp2024.eu/files/ugd/8e086a\\_c756f154a5fc4da0acc16adb85c330.pdf](https://www.epp2024.eu/files/ugd/8e086a_c756f154a5fc4da0acc16adb85c330.pdf)

### PES

- [https://pes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024\\_PES\\_Manifesto\\_EN.pdf](https://pes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024_PES_Manifesto_EN.pdf)

In Annex, we are providing a table of extracts from the programs which are relevant to the Manifesto topics listed above.

The following analysis is organised in order of the Manifesto themes rather than vertically by Political Party in order to allow for a comparative analysis of the varying positions in different Programs.

## ANALYSIS

### Organised Crime

Most political parties make specific references to organised crime in their electoral programs, invariably addressing with varying degrees of commitment, commitments to improve the effectiveness of policing, security, and cross-border co-operation of law enforcement agencies. There is appreciation that organised crime is a risk to citizen safety (PES) and harms democracy (Greens). There is appreciation that organised crime is a European (rather than a national) problem (EPP, PES, Greens, ALDE). There is no acknowledgement however of the social roots of organised crime and consequently, there is no evident appreciation that engagement with civil society is desirable in the effort to defeat organised crime.

The EPP specifically addresses proposals for improved confiscation of assets from organised crime. No party picks up our recommendation for legislative measures to provide for the social reuse of confiscated assets which is perhaps a consequence of the missing appreciation of the social context for organised crime.

### Anti-Corruption

The EPP, PES, and ALDE make specific recommendations that identify the fight against corruption as an area of priority for them. The EPP recommends restraint in regulation in order not to hinder competitiveness. However, the EPP identifies tax evasion and corruption as matters for improved European legislation. ALDE speaks of an effective anti-corruption sanction regime while both the PES and ALDE speak about the need of further European support for the efforts of Member States in this area.

We note that the PES and ALDE reiterate the principle that civil society has a crucial role in fostering democracy and commit to further EU action to protect human rights defenders and to support civil society organisations in the fulfilment of their function.

This is not to say that there are any specific recommendations to foster civil society engagement with institutions or for the erection of more effective partnership between institutions and civil society in the monitoring of corruption.

### Victims of Trafficking and Organised Crime

The EPP and PES commit to improved policing on human trafficking and are particularly concerned with women and girls being trafficked for prostitution. As with other sections that are covered by this review, the concerns in this sector are focusing on policing and prosecuting perpetrators with little consideration made to the rights of victims, their adequate representations, and improved mechanisms to secure compensation to make good for their losses and suffering.

The European Left focuses on legal and safe routes for migrants arriving into Europe as a means to undercut smugglers and human traffickers. In a way this policy can be said to be victim-centred in a preventative sense of the term.

## **Ecomafias**

The Greens are alone in committing to the recognition of 'ecocide' as a crime. They argue for a departure from the classic notion of "do no harm" looking for partner engagement 'to jointly change people's lives for the better.'

Beyond this very specific reference, political parties do not appear to connect organised crime with wilful environmental degradation.

## **Engagement with Civil Society**

Further to the specific references noted above to the role of civil society in the protection of democracy (and consequently the fight against corruption), we also wish to underline other references made by political parties to the role of civil society in democracy.

The PES argues for civil society participation in the implementation of the EU's Cohesion Policy, together with local and regional authorities. The Greens commit to structured dialogue with NGOs in the legislative process. And though with more explicit reference to the participation of local and regional authorities, ALDE argues for a change in the Treaty to allow for greater citizen participation in Europe's governance which we interpret as open to the engagement of civil society organisations.



## CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The present review is fully cognizant that our Manifesto presents an ambitious set of proposals which are not typically prominent in the political agenda of any political party.

We recognise that the purpose of our existence as civil society activists includes drawing the attention of political leaders to policy matters that fail to attract their attention in any other way.

We are therefore not surprised nor particularly disappointed to generally observe that published Electoral Programs rarely, if ever, prioritise the themes put forward in our Manifesto and any specific commitment to measures we propose is rare.

Taking into account the extent to which political discourse prioritises issues of trafficking of people, drugs, and other illicit activities, it is paradoxical that mobilising the community's effort to overcome the influence of organised crime is hardly a consideration in these electoral programs.

Had it been the case that political parties already undertake to adopt the measures we propose, we would be concerned that we would be failing in our ambition and imagination. We intend to build on the references in the Programs that are consistent, even if tangentially, with our Manifesto and to seek to persuade political parties in the new Parliament to engage with the remainder of our agenda.

We are encouraged to note relatively widespread commitment by political parties to improved engagement with civil society in European governance, legislation, and democratic life. We interpret this commitment as an increased opportunity for us to engage with the next European Parliament on our Manifesto agenda. We will make the most of their openness to ideas coming from civil society to seek to persuade them to share and commit to our objectives.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. It is clear to us that organised crime, to the extent that it is recognised as a European challenge, is placed in the silo of law enforcement and is disconnected both from the social context from which it arises and on the back of which it thrives and from the economic, social and environmental consequences of its activities. Cross-border cooperation, not only between law enforcement agencies but also among CSOs is crucial, and the CHANCE network is a good example of this.

Our campaigning for the social reuse of confiscated assets presents, in our view, an opportunity to compensate the community from the social harm that it was made to suffer as a result of the infiltration of the legal economy and the exploitation presented by organised crime.

It is in this context that we also look for improved methods of victim compensation, not only in terms of liquidating damages to make good for their economic losses, but also to address and

reverse the social harm, i.e. the deprivations, the loss of economic and cultural opportunities, and the environmental degradation caused by organised crime.

As civil society organisations we feel we can contribute to policy and law making that may address these priorities. We will therefore use informal opportunities granted to us to access the next European Parliament to argue for structured and formal fora for the engagement of civil society in the making of policies and laws.

Turning public opinion toward this cause is the first step in protecting our society and institutions from organised crime and to build a safer and more just Europe.

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## Annex 1 – Member Organisations in CHANCE

ENGIM Albania

BASTA!, Belgium

Sustainable Communication Aisbl, Belgium

Open Space Foundation, Bulgaria

DeMains Libres, France

Mafianeindanke, Germany

Eine Welt, Germany

Libera. Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie, Italy

CHANCE Malta

Repubblika, Malta

Between (Entretodos), Portugal

Association for Cooperation and Sustainable Development (ACDD), Romania

Protecta CV, Serbia

FIADYS, Spain

CHANCE Switzerland

Firm UK

## Annex 2 – Summary of Extracts from Reviewed Electoral Programs

Manifesto points	EPP	PES	European Green	European Left	Alde
<b>Organised crime</b>	<p><b>1.5 Our Europe is determined to fight terrorism and organised crime</b></p> <p>As the main goal of organised crime groups is financial gain, the most effective way to fight them is to stop their financial flows through strengthened anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing rules. We will establish a reinforced illegal assets recovery system, with improved means of confiscation capabilities, strengthened cross-border cooperation and information-sharing among relevant national, regional, local and EU bodies. Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to our citizens.</p>	<p>9. GUARANTEEING SECURITY</p> <p>We want to ensure safety and security for all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will improve police and judicial cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organised crime, drug and arms trafficking, cyber-crime, money laundering and any form of gender-based crimes.</li> <li>Increasing cooperation among European ports is needed to effectively reduce the influx of narcotics into Europe.</li> </ul>	<p>A European fight against organized crime harms our democracies, puts lives at risk, and destroys local environments. As organized crime is transnational, it can only be fought through European cooperation. We support policies that improve exchange and information flows between European police and intelligence services and would create a Europe-wide exchange programme for police officers.</p>		<p>Tackle the rise in drug-related crime in Europe, which has become a prime market for international drug traffickers. Increase collaboration between Europol, Interpol and national law enforcement agencies through enhanced information and data exchange for all serious cross-border and organised crime. Strengthen Europol's right to initiate new investigations and execute law enforcement activities in and with the Member States and to proactively engage in and handle cases on its own.</p>
<b>Social Reuse</b>	<p>Mentions stronger confiscation provisions.</p>				

Manifesto points	EPP	PES	European Green	European Left	Alde
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Anti-corruption and money laundering</b></p>	<p>At the same time, economic growth, competitiveness and the wish to create an attractive market need to also be reflected in European legislation and in concrete means and actions to fight tax evasion and corruption. We have to refrain from tendencies towards over-regulation without considering all three dimensions of sustainability – economic, ecologic and societal.</p>	<p>We want to strengthen Euro-pol, the European Public Prosecutor’s Office and the future Anti-Money Laundering Authority, aiming for a truly European investigation authority that supports Member States.</p> <p>11. DEFEND DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW</p> <p>Democracy and the rule of law protect citizens’ rights and ensure everyone is treated equally. They are the best defences against abuses of power.</p> <p>We defend the rule of law at all levels, with a trustworthy justice system, efficient anti-corruption measures, and media freedom and pluralism.</p> <p><b>The crucial role of civil society in fostering democracy must be supported.</b></p>			<p>Foster a professional, reforming, progressive and responsive civil service across all levels of government and institutions in Europe and put in place anti-corruption policies including a system of indicators for policy monitoring to ensure impartiality, and to end clientelism and party politicisation, as well as to prevent impunity of corruption.</p> <p>Establish an effective anti-corruption sanction regime in Europe and reinforce national anti-corruption agencies with more funding, possibly through EU-level initiatives. Secure the functioning of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) by ensuring national cooperation and adherence to recommendations.</p> <p><b>Uphold the right to association and assembly to protect civil society organisations, in particular those fighting to protect and promote democracy under threat.</b></p>

Manifesto points	EPP	PES	European Green	European Left	Alde
Victims of trafficking and organised crime	<p><b>1.6 Our Europe stops violence against women</b></p> <p>We want women to live without fear of any form of violence. The fight against organised crime is also a fight for the rights of oppressed women. Human trafficking affects between 70,000 and 140,000 people every year in Europe, 84% of whom are forced into prostitution. We want 1,000 officers to be deployed in a Euro-pol special unit to combat prostitution and trafficking of women and girls.</p>	<p>4. MANAGING ASYLUM AND MIGRATION</p> <p>We will fight against traffickers and smugglers.</p> <p>Sexual violence and exploitation must be severely punished.</p>		<p>We call for a break with ‘Fortress Europe’ – we stand for legal and safe migration routes and oppose the policy of illegal pushbacks. The EU must develop and implement a truly European migration and asylum policy, based on co-responsibility and obligatory solidarity between all Member States. A migration policy defined by the creation of safe, legal passages, in order to combat the extensive trafficking in human beings and stop human losses in the Mediterranean.</p>	
Ecomafias and environmental crimes			<p>As Greens, we go beyond the do-no-harm-principle. We will use all tools at hand to engage with partners to jointly change people’s lives for the better and act against the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. We will continue our push for the international recognition of the crime of ecocide.</p>		

Manifesto points	EPP	PES	European Green	European Left	Alde
Civic participation in policymaking		<p>We defend the partnership approach with regional and local authorities and their crucial role in shaping and implementing Cohesion Policy for upwards social convergence, together with civil society.</p>	<p>Measures to support a regular, meaningful, and structured dialogue with civil society during legislative procedures are essential. We will introduce a statute for European cross-border associations and non-profit organisations. We advocate for an EU-level civil dialogue, modelled on the social dialogue, between CSOs and EU institutions.</p>		<p>Reform the EU treaties to strengthen your active participation and increase transparency and accountability for the EU to meet your needs and key concerns. Open the European Commission consultation process to encourage more citizen engagement, your engagement, including by better integrating local communities and subnational governments such as local and regional authorities. They are responsible for executing most EU laws and managing half of the EU's public investment and are crucial for providing feedback on EU operations at the grassroots level.</p>