To: Members of European Parliament

Civil society engagement at the heart of the European project

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

This Wednesday, 7 May, you will be voting on the *2023 discharge: EU general budget – Commission, executive agencies and European Development Funds*, rapporteur MEP Niclas Herbst.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is an alliance of over 70 member organisations working for better health through a healthier environment. Our members include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts.

HEAL urges you to express your support for civil society in tomorrow's debate and in Wednesday's vote:

Vote in favour of amendments 2, 3, 12, 13

Reject amendments 37, 41, 42, 43, 53, 56, 64, 67, 68, 71, 74, 89

Civil society engagement is at the heart of the European project, and civic participation is an essential pillar of our shared European values.

For over twenty years, HEAL has been at the forefront of bringing forward independent scientific research, to show the potential of saving health costs by reducing people's exposure to pollution. We have also amplified the voices of those most vulnerable to the impacts of pollution and climate change. We are part of civil society upholding the public interest amidst resource-rich, profit-driven corporate lobbying.

The perspective brought by HEAL and other civil society organisations to EU decision-making is invaluable and unique, yet the space for our engagement is shrinking.

Unprecedented attack, fuelled by disinformation

In recent months, European civil society organisations (CSOs) have been facing an unprecedented attack coming from certain Members of the European Parliament. Led by some MEPs from the European People's Party (EPP) and by the far-right groups, this attack is driven by disinformation.

The attack relies on misleading arguments to artificially manufacture a scandal, amplified by poorly informed media articles. At a time when democratic values are being eroded across the EU and civic actors defending these values are increasingly under threat, this renewed attack on funding for CSOs and their legitimacy in the democratic process risks not only further shrinking civic spaces in Europe but also undermining democracy itself.

Together with now over 700 other organisations from 40 countries, including all EU member states, HEAL calls for your support for a strong and independent civil society.

Civil society has led efforts to increase transparency

HEAL and other civil society organisations receive operating grants through a competitive, thorough and independent evaluation process. Like all recipients, HEAL adheres to strict accountability standards, including monitoring, reporting, and audit practices, ensuring the transparent use of public funds. In addition, civil society organisations have been at the forefront of advocating greater transparency, including through the EU Transparency Register.

The recent European Court of Auditors special report on *Transparency of EU funding granted to NGOs* did not find any wrongdoing or financial irregularities, nor did it find any misuse of EU funds by NGOs. The Auditors' report affirmed that European Union funding may legitimately support public interest advocacy as part of transparent and ongoing dialogue with civil society organisations. The report did <u>not</u> find the European Commission pays NGOs to lobby the European Parliament on its behalf.

HEAL urges you as a Member of the European Parliament to stand in support of a strong, independent and vibrant civil society.

We are available for any further information.

Regards,

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Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

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