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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Council conclusions on inclusive democratic participation, and societal and community resilience

Delegations will find in the annex Council conclusions on inclusive democratic participation, and societal and community resilience approved by the Council (General Affairs) on 13 October 2026.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION,
AND SOCIETAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING that, as laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities; and that these values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail;

HAVING REGARD to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular Articles 1, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 39, 40 and 44 thereof.

EMPHASISING that democratic societies are sustained through active civic participation and citizens' engagement, and where fundamental rights are respected and protected.

UNDERLINING that democracy can only thrive with freedom of expression and information.

EMPHASISING the critical role of media freedom and pluralism in contributing to well-functioning democracies and EMPHASISING that since the rule of law and democracy are mutually reinforcing values, it is essential that Member States adhere strictly to robust rule of law standards.

RECALLING the European Council conclusions of 18 December 2025¹ and 19 March 2026² which highlighted the importance of strengthening Europe's democratic resilience and stressed the need to deepen citizens engagement.

¹ EUCO 24/25, 18 December 2025, cf. p. 8 *Fight against disinformation and against foreign information manipulation and interference*.

² EUCO 1/26, 19 March 2026, cf. p.58 *Strengthening Europe's democratic resilience*.

RECALLING its conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship³; democratic resilience: safeguarding electoral processes from foreign interference⁴; the role of the civic space in protecting and promoting fundamental rights in the EU⁵; the strategic role of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in upholding European values and democratic resilience⁶; and enhancing and protecting free, open and informed democratic debate⁷.

RECALLING the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2023/2836 of 12 December 2023 on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking processes.

WELCOMING the Joint Communication from the Commission and the High Representative on the European Democracy Shield⁸ and the Commission Communication on the EU Civil Society Strategy⁹.

WELCOMING the establishment of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience (ECDR) in February 2026.

NOTING that these conclusions build on the work of the Polish Presidency on strengthening EU democratic resilience, the Danish Presidency on access to reliable news as part of the European Democracy Shield, and the structured discussion following up to the European Democracy Shield conducted during the Cyprus Presidency¹⁰.

NOTING also the Report on the findings and recommendations of the Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield of the European Parliament P10_TA (2026)0286.

³ 15738/23.

⁴ 10119/24.

⁵ 7388/23.

⁶ 15814/25.

⁷ 10533/24.

⁸ JOIN(2025) 791 final

⁹ COM(2025) 790 final

¹⁰ 9605/26 (Presidency report).

RECALLING that these conclusions are without prejudice to the ongoing negotiations on the next multiannual financial framework.

1. STRESSES that democracy, freedom and equality, and the rule of law, are mutually reinforcing and that respect for these values is a shared responsibility of Union institutions and Member States.
2. ACKNOWLEDGES the contribution of broad civic engagement to democratic life and social cohesion; UNDERLINES that democracy requires the active and inclusive participation of citizens and respect for common values. RECALLS the important role played by an effective right to petition in strengthening citizens' political participation.
3. RECOGNISES that trust in public institutions, in the integrity of democratic processes and of the information space are mutually reinforcing and are foundations of democratic and societal resilience; and ACKNOWLEDGES that the current changing geopolitical context poses challenges to our democracies, which can aggravate radicalisation and diminish trust in institutions and elections.
4. UNDERLINES in this regard that digital exclusion alongside the challenges posed by news deserts, can create barriers to active and inclusive participation in democratic life.
5. EMPHASISES that foreign information manipulation and interference seek to divide society, weaken trust in democratic institutions, impede informed democratic debate and discourage citizens' participation in democratic life by distorting the information environment, manipulating content, amplifying division and undermining the reach and discoverability of reliable information and independent media. UNDERLINES that measures addressing foreign information manipulation and interference should be proportionate, while safeguarding freedom of expression, media freedom, and democratic debate.

6. NOTES that the malicious use of artificial intelligence, including generative AI and deepfakes, is being used to spread disinformation, in attempts to target persons in vulnerable situations, and facilitates the creation, targeting and amplification of deceptive content, further undermining trust in democratic processes. RECALLS the particular need to ensure the transparency and accountability of digital platforms, including Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs), the transparency of political advertising and addressing AI-generated or manipulated content while safeguarding fundamental rights.
7. RECOGNISES that along with broader efforts to support civic participation, there is also a need for a preventive approach to counter foreign information manipulation and interference through awareness, preparedness, early detection, support for independent research and fact-checking and the promotion of common methodologies and best practices, to ensure that these civic participation efforts are more visible and effective.
8. RECOGNISES the paramount importance for our democracies of ensuring that the Charter of Fundamental Rights is fully applied and that fundamental rights are fully respected; RECALLS that the freedom of expression and information and the freedom of assembly and association are vital prerequisites for citizens' participation in democratic processes; and REAFFIRMS that the rule of law is instrumental to protecting these fundamental rights and freedoms.
9. STRESSES the importance of free, diverse and independent media as fundamental pillars of democratic resilience, enabling citizens to access reliable information, hold institutions accountable and make informed choices. UNDERLINES in that context the importance of media, digital and information literacy to critically assess information, identify manipulative techniques and make informed judgements regarding the reliability of sources.

The challenge of democratic disengagement

10. RECALLS that the organisation of elections and electoral systems is the competence of the Member States; NOTES that turnout in European Parliament Elections at approximately fifty percent can be improved for all citizens.
11. EMPHASISES that voting in elections and referendums is a fundamental avenue through which citizens exercise their democratic voice, complemented by meaningful opportunities to participate in and influence democratic decision-making between elections.
12. UNDERLINES that citizens' trust in public institutions is essential for building resilient democracies; STRESSES that such trust is enhanced when authorities act transparently and accountably and evidence-based, and when citizens are provided with clear feedback on how their participation has been taken into account in decision making.
13. EXPRESSES CONCERN that persons in vulnerable and marginalised situations can experience disproportionate risks of political disengagement and a lack of trust in public decision-making; and RECOGNISES that a sense of reduced political representation is a broad societal challenge.
14. STRESSES the need for initiatives to strengthen democratic resilience and break down structural barriers to democratic participation and civic engagement, which may particularly affect certain groups. RECOGNISES that inclusive, diverse, and meaningful participation in cultural and community life can contribute to social cohesion and democratic resilience.
15. UNDERLINES the necessity of addressing the specific barriers to civic engagement including as encountered by early leavers from education and training, those not in employment, education or training (NEETs); and persons with disabilities; UNDERLINES the importance of countering abuse, harassment and threats directed at those active in public life. REITERATES that these efforts have to fully respect fundamental rights and must not inhibit legitimate criticism, political debate or democratic oversight. WELCOMES the announcement by the Commission of a Recommendation and a Guide of best practices to support Member States to better ensure the safety of political candidates and elected representatives.

16. ACKNOWLEDGES that the participation of women and men is indispensable to inclusive democratic participation and that women remain underrepresented in political leadership positions and continue to face barriers to their full, equal and effective participation in political and public life; RECOGNISES that promoting gender equality is essential to ensuring fair, effective and democratic decision-making processes; and strengthening societal and community resilience.

The European dimension of inclusive participation

17. RECOGNISES that Member States have the potential to benefit from more coordinated action at EU level to encourage political re-engagement while fully respecting the competences, responsibilities and prerogatives of the Member States. WELCOMES cooperative initiatives, such as the Vienna Forum for Fundamental Rights and Democracy.
18. NOTES that in addition to enriching public decision-making, deliberative democracy processes can re-engage citizens when they are complementary to elections, properly designed and implemented, and based on a transparent methodology and a genuinely representative sample of citizens. ACKNOWLEDGES that participants in citizens' assemblies, participatory panels, participatory budgeting and cultural and community dialogues consistently report increased political knowledge, enhanced perceived empowerment and greater inclination to engage in democratic processes. NOTES FURTHER that experience in several Member States shows the value of conducting such exercises regularly and at national, regional and local levels, and the potential of e-democracy services to support these tools¹¹. ENCOURAGES Member States to consider similar initiatives.
19. WELCOMES efforts to support the participation of candidate countries and potential candidates in European initiatives promoting inclusive democratic participation and societal and community resilience, including association to the European Centre for Democratic Resilience.

¹¹ Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe Engaging with citizens for democracy – Building a more resilient Europe 2021/C 91 I/01

A framework for inclusive democratic participation

20. REITERATES that education for democratic citizenship contributes to Europe's long-term resilience, especially in times of crises; STRESSES its importance in actively enhancing critical thinking, and fostering democratic values and human rights across all levels of education and types of learning. EMPHASISES also the importance of image, digital and media literacy and empowering citizens of all ages especially youth to understand the functioning and impact of digital technologies, including algorithms and AI.
21. UNDERLINES the importance of promoting an enabling environment for civil society and a transparent civic space and encouraging open, regular and transparent dialogue with citizens and civil society organisations; STRESSES that civil society actors must be able to operate freely, safely and independently, free from undue interference.
22. HIGHLIGHTS that meaningful, inclusive and transparent public consultations and citizen participation in public policy-making can enrich decision-making.
23. RECALLS that strengthening inclusive democratic participation requires a whole-of-government approach, involving authorities at all levels, as well as an inclusive whole-of-society engagement with all relevant civil society stakeholders.
24. RECOGNISES the important role of local and regional authorities in bringing democratic processes closer to citizens; and WELCOMES their contribution at the European institutional level, in particular through the Committee of the Regions, in accordance with the Treaties and the principle of subsidiarity; ACKNOWLEDGES that growth and prosperity of the European Union as a whole can contribute to European citizens' participation to democratic processes and thus to democratic resilience. EMPHASISES, in this context, the fundamental role of cohesion and common policies at the Union level seeking to strengthen the bond between communities and society.

25. UNDERLINES the importance of access to independent and pluralistic news media, including regional and local media; RECALLS the value of transparent and publicly accountable financial support at all levels for news reporting to under-served audiences and public interest reporting, including on local issues, in full respect of editorial independence; RECALLS the need to ensure transparency of media ownership and protect public interest journalism in line with the European Media Freedom Act; and STRESSES the importance of fostering access to reliable information, particularly in the digital environment, for all across the Union, such as through any upcoming revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and sustainable sources of financing.
26. ENCOURAGES the Commission and Member States to foster a free and pluralistic media environment, thereby safeguarding access to reliable information and democratic dialogue, and to secure EU funding to support relevant media initiatives, without prejudice to the ongoing MFF negotiations.
27. ENCOURAGES Member States to strengthen efforts to foster safe, inclusive and enabling conditions for democratic engagement for all, to address barriers and to promote gender equality and the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in political and public life.
28. ENCOURAGES the exchange of information and best practices among Member States through the network of national authorities on citizens' participation reinforced by the Commission in 2026, which could assist the Member States on a voluntary basis to exchange and develop common tools, methodologies and capacity-building frameworks to enhance societal and community resilience. ENCOURAGES Member States to foster active citizenship and social cohesion by supporting voluntary community initiatives, civic education, and media literacy programmes, and by promoting cooperation with relevant local stakeholders, educational, cultural and heritage institutions, and civil society organisations.

29. INVITES the Commission to assist the Member States to take additional voluntary actions to engage young people, particularly those not in employment, education or training (NEETs), harnessing best practices from across the Member States.
30. CALLS UPON the Commission to promote the full use of existing EU funding instruments to support, including through technical support, initiatives for participatory democracy designed to facilitate the inclusion of all citizens, including for those facing socio-economic barriers, in accordance with their respective rules and within available financial resources.
31. INVITES the Commission, without prejudice to the ongoing negotiations on the future financial frameworks and their outcome, to integrate participatory democracy mechanisms with digital, media and AI literacy programmes, focusing, among others, on the use and misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and to promote education for democratic citizenship, highlighting best practices in public awareness campaigns and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Strengthen support for civil society engagement

32. RECOGNISES that an independent, diverse and resilient civil society, alongside citizen-led initiatives, contributes to democratic checks and balances and democratic resilience, such as by contributing to accountability efforts. STRESSES the benefit of strengthening the genuine participation of civil society in policymaking.
33. NOTES the need for adequate and sustainable funding for civil society; and URGES continued efforts to streamline and simplify administrative procedures to improve the accessibility of relevant EU funding streams for eligible organisations. CONSIDERS it important to ensure that information on funding opportunities and consultative initiatives reaches organisations operating at local and regional level, with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity.

34. INVITES the Commission, in close cooperation with Member States, to develop funding mechanisms that promote sustained engagement and advocacy, within existing relevant programmes and without pre-empting the ongoing negotiations on the future Multiannual Financial Framework. HIGHLIGHTS that greater emphasis could be placed on capacity-building measures, including technical assistance, training and advisory support, to strengthen the ability of civil society organisations to access and manage funding opportunities.

Follow-up to the adoption of the European Democracy Shield

35. WELCOMES the Commission's announcement in its Communication on a European Democracy Shield of a reinforced network of national authorities on citizens' participation, a European Citizens' Panel on democratic resilience, a Civic Tech Hub and youth-policy dialogues, such as the EU Youth Dialogue.
36. INVITES the Commission and Member States to take into account that the elements raised in these conclusions are reflected in the work of the ECDR, complementing and not duplicating the work of the Network of national authorities on citizens' participation; In this regard NOTES the value of the voluntary exchange of good practices and expertise with all relevant stakeholders, in full respect of the competences of Member States and the principle of subsidiarity.
37. ENCOURAGES Member States to submit project proposals to the ECDR on inclusive democratic participation and the engagement of all citizens, drawing on national experience with structured participatory processes, in full respect of national competences and institutional setups.
38. WELCOMES the establishment of the annual high-level Ministerial Forum on the European Democracy Shield as a valuable platform to take stock of relevant actions and facilitate the sharing of best practices, including on citizens engagement.

39. STRESSES that the European Democracy Shield will succeed only if it protects our common values and vindicates our fundamental rights. EMPHASISES the importance of strengthening democracy beyond those citizens who are already engaged; and UNDERLINES that citizens who see their voices reflected in decision-making are more active participants in defending our shared values and strengthening democracy.
 40. INVITES the Commission to take these conclusions into account in the implementation and further development of the European Democracy Shield.
 41. COMMITS to returning regularly to the matter of inclusive democratic participation and societal and community resilience.
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