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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Strengthening Europe's democratic resilience and implementing a European Democracy Shield (structured discussion) – Presidency report

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 12 November 2025, the Commission adopted the Communication on a European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies, as part of the Democracy Package, which also includes a Communication on the EU Strategy for Civil Society.
2. The Democracy Package builds on other previous initiatives, notably the 2018 Securing Free and Fair Elections package, the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan and the 2023 Defence of Democracy Package.

3. The Presidency conclusions of 27 May 2025 on strengthening EU democratic resilience, which were supported by 25 delegations, underlined that democracy cannot thrive without the freedom of expression and that democratic resilience must be based on the rule of law, fundamental rights and the values upheld by the European Union as enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
4. In line with those conclusions, and with the Cyprus Presidency Programme under the remit of the General Affairs Council to place strong emphasis on promoting the Union's fundamental values, democracy and the rule of law, reinforcing citizens' trust in the European project and strengthening democratic resilience, this matter was discussed regularly between January and May 2026.

II. WORK IN THE COUNCIL

5. The Commission presented the Democracy Package to the General Affairs Council on 12 November 2025, which subsequently exchanged views on the European Democracy Shield in its meeting of 26 January 2026. During the meeting the Presidency announced a structured discussion in the Working Party on General Affairs on topics related to strengthening democratic resilience, which were communicated to delegations on 27 January 2026.¹
6. The exchanges of views in the Working Party on General Affairs were framed by steering notes², written contributions by delegations submitted in advance of the discussions³, as well as by updates from the Commission on relevant actions in the areas under discussion, with a particular focus on the implementation of the European Democracy Shield.

¹ 5502/26

² WK 2541/26, WK 3552/26, WK 5049/26, WK 6208/26

³ WK 3249/26 REV1, WK 4330/26, WK 5675/26, WK7531/26

7. The structured discussion was without prejudice to the examination in other Council filières of specific actions proposed in the European Democracy Shield initiative, in particular by the Audiovisual and Media Working Party (AVMWP) on aspects related to media, by the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats (HWP ERCHT) on aspects related to foreign information manipulations and interference (FIMI), and by the Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP) on the EU Strategy for Civil Society.

III. TOPICS

8. The **first session** focused on “**Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and the contribution to this approach by the new European Centre for Democratic Resilience**” and took place on 26 February 2026.
9. On that occasion, Luxembourg and Poland presented their national efforts to strengthen democratic resilience through a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. In particular, Luxembourg outlined its national resilience strategy built on eight pillars, and Poland shared examples of its national initiatives to raise public awareness, including a Safety Handbook distributed to citizens and the RESIL-POL project with the goal of enhancing societal resilience to threats. The presentations were followed by an exchange where other Member States also briefly informed about their national efforts.
10. Main outcomes:
- Delegations confirmed the need for a holistic approach to strengthening democratic resilience by involving all actors of society and all levels of government.
 - Some delegations already have in place a framework that integrates threats to democracy into national preparedness and crisis prevention. Such holistic approaches aim to address risks in a systematic manner, including linked vulnerabilities, such as the functioning of democratic institutions during national disasters.

- Delegations welcomed the aim of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience in bringing together Member States, candidate and likeminded countries, and stakeholders, but reminded of a holistic approach and the need to avoid duplication of work.
11. The **second session** focused on “**Strengthening the integrity of the digital space and digital and media literacy**” and took place on 24 March 2026.
 12. On that occasion, Estonia presented its six-tier model for countering information influence and its national action plan on media literacy, while the Irish Media Regulator outlined Ireland’s Online Safety Framework, which aims at reducing the risk of people being exposed to illegal or harmful content online. Nearly all delegations shared information on their national efforts in relation to media and digital literacy.
 13. Main outcomes:
 - Delegations highlighted the urgency of enforcing the EU digital rulebook, notably the Digital Services Act, to strengthen the integrity of the digital space. They also underlined the importance of supporting free, pluralistic, and independent media.
 - Delegations noted the importance of strengthening digital and media literacy and presented their national holistic approaches with emphasis on schools but also targeting the entire population.
 - Some delegations expressed the need to counter threats by domestic actors in addition to threats by foreign actors.

14. The **third session** focused on “**Strengthening the fairness and integrity of electoral processes**” and took place on 21 April 2026.
15. On that occasion, the discussion was framed around three main strands, namely (I) enhancing citizens’ resilience in support of free vote, (II) engaging citizens and supporting turnout, and (III) protecting infrastructure. Delegations shared their views on the existing EU-level tools and initiatives in these three key strands, and whether they adequately complement and maximise national efforts to reinforce trust in the integrity of electoral processes.
16. Main outcomes:
- Delegations emphasised robust and reliable electoral systems as the foundation of resilient democracies.
 - Delegations welcomed the European cooperation network on elections (ECNE) as a framework for concrete and practical exchanges among representatives of Member States’ authorities with competence in electoral matters.
 - Delegations expressed appreciation for regulatory tools such as the Regulation on political advertising and the Code of Conduct on disinformation under the DSA, as well as for existing tools, notably the Rapid Alert System, or planned actions, e.g. in relation to the safety of political candidates.
17. The **fourth session** focused on “**Reinforcing citizens’ trust in the European project and increasing citizens’ engagement and participation**” and took place on 28 May 2026.
18. On that occasion, delegations exchanged views on initiatives launched at the EU level to reinforce trust by strengthening transparency, accountability and ways for citizens to participate in public decision making.

19. Main outcomes:

- Delegations recognised the need for meaningful participation and engagement of citizens in democratic processes, in particular of young people and of those least engaged, highlighting the need for effective measures in reaching the target audiences based on objective measurements and further research into trends and challenges to meaningful citizens' engagement.
- Delegations welcomed a greater effort of exchanges on the matter between Member States to inform about best practices but also to streamline actions and communication, with EU level initiatives to complement and not to replace national efforts.
- Some delegations raised the need for adequate funding to support citizens' engagement in public decision-making processes, for the fight against corruption, and for an operational EU Ethics Body.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

20. Strengthening democratic resilience is a key political priority of the Cyprus Presidency. Three Ministerial-level discussions have already been dedicated to this issue, reflecting the Presidency's commitment to addressing it in a coherent, strategic, and institutionally balanced manner.
21. In this context, and in recognition of the importance of closer cooperation on democratic resilience, the Cyprus Presidency is organising a joint ministerial breakfast meeting with candidate countries and potential candidates in the margins of the June General Affairs Council, to further discuss structured cooperation.
22. In its conclusions of 19 March 2026, the European Council recalled the importance of strengthening Europe's democratic resilience and stressed the need to safeguard the integrity and the accountability of the information space.

23. The structured discussion in the Working Party on General Affairs demonstrated that Member States face similar threats and challenges to their democracies. It confirmed the importance of actions at EU level, but also the need for such actions to be coordinated with efforts undertaken by Member States domestically. Such efforts would in turn also benefit from exchanges between Member States sharing experience and best practises.
24. In this regard, the coordinating role of the Working Party on General Affairs proved valuable. In view of the foreseen implementation of the actions under the European Democracy Shield by 2027, this coordinating role constitutes an important contribution to these efforts, alongside expert discussions in various other Working Parties, such as AVMWP, FREMP, and HWP ERCHT.
25. Regarding notable actions under the European Democracy Shield, the Council will pay particular attention to the advancement of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience by bringing together Member States, candidates, potential candidates and like-minded countries, and civil society in the spirit of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
26. Fully in line with the March European Council conclusions, it became clear from the discussions in the Working Party on General Affairs that strengthening democratic resilience requires consistent efforts in a wide range of areas. Apart from countering FIMI and implementing the existing rulebook to safeguard the information space, notably the Digital Services Act, the AI Act and the Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, particular attention should be paid to deepening citizens' engagement and citizens' trust in the institutions, strengthening democratic discourse and protecting free and pluralistic media and civil society.
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