

Reinforcing Democracy: European and National Perspectives

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Background

- Democracy is the cornerstone of the European Union
- Risks of democratic backsliding affect also EU and its Member States.
- Democracy, the rule of law, and human rights are interconnected and together form the foundation of a well-functioning democracy
- Municipalities and local communities form the foundation of democracy by enabling direct participation, representation, and citizen engagement at the closest level to people's everyday live

“While democracy is about bringing together different voices in society and finding common solutions, authoritarian regimes seek to create or widen divisions, instrumentalise conflicts, discredit democratic actors, in particular free media and civil society, and undermine free and fair elections.”

European Commission, Democracy Shield 11/2025

EU Democratic Shield

The Commission issued communications on 13 November 2025 on **the European Democracy Shield and the EU Civil Society Strategy**. The Commission intends to implement the measures included in these initiatives gradually over the course of its term of office

The Commission emphasises the importance of an open civil society for democracy, which is why the Democracy Shield and the Civil Society Strategy were published at the same time

Both initiatives are based on the idea of the key pillars of democratic systems:

- free people,
- free and fair elections,
- free and independent media,
- a vibrant civil society, and
- strong democratic institutions.

The European Democracy Shield sets out a range of measures to empower, protect and promote strong and resilient democracies in the EU. The Democracy Shield also takes into account the impact of candidate countries on the development of European democracy and their support

EU regulations

- The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulates the processing of personal data in all EU Member States. Its aim is to **improve the protection of individuals' personal data and to harmonize data protection practices** across the European Economic Area.
- The EU Digital Services Act (DSA), which has been fully applicable since 2024, increases the transparency and safety of digital services such as social media and online platforms. **The regulation improves users' rights, facilitates the reporting of illegal content, and strengthens, in particular, the obligations of large platforms to combat disinformation and harmful content**
- The EU Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising entered into force in spring 2024. Its purpose is **to increase transparency in electoral influence and to combat interference by foreign actors in elections**
- The EU Artificial Intelligence Act aims to ensure that **AI systems on the European market are safe, transparent, and respect fundamental rights**
- The EU Media Freedom Act strengthens the independence, pluralism and editorial freedom of the media across the EU. It limits political interference in editorial decisions, **protects journalists' sources, and increases transparency of media ownership and state advertising**
- Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council on **protecting persons who engage in public participation (the anti-SLAPP Directive) against manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings**

Council of Europe: Democratic Pact for Europe

- The Council of Europe is currently preparing a new **New Democratic Pact for Europe**, which is a strategic and political process aimed at strengthening democracy. The objective is to address democratic backsliding, disinformation and authoritarianism in Europe

Three pillars:

- Learning and practising democracy
 - Protecting democracy
 - Innovating democracy
 - Actions that promote citizen participation
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- The Pact is an evolving process that will be consulted on and developed during the period 2024–2026. The Pact's online platform was launched in September 2025

National Democracy Programme

The government resolution outlines the promotion of democracy and participation in 2025–2027. The Government adopted the resolution at its plenary session on 20 March 2025. The National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation (Democracy Programme) contains 15 policy goals as well as key measures to promote democracy and participation

The particular objective of the Democracy Programme is to:

- improve voter turnout and strengthen the participation of children and young people
- to develop good practices in education for democratic citizenship and human rights
- to strengthen a culture of good discussion and exchange of opinions in society, starting at an early age, while safeguarding the constitutional freedom of expression and opinion
- develop municipal government and ensure grassroots democracy
- the programme also outlines the goals and measures for the development of national democracy policy and for the promotion of democracy in the European Union and internationally

The National Action Plan for Fundamental and Human Rights



Strengthening the Independence of the Judiciary

- Safeguarding the independence of the judiciary



Availability of Legal Protection and Access to Rights

- Availability of legal protection
- Accessibility of legal protection for persons with disabilities
- Children's access to rights and legal remedies
- Victims of crime access to rights



Equal Realisation of Rights

- Promotion of equality and prevention of discrimination
- Persons with disabilities
- Older persons
- Homelessness
- Regional equality



Increasing Knowledge of Human Rights and the Rule of Law

- Education on democracy and human rights
- Developing authorities' human rights expertise
- International rule of law cooperation



Monitoring the Implementation of Rights

- Fundamental and human rights indicators
- International human rights recommendations
- Development of the knowledge base



Democracy, Good Governance and Freedom of Expression

- Democracy and participation
- Good governance and trust in authorities
- Sámi self-government
- Freedom of expression and media pluralism

CSO Strategy 2023–2027 - Government resolution on the development of civic space

- The Government resolution outlines the development of civic space in the Government Programme period 2023–2027. An active and vibrant civil society with its CSOs is a key part of a functioning democratic society
- The resolution was approved by the government on 6.6.2024
- CSOs promote people's wellbeing, democracy and participation, increase trust and strengthen society's comprehensive security and crisis resilience
- The resolution promotes CSOs' own fundraising, develops government grant activities concerning CSOs and dismantles burdensome bureaucracy

Kiitos!

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