



Policy Review on Existing Policies with Regard to Strengthen Democratic Resilience

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Policy Review on Existing Policies with Regard to Strengthen Democratic Resilience

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We-ID Identities - Migration - Democracy is a three-year project (2025-2028) that analyses the transformation of individual and collective identities, social cohesion and democracy in the midst of migration, demographic change and current crises in Europe. The consortium includes eight partners: Georg August University of Göttingen, the University of St Andrews in Scotland, the Bocconi University, the Institute for the Study of Population and Human Studies (Bulgaria), the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (Croatia), Max Planck Society (Population Europe), the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and The Civics Innovation Hub.

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1. Control Sheet

Version History			
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2. List of Participants

Participant No.	Participant Organisation Name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	University of Goettingen (UGOE)	Germany
2	Bocconi University (UB)	Italy
3	University of St. Andrews (USTAN)	Great Britain
4	Institute for Population and Human Studies (IPHS)	Bulgaria
5	Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (IPI)	Croatia
6	Max Planck Society (MPG)/Population Europe	Germany
7	Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)	IGO, Sweden
8	THE CIVICS Innovation Hub (CIVICS)	Germany

3. Objectives

The European Union's promise of prosperity and security is based on the principle of "unity in diversity" and the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, rights and democratic participation of its citizens. The vast majority of EU citizens share these values. At the same time, democracies are in crisis. Populist parties are fuelling fears and spreading the narrative that migration leads to a loss of identity. There is no doubt that migration always raises the question of identity and belonging. How do we organize integration and participation in such a way that cohesion is created despite diverse identities? The project "Identities - Migration - Democracy" (We-ID) is therefore concerned with the transformation of individual and collective identities, social and territorial cohesion and democracy under the conditions of demographic change, particularly with regard to migration and growing population diversity. We-ID follows an innovative research path by a) analysing the impact of migration on identities, belonging, cohesion and democracy, taking into account both the impact on host

communities and the changes in the identities of migrants and their descendants, and b) elaborating the interrelationship between identities, cohesion, resilience and democracy. In addition to quantitative data analysis, we will use qualitative methods at the local level (e.g. pilot study in a border region, content analysis, case studies) to look for factors that strengthen resilient democratic communities. By consistently pursuing a transdisciplinary approach within our Policy, Advocacy and Research Lab (We-PARL) throughout the project, we will create a platform for mutual learning between different stakeholders from the European to the local level, while at the same time contributing to evidence-based and thoroughly discussed policy recommendations. In addition, based on our findings, we will develop materials such as toolboxes that can be used by practitioners and local actors (We-SCOUTS).

In detail, We-ID pursues the following objectives:

- Objective 1:** Revise and evaluate the relevant conceptual issues concerning identities, belonging and cohesion, and establish their relationship with resilience and democracy, with a particular emphasis on migration.
- Objective 2:** Map trends and patterns of identities, belonging and cohesion together with their drivers, including geographic differences, gender, age and education, as well as immigrant status and employment.
- Objective 3:** Investigate how the social identities and political participation of immigrants and their descendants differ across European countries, what factors influence identity and participation of immigrants, and what assumptions can be made for the future.
- Objective 4:** Extending objectives 2 and 3 through a regional pilot study in a Bulgarian border region. To analyse, how migration flows affect both the migrant communities themselves and their identities, and the communities exposed to new and large-scale immigration.
- Objective 5:** Development of an inclusive concept for resilient democratic communities (ReDeCos), through the identification (five case studies) of local factors that hinder or strengthen belonging.
- Objective 6:** In addition, development of a Civic Competences Toolbox (CCT) for local actors (We-SCOUTS) equipped with civic skills and competences to support local communities, moderate conflicts and controversies and create spaces for participation.
- Objective 7:** Establish the We-PARL - Policy, Advocacy and Research Lab - transdisciplinary platform, the tool which supports all thematic research areas foreseen in the project.
- Objective 8:** To disseminate We-ID findings, drawing on the outcomes and findings from the We-PARL, communicating them to a broader audience.
- Objective 9:** The project will identify factors at both national and local level that hinder social and political participation and at the same time develop policy recommendations on how to achieve equality and mitigate discrimination against women, LGBTIQ+ and ethnic minorities.

4. Purpose of the Deliverable

Work Package 2 establishes the conceptual foundation for developing policies that enhance democracy and strengthen societal resilience. It explores how policy-making can effectively prevent and respond to social and territorial marginalisation, as well as discrimination, while promoting social cohesion and fostering a shared sense of belonging among EU citizens and migrants alike. The work package is closely connected to the Policy Advocacy and Research Lab (WP7) and generates essential insights for other scientific work packages addressing key drivers, migration dynamics, and identity-related issues. Furthermore, it addresses the ongoing democratic challenges within the EU, reflected in declining levels of public trust in political institutions and increasing electoral support for populist and far-right parties.

A primary objective of the policy review is to provide a comprehensive assessment of existing policies designed to reinforce democracy and resilience, with particular attention to migration-related measures. As part of this mapping exercise, we examine relevant policy reviews and strategic reports. The analysis evaluates the extent to which these policies can be regarded as examples of good or poor practice, using the principles and objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights as the overarching benchmark.

5. State of Research

Democracies around the world are under pressure. European welfare states are groaning under the demographic burdens brought about by low birth rates and increased life expectancy. It is slowly sinking into the European consciousness that this was not merely a lovely hot summer, but that the climate crisis is having a massive impact on health and the economy. The faltering automotive industry is just one sign of the weak economic climate in Europe. Digitalisation, with social media and AI, brings not only faster communication and digital patient records, but also fake news and targeted propaganda. And war is back, even in Europe – whether in the form of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine or in hybrid form through attacks on critical infrastructure and interference in elections.

These crises and wars are unsettling the population and causing confidence in the functioning of democratic institutions to dwindle visibly. Whilst the triumph of democratic systems long seemed unstoppable – particularly after the fall of the Iron Curtain – authoritarian regimes have been making a comeback on the political stage in recent years. As a result, populists and far-right parties are racing from one electoral success to the next. In Germany, two state elections are due to take place this autumn, in which the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – a party that is, in some respects, firmly far-right – could become the largest party and perhaps even win an absolute majority. In France, too, the convicted criminal Marine Le Pen is preparing to take the political lead in the upcoming elections with her right-wing populist party, the Rassemblement National (RN).

Yet this is not a one-way street, for as Poland and, most recently, Hungary have demonstrated, right-wing populists can also lose the favour of the electorate. It is also becoming clear, however, that, for example, the judicial reforms previously introduced by populist parties or the attacks on the free press cannot simply be reversed; this will require considerable effort in the aftermath.

Politics and civil society seem strangely at a loss when it comes to measures that effectively strengthen democracy or trust in democracy. Rather, there is no shortage of daily analyses (in the media and in academic circles) of social polarisation and division. Narratives of loss and decline are finding an audience far and wide. Hopelessness and resentment are spreading. What is more, political opponents are becoming enemies. Even in everyday life, there are moments of affective polarisation, in which

one's own group is elevated whilst other groups are devalued: those with differing views are 'filtered out', political topics end in arguments or are no longer discussed within the family at all. The political scientist Oliviero Angeli observes: "In Germany and other EU countries, affective polarisation is on the rise, but it is still nowhere near as drastic as in the USA. Our multi-party system protects us from the kind of polarisation seen in the two-party system of the USA. In everyday life, this is evident in the fact that people no longer merely reject certain political groups on the basis of their policies, but attribute negative characteristics to them. They are then regarded as dangerous, immoral or anti-democratic." (Angeli in Bäunker 2026) The German sociologists Mau, Westheimer and Lux quite rightly highlighted the crucial role of 'polarisation entrepreneurs' in their book 'Triggerpunkte' (2023): Actors (politicians, social media influencers, 'Reichsbürger') who capitalise on citizens' feelings of uncertainty, anger and disappointment, amplify them and ultimately use them to further their own goals – the denigration of democracy. However, Mau, Westheimer and Lux also warn against overestimating the 'perceived' level of polarisation, as – in Germany, for example – individual positions on issues such as climate change or the recognition of homosexuality are often not that far apart. Rather, Germans are divided on how to deal with these challenges. The authors recommend breaking down societal transformation and the crises into individual areas of conflict and addressing them separately.

This gives rise to the apparent paradox that, whilst democracies are perceived as no longer functioning adequately and as polarised, at the same time there is a growing awareness of the need for a strong, united EU. The wars flaring up across the European continent and the fractured US-EU relationship are bringing Europeans closer together once again and mobilising their collective strength. EU citizens (58 per cent) view the state of the world with considerable concern, yet three-quarters (75 per cent) see the EU as a safe haven in an uncertain world. For 68 per cent of those surveyed in the 2026 Eurobarometer, the EU should even play a greater role in protecting its population (European Parliament 2026). So, if there is a willingness to embrace change and continued strong support for democracy as a form of government in European countries, where should efforts to build greater democratic resilience begin?

5.1 Democracy – Resilience – Democratic Resilience

Before we turn our attention to the concept of resilient democracy, we should briefly define the two terms 'democracy' and 'resilience'.

Democracy is generally recognised as a form of government that creates optimal conditions for decision-making and the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts, whilst also providing an environment conducive to social and economic development and the fight against poverty. Democracies are characterised, amongst other things, by respect for human rights, the separation of powers, government accountability, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, a multi-party system, free, fair and secret elections, and a free press.

Yet democracies worldwide are in retreat, whilst autocracies are on the rise. In 2026, the German Bertelsmann Foundation examined 137 countries (excluding, however, the USA, Canada and Australia) for democratic and autocratic forms of government: a majority of 77 of the 137 states examined are governed autocratically (see figure 1). They are taking an increasingly repressive stance towards the opposition, the media and civil society; 52 states are classified as hard autocracies, in which all fundamental rights are disregarded. However, autocratic tendencies are also gaining ground in numerous democracies (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2026).

Politische Regime BTI 2026

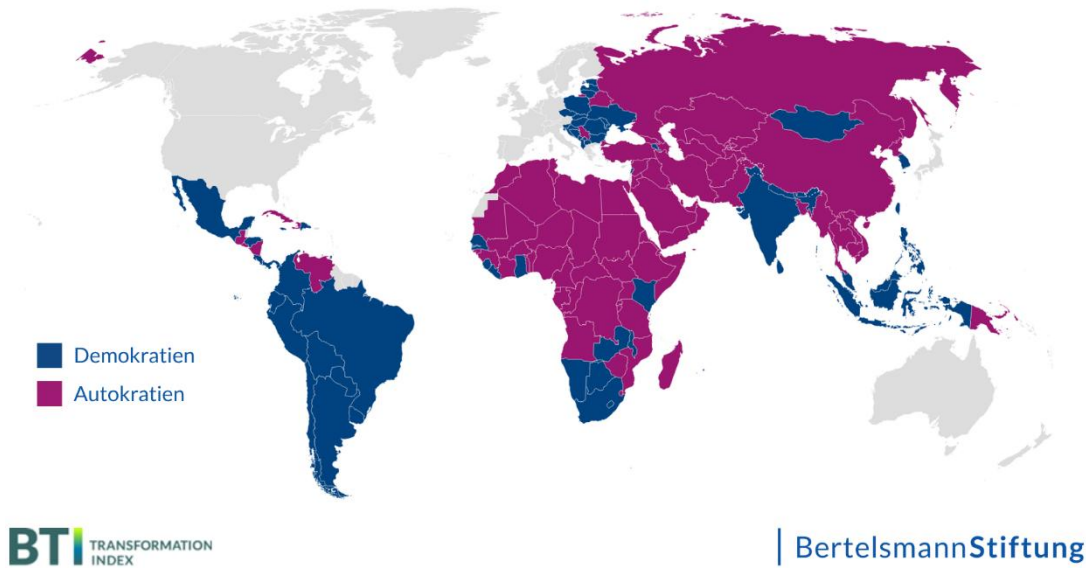


Figure 1. BTI 2026 Political Regimes

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2026

Resilience has become a central concept in the discourse on crises and uncertainty (Norris et al. 2008; Waller 2001) – not least in light of recent experiences with the pandemic, wars (both in Europe and the Middle East) and the recent energy and inflation shocks. Consequently, resilience is important for both individuals and communities; in the face of new waves of migration, it has also become significantly more relevant. Resilience encompasses, on the one hand, preparedness and, on the other, adaptation to and recovery from shocks and crises (Walker 2020; Windl, 2011; Thorén 2014). With regard to preparedness, individuals, neighbourhoods and communities can take various measures to avoid negative shocks. Migration itself constitutes such a measure, as climate disasters or armed conflicts are, in many cases, key ‘push factors’ (reasons for leaving one’s home). The ability to adapt to these shocks is referred to as resilience. These capacities have a multi-level structure. Individuals can be resilient through their own human, social and economic capital (Dahlgren and Whitehead 1992); social networks play a crucial role in how they adapt and cope with new situations (Kruk et al. 2015; WHO 2021). Or indeed, entire societies must adapt to changing structures, crises and challenges.

If we now combine both concepts, as Wolfgang Merkel has done, the following definition of **democratic resilience** emerges: ‘Democratic resilience is the ability of a democratic regime to absorb external challenges and internal stressors and to adapt dynamically to the changing functional conditions of democratic governance, without undergoing a regime change or abandoning or undermining its defining principles, functions and norms.’ (Merkel 2024, p. 343)

Various actors and subsystems contribute to the resilience of a democratic system; they are affected to varying degrees depending on the nature and duration of the crisis and recover at different rates. However, it is also a question of how these actors – the government, political parties, NGOs, the police and citizens – interact with one another in order to avert a crisis or shock, or to adapt to it.

The COVID-19 pandemic is regarded as a prime example of how societies have adapted to this exceptional situation. The government and the executive have, in part, attempted to bring the situation under control through measures akin to those taken in a state of emergency; these decisions were

supported by the overwhelming majority of the population, yet the COVID-19 denialist movement has nonetheless stirred up considerable sentiment against state ‘crackdowns’ and against ‘state failure’.

5.2 Political Landscape

Beyond this exceptional situation, massive shifts are taking place across Europe in the party landscape; old party-political certainties – right and left, conservative and social democratic, capital versus labour – are dissolving. The fringes of the political spectrum are gaining significant influence, putting the centrist parties under even greater pressure. Europe’s social democratic parties are visibly losing voters; the working class now constitutes a not inconsiderable pool of voters for right-wing populist parties. In his most recent essay ‘Lines of Division’, the German philosopher Philip Manow (2026) attributes this, in part, to the fact that an increasing number of right-wing populist parties in Europe – such as the French RN, the Hungarian Fidesz or the Sweden Democrats – have shifted to the left in their economic stance, or at least those voters perceive them as having done so. Manow (2026, p. 49f.) cites examples of a shift to the left by right-wing parties, such as the RN’s support for a railway strike, the AfD’s rejection of pension plans, or the PIS’s support for the minimum wage in Poland. At the same time, the positions of far-left parties – such as the German Bündnis Sarah Wagenknecht (BSW) or the Danish Social Democrats under Mette Frederiksen – are also shifting; these parties combine an economically left-wing programme with a socio-politically right-wing one. In the political centre, Manow sees EU citizens who advocate both open markets (right) and open identities (left). For Manow, therefore, the focus is less on cultural dividing lines – cosmopolitans versus communitarians – and more on the emergence of new combinations of redistributive and social policies: along the dividing line between ‘social and redistributive liberalism’ on the one hand and ‘social and redistributive illiberalism’ on the other. Consequently, this also leads to an erosion of political representation as we have known it to date.

5.3 Civil society

Civil society represents a sphere of society that lies beyond the state, the market and even the private sphere. This is because, within the EU, citizens have the opportunity to play an active part in shaping society not only through elections, but also by getting involved in public life on a voluntary basis and for the common good (Deutscher Bundestag 2002, p. 333). This engagement can take place within associations, NGOs, political parties or self-help groups. As the countries of the former Eastern Bloc have shown, civil society can also turn against the state. Totalitarian systems are therefore more inclined to suppress civil society and its opposition forces. Conversely, this means that democracies must tolerate conflicts that are played out through civil society engagement, for example during demonstrations. In 2023/4, 44 per cent of those surveyed in Iceland in the past twelve months had signed a petition, according to the European Social Survey (ESS11); the figure was 41 per cent in the UK, 26 per cent in Germany, 22 per cent in Lithuania, 12 per cent in Bulgaria and just 3.6 per cent in Hungary. Comparatively fewer people have taken part in a public demonstration over the past twelve months, but here too Iceland leads the way with just over 11 per cent, whilst the Netherlands, with 3.2 per cent of demonstrators, brings up the rear, closely followed by Croatia at 3.2 per cent and Hungary at 3.3 per cent. France, at 16 per cent, and Germany, at 10 per cent, are in the upper mid-range of the nations most keen to demonstrate. Regardless of the survey data (from 2024, looking back at 2023), Hungarian voters have this year voted the Orbán regime out of office and opted for a democratic, pro-European course.

However, an active civil society is evident not only in demonstrations, petitions or elections, but above all in everyday life.¹ Millions of people participate in public life through their involvement in sports clubs, church choirs or refugee support. In Norway, just over 39 per cent of citizens surveyed in the ESS11 said they had volunteered for an NGO or charity in the past twelve months; in Iceland the figure is 32 per cent, and in Germany 28 per cent. At the lower end of the scale are Bulgaria, with 5.3 per cent, and Hungary, with 5.5 per cent, in terms of voluntary involvement in an NGO or charitable organisation (Croatia: 8 per cent). Although the data collection is not directly comparable, the results of the World Giving Index also show particularly low levels of voluntary engagement in the former Eastern Bloc countries (e.g. Bulgaria 6 per cent, Croatia 11 per cent); here too, Norway ranks first among European countries at 31 per cent (CAF 2024, 16ff). These findings do not imply that the former Eastern Bloc countries are particularly lacking in solidarity; rather, they suggest that civic engagement takes place less in organised or institutionalised forms and is more likely to manifest itself in neighbourly help, family support networks and groups that are only slightly formalised, if at all. As early as 2014, Olk and Gensicke were able to demonstrate for eastern Germany that eastern Germans are not simply less engaged, but that institutional structures for civic engagement are lacking and that support is provided, in particular, through family- and neighbourhood-based forms. This is certainly also a legacy of socialist oppression and the nationalisation of civil society, which stifled public participation beyond state-led activities. Research into civic engagement in Germany, a country with a strong culture of voluntary organisations, also shows that many people get involved in free, ‘unaffiliated’ forms of civic engagement, such as helping refugees – initiatives which are often launched by (former) migrants – or contributing to their neighbourhood via neighbourhood apps (University of Göttingen 2024).

Is there evidence that civic engagement strengthens democratic resilience? Findings from a recent German study provide indications of a positive correlation between civic engagement and support for democratic values. The Institute for Demoskopie Allensbach (2023, p. 67ff.) demonstrates that those who are actively engaged, as well as (potential) voters, are far more likely to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy than non-voters and those who are not actively engaged. In particular, those who hold a voluntary post or have a fixed role within their civic engagement are especially satisfied. Similar positive correlations are evident in terms of trust in institutions and the belief that democracy can solve current problems: “Among those actively involved who hold an office or have a fixed role, 68 per cent expect this; among those not actively involved, the figure is just 50 per cent; among those who voted in the 2021 federal election, 59 per cent; and among non-voters, only 40 per cent.” (Institute for Demoskopie 2023, p. 68) Last but not least, voters and those actively involved feel significantly less politically powerless than those who are not actively involved. A special analysis of the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study (2026) also reaches comparable conclusions: On average, politically engaged individuals are more satisfied with the idea of democracy, the constitution and democratic practice; at the same time, they are less likely to feel politically powerless. Politically engaged individuals are less likely to hold far-right extremist views. Furthermore, it is evident that negative assessments of the general economic situation among politically engaged individuals – unlike among those who are not politically engaged – do not go hand in hand with higher levels of far-right extremism. Nevertheless, a proportion of politically engaged individuals also exhibit fragile-democratic

¹ Valentinavičius et al. (2025) were able to demonstrate that, in Lithuania, the willingness to take an active part in protests correlates positively with civic engagement and with the perception of a conflict between citizens and the government.

(39 per cent of politically engaged individuals) or right-wing authoritarian attitudes (22 per cent of politically engaged individuals); according to the study, 39 per cent of politically engaged individuals display resilient-democratic attitudes (Hoffmann et al. 2026). A Lithuanian study (Valentinavičius 2025), which examines the relationship between civil society, civic participation and democratic resilience in Lithuania in comparison with the EU, also provides evidence that civic engagement – in the form of voluntary work, involvement in NGOs, participation in protests or similar activities – plays a decisive role in strengthening democratic resilience. Furthermore, greater civic engagement is associated with a greater willingness to defend democratic values in times of crisis. However, in the case of Lithuania, there is only a weak and context-dependent link with institutional trust.

The results presented suggest at least a correlation – not causality – between civic engagement and support for democracy. Civic engagement is an important factor in social participation and can thus strengthen (individual and collective) resilience. Since civic engagement is not ‘automatically’ democratic engagement – and given that far-right groups are heavily involved in associations and often present themselves as carers offering opportunities for civic engagement – it is essential, when promoting civic engagement, to examine very carefully what and who is being supported.

6. Key Policy Trends and Reviews (2025–2026)

Recent research suggests that broad democracy-building efforts are often less effective than targeted, context-specific interventions, particularly in countries experiencing rapid democratic backsliding, where support tailored to the specific mechanisms of authoritarian encroachment appears more promising (Carothers, Harnett 2024; Bianchi, Cheeseman, Cyr 2025).

But what political measures can be identified in Europe and Germany in response to the growing need to defend European democracy? Policy approaches are increasingly linking national security to democratic stability and view the integrity of elections and media freedom as essential components of the security infrastructure. The core areas are combating disinformation by increasing the focus on identifying and curbing disinformation campaigns, supporting independent media, and introducing media literacy programs to strengthen digital literacy in society. Policy approaches are emerging to address AI-related threats to public opinion formation, promote “data governance that safeguards rights,” and regulate online platforms to reduce polarization.

Another approach is to support civil society with new strategies, such as the EU Civil Society Platform planned for 2026. The goal is to strengthen civil society engagement and create safe spaces for civil society action. In addition, civic engagement and participation should be promoted: Increased use of citizens’ assemblies, participatory budgeting, and deliberative processes to strengthen trust in government action.

The following chapters present the various programs aimed at safeguarding democracy in Europe and Germany.

6.1 The European Democracy Shield (EDS)

By decision of the President of the European Commission on January 7, 2025, a project group composed of members of the Commission was established to address the issue of democracy. The project group is chaired by the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law, and Consumer Protection Michael McGrath. The project group’s objective is to coordinate and steer relevant policy initiatives in the area of democracy (Benzen 2025).

In the European Commission’s Work Program of February 11, 2025, the development of a *European Democracy Shield* is announced as a non-legislative initiative under Policy Objective 3.5, “Protecting

Our Democracy and Upholding Our Values.” The Democracy Shield is intended to address the evolving threats to democratic processes and electoral procedures in the European Union and to strengthen the protection of democratic institutions as well as the resilience of the democratic order against hybrid and other threats (ibid.).

On November 12, 2025, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published a joint communication titled *“European Democratic Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies.”* The measures outlined in the communication, which are to be implemented gradually by 2027, focus on four key areas of action (ibid.):

- the establishment of a new European Center for Democratic Resilience;
- the protection of the integrity of the information space;
- the strengthening of democratic institutions, ensuring free and fair elections, and promoting free and independent media;
- the strengthening of societal resilience and the promotion of civic engagement.

The European Democracy Shield (EDS) was launched with the aim of protecting democratic norms and fundamental values. The center’s goal is to bring together expertise, resources, and capabilities from the member states of the European Union as well as from neighboring countries and to improve the collective capacity to respond to threats to democracy. A key component of the initiative is the establishment of the *European Center for Democratic Resilience* in February 2026. In particular, this center is intended to help combat foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and strengthen the resilience of democratic societies against such threats.

Digital regulation is a key component of the Democracy Shield. This includes, in particular, the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Regulation). Other important legal instruments include the Democracy Defense Package presented in 2023, the Regulation on Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA), the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), and the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), which is currently being revised (ibid.).

At the General Affairs Council meeting on February 24, 2026, the European Commission and the Council Presidency invited the EU member states to support the launch of the European Center for Democratic Resilience. The European Parliament is designated as a member organization of the Center, alongside the European Commission and the European External Action Service. In addition, all 27 member states of the European Union are participating in the initiative (ibid.).

The European Democracy Shield Committee (EDS) has extended its mandate through February 2027, thereby underscoring the political priority of this issue. In its report adopted in June 2026, the committee recommends, among other things, the establishment of a European Center for Democratic Resilience with its own mandate and budget. Other key priorities include strengthening the EU’s ability to address foreign influence, hybrid threats, and disinformation, as well as protecting free and independent media and democratic electoral processes. The final vote in the European Parliament’s plenary session is expected in September 2026 (ibid.).

6.1.1. European Center for Democratic Resilience (ECDR)

The European Center for Democratic Resilience is a key component of the European Shield for Democracy. As a platform for cooperation and knowledge-sharing, it brings together EU institutions, member states, candidate countries, and civil society actors to strengthen democratic resilience in Europe in a sustainable manner. The Center pools expertise, promotes structured exchange, and supports the coordinated development of measures to prevent, detect, and counter hybrid threats, particularly information manipulation, foreign influence, and disinformation. By involving independent

research institutions and civil society organizations, it enhances knowledge transfer and supports evidence-based policymaking (European Commission).

The Center's objectives are (ibid.):

- Strengthen situational awareness and the capacity for early detection and anticipation of threats to democracy;
- develop coordinated early-warning mechanisms and improve crisis preparedness and response;
- promote the resilience of citizens, institutions, and civil society against information manipulation, foreign influence, and disinformation, and
- expand cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange to strengthen democratic resilience across society in Europe.

6.1.2. European Commission's Strategic Foresight Report "Resilience 2.0"

The European Commission's Strategic Foresight Report 2025 introduces "Resilience 2.0," a forward-looking concept designed to strengthen Europe's capacity for adaptation, innovation, and action. Resilience is understood here as a proactive, transformative, and forward-looking approach designed to enable Europe to be prepared for profound geopolitical, technological, environmental, and societal changes and to safeguard democracy, competitiveness, and strategic autonomy in the long term (Europäische Kommission 2025).

The report identifies key megatrends—including climate and environmental change, increasing security risks, technological change, global competitive pressures, and demographic trends—and establishes strategic foresight as an integral part of European policymaking. Starting in 2026, regular scenario analyses are intended to support the development of robust, evidence-based, and forward-looking policies (ibid.).

The focus is on eight strategic areas of action: strengthening Europe's global role; internal and external security; technological and scientific excellence; economic resilience; sustainable and inclusive well-being; future-oriented education and skills; democratic resilience, including the fight against disinformation; and managing demographic change in a way that is fair to all generations (ibid.).

6.1.3. Civil Society Platform

The EU Strategy for Civil Society is establishing a Civil Society Platform as a structured dialogue mechanism to promote the EU's fundamental values and provides for a significant expansion of funding for civil society organizations under the future Multiannual Financial Framework, including up to €9 billion for the AgoraEU program (Kotanidis 2026; European Commission 2025)

With the EU Strategy for Civil Society, the European Commission is establishing a strategic framework to strengthen, protect, and provide sustainable support to civil society organizations (CSOs) both within and outside the European Union. The strategy recognizes the central role of civil society in democratic participation, evidence-based policymaking, the protection of fundamental rights, and the promotion of shared European values (Kotanidis 2026).

The strategy is based on three areas of action. First, the systematic involvement of civil society in political decision-making processes is to be strengthened through structured dialogue formats, the establishment of a Civil Society Platform, an annual civil society summit, and shared guiding principles for transparent, inclusive, and participatory cooperation. Second, measures are planned to protect civic space, including combating disinformation and intimidation, protecting human rights defenders, expanding monitoring and early-warning mechanisms, and implementing the recommendation on the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in political decision-making processes. Third, the

strategy aims to ensure long-term, predictable, and adequate funding for civil society organizations, including through existing and future EU funding programs as well as the mobilization of private and philanthropic funding sources (ibid.).

Furthermore, the strategy strengthens the role of civil society in the European Union's external relations by systematically expanding its participation in human rights, democracy, and multilateral policy processes, as well as in political dialogue through EU delegations (ibid.).

6.2 OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative

Through the OECD's "Reinforcing Democracy" initiative, launched in 2022, the OECD supports its member states in strengthening democratic values and institutions based on evidence-based recommendations and international best practices. The initiative addresses growing challenges such as social polarization, geopolitical tensions, crises, foreign influence, and disinformation, which undermine trust in democratic institutions. In doing so, it provides important impetus for building democratic resilience and strengthening democratic processes (OECD 2022).

The OECD's "Reinforcing Democracy" initiative takes a holistic approach to strengthening trust in public institutions. It focuses on five pillars of action (ibid.):

- Combating disinformation;
- promoting participation and transparency;
- strengthening resilience against foreign influence;
- adapting government action to climate and environmental challenges
- and advancing digital governance for a sustainable democracy.

In its *Action Plan on Public Governance for Combating Mis- and Disinformation*, adopted in 2022, the OECD recommends a comprehensive governance approach to strengthen societal resilience against disinformation. Key measures include expanding multi-stakeholder cooperation among governments, civil society, academia, and international organizations; developing innovative approaches to detect and curb disinformation; strengthening strategic public communication; and promoting media and information literacy. Furthermore, the Action Plan emphasizes the importance of evidence-based research, the exchange of best practices, and a society-wide approach to ensuring resilient information ecosystems (ibid.).

Another key focus of the OECD Action Plan is the *development of policy and regulatory measures to increase transparency and data sharing* in the digital information space. In particular, the plan recommends improved access to platform data while safeguarding data privacy, greater transparency regarding ownership structures and online political advertising, and greater traceability of algorithmic systems and AI-powered content moderation. In addition, closer cooperation between public institutions and online platforms is recommended to more effectively detect and curb coordinated disinformation campaigns, bots, and other forms of manipulative behavior (ibid.).

The OECD Action Plan also recommends regulatory and institutional measures to address the structural causes of disinformation. The exchange of best practices among regulatory authorities and the development of flexible regulatory instruments are of particular importance. With the OECD DIS/MIS Resource Hub, the OECD is also creating an international platform for knowledge transfer, dialogue among policymakers, academia, civil society, and the private sector, as well as the development of evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen democratic resilience against disinformation in the long term (ibid.).

The OECD *Action Plan to Strengthen Representation, Participation, and Openness in Public Life* identifies key areas of action to promote inclusive, transparent, and democratic public governance.

The goal is to strengthen public participation, increase the representativeness of public institutions, and build lasting trust in democratic processes.

1. Promoting *Inclusive Citizen Participation*

The Action Plan recommends systematically embedding participatory and deliberative processes in policymaking, decision-making, and the development of public services. This includes:

- Institutionalized participation formats at all levels of government,
- transparent consideration of citizen input,
- removing barriers to access for different population groups,
- strengthening the capacity of public administrations in the area of participation,
- improving access to information, and
- promoting an ongoing dialogue between the administration and society through digital and analog channels.

2. Protection of *Civil Society Space*

A functioning democracy requires an open and protected civil society space. The Action Plan therefore calls for:

- The protection of fundamental rights to freedom and participation,
- effective complaint and legal remedy mechanisms,
- measures against discrimination and social exclusion, and
- the promotion of a diverse and trustworthy information ecosystem, including independent media.

3. Strengthening *Democratic Representation*

To enhance democratic legitimacy, public institutions should better reflect societal diversity. Key priorities are:

- Increasing the representation of women, young people, and other underrepresented groups,
- analyzing and removing structural barriers to access,
- promoting ethical and transparent electoral and governance processes, and
- limiting undue influence through transparent lobbying regulations and high standards of integrity.

4. Developing a *Diverse and Effective Public Administration*

The action plan supports the establishment of a modern, open, and representative administration through:

- Promoting diversity at all hierarchical levels,
- training employees in participatory governance,
- promoting intergenerational learning,
- improving access to leadership positions for diverse population groups, and
- continuous monitoring using appropriate indicators and data.

5. Development of *Inclusive Policies*

Policy-making should systematically take into account the needs of previously underrepresented population groups. This includes:

- Integrating diversity and equity into policy-making processes,
- improving the data foundation for evaluating policy measures, and
- evidence-based refinement of public strategies.

6. *Joint Implementation* within the OECD Framework

The OECD supports member states through:

- Comparative analyses and the exchange of best practices,
- the development of common indicators to measure openness, participation, and representation,
- the collection of data on public trust in public institutions, and
- the professionalization of public communication as the foundation of a citizen-centered administration.

A complementary action plan focuses on the equal participation of gender equality. Key measures include:

- Improving gender-disaggregated data collection and evidence-based policymaking,
- reducing structural disadvantages and discrimination,
- promoting transparency, accountability, and effective gender equality measures,
- combating violence and harassment in both digital and physical spaces,
- ensuring equal pay, and
- promoting equal representation and leadership of women in public institutions and political decision-making processes.

Overall, the OECD Action *Plan to Strengthen Representation, Participation, and Openness in Public Life* aims to make democratic systems more resilient, inclusive, and transparent, and to sustainably strengthen the active participation of all social groups in political decision-making processes (ibid.).

The OECD Action Plan *Stronger Open Democracies in a Globalized World* has the goal to improve the capacity of public institutions to respond to cross-border challenges, promote international cooperation, and make democratic systems more resilient to undue foreign influence (ibid.).

1. *Strengthening Governmental Governance Capacities* to Address Global Challenges

The Action Plan recommends the strategic development of public institutions to effectively address complex global challenges. Key priorities include:

- Adapting government administrative and coordination structures to transnational challenges,
- improving interagency and international policy coordination,
- promoting coherent policy decisions across administrative and governmental levels,
- greater involvement of citizens and relevant stakeholders to enhance the democratic legitimacy of global action, and
- utilizing judicial and accountability mechanisms to implement international obligations, particularly in the areas of climate and sustainability policy.

2. Use of *Innovative Governance Tools* for Global Action

To increase the effectiveness of government measures, the Action Plan recommends the systematic use of evidence-based and innovative governance approaches. These include:

- Promoting science- and data-based policymaking,
- strategically aligning public budgets with future global challenges such as climate protection, digitalization, gender equality, health, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
- sustainable and socially responsible public procurement as a tool for shaping markets and promoting investment,

- improving the interoperability of data and digital administrative systems across departmental and state boundaries,
- systematically taking into account the cross-border impacts of national policies,
- expanding international regulatory cooperation to promote common standards,
- promoting mission-oriented innovation in the public sector through international cooperation, and
- Expanding monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure transparent reporting on progress to the public.

3. Building *Future-Ready Skills* in the Public Sector

The action plan emphasizes the critical importance of qualified professionals in addressing global challenges. The following recommendations are made:

- Developing new competency profiles for addressing complex, interconnected, and international challenges,
- integrating these competencies into recruitment, training, continuing education, and leadership development,
- strengthening government schools and comparable training institutions,
- introducing strategic talent and performance management systems that take future competency needs into account,
- promoting cross-ministerial and international mobility as well as knowledge exchange between administrations, and
- recruiting and retaining a diverse, interdisciplinary, and internationally experienced public workforce.

The OECD Action Plan overall aims to make public administrations more resilient, more innovative, and better connected internationally. Through evidence-based policymaking, stronger international cooperation, modern governance tools, and the development of relevant competencies, countries are to effectively address global challenges while sustainably strengthening democratic legitimacy, transparency, and societal resilience (ibid.).

The OECD Action Plan *Building Resilience Against Undue Foreign Influence* has to enhance transparency, integrity, and democratic resilience, and to ensure long-term trust in public institutions:

1. Strengthening *Transparency and Integrity in Political Decision-Making Processes*

The Action Plan recommends expanding legal and institutional frameworks to effectively identify and limit foreign influence. Key measures include (ibid.):

- Increasing transparency in lobbying, political advocacy, and party financing involving foreign actors,
- further developing integrity standards for political decision-makers, and
- regulating the transition of high-ranking public officials to positions in foreign governments, state-affiliated organizations, or companies to prevent conflicts of interest.

2. Promoting *Transparency and Integrity in Civil Society and the Academic Sector*

To safeguard the independence of societal institutions, the Action Plan recommends:

- Introducing transparent regulations governing foreign funding and cooperation involving nongovernmental organizations, as well as universities and research institutions,
- strengthening governance and compliance structures to ensure integrity and accountability.

3. *Protecting democratic information spaces*

Another priority is strengthening resilience against disinformation and targeted manipulation of information. This includes:

- Developing effective strategies against foreign disinformation and influence campaigns,
- protecting democratic opinion-forming and decision-making processes,
- promoting independent and trustworthy information ecosystems, and
- ensuring a safe working environment for journalists, media outlets, and civil society organizations, including protection against intimidation and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP).

4. Preventing the Abuse of Investment-Based Residency and Citizenship Programs

The Action Plan recommends reviewing and refining Residence-by-Investment (RBI) and Citizenship-by-Investment (CBI) programs to effectively prevent their abuse for corruption, money laundering, tax evasion, and other forms of financial crime.

The OECD Action Plan overall aims to make democratic institutions and political decision-making processes more resilient to undue foreign influence. By increasing transparency, strengthening integrity mechanisms, protecting independent media and civil society, and combating disinformation and financial crime, the plan seeks to sustainably strengthen open, trustworthy, and resilient democracies (ibid.).

The OECD Action Plan for *Joint Implementation in the Area of Global Governance and Democratic Resilience* emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in strengthening governments' capacity to act in the face of global challenges and in enhancing the resilience of democratic systems against undue influence. The OECD plays a coordinating role in knowledge sharing, capacity building, and the promotion of common governance standards (ibid.).

1. Building Joint Governance Capacities to Address Global Challenges

To support member countries, the OECD recommends:

- Conducting comparative analyses and public governance reviews to assess institutional capacities for addressing global challenges,
- further developing competency profiles for public service leaders in collaboration with government schools and international networks,
- promoting cross-border mobility, peer learning, and the exchange of experiences among public administrations,
- strengthening international regulatory cooperation (IRC) through common standards and coordinated policy approaches, and
- promoting the participation of young people in the development of policy solutions for global and intergenerational challenges.

2. International Cooperation to Strengthen Democratic Integrity

In the area of democratic resilience, the Action Plan emphasizes close cooperation between OECD member countries and international partners. Key measures include:

- Developing joint approaches to increase transparency regarding political influence and to limit improper influence-seeking activities,
- cooperating with international organizations, in particular the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), to combat money laundering, corruption, tax evasion, and foreign bribery,

- developing comprehensive governance and accountability mechanisms to mitigate the risks associated with investment-based residence and citizenship programs (Residence-by-Investment and Citizenship-by-Investment), as well as
- promoting internationally coordinated integrity and compliance standards.

3. Contributing to Resilient and Cooperative Governance

Through the systematic exchange of best practices, joint analyses, and coordinated policy measures, the OECD supports its member countries in building effective, transparent, and internationally connected public administrations. At the same time, common standards for safeguarding democratic integrity, regulatory coherence, and good governance are strengthened (ibid.).

This OECD Action Plan aims to strengthen international cooperation in the area of public governance and to develop joint solutions to global challenges. By enhancing institutional capacity, regulatory cooperation, and international integrity standards, the plan seeks to make democratic systems more resilient, more transparent, and better prepared for global transformation processes.

6.3 Fundamental Rights Platform

The Fundamental Rights Platform of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) serves as the central framework for cooperation between the FRA and civil society actors in the field of fundamental rights. It connects organizations from EU member states and FRA observer states and promotes structured dialogue among civil society, academia, social partners, religious communities, and international organizations (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights).

The platform supports the mutual exchange of information and knowledge, provides the FRA with thematic expertise and strategic advice, and strengthens cooperation among the participating organizations. In addition, it facilitates access to the FRA's tools, resources, and expertise, thereby contributing to the evidence-based promotion and protection of fundamental rights, as well as to the strengthening of civil society participation at the European level (ibid.)

6.4 Strategies in Germany

Germany's strategy focuses on a robust democracy and cross-agency resilience planning, with key areas of common ground with the EU including the fight against disinformation and promoting civic participation—with the strengthening of NGOs, associations, and civic engagement serving as pillars of resilience.

6.4.1 Strategy “Together for Democracy and Against Extremism”

With its strategy “Together for Democracy and Against Extremism” (2024), the Federal Government is pursuing a cross-ministerial and society-wide approach to strengthening democratic resilience and protecting the free democratic basic order. The goal is to strengthen democracy in the long term through both preventive measures and the effective countering of developments that threaten Democracy (Bundesministerium des Inneren).

The strategy focuses on two key areas of action. First, it aims to strengthen democratic participation through civic education, civic engagement, social cohesion, and the promotion of diversity and equal opportunity. Central to this are protection against racism, antisemitism, and other forms of group-based hostility, as well as the promotion of an inclusive democratic culture. Second, the strategy aims to prevent and combat extremism, online hate, and disinformation. To this end, measures for the early

detection, monitoring, and countering of extremist activities, as well as for strengthening resilience against influences that threaten democracy, will be further developed (ibid.).

6.4.2 Federal Program “Living Democracy!”

Through the federal program “Living Democracy!” (“Demokratie leben!”, funding period 2025–2032), the federal government is strengthening civil society’s commitment to democracy, diversity, and social cohesion, as well as measures to prevent extremism, radicalization, and polarization. The program takes a long-term, evidence-based approach and promotes the development of sustainable structures at the local, state, and federal levels (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend).

The focus is on expanding nationwide networking and knowledge-sharing structures, improving the quality of democracy-related prevention work, and supporting local and regional actors through state democracy centers and partnerships for democracy. In addition, innovative approaches to promoting democracy and engaging target groups are being developed and tested, and measures to prevent extremism within the correctional system and probation services are being further refined.

Complementing these efforts, special projects support research, the protection and participation of vulnerable groups, and specialized expert and advisory structures aimed at strengthening a resilient and inclusive democratic society (ibid.)

6.4.3 Democracy Promotion Act

With the Democracy Promotion Act, the federal government is establishing, for the first time, a legal framework for the long-term promotion of democracy, political education, and social diversity, as well as for the prevention of extremism and group-focused hostility. The goal is to sustainably strengthen civic engagement as a cornerstone of democratic resilience and to create the legal foundation for the ongoing promotion of measures of national significance (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2023).

The law improves planning and funding certainty for civil society actors by providing the possibility of long-term, age-neutral, and needs-based funding. At the same time, it allows funding measures to be flexibly tailored to new and evolving challenges in the area of anti-democratic and anti-human activities. The law was developed through a broad participatory process involving civil society, academia, and specialized organizations, underscoring the commitment to evidence-based and cooperative democracy promotion (ibid.)

6.5 Challenges and Emerging Priorities

Despite these efforts to strengthen the resilience of our democracies, policymakers face challenges such as rising polarization, the rapid erosion of democratic standards, and the need to make democracy “closer to the citizen” to be effective. Future policy efforts are expected to place greater emphasis on:

- Fostering democratic resilience at the local level,
- strengthening civil society, encouraging youth engagement,
- integrating evidence-based analysis into democracy-support strategies.
- Addressing the “twin transitions” (digital and green transformation) while ensuring compatibility with democratic values.
- Revisiting the role of private platforms in shaping political discourse.
- Strengthening the free press, media literacy and
- preserving, better expanding civic education

7. Conclusion

“It depends on the strength of civil society and the political movements in individual countries as to how far authoritarian rulers can get away with it [...].”

Anne Applebaum in Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 2026 (Mayer 2026)

At both EU and national levels, measures are certainly being taken to counter the growing threat from the far right and to strengthen democracy; at the same time, however, support for civil society – a key pillar of a resilient democracy – is being disparaged or scaled back. In Germany, for example, funding is being cut for programmes such as “Demokratie leben!” (<https://www.demokratie-leben.de/>), diversity is scarcely mentioned as a funding objective, and the bureaucratic hurdles for small initiatives and associations are being raised to such an extent that it is no longer worth applying for grants (Höhne 2026). Following the 2024 European elections, a number of MEPs from right-wing political groups launched a smear campaign against non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which was initially directed, as reported by, primarily against environmental NGOs receiving funding from the LIFE programme, as Civil Society Europe (2025, 22) reported. It was claimed that these organisations were being paid by the European Commission to lobby MEPs.

Yet it is precisely in the field of integration that local citizens’ initiatives do the bulk of the work, supporting new arrivals with administrative procedures and in finding accommodation and employment. Often on their own initiative and without much financial backing. Consequently, those active in refugee aid not only receive no recognition or financial support, but their offers of assistance are systematically cut off.

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