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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

on Defence of Democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are founding values of the European Union¹. They underpin all the EU's achievements in fostering peace, prosperity, economic competitiveness, social cohesion and stability across the continent and around the world². The essence of democracy is that citizens can freely express their views and participate in democratic life, choose their political representatives, and have a say in their future. Citizens should be able to form their own opinions in a public space where different views can be expressed, where they have a right to disagree and to change governments through elections, free from interference, either foreign or domestic. With the wealth of local, regional, national and European elections, the EU and its Member States represent one of the deepest democratic experiences in the world. European democracy and the rights and freedoms associated with it are at the core of our open and transparent societies.

But democracy also has its challenges and its enemies. Authoritarian regimes see it as a threat, whether at home or abroad. This has resulted in some such regimes adopting a conscious policy to undermine the democratic process in the EU. They aim at undermining democratic institutions, put pressure on the media and reduce the space for civil society. This can range from attempts to exploit societal division and stoke mistrust of, and disillusionment with, established institutions, to weakening the democratic voice of citizens and civil society³, engaging in information manipulation and disinformation, and direct distortion of election campaigns⁴. Recent experience shows how quickly those wishing to foment hatred in our society can seize on new opportunities, and the need for the EU to be in the vanguard of countering such destructive forces⁵.

Interference from outside the EU in our democratic process, including by the use of proxies, has received increasing political attention, at both national level and in the EU institutions. The Commission shares many of the concerns expressed by the European Parliament⁶, including on the need for a coordinated EU strategy against foreign interference and information manipulation⁷. Free and fair elections are a cornerstone of democracy, and independent and transparent electoral processes are vital to a competitive electoral environment to ensure citizens' trust in the integrity of elections and their results. There is increasing evidence of cases such as lawmakers hacked ahead of elections, covert lobbying via proxies, fake research issued to whitewash human rights records, and websites purporting to be independent media platforms while covertly facilitating political interference campaigns. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which is also a war on democracy and on all the values for which the EU

¹ Article 2 TEU.

² Article 8 TEU, Article 21 TEU.

³ Civil society organisations are frequently referred to as non-State, not-for-profit, non-partisan and non-violent structure, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they can comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations.

⁴ Key trends identified are attempts to undermine trust in or attachment to democratic institutions and representative democracy, attempts to remove democratic checks and balances, destabilisation of electoral campaigns, pressure on free media and the civic space, and the illegal use of spyware against democratic actors.

⁵ COM(2023) 772 final.

⁶ On 1 June 2023 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation ([2022/2075\(INI\)](#)).

⁷ See: [Commission response to European Parliament resolution on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the EU, including disinformation](#).

stands, has further intensified the risk of outside interference. A recent Eurobarometer survey shows that 81% of people surveyed in the EU believe that foreign interference in our democratic systems is a serious problem that needs to be addressed⁸.

The EU has increasingly acknowledged the need to be proactive in safeguarding democracy, and in strengthening the rule of law and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. **Work on the measures put forward by the Commission in 2020 in the European Democracy Action Plan⁹ is well under way**, helping to strengthen democratic resilience by promoting election integrity, protecting media freedom and pluralism, and strengthening the fight against disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference. This Communication sets out how the Commission, in close cooperation with the High Representative, has worked on all these fronts through key legislation and other political initiatives, bolstering societal resilience from within and the direct engagement of citizens¹⁰.

At the same time, the EU has responded to the different risks of foreign interference in a variety of ways. This includes addressing **risks affecting economic security**, due to the involvement in the internal market of actors associated with third countries not primarily motivated by market rationales. Steps have included a proposal for a new tool to counter the use of economic coercion by third countries¹¹, rules on screening foreign direct investments where security or public order might be at risk¹², as well as measures in the field of cybersecurity¹³, research security¹⁴ and countering hybrid threats¹⁵. In particularly serious circumstances, to respond to threats or risk of threats to the fundamental interests of the Union and the objectives of the common foreign and security policy, the EU has imposed restrictive measures under EU sanctions regimes¹⁶.

This Communication introduces the defence of democracy package announced in the 2022 State of the Union address. The package centres on a legislative proposal aiming to enhance transparency and democratic accountability by shedding light on covert foreign influence, as well as to improve the functioning of the internal market through common standards for interest representation activities carried out on behalf of third countries. The proposal has been developed through an extensive public and stakeholder consultation and a fully-fledged impact assessment.

The upcoming European elections will be a crucial test case for the resilience of our democratic processes. The package includes a targeted recommendation to promote free, fair and resilient elections, and to protect them from cyberattacks and other efforts to distort or manipulate our democratic and electoral environment.

⁸ [Flash Eurobarometer 528](#) (2023) on “Citizenship and Democracy”.

⁹ COM(2020) 790.

¹⁰ COM(2022) 404.

¹¹ COM(2021) 775 final. The aim of this legal instrument is to deter third countries from restricting or threatening to restrict trade or investment to bring about a change of policy in the EU in areas such as climate change, taxation or food safety.

¹² [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/452](#) of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union.

¹³ [The Cybersecurity Strategy | Shaping Europe’s digital future \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁴ [An EU approach to enhance economic security \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁵ JOIN/2016/018 final; JOIN/2018/16 final; 2020 EU Security Union Strategy. Council conclusions on a Framework for a coordinated EU response to hybrid campaigns” (June 2022)

¹⁶ See for example the media-related restrictions in Regulation (EU) 2022/350 of 1 March 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

The Commission also works with Member States to promote and protect a civic space where an active and independent civil society and citizens are provided with the enabling conditions and tools to become more engaged. This can contribute to making our democracies more resilient. This builds on investment already made and using new avenues for citizen participation in the public sphere as boosted by the Conference on the Future of Europe and its follow up¹⁷. A dedicated recommendation sets out ways to promote the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes.

The defence of democracy package is part of a set of **initiatives which represent a proactive approach to uphold EU values**. Since 2020, the Commission has examined the situation in Member States in its annual Rule of Law Reports. The anti-corruption¹⁸ and ethics¹⁹ initiatives put forward in early 2023 also seek to protect democracy from the corrosive impact of corruption, including from foreign actors. The recent Joint Communication on combating hatred²⁰ aims to step up the EU action against hatred and promote an inclusive, diverse and democratic Europe. The Commission has been implementing strategies to combat discrimination, which also promote equal opportunities for inclusive participation and engagement²¹. The 2022 report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights²² focused on the civic space and its role in protecting and promoting fundamental rights. Putting people and their rights at the centre of the digital transformation are also core principles in the EU approach to digitalisation and technological advancement²³. This approach is also at the heart of the EU's enlargement policy, and guide the EU's work worldwide to support and promote democracy and the universal values of human rights and the rule of law in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024)²⁴. In all its actions, the EU commits to engage with organisations which respect democratic values and fundamental rights, as enshrined in Article 2 of TEU and in the Charter.

2. ENSURING TRANSPARENCY OF FOREIGN INTEREST REPRESENTATION IN THE EU DEMOCRATIC SPHERE THROUGH HARMONISED REQUIREMENTS

The EU is open to the world and actively engaged with partners across the globe. Transparent and open exchanges across countries and cultures and access to information are part of our identity and are mutually beneficial at all levels. Governments, public authorities and political

¹⁷ The Conference on the Future of Europe was itself a bold statement on deliberative democracy by the European institutions: a broad and deep grass-roots consultation with citizens, including the highly innovative randomly selected European Citizens' Panels and the Conference Plenary, which reaffirmed citizens' desire for an active European civic space which can bring value-added to our representative democracy and which amplifies the role available to civil society to play an active part in our democracy. See also the Commission's follow-up communication: COM(2022) 404 final.

¹⁸ Communication on the fight against corruption, JOIN (2023) 12 final, with accompanying proposals COM (2023) 234, HR(2023)108 and JOIN(2023)13.

¹⁹ Communication on a Proposal for an interinstitutional ethics body COM(2023) 311 final.

²⁰ Communication to the European Parliament and the Council *No place for hate: Europe united against hatred*, COM(2023)772 final.

²¹ The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

²² A thriving civic space for upholding fundamental rights in the EU, COM(2022) 716 final.

²³ See [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles](#).

²⁴ [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy \(2020-2024\)](#).

actors from outside the EU have the possibility to present their views and may try to have these views reflected in the democratic debate and influence policies on various issues. When they do this via entities that represent their interests, the legitimacy of such interest representation rests on its transparency and accountability.

There is however a growing concern in the EU that the openness of our societies can be exploited: **interference by foreign governments** seeking to manipulate public opinion and distort the democratic debate poses a threat to the EU's democracies²⁵. This risk has increased due to a dynamic threat landscape, and third country governments can make use of public resources to carry out wide-ranging and sustained influence campaigns²⁶, sometimes covertly, and to promote their political and geopolitical interests at the expense of domestic constituencies. Comparable data about this phenomenon in the EU is scarce. This also results in limited accountability and oversight. Instilling transparency and openness in the way that foreign interests are represented is the best way to protect the integrity of our democratic space and to prevent foreign interference²⁷. More broadly, a political and institutional system based on integrity, transparency and accountability in public life is the best guarantee against corruption²⁸, and public bodies should seek the highest standards of transparency as an important part of broader efforts to tackle corruption.

Interest representation activities are increasingly used by third country governments alongside formal diplomatic channels and processes²⁹ to promote their policy objectives. The transparency and reporting requirements for interest representation activities are currently regulated in different ways, and to different extents, in Member States. Some national laws make it compulsory to register while others rely on self-regulation. In substance, the rules may differ, for instance in terms of the types of activities and entities caught by obligations. Given that interest representation is an increasingly cross-border activity, an **EU response is necessary to prevent the emergence of additional obstacles in the internal market** and the risk of a patchwork of regulatory landscapes. Fragmentation imposes additional costs and creates legal uncertainty, with providers required to invest in separate compliance steps and adapt to the various requirements of the different EU jurisdictions. Without EU action, Member States address the identified risks and threats to democracy unilaterally³⁰, undermining the internal market, and facilitating attempts by third countries to use diverging rules to their advantage when they seek to covertly influence our democratic process.

The Commission is therefore putting forward a **proposal for a harmonised approach to remove obstacles in the internal market** and equip the EU with transparency tools that will enable it to defend democracy, remain an open society and protect fundamental rights, in particular freedom of expression and access to information. It aims to ensure a **common high level of transparency and democratic accountability** across the EU in relation to lobbying campaigns provided as a service, as well as similar activities performed by entities on behalf

²⁵ In [Flash Eurobarometer 522](#) (2023) on “Democracy”, 43% of Europeans referred to propaganda and/or false or misleading information from a non-democratic foreign source and covert foreign interference in the policy and economy of their country as amongst the most serious threats to democracy.

²⁶ Estimating the amounts effectively spent by third countries in Member States and across the EU with the purpose of interfering with democratic processes is difficult due to the nature of those activities, which are by definition covert. A clearer overview on amounts spent by third countries on interest representation in the EU should be available once this Directive is implemented.

²⁷ [Flash Eurobarometer 528](#) (2023) on “Citizenship and Democracy”.

²⁸ COM (2023) 800 final.

²⁹ OECD (2021) *Lobbying in the 21st Century* which shows that ‘the increasing complexity of domestic policy-making processes and negotiations at the international level is blurring the lines between lobbying and diplomacy.

³⁰ Some Member States are looking into introducing national rules of various types. See [SWD\(2023\) 661](#).

of a third country government that are attempting to influence the development, formulation or implementation of public policy or legislation, or of public decision-making processes. As such it will also contribute in the medium term to a better understanding and public awareness of the magnitude, trends and actors involved in such activities. This would allow EU citizens and public authorities to understand the motivation behind them and to see which third countries invest in influencing democratic debate and the decision-making processes in the EU.

The Commission proposal would **enhance the integrity and openness of public debate** by ensuring that when third countries seek to influence EU democratic processes through intermediaries, this is done in a transparent manner. Freedom of expression and association, as well as academic freedom and the freedom of scientific research, are paramount to the democratic debate and should not be significantly affected by the limited and proportionate transparency requirements foreseen. It is up to service providers to decide which services they want to offer. Funding received by civil society organisations or others from a third country government that is unrelated to an interest representation activity would not be covered by the requirements. The proposal also includes comprehensive safeguards to ensure that entities subject to the transparency requirements would not be stigmatised, nor incur consequences for the mere fact of being registered³¹.

The proposed Directive³² focuses on **interest representation activities**, i.e. activities carried out with a view to influencing democratic processes, that are of an economic nature and which are carried out on behalf of third countries. It would cover all entities engaging in an activity seeking to influence the development, formulation or implementation of policy or legislation, or public decision-making processes, in the EU. This could include lobbying and public relations companies, think tanks, civil society organisations, private research institutes, and public research institutes offering research services, as well as consultants and in-house lobbyists, carried out on behalf of third countries with a view to influence public life and the democratic process in the EU³³. When this happens, the fact that a foreign government is behind the activity needs to be transparent. The proposal specifically excludes activities such as diplomatic representation or legal representation in a trial³⁴.

The Directive would apply in a fair, and non-discriminatory manner, with minimal administrative formalities. It would subject the entities within its scope to **mandatory**, but **limited and proportionate, registration requirements**. Member States would be asked to establish, or adapt existing, national registers to ensure the transparency of interest representation activities. Such registers should have simple and clear access requirements to facilitate registration and enforcement. **To limit administrative burden**, Member States would be invited to ensure that entities having to register can re-use data already submitted in other national registers ('Once Only' principle), where possible. Information on the registration obligations and formalities established by this Directive should be available via the Single Digital Gateway³⁵ which sets up a one-stop shop to give businesses and citizens information

³¹ The proposed directive would cover all interest representation activities on behalf of third countries, irrespective of the entity involved. Inclusion in the register should therefore not result in any negative labelling or questions of the credibility or legitimacy of the entity concerned, thereby significantly reducing the risk of stigmatisation.

³² COM(2023) 637.

³³ While the provision of media services would not fall within the scope of application of the proposed Directive, interest representation activities carried out on behalf of third country entities by media service providers would be covered.

³⁴ This is without prejudice to restrictive measures imposed under an EU sanctions regime.

³⁵ Established under Regulation (EU) No 2018/1724.

about rules and procedures in the Single Market.³⁶ The most important elements of the registered data would be publicly available, allowing for **transparency and enhanced public scrutiny**, in full compliance with EU data protection rules³⁷.

In line with the Court of Justice's case law³⁸ and guidelines from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe³⁹, the Directive would also **include safeguards** to avoid registration requirements being misused to limit fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the freedoms of expression or of association, academic or artistic freedom, or to unduly restrict the civic space. First, **independent supervisory authorities** would be empowered to request limited records in duly justified cases only, and in a proportionate manner. The supervisory authority should have clearly defined and circumscribed powers, and should be competent for supervision and enforcement activities, including to ensure that no adverse consequences arise from registration. Secondly, there should be **proportionate administrative fines for non-compliance, subject to judicial review and effective remedies**, to avoid potential chilling effects. The proposal would also create a cooperation framework for the exchange of information between supervisory authorities.

Full harmonisation for matters falling within the scope of the proposed directive would prevent Member States from maintaining or introducing additional requirements within the framework of the harmonised rules. This would further limit the risk of divergent and potentially disproportionate and repressive national rules and practices⁴⁰. At the same time, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, Member States would remain free to establish rules for areas not covered by the Directive, for example rules on contacts between their public officials and interest representatives.

This proposal would be a key first step in tackling foreign interference based on a framework that will harmonise transparency requirements in the internal market and allow an overview of third countries' interests represented in the EU. It is a targeted and proportionate response to current concerns. Its implementation, and in particular the effectiveness and proportionality of the rules, would need to be kept under review and a timely assessment made as to whether revisions or further steps are needed, including as regards the scope of intervention⁴¹ and as well as a reflexion on the possibility of creating a Union level portal connecting national registers. In parallel, the Commission will continue to monitor and support reforms in Member States to ensure the transparency of lobbying. The Rule of Law reports recognise this to be key

³⁶ To further limit administrative burden, administrative cooperation and exchanges of information between the national authorities, as well as the supervisory authorities and the Commission, should take place through the Internal Market Information (IMI) system established under Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 for administrative cooperation between EU countries' competent authorities in Single Market related policy areas. A targeted revision of this Regulation is also part of this package.

³⁷ Registered entities may request that all or part of the information provided is not made publicly available where there are overriding interests that justify withholding publication, including fundamental right considerations, where for instance, the publication of such information would endanger the entity or its employees or partner associations.

³⁸ Judgment of 18 June 2020, *Commission v Hungary (Transparency of associations)*, C-78/18, EU:C:2020:476.

³⁹ Venice Commission Report on Funding of Associations CDL-AD(2019)002.

⁴⁰ For example, Member States would be prevented from requiring the entities fall within the scope of the initiative to register 'as an organisation in receipt of support from abroad' or indicate on their internet site and in their publications and other press material the information that they are organisations in receipt of support from abroad.

⁴¹ Broadening the scope of this proposal to all interest representation on behalf of any entity would affect an estimate of 3.5 million entities.

element of fostering integrity, transparency and accountability in public life⁴². The Commission will also organise regular stakeholder group meetings to touch base on the application of the rules.

At EU level, the **EU Transparency Register**⁴³ covers activities carried out by interest representatives with the objective of influencing the formulation or implementation of policy or legislation, or the decision-making processes of the EU institutions. Citizens and interest groups can use it to look at the potential influence of interest representatives towards decision-makers, thereby promoting ethical and transparent interest representation. It is supplemented by a **code of conduct**, as well as by internal transparency measures in the EU institutions concerning meetings and other interactions with lobbyists⁴⁴. Although it has a different scope compared to the proposed Directive⁴⁵, the EU Transparency Register already covers activities of foreign influence when carried out by foreign entities without diplomatic status, or any entities that lobby the EU institutions on behalf of third countries⁴⁶. Once the outcome of the discussions between the European Parliament and the Council on the proposed Directive is clear, the Commission will consider how to best address issues such as double registration and whether to develop possible links between national registers under the Directive and the Transparency Register.

The proposed Directive would complement the rules that apply to digital services under the Digital Services Act and to advertising service providers and publishers under the proposal on political advertising, both of which have a different scope⁴⁷. Concrete preventive measures proposed in the European Research Area to create awareness about foreign interference and build resilience across the sector, building on the **Toolkit on Tackling Research and Innovation Foreign Interference**⁴⁸, are also complementary. It is also in line with standards at international level⁴⁹. The Commission will also support actions such as the **exchange of best practice** in relation to informing citizens, building resilience and engaging actively with the topic of interference in the European democratic sphere, including training, media literacy, awareness-raising and critical thinking. The Commission has also put in place a set of actions⁵⁰ to support Member States' administrations preparing reforms, anticipating future trends and

⁴² The Commission addressed recommendations in this area to a number of Member States in its annual Rule of Law reports in 2022 and 2023.

⁴³ Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register.

⁴⁴ [Transparency Register \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-room/pages/press-room.aspx?pid=14777).

⁴⁵ The Transparency Register is a general lobby register that covers interest representation activities directed at the EU institutions. It makes no differentiation for interest representation on behalf of third countries. The register does not apply to lobbying activities directed at public authorities of Member States. Its legal architecture is also different: contrary to the mandatory national registers envisaged by the proposal, the Transparency Register is generally voluntary, even though the EU institutions do require prior registration for certain types of activities.

⁴⁶ This would include law firms, professional consultancies or standalone lobbyists hired by third country governments or public authorities to lobby the Union institutions, as well as any entities such as foreign agencies, investment funds and public-private structures without diplomatic status. Those actors would be expected to register and provide information in relation to their activities and, in the case of intermediaries, declare on the register their clients, and provide an indication of the annual amounts generated by the activities.

⁴⁷ See section 3.1 below.

⁴⁸ Staff Working Document on "Tackling R&I Foreign Interference" (SWD(2022)12).

⁴⁹ Notably the Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) and Council of Europe Recommendation on the legal regulation of lobbying activities in the context of public decision-making (CM/Rec(2017)2, 22 March 2017).

⁵⁰ COM(2023) 667 final, [Enhancing the European Administrative Space \(ComPAct\)](#)

strengthening administrative cooperation which support democratic structures. There is also support for efforts at national level to further reforms that reinforce democratic structures and processes⁵¹.

With this proposal, the Commission seeks to contribute to setting standards, not only in the EU, but also on a global scale, on how to address covert foreign influence in a coherent, balanced and proportionate way, fully respecting fundamental rights. By focusing on transparency and democratic accountability and by introducing targeted rules accompanied by strong safeguards, the approach strikes a balance between the exercise of fundamental rights and the public interest.

Understanding and taking action to tackle the phenomenon of foreign interference has been gaining ground globally. Some jurisdictions outside the EU – such as Australia, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom – have introduced or are preparing frameworks to regulate the transparency of foreign government influence by means of specific disclosure and registration requirements applicable to lobbying on behalf of foreign governments.

Other jurisdictions have adopted ‘**foreign agent**’ laws which go beyond transparency requirements and have been found to be in violation of fundamental rights and freedoms. The aim of such laws has been to restrict the civic space by stigmatising and intimidating certain civil society organisations and human rights defenders – which often rely on funding from abroad, including from the EU – and curtailing their activities. For example, the Russian ‘foreign agent’ law effectively empowers authorities to hinder the work of independent civil society organisations through intrusive inspections, direct oversight over programmes and events, and the threat of dissolution and of taking criminal proceedings against non-compliant organisations and their members – even when foreign support is fully transparent. The label of ‘foreign agent’ under such laws undermines the financial stability of an organisation, due to the heavy fines imposed on those who do not abide by its rules. It also harms its credibility, as it carries with it connotations of spying, which can in turn incite violence against members of targeted civil society organisations online and offline. Such ‘foreign agent’ laws are profoundly undemocratic and have been found to violate international laws and standards⁵².

Not all risks of foreign interference are associated with state actors. Some **non-state entities** may also use similar tactics to promote actions that directly contravene EU values, such as actions designed to amplify polarisation and incite hatred. This is particularly true online, as evidenced recently in an explosion of violent extremist, hateful and divisive content.

The Commission strongly encourages Member States to remain vigilant and share information with one another and at EU level on such non-state entities, even if they are not linked to, or dependent on, a foreign government. In line with this, the Commission’s **proposed recast of the Financial Regulation** includes adding a new ground of exclusion from EU funding for ‘incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence.’ The new ground would be applicable for funds disbursed in direct and indirect management, even in the absence of a final judgment at

⁵¹ Technical Support Instrument / [Reform Support \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁵² In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgement in the case [Ecodefence and Others v Russia](#), in which the Court said the law violated the freedom of assembly and association guaranteed in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Venice Commission has also issued related opinions: <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/events/?id=3271>. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council have also on several occasions expressed similar concerns over the legislation, calling on Russia to stop the harassment, criminalisation and imprisonment of human rights defenders, the forced dissolution of human rights organisations, and lift the severe restrictions on the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. The EU and its Delegations has also strongly condemned this law, see: [EU-27 Declaration on the 10th anniversary of the Law on Foreign Agents, July 2022](#).

national level. In addition, the Commission is introducing internal **awareness-raising measures** and developing internal working methods to ensure increased **scrutiny in the selection of projects**⁵³.

3 TAKING THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY ACTION PLAN FORWARD

The European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) adopted in December 2020 aims to strengthen the resilience of EU democracies, identifying key actions to address the areas where our systems and citizens are most vulnerable. These actions seek to better protect the integrity of elections, safeguard media freedom and media pluralism, and fight disinformation⁵⁴. The Action Plan also recognised that a healthy democracy relies on meaningful and inclusive citizen engagement exercises and an active civil society, not only at election time, but on an ongoing basis, and that engaged, informed and empowered citizens and a vibrant civil society are vital to guarantee the resilience of our democracies, including resilience to foreign interference.

Taking stock of the state of implementation of the actions under EDAP⁵⁵, this section highlights areas where the EU can be proactive in the face of existing and evolving challenges.

3.1 Protecting election integrity and promoting democratic participation ahead of and beyond the 2024 European elections

Free and fair elections are at the very core of our democracy. If left unaddressed, risks to the electoral process can both distort the process itself and undermine citizens' trust in the fairness and integrity of elections.

Together with this Communication, the Commission is putting forward a **Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the European Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament**⁵⁶. It is addressed to Member States, European and national political parties, foundations and campaign organisations in the context of the preparation of elections in general and with regard to the upcoming European elections in particular. It aims to promote high democratic standards for elections in the EU, supporting high turnout, inclusive participation, easy and equal exercise of electoral rights and resilient electoral processes. To this end, it includes specific recommendations to **support voter turnout and inclusive participation**, with a particular focus on gender equality and addressing the needs of specific groups⁵⁷.

There is a constant need to step up the **cybersecurity of election technology**. The Recommendation sets out specific proposals to ensure the security, integrity and resilience of elections and election-related entities and infrastructure, in light of the requirements established by the revised Directive on security of network and information systems (NIS2 Directive)⁵⁸

⁵³ See Fifth Progress Report on the implementation of the EU Security Union Strategy (COM(2022) 745, 13.12.2022).

⁵⁴ This also includes foreign information manipulation and interference.

⁵⁵ See also Annex for a detailed overview and more information.

⁵⁶ C(2023) 8626.

⁵⁷ The Recommendation takes into account specific groups including persons with disabilities, younger voters and mobile citizens and those susceptible to marginalisation. In addition, as announced in the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (COM(2021) 101, 3.3.2021), the Commission has prepared a [Guide of good electoral practice addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities](#).

⁵⁸ Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union.

and the Directive on the resilience of critical entities⁵⁹. Building on a first experience from 2019⁶⁰, a new EU tabletop exercise took place on 21 November 2023 with the participation of the Commission, European Parliament, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity and Member States. The NIS Cooperation Group should also continue the review of the Compendium on Cybersecurity of Election Technology, to ensure it keeps pace with the evolving threat landscape.

In addition to the direct risk posed to election infrastructure, the intentional and coordinated manipulation of the information environment by foreign state actors likewise poses a threat to democracy and security. There are numerous reports of large-scale coordinated efforts combining different tactics, techniques and procedures, such as the use of fake social media accounts to ‘like’, comment on or share information to artificially boost its visibility, the spread of disinformation including through manipulated audio-visual content such as deepfakes⁶¹, or opaquely targeting voters to influence them and manipulate the outcome of elections. Additionally, information manipulation can occur in concert with activity in other domains, such as cyber threats in the case of hack-and-leak operations. To this end, and building on the Eurobarometer data, the Recommendation puts forward a series of measures to **protect election-related information from manipulation and disinformation**⁶².

A free and fair democratic debate relies on legality and fair play. **Surveillance tools** may be used by public authorities, under certain conditions, for reasons of national security, but the use of spyware to gain political advantage is very different. **The recommendation stresses that** surveillance tools should never be used to interfere with the democratic debate and deploying such tools to target political actors and journalists for political gain is unacceptable. The Commission has always made clear that the notion of national security should be interpreted in accordance with the criteria laid down by EU case law. The country chapters of the Rule of Law report cover this issue insofar as the functioning of institutional checks and balances is concerned. There are also strong safeguards against the use of spyware against media, journalists, and their families in the proposal for a European Media Freedom Act⁶³. The European Parliament has set up an important strand of work on spyware with a Committee of Inquiry to investigate the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware (PEGA Committee). In its resolution of June 2023 the Parliament strongly condemned the illegal use of spyware, calling on action at both national and EU level⁶⁴. The Commission is preparing a

⁵⁹ Directive (EU) 2022/2557 of 14 December 2022 on the resilience of critical entities.

⁶⁰ A first EU tabletop exercise was organised in April 2019 to test how effective Member States and the EU’s response practices and crisis plans were and to identify ways to prevent, detect and mitigate cybersecurity incidents that may affect the European elections.

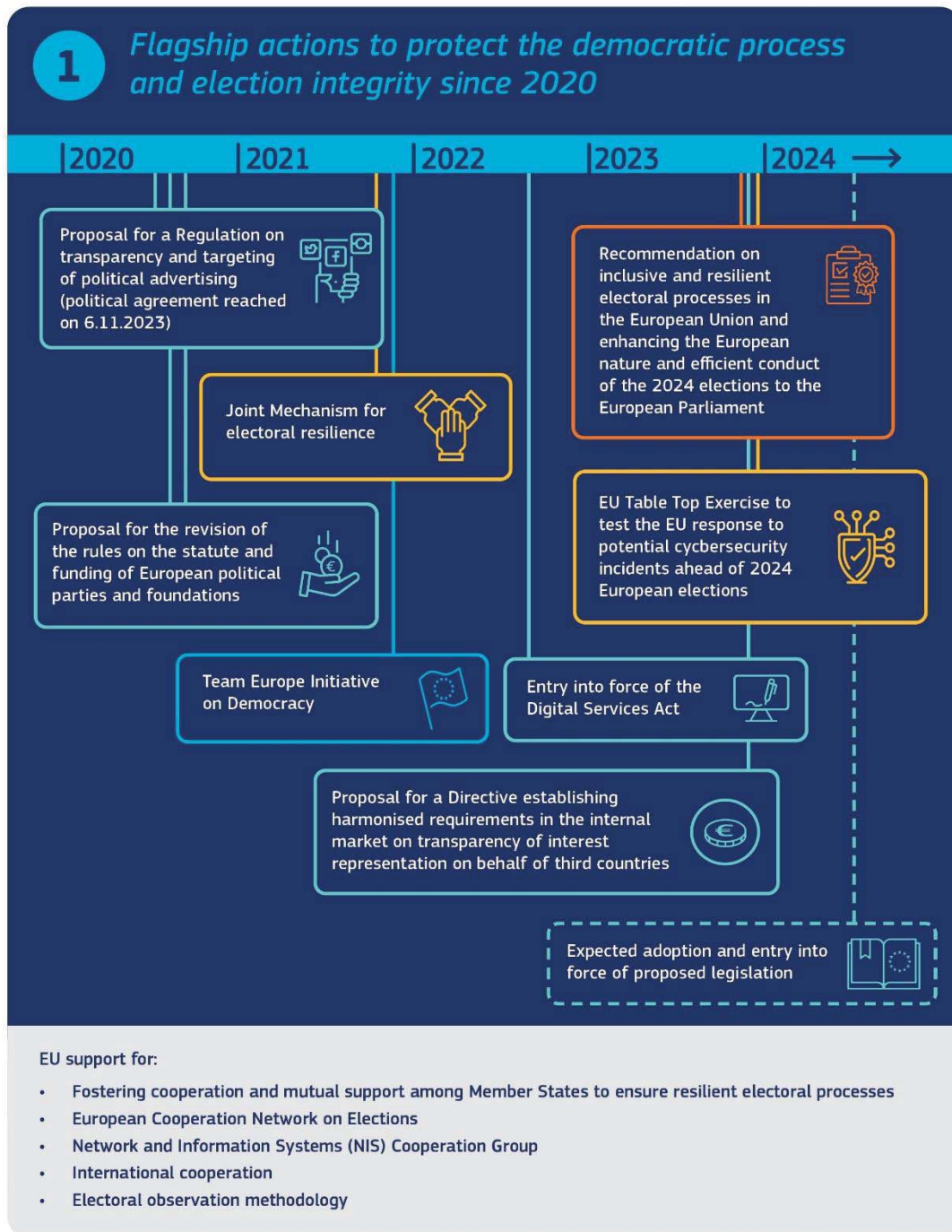
⁶¹ Deep fakes are understood to be images, audio or video content generated or manipulated by artificial intelligence systems that appreciably resemble existing persons, places or events and would falsely appear to a person to be authentic. The AI Act proposal - COM(2021)206 - would ensure the labelling of AI content and the disclosure of its origin.

⁶² In a Eurobarometer survey in which respondents were asked to rate the most important aspects of free and fair electoral campaigns, the strongest responses concerned (i) debates and campaigns avoiding hate speech, manipulation and lies; (ii) the need for candidates and political parties to have equal opportunity to access the media and (iii) voters knowing who finances candidates and political parties. See Flash Eurobarometer 522 (2023) on “Democracy” and, respectively, Flash Eurobarometer 528 (2023) on “Citizenship and Democracy”

⁶³ COM(2022) 457 final.

⁶⁴ [P9_TA\(2023\)0244](#) Investigation of the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware (Recommendation).

non-legislative initiative clarifying the boundaries and the interplay between EU law, in particular the data protection and privacy acquis, and national security⁶⁵.



Other recommendations include the use of campaign pledges and codes of conduct by political parties to encourage **election integrity and fair campaigning**; efforts to ensure the **transparency of political advertising**; and promoting the **observation of elections** as an efficient means of encouraging citizens to actively engage with the electoral process and

⁶⁵ See: [Commission response to the European Parliament Recommendation following the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law in relation to the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware](#).

improve public trust in elections. It also touches upon the funding of political parties and foundations, with a view to limiting any risk of covert foreign influence, including by means of covert donations, to distort the level playing field in the electoral process.

The recommendation builds on the decisive steps taken by the Commission since 2020 to address identified loopholes and to ensure citizens can form their own judgments and make electoral choices in a public space where a plurality of views can be expressed, free from interference, be it domestic or foreign.

When it comes to the digital sphere, the rules under the **Digital Services Act**⁶⁶ set out the responsibilities of online platforms and search engines in addressing the risks related to civic discourse and electoral processes stemming from the functioning, design or use of their services, including through disinformation, inauthentic use or tactics involving artificially generated content. The rules also provide for more transparency and support people to take informed decisions about the information they see online. In addition, the **regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising**⁶⁷ will allow for better public scrutiny and accountability in relation to political advertising services, including through a European public repository for online political ads, and introduce stricter conditions around the use of personal data for the targeting and delivery of political adverts. To address the risk of foreign interference, it will also prohibit sponsoring political advertising by non-EU actors three months before elections or referenda. The role of European political parties and political groups in the European elections is also recognised. In 2021, the Commission also proposed a **revision of the rules on the statute and funding of European political parties and foundations**⁶⁸. The proposal aims at giving European political parties more possibilities to fulfil their role in building and nurturing a truly European political sphere, while at the same time protecting their action from foreign interference. The enforcement of these rules is a top priority for the Commission. When it comes to the Digital Services Act, the Commission is supervising and enforcing the application of the rules by very large online platforms and search engines.

Although the organisation of national elections is a Member State competence, it is informed by international standards, and governed by this broader framework of EU law. Reinforced **mutual support and cooperation among Member States** is now well established, centred on the work of bodies such as the European Cooperation Network on Elections, also drawing on the EU's structures to promote information security and tackle disinformation. In preparation of the European Parliament elections, the Commission organised a **high-level event on elections in October 2023** bringing together Member States, EU institutions, NGOs, and academia to put forward ideas on supporting voter turnout, the resilience of the electoral systems and fair and inclusive elections across the Union.

A **Joint mechanism for electoral resilience** was launched in January 2022, aiming to build capacity in Member States to address risks to elections, through expert exchanges, in particular on disinformation and cyber-related threats. The mechanism has also been used to support the preparation of the compendium on e-Voting and other ICT Practices⁶⁹, in addition to targeted exchanges on how to ensure parity of treatment and balanced media coverage during elections.

⁶⁶ [EUR-Lex – 32022R2065 – EN – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁶⁷ COM(2021) 731 final. A provisional agreement between the European Parliament and the Council was reached on 6 November 2023. Formal adoption is expected for early 2024. While the full set of rules will apply 18 months after entry into force, provisions such as the non-discrimination clause and the definitions will apply immediately, ahead of the European elections.

⁶⁸ COM(2021) 734 final.

⁶⁹ [Compendium on e-Voting and other ICT Practices](#).

Exchanges between national parliaments could also be a valuable way to share experience and the Commission will support such exchanges.

The EU has refined its external **electoral observation** methodology in recent years, including through common guidelines based on international standards, that consolidate its capacity to tackle the use of new technologies in the electoral process. Good practices are regularly discussed within the European Cooperation Network on Elections and in the context of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

The EU does not act in isolation. Under EDAP, the Commission has continued its efforts to **help build resilience in third countries**, with a view to better equipping societies and public authorities with the means to respond to common external threats to the democratic process. Such efforts are a priority in EU enlargement policy⁷⁰. The EU also facilitates **international cooperation** on electoral matters between EU networks, partner countries and international organisations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the OSCE⁷¹. The European External Action Service conducts election observation missions in close coordination with other international and regional observation organisations. It complements these activities with dedicated support to governments, civil society and independent media to help build resilience against and prevent, deter and respond to foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), including through insights into how FIMI has been used in electoral contexts. EU action has also included participation in the two Summits for Democracy⁷² and financial support for capacity-building and electoral reform, including in the countries in the EU's immediate neighbourhood⁷³.

3.2 Strengthening media freedom and pluralism

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has also dramatically highlighted the essential role journalists play in informing citizens about the reality on the ground. The Russian authorities have engaged in a systematic crackdown on and censorship of independent media, which remains essential to fight propaganda.

Under EDAP, the EU's efforts to protect media freedom and counter disinformation are two sides of the same coin. As part of this vision, the Commission proposed key new initiatives to **improve the safety of journalists**⁷⁴ and to protect journalists and human rights defenders and others from **abusive lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)**⁷⁵. The anti-SLAPP directive brings a system of powerful procedural safeguards for cross-border SLAPP cases,

⁷⁰ In the EU's revised enlargement methodology, progress made on reforms related to upholding fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law are key for determining the overall pace of the accession process.

⁷¹ The EU has funded electoral assistance projects of over EUR 380 million over the last ten years. These country actions are supported by global democracy programmes, including the Team Europe Democracy Initiative (TED), launched in December 2021, which coordinates action by the EU and Member States. The programme for Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative supports civic and political participation around the world, notably in areas like election observations and democratic reforms.

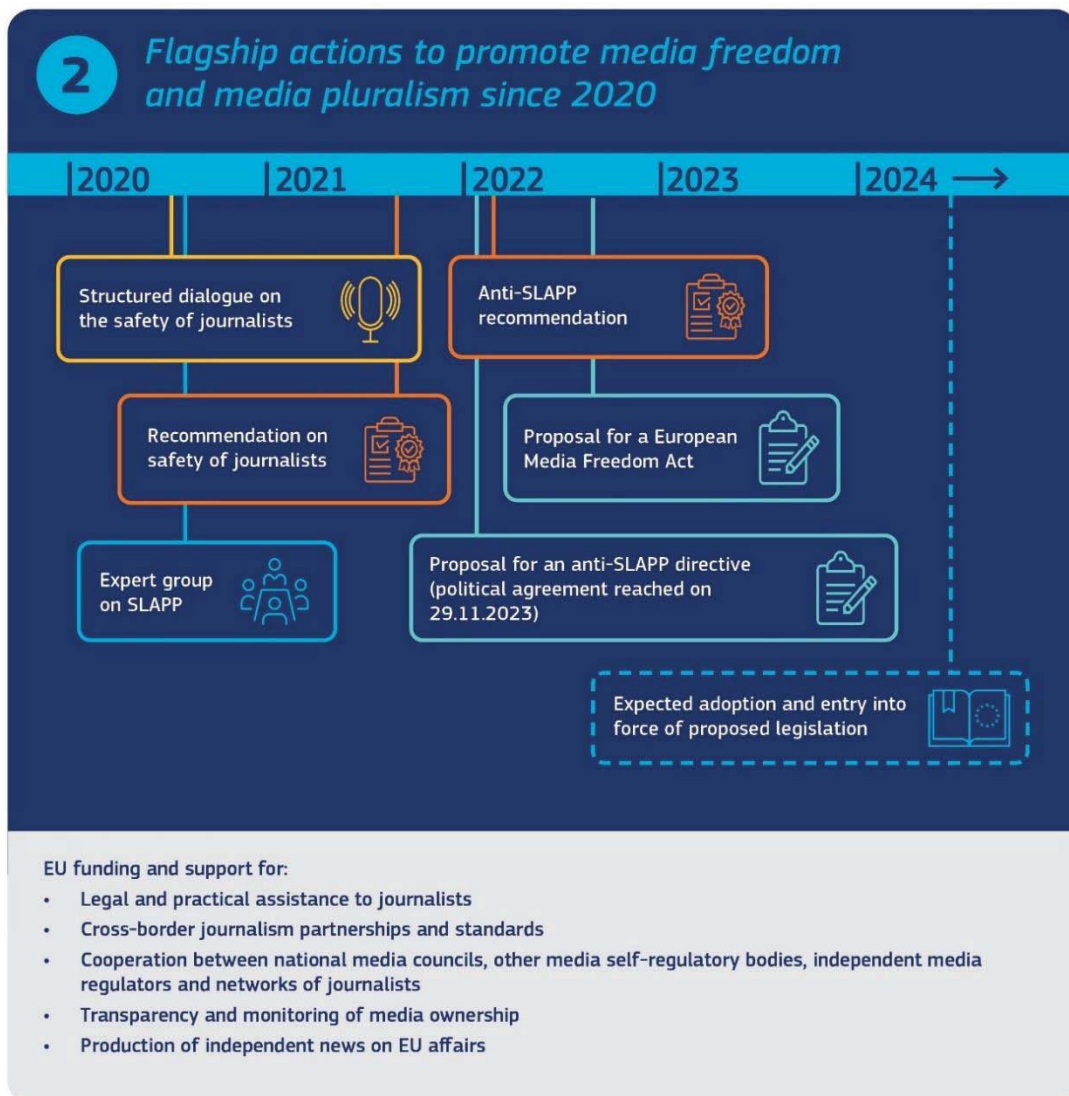
⁷² The EU participation in the [Summits for Democracy](#) in 2021 and 2023 provided the occasion to reinforce alliances for democracy and to showcase the work done by the EU to support democracy globally. For more information see Annex.

⁷³ Examples include a project to support electoral reform in the Western Balkans, running until mid-2024 (budget of EUR 1.715 million), implemented by ODIHR.

⁷⁴ C(2021) 6650, 16 September 2021.

⁷⁵ COM/2022/177 final and C/2022/2428 of 27 April 2022. On 30 November, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional political agreement on the anti-SLAPP directive. The Commission is working closely with Member States to support them in implementing the anti-SLAPP Recommendation.

which equip courts to deal with abusive litigation and act as a deterrent to potential new SLAPP cases. The directive includes rules that allow the early dismissal of such cases and provide effective remedies for SLAPP victims. Together with the related recommendation, the rules form a strong package of measures to fight SLAPP and protect public participation and the freedom of expression in the EU. The Commission also proposed to harmonise certain aspects of national rules related to media services under the **European Media Freedom Act**. The proposal aims to address fragmented national regulatory approaches related to media freedom and pluralism and editorial independence and to ensure the free provision of media services within the internal market. It also puts a focus on the independence and stable funding of public service media as well as on the **transparency of media ownership** and of the **allocation of state advertising**, two key objectives under the EDAP. Under the new provisions, Member States would also have to look at the impact of national measures and media concentrations on media freedom and pluralism. When it comes to the dissemination of media content in the online environment, the European Media Freedom Act proposal builds on the horizontal framework established by the **Digital Services Act**.



The Commission also assesses media freedom and pluralism in its annual **rule of law report**. The report covers in detail developments in Member States as regards topics such as the independence of national media regulatory authorities, the transparency of media ownership,

the fairness and transparency of state advertising, the governance of public service media, and the frameworks in place to ensure the safety of journalists. This exercise is based on constant dialogue with the relevant Member State authorities and stakeholders and has resulted in a number of reforms being initiated at national level⁷⁶.

The **media's financial sustainability** is a key driver of editorial integrity and media independence⁷⁷. The Commission has stepped up its support for media resilience since the adoption of the **Media and Audiovisual Action Plan (MAAP)** in December 2020⁷⁸, in particular with measures boosting private investments in news media. The MAAP called to bundle actions and support to the news media sector by offering better access to loans, enhancing media collaborations and proposing the setup and implementation of a data space for media.

The Commission has also strengthened **funding** to news media organisations. The Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 has devoted around EUR 75 million for projects and initiatives supporting media pluralism, journalism and media literacy. Actions include monitoring of media pluralism, support to media councils, to a media freedom rapid response mechanism and to specific sectors such as investigative journalism or local reporting. As the demand for financing exceeds the available resources under Creative Europe, the Commission will continue seeking ways to support these sectors⁷⁹.

As the EU strengthens support and protection for media freedom within the EU, it does so also abroad, with a particular attention to the neighbourhood⁸⁰. In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU has allocated **funding to supporting journalists and the media in Ukraine** to a value of EUR 30 million. Support for Russian independent media has also been increased and needs to be sustained in the long term⁸¹.

A provisional political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the proposed anti-SLAPP directive. Co-legislators are also shortly expected to reach agreement on the European Media Freedom Act. The implementation and enforcement of the new rules will be **key next steps**. Member States should also continue working for the full implementation of the recommendation on the safety of journalists and the anti-SLAPP recommendation. Several cases of abusive lawsuits launched by, or on behalf of, third countries also underscore the importance of strong EU-wide rules to curb SLAPPs and protect the democratic space.

⁷⁶ See COM(2023) 800 final.

⁷⁷ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/1634 of 16 September 2022 on internal safeguards for editorial independence and ownership transparency in the media sector (C/2022/6536). See also the Communication on European Media Industry Outlook COM(2020) 784 final.

⁷⁸ COM(2020) 784 final.

⁷⁹ See Annex for more details and examples of financing.

⁸⁰ Under the Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy programme 2021-2027, an estimated EUR 185 million are earmarked for support to independent media and harnessing digitalisation worldwide. The new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement on Protecting Independent Media was launched in October 2023 to provide sustainable support to NGOs that work to protect independent journalism and fight disinformation across the world.. In the context of enlargement, numerous regional programmes support media freedom and pluralism, such as the Western Balkan media programme with a budget EUR 40.5 million. See annex for further information.

⁸¹ The Commission launched this year a call for proposals for a pilot project supporting exiled independent media and journalists from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia that have relocated and are working from the Member States so that they can continue producing content and distributing it to their audiences without editorial interference.

3.3 Countering disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference

Protecting Europe’s democracies from the threats and harmful effects of disinformation, information manipulation and interference, in particular from foreign actors, has been a priority of the EU in recent years⁸².

Such manipulative influence operations and disinformation campaigns seek to undermine democratic debate and exacerbate societal division. Such operations are often well-funded, state-sponsored and carried out by hostile actors and, as such, constitute a security threat to EU democracies⁸³. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine highlighted and heightened the risk to the European information space, with the Kremlin increasingly engaging in disinformation campaigns and foreign interference operations and using them as a strategic and coordinated instrument to threaten security, democracy and support its war of aggression⁸⁴. The conflict in the Middle East following the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel has also triggered widespread disinformation and hate campaigns⁸⁵. This is exacerbated by digitisation, including design features of online platforms that allow to disseminate disinformation with unprecedented speed and efficiency, as well as new tools powered by artificial intelligence able to be used by malicious actors.

When asked how often they believed they were exposed to disinformation, 35% of respondents in a recent Eurobarometer survey answered ‘often’ or ‘very often’, and 33% answered ‘sometimes’. The respondents perceived online social networks to be the primary medium via which they were most frequently targeted (64%), followed by television (36%), online newspapers and news magazines (22%) and video-sharing websites (21%)⁸⁶.

Under the EDAP, the EU has stepped up efforts to improve its capacity to react to this new and evolving threat landscape – both domestically and internationally. **Existing cooperation has been strengthened within the Commission, between the EU institutions and services and beyond**, involving relevant stakeholders in civil society, academia and private industry, as well as international partners. The EU has stepped up its strategic communication response to disinformation through the Commission’s **Network against Disinformation (NaD)**. The EEAS-managed **Rapid Alert System (RAS)** has continued to provide common situational awareness and share effective approaches to responding to the threat of FIMI⁸⁷ with Member States, EU institutions and international partners. Initiatives include detection, active pre- and debunking, and targeted campaigns addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a comprehensive and constant reaction to Russian state-sponsored disinformation around its war

⁸² As well as the EDAP itself, see the work of the European Parliament Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes; and Council conclusions on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (18 July 2022); Complementary efforts to enhance resilience and counter hybrid threats (10 December 2019); and strengthening resilience and countering hybrid threats, including disinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (15 December 2020).

⁸³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/countering-disinformation/tackling-disinformation-information-work-eeas-strategic-communication_en?s=2803

⁸⁴ Allegations that EU sanctions are the reason for food shortages and attempts to abuse the UN Security Council to engage in information manipulation are only two examples that illustrate how such activity can target the international community and international cooperation.

⁸⁵ The Commission is currently negotiating a new a new Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, with a view to establish it as a code of conduct under the DSA in early 2024. It should help improve prevention and anticipate a rising threat of hate speech before content has gone viral.

⁸⁶ [Flash Eurobarometer 522](#) (2023) on “Democracy”.

⁸⁷ For an overview of the Rapid Alert System, see: [Rapid Alert System | EEAS \(europa.eu\)](#). For an overview on the Network against Disinformation, please consult: [DG COMM Management Plan 2022](#).

of aggression against Ukraine⁸⁸. The results have been shown in the ability to be effective in addressing challenges more rapidly and in a more coordinated manner. This has also made a broader contribution to democratic resilience.

International cooperation has been strengthened with support to the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism⁸⁹ and close cooperation with NATO has continued, with FIMI highlighted as one of the key security threats for EU-NATO cooperation⁹⁰. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council and the EU-US Summit statement of October 2023 gave further impetus to close transatlantic cooperation on the threat, in particular to advance on the strategic cooperation and enhancing interoperability of approaches to tackle FIMI⁹¹. The EU has also made effective use of its diplomatic tools to counter FIMI and foreign interference, most notably through the adoption of restrictive measures imposed on individuals and media outlets involved in information manipulation and interference following the war of aggression against Ukraine. This has been complemented by the development of a reinforced **EU Toolbox to counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)**⁹² which offers a common analytical framework and methodology to collect systematic evidence of FIMI incidents to help improve the understanding of tactics, techniques and procedures used to manipulate and interfere⁹³. This complements the work of the EEAS StratCom Task Forces to raise awareness and build capacity, support EU Delegations and conduct outreach to civil society. The objective is to make it harder for FIMI actors like Russia and China to manipulate the EU's and neighbouring information environments⁹⁴.

A centrepiece of the Commission's approach to fighting disinformation has been its work to ensure **more accountability for online platforms**. 52% of Europeans think that online platforms should do more to prevent the spread of false and misleading information⁹⁵. The **Digital Services Act** obliges providers of very large online platforms and of very large online search engines to regularly assess the systemic risks their services may present to society, including to the freedom of expression, or the risk of their services being used as a tool for disinformation campaigns, not least in view of protecting electoral processes⁹⁶. As a key way to mitigate such risks⁹⁷, they are invited to participate in establishing voluntary codes of

⁸⁸ This includes social media communication and campaigns to de-bunk Russian disinformation on sanctions, food and energy security with a total of more than 10 million impressions in 2022. In the Member States, Commission Representations have been tailoring responses to local contexts with flagship initiatives like the "Decodeurs d'Europe" initiative in France. The Representation in Sofia launched an anti-disinformation network and led a successful de-bunking campaign in collaboration with Bulgarian fact checkers, while in Vilnius the Representation teamed up with independent journalists to produce inspiring videos about Ukrainian refugees successfully integrating into Lithuanian society. See also: [EUvsDisinfo](#).

⁸⁹ <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2022elmau/2022-05-06-rrm-data.pdf>.

⁹⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023>.

⁹¹ [US-EU-statement-final.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹² Set out in EDAP, this was based on the tasking in the Strategic Compass, see: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en.

⁹³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/1st-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats_en.

⁹⁴ The EEAS also provides insights into how FIMI targets specific groups, and underlines the harmful impact of such manipulation to society: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/fimi-targeting-lgbtqi-people_en.

⁹⁵ [Flash Eurobarometer 522](#) (2023) on "Democracy".

⁹⁶ The Commission reinforced efforts to tackle harmful and illegal content online, specifically in the context of unprecedented period of conflict and instability. See Commission Recommendation of 20.10.2023 on coordinating responses to incidents in particular arising from the dissemination of illegal content, ahead of the full entry into application of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (the 'Digital Services Act').

⁹⁷ Under the DSA, services need to adopt all necessary mitigation measures and are subject to public scrutiny and independent audits.

conduct and crisis protocols. An example is the ambitious new **Code of Practice on Disinformation** signed in June 2022 by a wide range of signatories⁹⁸. Importantly, the Code also comes with a solid monitoring framework and a Transparency Centre to ensure transparency and accountability. In January and September 2023, the Code's signatories, including online platforms, reported on progress, providing an unprecedented level of information on the way they implement their commitments to fight disinformation.

In the run-up to the 2024 European elections, the Commission is carrying out a **pre-election dialogue and collaboration with online platforms and other signatories of the Code**. In addition, the work within the Code is also focusing on addressing harmful potential of the new AI-powered tools that could be used in disinformation and foreign interference campaigns. Concluding the negotiations on the proposed AI Act is a priority in this context, as it would put in place the necessary guardrails and transparency on the use of AI⁹⁹.

In order to **empower citizens to make informed decisions**, the Commission supports a broad range of innovative projects to fight disinformation under various EU programmes, in particular by civil society organisations and education and training institutions, or with the involvement of journalists, with a view to promoting media and digital literacy and helping citizens identify disinformation, both within the EU and beyond¹⁰⁰. As part of the **Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-2027), the Commission published Guidelines for Teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training¹⁰¹. Likewise, both Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps have dedicated funding for grassroots projects promoting media literacy¹⁰².

In parallel, the EU has supported community-led initiatives to fight disinformation through reinforced fact-checking, such as the **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)**¹⁰³ and the development of the **European Code of Standards for Independent Fact-Checking Organisations**¹⁰⁴. This has proven to be instrumental in fighting disinformation related to the war of aggression against Ukraine¹⁰⁵. As part of its broader mission to fight disinformation, EDMO has set up a **special European elections task force** dedicated to detect early signs of potentially dangerous disinformation campaigns that might spread across the EU and coordinate dedicated media literacy activities. The task force¹⁰⁶ will also provide its expertise to European institutions in the framework of the preparation to the European elections.

⁹⁸ This followed Commission Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation of 26 May 2021 (COM(2021) 262 final): <https://disinfocode.eu/>. To date there are over 40 signatories.

⁹⁹ In this context, the Commission is planning to launch an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pact seeking the voluntary commitment of industry to anticipate the AI Act and start implementing its requirements ahead of the legal deadline, see: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-pact>.

¹⁰⁰ See Annex for details.

¹⁰¹ COM/2020/624 final.

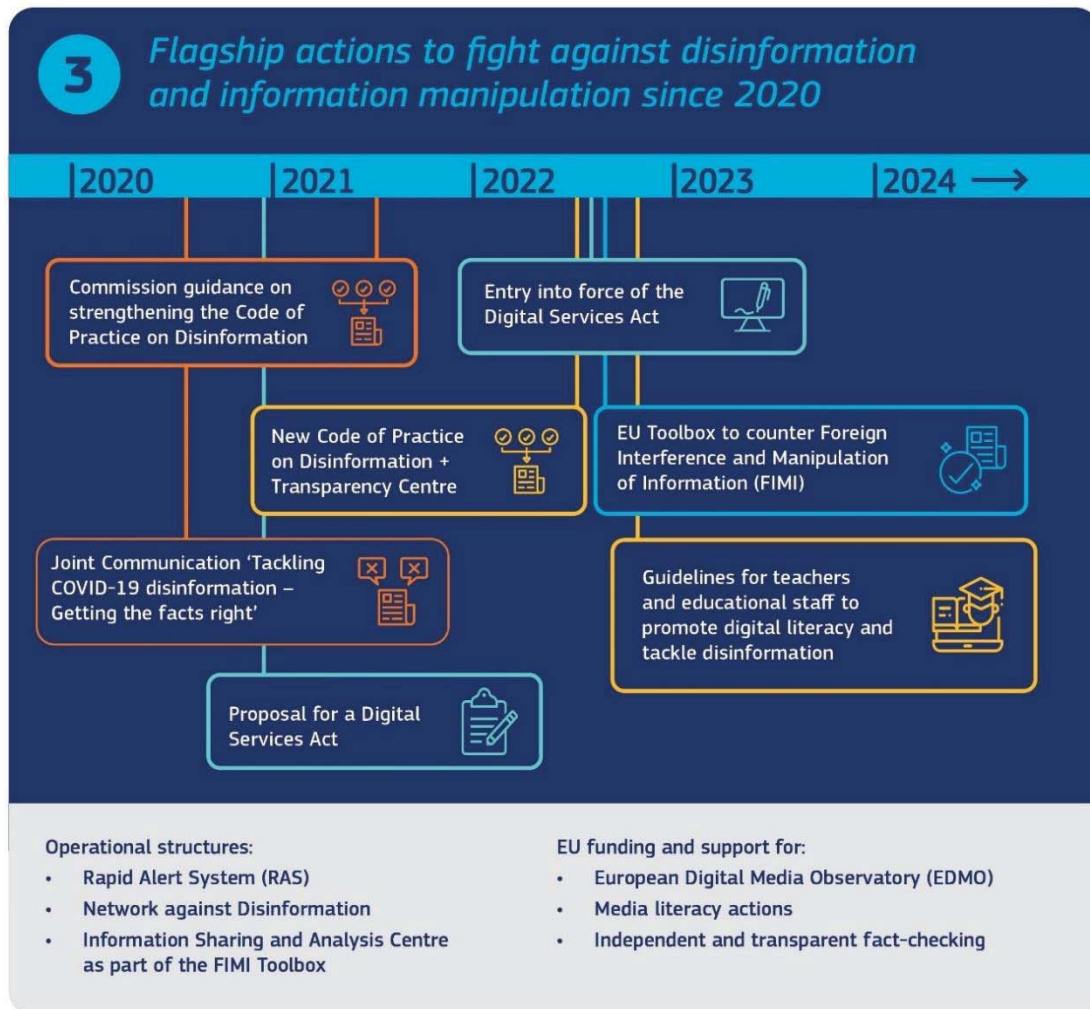
¹⁰² See also section 3.4 and more details and examples under Annex.

¹⁰³ <https://edmo.eu/>.

¹⁰⁴ <https://eufactcheckingproject.com/> by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).

¹⁰⁵ EDMO established a dedicated Task Force, fostering collaboration among practitioners and leading to the identification of more than 2 000 disinformation instances related to the Ukraine war through fact-checks and the publication of reports and investigations on emerging and trending narratives.

¹⁰⁶ [EDMO Task Force on 2024 European Elections](#).



In parallel, the High Representative is advancing work on further strengthening the ‘whole-of-society’ approach for information sharing in the form of an **Information Sharing and Analysis Center on FIMI**. This is an integral part of the FIMI Toolbox to enable a stronger common situational awareness and further develop the common methodology for collecting systematic evidence on FIMI and putting in place a trusted framework for exchanging information between the relevant stakeholders, also bringing the defender community together to systematically collect and share information on FIMI incidents. It also follows up on the Strategic Compass on Security and Defence’s call for a FIMI Data Space. The Commission will also continue to strengthen its own capacity to detect, monitor, analyse and tackle disinformation activities, carried out both at EU and national level. Under Horizon Europe, more than a third of the over EUR 300 million support for research on democracy was mobilised for funding research and innovation to better detect and understand foreign information manipulation and interference, and other undue influences on political decision-making¹⁰⁷. In future, it would be important to maintain this level of ambition and capitalise on the lessons learned.

¹⁰⁷ [Horizon Europe call “Standing up for democracy”](#) (2023), includes EUR18 M to finance up to 6 projects to address research gaps concerning FIMI. Overall, between 2021 and 2024 Horizon Europe has mobilised over EUR 100 M for research on foreign interference or very related issues like undue influence on political decision making, disinformation, digital literacy.

Civil society actors are at the forefront of the fight against disinformation and uncovering foreign interference, including through grassroots initiatives and the expert community working to analyse and counter FIMI and disinformation. A strong involvement of civil society is key for assessing quickly and efficiently the constantly evolving threat landscape, the actors and tools they use. The Commission will continue to support the work of the EDMO hubs' independent community. Research and awareness-raising focused on disinformation and foreign interference inside the EU, notably using the data generated by Code of Practice on Disinformation and its transparency and access to data provisions. To support the work of fact-checking in the implementation of the Code of Practice and to ensure high professional standards and independence of fact-checkers, the Commission will also continue to fund training activities to back up the Code of Professional Integrity of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).

3.4 Inclusive civic engagement and participation for European democratic resilience

Strengthening the links between people and the democratic institutions that serve and represent them is the bedrock for democratic resilience. A strong, safe and enabling civic space and engaged, informed and empowered citizens are an essential guarantee for the resilience of our democracies, whether at election time or beyond¹⁰⁸. In the recent Eurobarometer, almost nine in ten respondents (87%) saw civil society (associations, NGOs) as important in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate. The data also shows that more than half of respondents think there is a need to increase the engagement of civil society organisations in the decision-making process at the national level (56%) and the European level (54%). Around two-thirds of respondents are in favour of an increased engagement of citizens in the policy-making process at the national (68%) and European level (66%)¹⁰⁹.

Empowering citizens and civil society organisations, and providing them with appropriate tools for civic engagement, are cross-cutting priorities across the different pillars of the EDAP, as well as in the Charter and the Rule of Law Reports. A wide range of funding opportunities has also been made available to boost **citizen participation, civic engagement and trust in democracy**, most notably under EU programmes such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme; Creative Europe; Erasmus+; and Horizon Europe. Technical assistance for administrative reform in the Member States under the Technical Support Instrument¹¹⁰ has also been deployed to build **capacity in public administrations and public authorities** for participatory practices. Incorporating citizen engagement into policy design and implementation had also been a priority under the partnership principle of EU cohesion policy¹¹¹. The **Conference on the Future of Europe** provided valuable experience on how to

¹⁰⁸ A recent working paper highlights that civic engagement at local levels can contribute not only to economic and social development but also to good functioning of democracy by increasing people's trust in public institutions. See REGIO working paper, "The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap in Europe." [Horizon Europe](#) has also continued to support research to develop a better understanding of people's dissatisfaction with democracy and how it can be addressed through democratic innovation, including civic engagement and deliberative democracy initiatives.

¹⁰⁹ [Flash Eurobarometer 528](#) (2023) on "Citizenship and Democracy".

¹¹⁰ The total allocations under this instrument amounts to EUR 864 m for the period 2021-2027.

¹¹¹ The partnership principle makes cohesion policy close and recognisable to EU citizens. Engagement of partners is essential for ensuring transparency and democratic accountability of public investments. The Commission and the OECD ran a pilot project to explore how to apply innovative citizen participation methods to cohesion policy, focusing on five authorities across Europe. Follow-up projects were launched in July 2022 in six Member States. See Annex for further examples of actions.

strengthen citizen engagement in policy-making by implementing deliberative processes. It also contributed to boosting democratic resilience, leading to the implementation of a new phase of citizen engagement with European Citizens Panels now embedded in the European Commission's policy-making process.

In parallel, increasing support and funding under EU programmes has also been dedicated to promoting **media and digital literacy**, equipping people of all ages with the tools to navigate today's information and media environment, identify different types of media and how they work, and have a critical understanding of different types of media, including social networks, so that they are able to make informed decisions. As the possibilities to engage online are widening and becoming more commonplace, online hate speech can deter people from expressing their views and participating in online discussions. Fostering a respectful, enabling a safer environment in which to express their views is a priority. To this end the Commission has proposed an **initiative to extend the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime**¹¹². This will complement the regulatory framework under the Digital Services Act, the Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law¹¹³ and the efforts under the Code of conduct on tackling illegal hate speech¹¹⁴.

New and meaningful methods of **citizen participation, deliberation and engagement, across all generations**, can reinforce representative democracies. These forms of participation offer complementary ways for citizens to actively participate in the democratic debate and contribute to policy-making, taking into account the Member State's constitutional traditions and specificities. Experiences with participatory and deliberative democracy, whether at the local, national and pan-European levels, demonstrate that these practices can help to bridge existing gaps between citizens and decision-makers and bring together diverse groups of people to develop collective recommendations. Building on the Conference on the Future of Europe, new ways to ensure citizens are given this closer role in EU policy-making¹¹⁵ have been set up. These forms of engagement complement established **practices of involving citizens in policy-making processes at EU level**, such as public and stakeholder consultations, regular dialogues with stakeholders, or transparency and access to information and documents rules. To strengthen the participation of stakeholders in different stages of policy-making processes, the Commission has adopted **Better Regulation Guidelines** setting out the principles it follows when preparing new initiatives and proposals and when evaluating and monitoring the implementation of existing legislation¹¹⁶.

Education plays a major role in forging appetite for citizen engagement and participation and the attachment to democratic values. Promoting and protecting European democratic values is a central dimension of the **European Strategy for Universities** adopted in 2022, as higher education institutions contribute to promoting active citizenship, tolerance, equality and diversity, openness and critical thinking. **Erasmus+** (2021-2027) promotes participation and civic engagement in Europe's democratic life through multiple funding streams, in the EU Member States and beyond. The promotion of inclusive participatory democracy is one of the guiding principles of the **EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)**¹¹⁷. The 2023 **Citizenship Package** recognises the importance of citizenship education, including awareness of EU citizens'

¹¹² COM(2021) 777 final.

¹¹³ Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

¹¹⁴ [Code of conduct on tackling illegal hate speech online](#).

¹¹⁵ COM(2022) 404.

¹¹⁶ [Better Regulation Guidelines](#).

¹¹⁷ See Annex for more details.

rights¹¹⁸, and voter education for promoting political participation, as well as building resilience to disinformation among citizens.

Civil society organisations are one of the main pillars of a functioning democracy. They act as watchdogs for democratic foundations and institutions. They hold governments to account and help protect and promote fundamental rights and the rule of law by assisting individual people and communities and helping to promote their interests. They also empower individuals to take part in matters of public interest and overall help in growing meaningful public participation.

The Commission engages with **civil society organisations** in policy-making on many fronts. Consultation and dialogue enable civil society organisations and human rights defenders to present their views on EU legislation and policy. The ‘*Have Your Say*’ portal is the entry point for consultation¹¹⁹ and makes it possible for all interested parties to contribute to initiatives before and after adoption¹²⁰. Civil society organisations are part of the partnership with regional and local authorities and economic and social partners, which allows them to be involved throughout the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of EU-funded Cohesion policy programmes.

The Commission has also established regular dialogues with civil society actors in different policy areas providing for more effective communication and involvement in policy-making. **Structural civil society dialogue** takes place through forums and platforms, covering a broad range of policy areas¹²¹. Representations of the Commission in the Member States are important local actors for citizen engagement. They have organised thousands of events, ranging from citizens’ dialogues to ad-hoc participatory events, notably during the Conference on the Future of Europe, where more than 6000 events were organised in the Member States gathering more than 700 000 participants in total. This can be expanded and complemented by other initiatives to connect to the local level¹²².

Protecting, supporting, and empowering civil society organisations and human rights defenders is at the core of the EU’s work on ensuring a thriving civic space as underlined in the **2022 Report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights**¹²³. The report highlights the importance of ensuring that civil society organisations and human rights defenders work in an enabling, safe and supportive environment. The **2022 Rule of Law Report** set out how the operation of civil society organisations without unjustified interference is based on EU case law¹²⁴ and European standards,¹²⁵ and the reports provide an overview of the steps taken in

¹¹⁸ A “[Guide to EU citizenship](#)” presented by the Commission with the Citizenship Package on 6 December 2023, is a useful tool in this context intended to further advance awareness of EU citizenship.

¹¹⁹ [Have your say \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹²⁰ By providing general feedback or sharing views or knowledge during an Open Public Consultation or Call for Evidence via the ‘Have your Say’ portal. This can be complemented by targeted consultations. There are also opportunities to place formal complaints before the Commission if a breach of EU law is suspected, while the European Ombudsman can investigate complaints from individuals and organisations about maladministration by the institutions, bodies and agencies of the EU.

¹²¹ Some such examples include the Permanent Anti-racism Civil Society Forum, the Disability Platform, and the European Migration Forum. The Victims’ Rights Platform launched in 2020 was put in place to facilitate dialogue and the exchange of best practices and information among its members, two thirds of which are civil society. See COM(2022) 716 final, p. 31.

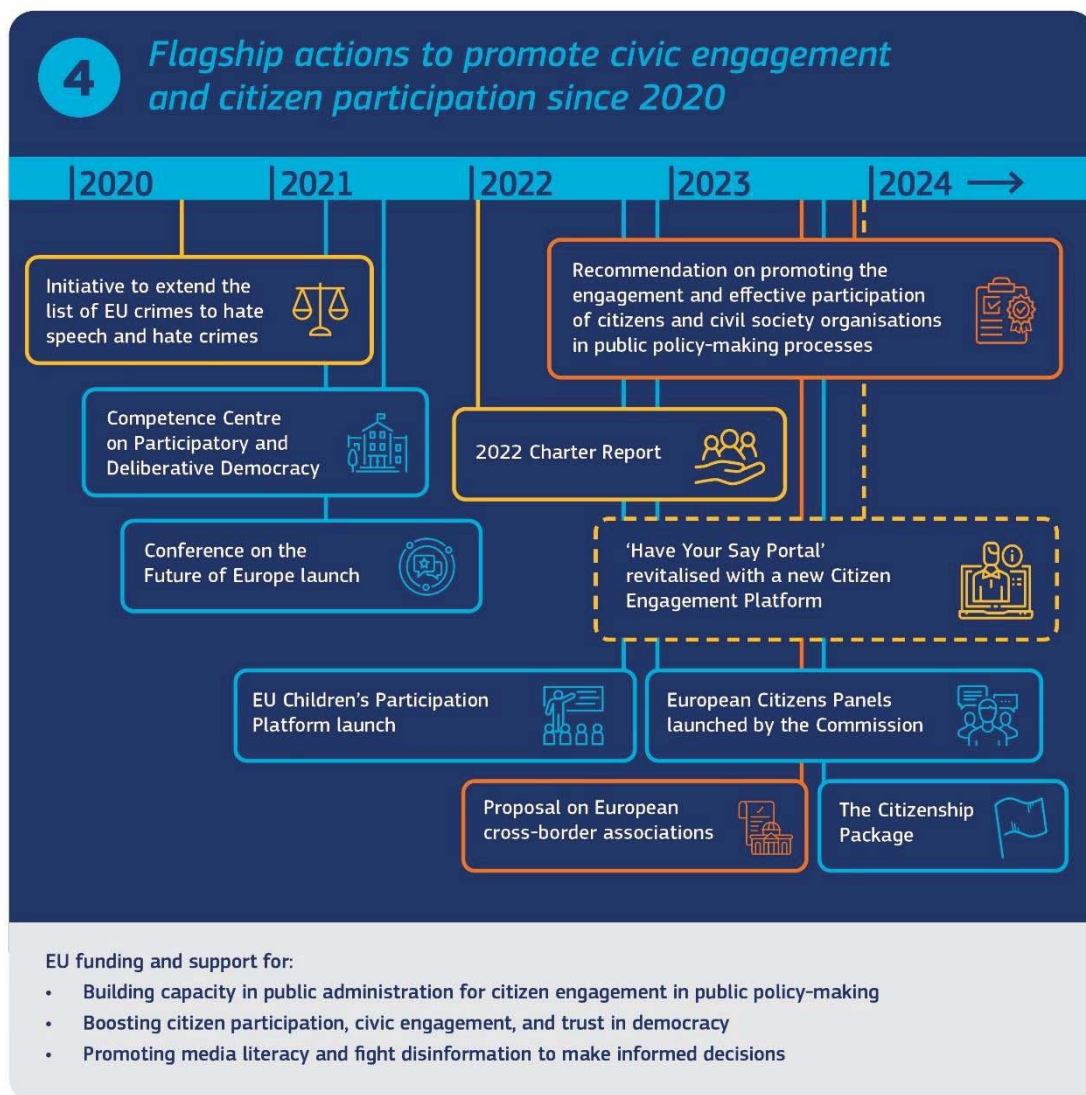
¹²² One example is the Building Europe with Local Councillors initiative. https://building-europe-with-local-councillors.europa.eu/index_en.

¹²³ COM(2022) 716 final.

¹²⁴ Judgment of 18 June 2020, Commission v Hungary, C-78/18.

¹²⁵ See in particular Recommendation Rec(2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe.

Member States to improve the situation for civil society organisations. Examples include simplifying registration procedures, setting up structures to assist civil society organisations, and revising rules on the operation and access to funding of civil society organisations. The 2022 and 2023 Rule of Law Report made specific recommendations to a number of Member States. In addition, in September 2023 the Commission put forward a proposal for a legislative initiative on cross-border activities of associations¹²⁶, which will aim to remove barriers in the single market to enable associations to thrive in the single market, will complement action taken in the current package.



To further foster citizen participation and empower civil society organisations and human rights defenders to participate in policy-making and complement other actions taken at EU level, the Commission is putting forward a **Recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes**¹²⁷. The Recommendation aims to promote the participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making and to help build democratic resilience in the Union. The Recommendation also aims to facilitate the promotion of civic engagement and

¹²⁶ Single market – Proposal for a legislative initiative on cross-border activities of associations (europa.eu) COM(2023) 516 final.

¹²⁷ C(2023) 8627.

the protection of democracies and respect for fundamental rights in Member States. It encourages Member States to ensure effective and inclusive participation of citizens and civil society organisations¹²⁸ in policy-making processes, with a wide representation of the different groups and instances in society, thus reducing exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination, and to support capacity-building of citizens, civil society organisations and public administrations, in both traditional and emerging public spaces. The Recommendation also draws on the lessons of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the ongoing work of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, in line with the established standards and good practices of co-creation and deliberative democracy¹²⁹. Acknowledging the need to ensure a common level of protection and engagement of civil society organisations across the Union (and beyond), it encourages Member States to create and maintain an enabling environment for civil society organisations and human rights defenders, allowing them to effectively engage in such policy-making processes. The Recommendation also proposes a list of measures Member States should take to protect and support civil society organisations and human rights defenders to safeguard a thriving civic space.

Financial support is essential for a thriving civil society. The EU already provides ample funding opportunities for civil society organisations to build their capacity and to implement projects that help foster EU values. One fundamental requirement for EU funding is respect for EU values. Respect for EU values already features as part of the grant agreement every beneficiary of EU funding must sign and the Commission has worked on guidelines to set out more clearly the consequences breaches of EU values have for beneficiaries. The Commission is also rolling out pilot projects on reinforcing checks and verification procedures for budgetary programmes in relevant spending areas that entail higher risk of abuse and disrespect of EU values. Member States should put in place effective mechanisms to apply the same approach when managing EU funds. The Citizens Equality Rights and Values programme (CERV) is focused heavily on supporting civil society organisations to protect and promote EU values and rights. The Commission will continue to ensure a targeted allocation of funding to priorities under the EDAP and mobilise dedicated funding from a range of the available EU Programmes to support the goals of today's package in terms of countering disinformation, as well as promoting election integrity and media pluralism. To make it easier to navigate through the different programmes, the Commission will further improve and promote the tool it has put in place on available funding with simple search functionalities so that relevant information about funds on democracy can be accessed easily and quickly¹³⁰. The Commission and the EEAS will continue to pro-actively engage with citizens and civil society organisations on the ground via the Commission Representations in Member State capitals and EU Delegations around the world to increase awareness and improve information sharing on the available opportunities under the various EU programmes. Figure 5 provides a brief overview of possibilities offered under EU Programmes, and other possibilities are available under EU structural funds and the Technical Support Instrument (for example to fund civil society and build capacity and institutional/administrative infrastructure for deliberative civic engagement and political participation).

¹²⁸ Generally understood as non-State, not-for-profit, non-partisan and non-violent structures, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations, in line with established EU definitions. This also includes 'human rights defenders'.

¹²⁹ The Commission is also drawing up internal guidelines establishing principles and providing a toolbox for participatory and deliberative formats and practices. This will include a Charter of Principles for successful citizen engagement. See also: [Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy](#).

¹³⁰ [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#).

5

Funding and support under EU Programmes*

Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values

Elections: promote democratic participation, civic engagement, and trust in democracy

Media pluralism: countering SLAPPs

Civic space: citizen engagement, equality for all, protection / promotion of rights and EU values

Erasmus+ and European Solidarity corps

Elections: promote democratic participation and trust in democracy within and beyond the EU

Media & disinformation: develop digital competences and media literacy to increase resilience to disinformation

Civic space: citizenship education and active participation in democratic life and society in general, and better awareness of the European project

Horizon Europe

Elections: research on future of democracy, inclusive democratic participation, processes and institutions

Media & disinformation: research on the digital transformation of democracy and media and on undue influence and disinformation

Civic space: projects involving also practitioners and civil society to identify democratic responses to challenges such as climate change, extremism or socio-economic inequalities

Cohesion policy: partnership principle – a cross-cutting requirement

Civic space: : support to public authorities to implement deliberative civic engagement processes

Media: actions to support independence of journalism and local media

Global Europe: NDICI

Elections: strengthen institutional and civil society capacities in third countries in countering electoral threats and promote high international standards in the use of new technology

Media & disinformation: support to media actors and harnessing new technologies to promote and protect democracy, counter threats to democratic processes and safeguard fundamental freedoms worldwide

Civic space: specific initiatives to support human rights defenders' and CSOs

Creative Europe

Elections: democratic participation, including projects on the future of democracy, the impact of inequalities, the role of culture for democracy-building, inclusion and inter-cultural dialogue

Media & disinformation: support for media serving the public interest contributing to a pluralistic debate across borders and a healthier democracy

Civic space: new opportunities to actors in the cultural and creative sector for work related to democracy and civic participation

Digital Europe

Disinformation: through the Connecting Europe Facility, and the Digital Europe Programme, financing of EDMO

Media: grants and support provided for the deployment of media data spaces, an infrastructure for sharing content, data and best practices

Pre-Accession Assistance

Elections: support to electoral reforms in enlargement countries

Media & disinformation: grants and technical assistance under bilateral/regional programmes provided to support regional networks of media and journalist associations

Civic space: grants and technical assistance under bilateral/regional programmes under the Civil Society Facility, including support to EED

*Non-exhaustive list of funding possibilities

4 CONCLUSION

In July 2019, President von der Leyen called for a new push for European democracy, with a greater say for Europeans and a greater effort from the EU to nurture, protect and strengthen our democracy. This translated in the December 2020 European Democracy Action Plan, which made a major contribution to fight against disinformation and information manipulation and to protect fair elections and media freedom and pluralism.

Since the beginning of this Commission's mandate, the EU has had to face a succession of major geopolitical, economic, climate and health crises. The way the EU has managed to respond to these crises has shown that it can rely on its strong liberal democracy, trust in its institutions, and respect for our common principles and values. However, these crises have also shown the threat of foreign interference and the risks from a highly volatile international context: some actors have devoted huge resources to the goal of undermining democracy and trust in our institutions.

This Defence of Democracy package aims to reinforce this action ahead of the elections to the European Parliament. This package answers these challenges, in full respect of our fundamental rights and values, also building on the lessons learned from the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Commission looks forward to the full engagement of the European Parliament and the Council to make decisive progress on all legislative proposals in the democracy area before the European parliamentary elections; and for the wide circle of national actors involved, public and private, to ensure the implementation of the European Democracy Action Plan and of this new Defence of Democracy package.



Strasbourg, 12.12.2023
COM(2023) 630 final

ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

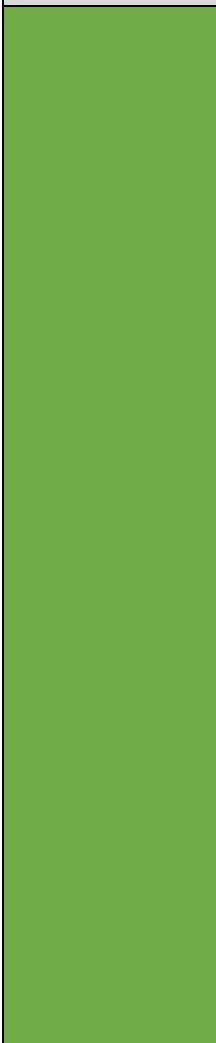
on Defence of Democracy

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY ACTION PLAN (EDAP)

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
Protecting election integrity and promoting democratic participation	<i>Propose legislation to ensure greater transparency in the area of sponsored content in a political context ('political advertising')</i>	<p>A proposal for a Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising was adopted on 25 November 2021. Interinstitutional negotiations were concluded on 6 November 2023, with a formal adoption by co-legislators of the agreed position expected for early 2024.</p> <p>The agreed compromise text provides for a common high standard of transparency for political advertising services for all media forms, enabling citizens, civil society and responsible authorities to clearly identify the source and purpose of such advertising, thereby allowing for better public scrutiny and accountability. The measures proposed also strengthen the protection of personal data, introducing stricter conditions and more transparency around the targeting and delivery of political advertising. Under the provisional agreement, the use of personal data for targeting political ads online will only be allowed if the data was collected from the data subject and if explicit consent was given; this is coupled with a ban on the use of special categories of personal data for purposes of targeting (such as religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation). The new rules will apply to political advertising normally provided for remuneration as well as political advertising prepared in-house or as part of a political advertising campaign, with particular attention to safeguard content under editorial responsibility or the expression of personal views, which are excluded from scope. In addition, the political agreement also foresees the Commission setting up a European public repository for online political advertisements. To address the risk of foreign interference, the regulation further prohibits sponsoring ads outside the EU three months before elections. The role of European political parties and political groups in the European election process is also recognised through a specific non-discrimination clause.</p> <p>The new rules will apply 18 months after the entry into force, with the non-discrimination clause and the definitions being applicable immediately, in time for the European elections.</p> <p><u><i>Useful links:</i></u></p> <p>Legislative proposal for regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising Technology and Democracy: Understanding the influence of online technologies on political behaviour and decision-making</p>
	<i>Adopt support measures and guidance for political parties and Member States on transparency of sponsored political content</i>	<p>The Commission has continued to facilitate in the European Cooperation Network on Elections exchanges of best practices on the issues of transparency of political advertising, including support and guidance for political parties and Member States.</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
	<p><i>Revision of Regulation No 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations</i></p>	<p>A proposal for a revision of the rules on the statute and funding of European political parties and foundations was adopted on 25 November 2021. The proposed regulation will give political parties and foundations more possibilities to fulfil their role in building and nourishing a truly European political sphere, while at the same time making sure that their action is free from undue interference. This would help European political parties interact with their national member parties and across borders; increase transparency, in particular in relation to political advertisement and donations; cut excessive administrative burden; and increase their financial viability.</p> <p>Interinstitutional negotiations are ongoing.</p> <p><u>Useful links:</u></p> <p>Statute and funding of European political parties and foundations</p>
	<p><i>Set up a new joint operational mechanism and other support measures, building on the work of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, to promote resilient electoral processes and take further practical measures to protect election infrastructure against threats, including against cyber-attacks</i></p>	<p>In January 2022 the Commission started rolling out a ‘joint mechanism for electoral resilience’, which supports the deployment of joint expert teams and expert exchanges between Member States. This capacity-building tool aims at supporting the resilience of electoral processes to various types of threats, in particular in the area of online forensics, disinformation and cybersecurity of elections. To-date, Romania, Lithuania and Sweden made use of this mechanism.</p> <p>With the support of the mechanism, the Commission, together with ENISA and the European Parliament organised on 21 November 2023 a table-top exercise to support cybersecurity of election processes, building on the lessons learned from the 2019 edition.</p> <p>The mechanism has also been used to support the work of the Commission and Member States for the preparation of the compendium on e-voting and the guide of good electoral practice addressing participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process.</p> <p><u>Useful links:</u></p> <p>European cooperation network on elections Towards cybersecure EU elections 2019 EU cybersecurity exercise: free and fair EU elections (europa.eu)</p>
	<p><i>The Commission will organise a high-level event bringing together various authorities related to elections to address</i></p>	<p>The high-level event on elections took place in Brussels on 23 and 24 October 2023. The event, organised by the European Commission, brought together various national authorities and stakeholders and focused on democratic participation and integrity of elections. The event offered the possibility to national policymakers and practitioners to engage in discussions and exchanges of best practices to support turnout, empower citizens to take part in the elections in an inclusive manner, as</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
	<i>the challenges outlined in this plan</i>	well as other measures ensuring the resilience of the electoral systems and the fairness and transparency of the elections across the Union.
	Strengthen cooperation on parity of treatment and balanced media coverage during elections	<p>To strengthen cooperation between the competent authorities responsible for media policy and those with competence on electoral matters, a joint meeting was organised in May 2022 bringing together the European Regulators Group for Audio-visual Media Services (ERGA), the Rapid Alert System and the European Cooperation Network on Elections to discuss parity of treatment and media coverage during elections.</p> <p>A follow-up meeting of the same actors took place in March 2023 to discuss in particular best ways to address disinformation, including follow-up to the strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, in the context of the preparation of the 2024 European Parliament elections</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Joint meeting – Summary of the Meeting of May 2022 Joint meeting – Summary of the Meeting of March 2023</p>
	Prepare a compendium of e-voting practices	<p>The Commission published a compendium of e-voting and other ICT practices. It was prepared together with Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections (ECNE), building on the expertise of the Council of Europe.</p> <p>The compendium is informed by the contributions of members of an informal expert subgroup of ECNE on e-voting and a short study on e-voting and ICT practices used in electoral processes prepared by a Network of Academics on citizenship.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Democracy and electoral rights – Commission activities Compendium of e-voting and other ICT practices Study on E-Voting practices in the EU</p>
Facilitate cooperation between EU networks and partner countries and international organisations to build capacity and exchange best practices in countering electoral threats and promote high	<p>The Commission and EEAS have reinforced efforts to facilitate cooperation between the EU, international organisations and partner countries to build capacity and exchange best practices in countering electoral threats and safeguarding democratic processes.</p> <p>The global Team Europe Initiative on Democracy (TED) was launched in December 2021. This innovative coordination mechanism between the EU and 14 Member States contributes to policy coherence in this area. It sets common objectives in line with the priorities set in the Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, in three key areas: ‘accountability</p>	

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
	<p><i>international standards in the use of new technologies</i></p>	<p>and Rule of Law’; ‘Political and Civic Participation’; ‘Media and Digital’. It will also include a Democracy Network, open to civil society and specialised international actors, launched in June 2023.</p> <p>A number of development cooperation programmes, in the field of Democracy Support, were designed and launched to this end. Examples include the EUR 42 million programme WYDE (Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative). The first component, WYDE Civic engagement, implemented by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), started in 2022. It also helps EU Delegation implement their Human Right and Democracy Country strategy by funding youth grass roots organisations involved in democratic reforms advocacy, accountability activities and domestic election observation. The WYDE inter pares helps increase inter-parliamentary cooperation with a specific focus on youth and women inclusion in political life.</p> <p>On 28 March 2023, in a side event to the Summit, Denmark and the European Commission also launched the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI), a multi-donor programme to amplify local civil society to protect and promote inclusive democracy in the digital age, with a focus on equal access to digital technologies, youth inclusion, climate justice and managing risks related to AI (EU contribution EUR 11M). The EU also supports the implementation of UNESCO’s Recommendations on the Ethics of AI as well as UNESCO’s Guidelines for Digital Platform Governance. The goal of these two actions is to safeguard human rights in the context of the development of AI and the development of digital platform regulatory processes across the world.</p> <p>In the EU enlargement context, the Commission has been funding support actions by the ODIHR aimed at following up to electoral recommendations and supporting electoral reform in the Western Balkans since 2017. The current phase (budget of EUR 1.7 million) will run until mid-2024. Several additional initiatives are funded at bilateral level in support of civil society participation in electoral processes and democratic debate.</p> <p>The EU participation in the first (2021) and the second (2023) Summit for Democracy provided the occasion to reinforce alliances for democracy and to display the work done by the EU in the field of global democracy support. The EU participated in the ‘Year of action’ preceding the second Summit through engagement in the multi-stakeholder coalitions, the so-called ‘Democracy cohorts’ with a focus on ‘Youth Political and Civic Engagement’ and on ‘Deliberative democracy’.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Team Europe Democracy (TED) Team Europe Initiative and Joint Programming tracker (europa.eu) Promoting inclusive democracy in the digital age: EU and Denmark launch the Digital Democracy Initiative (europa.eu) Summit for Democracy: EU launches milestone programmes to empower youth as key actors of democracy (europa.eu) Summary for Democracy: March 2023 Summit Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans OSCE The Youth Democracy Cohort</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
	<p><i>Consolidate the capacity of EU election observation missions in third countries to observe and assess online election campaigns and to follow-up on their recommendations</i></p>	<p>The EU deployed 35 Election Observation Missions (EOM), Expert Missions (EEM) and Follow-up Missions (EFM) in 2021 and 2022. A solid methodology and accompanying tools for observing social media are now consistently used in every EU Election Observation Mission, whose recommendations have been expanded to include this field. Social media observation is now integrated by default into the Core Team of experts for every EOM.</p> <p>As part of the ongoing work with the organisations having endorsed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (DoP) a working group focused on the impact of data protection over electoral integrity is led by the European External Action Service. The aim is to outline what are the guiding principles and the good practices that should be followed to guarantee that data is protected in an electoral process, thus enhancing the integrity of the election and safeguarding voters' right to privacy and also to access to public documents.</p> <p>Prior to this, common guidelines (non-binding) on observation of the online campaign and fundamental principles for Electoral ICT were adopted at the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation plenary meeting co-hosted by the EEAS, European Parliament in Brussels in December 2022 and are now being put to use.</p> <p><u>Useful links:</u></p> <p>EU Election Observation Missions Declaration of Principles for International Election Observations Guidelines for Observation of Election Campaigns on Social Networks</p>
	<p><i>Encourage the use of EU structural funds to fund civil society and build capacity and institutional/administrative infrastructure for deliberative civic engagement and political participation</i></p>	<p>The Commission coordinated a series of events and projects to raise awareness and build capacity for citizen engagement in the design and implementation of cohesion policy and in a wider and strategic EU policy context.</p> <p>The Partnership Principle lies at the heart of the EU's cohesion policy. Giving stakeholders – and via them also citizens – a voice in decisions that concern them directly plays an important role in enforcing the legitimacy of EU policymaking and the democratic accountability of investments by the EU and by the national authorities. The Code of Conduct on Partnership ensures that the regional, local and urban authorities, as well as civil society, environmental and social partners, non-governmental organisations are involved in the design and implementation of the investment projects on the ground.</p> <p>In 2022 the Commission launched the European Community of Practice on Partnership (ECOPP) which gathers 159 representatives from civil society, public authorities, regional and local level stakeholders to promote partnership in the implementation of the EU funds. The network has delivered concrete guidelines on the policy frame for partnership as well</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p>as tools for strengthening the partnership across the EU. On top, the cohesion policy plans to invest EUR 26,9 billion under the policy objective Europe Closer to Citizens by empowering local authorities to deliver integrated place-based investments all over Europe, with close engagement of local people and other stakeholders.</p> <p>In July 2020, the Commission and the OECD started cooperation to offer technical support to public authorities and civil society organisations that want to implement deliberative processes (e.g. citizens jury, voting, budgeting) in the context of design, implementation and monitoring of investments funded by ERDF, JTF and Cohesion Fund. Following the first phase, with publication of final report on “Engaging citizens in cohesion policy”, phase 2 started in July 2022. Today, eight deliberative processes are on-going or in preparation in Belgium, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain.</p> <p>Another example includes a pilot project run in 2022 on citizens engagement on green infrastructure in urban areas, in 10 European cities. The publication of this work can be found in the form of an Atlas available online, and offers amongst others rationale and guidance to conduct citizen engagement at city level.</p> <p>The Commission is developing a training package on co-creation and deliberative practices targeted to public administrations at all levels of governance. This package includes a training of trainers’ course. The full package is expected to be released through the EU Academy in the first trimester of 2024.</p> <p>The Commission is also developing a study on the role of public spaces to enable democratic practices. This is part of a wider vision that considers the need for redefinition of democracy infrastructures. The science for policy report based on the input of worldwide experts is planned to be released early Autumn 2024.</p> <p>In September 2021, the Commission launched a Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy to build capacity and best practice in participatory and deliberative citizen engagement practices, targeted at all levels of governance. The Competence Centre works to support the Commission services and Member States, sbased on the most up to date material on participatory and deliberative democracy.</p> <p>Externally, Global Europe Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) (NDICI) Civil Society Programme (EUR 1,5B) promotes civil society as actors of governance, whilst the Human Rights and Democracy Programme (EUR 1,5B) includes targeted actions to protect and build capacity of human rights and democracy civil society and human rights defenders. For instance, the EU supports the (EUR 30M) <i>Protect.Defenders.eu</i> programme, providing lifeline support to human rights defenders in the world. The EU has also funded a system for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society EU SEE (EUR 50m), which will monitor the enabling environment for civil society, and provide early warning in times of change, as well as long term capacity building and flexible financial support.</p> <p>The EU Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) Programme (EUR 186 M) works with European civil society organisations and local authorities (LAs) to empower EU citizens to address global challenges and crises; promote</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p>European values, justice, human rights and democracy, co-responsibility, equity, and sustainable development at local and global level.</p> <p>The Commission also provides substantive financial support to Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. Under IPA II (2014-2020) the EU provided around EUR 333 million to civil society and the media across the region through the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme. EUR 218.5 million are already being allocated for the period 2021-2023 with similar amounts earmarked for 2024-2027.</p> <p>Support is provided via multiple channels and modalities, including grants to CSOs on variety of topics and technical assistance to build their capacities.. Among others, to the European Endowment for Democracy implements a flexible re-granting scheme for pro-democracy support in fast changing environments (e.g. start-up funding, core and bridge funding, support to small-scale initiatives).. Further support is channeled under the EU Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Engaging citizens in cohesion policy: pilot project final report en OECD Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Summit for Democracy: EU launches milestone programmes to empower youth as key actors of democracy (europa.eu) European Endowment for Democracy - home (democracyendowment.eu) DEAR: Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (europa.eu) The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights - EIDHR</p>
	<p><i>Use EU funds and opportunities under the EU youth strategy, citizenship education, the Creative Europe Programme and the equality agenda to foster access to democratic participation and trust in democracy</i></p>	<p>The Conference on the Future of Europe acted as an important catalyst for new forms of citizens’ participation and deliberative processes. It has led to a new phase of citizens engagement with a new generation of European Citizen’s Panels embedded in the European Commission’s policy making process. In support, a new guidebook defining principles and formats of citizens’ participation and deliberative processes is under preparation. This is complemented by a new online one-stop-shop on citizens engagement, bundling together existing tools, notably the public consultation portal, the European Citizens’ Initiative and a new interactive space inspired by the Conference on the Future of Europe platform.</p> <p>In addition, a wide range of funding opportunities is available to foster access to democratic participation, civic engagement, trust in democracy and research into related questions, most notably in the context of the Creative Europe programme, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. This is fully aligned with the relevant EU’s policy agenda, in particular in the area of culture and media, youth, education and research.</p> <p>In the field of culture, the Commission published a report on <i>Culture and Democracy – the evidence. How citizens’ participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion</i> in June 2023. The EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026) maintains the focus on enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p>(defined as one of 4 priorities, notably “Culture and promoting democracy: toward cultural citizenship in Europe), with targeted activities on strengthening democracy and civic engagement through cultural participation. In this context, the Commission will collect concrete examples, to be shared with Member States and stakeholders, on how to build effective synergies between schools and cultural agents designed to enhance pupils’ civic engagement, democratic attitudes and resilience through a 2-year “Culture and Democracy Study and Peer-Learning” project..</p> <p>Under Creative Europe, a number of calls fund projects specifically addressing different aspects of democratic participation, including projects on the future of democracy, the impact of inequalities, the role of culture for democracy-building, inclusion and inter-cultural dialogue. Across 2023 and 2024, a EUR 10 million action has been set up to support primarily local, regional, or investigative media and other media relevant for democracy. Continued financial support is also provided to journalism partnerships to support the resilience of media, and therefore a plurality of offers on the market.</p> <p>The Commission also supports mutual learning, including on issues related to the citizenship education, EU values and European dimension of teaching, within the Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training, gathering education experts appointed by Member States and other participating countries, stakeholder organisations and social partners. In 2023 the Working Group published an Issue paper on citizenship education.</p> <p>The Commission has undertaken a variety of activities specifically to support youth participation, including through the organisation of the European Year of Youth (2022), the EU Youth Dialogue and the Young European Ambassadors programme. Erasmus+ (2021-2027) promotes participation and civic engagement in Europe’s democratic life through multiple funding streams, including actions specifically dedicated to young people, also internationally (supporting for instance youth organisations in the Western Balkans or South Mediterranean).</p> <p>Grants are also available under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme CERV, specifically the Call for proposals on Citizens’ engagement and participation, launched end 2022, with a focus on the 2024 European Parliament elections and efforts needed to promote the participation of citizens in the elections, and to promote EU citizenship engagement.</p> <p>Under Horizon Europe, a number of calls fund research specifically addressing different aspects of democratic participation, including projects on the future of democracy, the impact of inequalities, the role of education, the impact of online social networks and new media, among others. The 2023-2024 work programme foresees two yearly calls for proposals on democracy and governance (total envelope of EUR 170 million), on top of the EUR 125 million under the 2021-22 programme in support of 47 ongoing research projects.</p> <p>Under the Technical Support Instrument, Member States can receive support upon request to address several issues linked to education, equality, social protection, democracy, rule of law or the quality of public administration.</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p><i>Useful links:</i> Communication “Conference on the Future of Europe, Putting vision into concrete action” Overview of EU programmes and funds financed from the EU budget and NextGenerationEU Culture and democracy, the evidence. How citizens’ participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion : lessons from international research Erasmus+ project results platform EU-supported European Media Platforms Horizon Europe: Work Programmes and Research and innovation funding for democracy and governance (europa.eu) Technical Support Instrument (TSI) (europa.eu)</p>
	<p><i>Fight against hate speech and promote respect in the public debate through the extension the list of EU crimes to hate crime and hate speech</i></p>	<p>In 2021, the Commission adopted a Communication on a more inclusive and protective Europe extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime, also in view of fostering a respectful, enabling and safer environment for public debate. This paves the way for a future Council decision to extend the list of EU crimes under Article 83(1) of the Treaty to cover hate crime and hate speech, including online hate speech.</p> <p>Discussions at Council on the decision to extend the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime are still underway.</p> <p>Under IPA II, the Commission funds the programme “Reporting Diversity Network 2.0.” (EUR 1 million; Aug 2020 – Aug 2024) which empowers a regional network of CSOs to work together with the aim to influence the quality of media messages affecting perceptions of ethnicity, religion and gender as pressing thematic areas relevant for overall levels of understanding and tolerance in the Western Balkans. The project provides tools, resources and evidence for the entire civil society to promote more inclusive media, and effective policy-making advancing tolerance.</p> <p>Under IPA II and III, the Commission supports the work of the Council of Europe in fighting against discrimination and hate speech in the Western Balkans, through a dedicated component of the EU-Council of Europe Horizontal Facility (EUR 12 million). Thorough regional and country-specific technical assistance, it supports the alignment with European standards and the Commission’s country report recommendations in the area of fundamental rights.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i> Communication on a more inclusive and protective Europe Reporting Diversity Network - Reporting Diversity Network</p>
<p><i>Strengthening media freedom and media pluralism</i></p>	<p><i>Recommendation on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals</i></p>	<p>The 2021 Recommendation on the safety of journalists, adopted in September 2021, put forward actions for Member States to improve the safety of journalists. It provides a catalogue of practical measures relating to the effective and impartial investigation and prosecution of crimes, independent response and support mechanisms, access to venues and information, safety during demonstrations, training and online safety and digital empowerment. Intensified measures were recommended</p>

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	<p><i>in the European Union, taking into account new online threats faced in particular by women journalists</i></p>	<p>to protect those particularly vulnerable to threats and attack, including female journalists, journalists belonging to minority groups, and journalists reporting on equality issues. In July 2023 the Commission launched an independent external study to collect information on Member States' activities to implement the recommendation. The study will produce country factsheets and assess countries' practices and will develop key indicators and a monitoring and evaluation methodology. This methodology will be used in future reporting exercises and is expected to enhance completeness and consistency of reporting under the Recommendation. The preliminary findings of the study are discussed at the fourth edition of the News Media Forum held on 4 December 2023 in Brussels. The Commission also continues to fund actions focusing on providing legal and practical assistance to journalists in the EU and beyond.</p> <p>Under IPA III, the Commission funds the programme “SafeJournalists Network” (EUR 1.44 million; April 2023 - Jul 2026), implemented by a consortium led by Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia, to contribute to creating an enabling environment via support to a regional early warning platform reporting cases of attacks and threats against journalists, and further engagement with law enforcement and the judicial authorities, as well as to properly and swiftly follow up on such cases.</p> <p>Under the Horizontal Facility with the Council of Europe both regional and country specific allocations in the Western Balkans support the application of media actors' rights and responsibilities in line with European standards, and the improvement of the legal framework (EUR 4 million Jan 2023-Dec 2026).</p> <p><u>Useful links:</u></p> <p>Commission Recommendation on ensuring the protection, safety and empowering of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union Home - SafeJournalists Promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media - Horizontal Facility (coe.int)</p>
	<p><i>Structured dialogue, under the European News Media Forum, with Member States, stakeholders and international organisations to prepare and implement the recommendation</i></p>	<p>A structured dialogue on the safety of journalists in view of preparing the Recommendation took place at the first edition of the European News Media Forum (23-25 March 2021). Relevant stakeholder representatives attended the Forum, including international, national and EU institutions, journalists and publishers associations, researchers, NGOs, online platforms. After having discussed media transformation and innovation in its 2nd and 3rd editions, a new edition of the forum was held on 4 December 2023 in Brussels to discuss the preliminary findings of the independent external study on Member States' activities to implement the recommendation..</p> <p><u>Useful links:</u></p> <p>Event report on the structured dialogue on the safety of journalists European News Media Forum on Safety of Journalists</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
	<p><i>Sustainable funding for projects with a focus on legal and practical assistance to journalists in the EU and elsewhere, including safety and cybersecurity training for journalists and diplomatic support</i></p>	<p>The Commission funds projects on legal and practical assistance to journalists, both in Member States and globally. Actions focus on emergency support and rapid response to violations of press and media freedom and on capacity building and professional development of journalists.</p> <p>The second edition of the “Media Freedom Rapid Response” (MFRR-II), which runs until October 2023, documented 669 alerts with 1121 attacked persons or entities. It offered financial support to 22 legal cases in 11 countries involving media outlets and journalists facing legal threats. With regard to the emergency fund for practical support, the project received 457 requests for practical support and in 44 of these cases delivered grants with an average of 1,600 euro per grant. Regarding advocacy and awareness-raising in the field of media freedom and safety of journalists, MFRR published 94 statements and open letters addressing key press and media freedom issues in 27 countries. The fourth edition of the Media Freedom Rapid Response started in November 2023 and will run until end October 2025.</p> <p>The Free Media Hub EAST project, started in July 2023, will support existing and established independent Russian and Belarusian media working in the EU. It will award over EUR 2.2 million in grants, provide assistance and psychological support, invest in technological solutions and strengthen cooperation between local hubs where these exiled media are located in the EU (mainly Czechia, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania).</p> <p>The “Cross-border investigative journalism fund” IJ4EU, allowed almost 300 journalists throughout the EU to carry out investigative collaborations on transnational subjects in the public interest. The IJ4EU fund allocated 1,110,868.65 EUR to 43 projects. An additional 15,000 EUR was awarded to three journalistic teams under the IJ4EU Impact Award. It also offered specialist training and mentoring for freelancers and provided practical, legal and editorial assistance to all grantees, along with advocacy support in the event of press freedom violations. Support to investigative journalism will continue under the “Collaborative Investigative Journalism Initiative” project, from July 2023 to June 2025.</p> <p>Outside the EU, Delegations continue to implement measures in line with the Handbook for Safety of Journalists. Training and knowledge material has been developed for EU Delegations to deal with cases of abuses against journalists. The EU also supports action grants implemented by civil society and media organisations to provide legal assistance, capacity building, financial support, safety and cybersecurity training. The EU continues its financial and technical assistance, working with partners in the media sector and other trusted actors such as European Endowment for Democracy. Most EU Delegations have identified freedom of expression/media freedom and safety of journalists as a key priority in their Human Rights Country Strategies 2021-2024. Examples include the NDICI-Human Rights and Democracy Programme, which Inter alia supports projects to enhance professional skills, abilities and capacities of journalists, bloggers and media workers. It also supports self-regulatory and standard-setting initiatives developed by media. Under this Programme, the EU allocated</p>

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		<p>country-specific funding for 2022-2023 (managed by the EU Delegations) that allow for local actions supporting these objectives. The NDICI Programme also include a Global Action for Supporting Media and Harnessing New Technologies with the aim to promoting and protecting democracy, countering threats to democracy and electoral processes, safeguard media independence and countering the challenges of new technologies.</p> <p>Under IPA instrument (Civil Society Facility and Media Programme), the Commission has an established track-record in supporting independent media and media pluralism in the Western Balkans and Türkiye with a number of holistic and specialised regional programmes, worth more than EUR 42 million (October 2023). The programmes target different systemic aspects of media freedom, but mainly the broader aspects of enabling environment for media (including safety of journalists, fighting disinformation, etc.), access to finance and economic sustainability, professional standards of media and quality content. Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Support to Media Freedom and Pluralism in the Western Balkans” (EUR 10 million, March 2023 – Aug 2025) aimed to improve the economic sustainability of independent media outlets and improve their capacities for quality reporting and facilitate regional exchanges and networking between media outlets and other media market actors. • Three direct action grants to European Endowment for Democracy for targeted support to media outlets and civic actors (EUR 37.6 million of which around half for media) and yearly operating grant (EUR 2 million per year): a flexible re-granting scheme for pro-democracy support in fast changing environments. <p>In the last five years, the EU has also financed projects worth more than EUR 120 million in countries outside the EU to support freedom of expression and independent media. Examples of actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific support to journalists and the media in Ukraine (EUR 30 million) • Support for independent journalism in for the Southern Neighbourhood amounted to EUR 15 million in 2021. Grants were carried out through the European Endowment for Democracy • A substantial programme to support Russian independent media came into force in February 2022, providing emergency support as well as longer-term capacity building and other support measures. • Start of the procedures for selection of relevant organizations to implement activities for Protecting Independent Media in the context of the Thematic Framework Partnerships for Human Rights and Democracy. • ProtectDefenders intensifying their work to protect journalists in countries in crisis. In 2021, the mechanism supported about 550 journalists worldwide. • In Afghanistan two programmes for media inside the country and working from abroad have been agreed with UNESCO and Internews. • Media Support and Assises de Journalism.

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p>Under the Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy programme 2021-2027, an estimated EUR 185 million are earmarked for support to independent media and harnessing digitalisation worldwide. The new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement on Protecting Independent Media will allow for more strategic cooperation with selected NGOs that work to protect media freedom across the globe. The agreement is signed for a duration of four years (2023-2027) with three leading consortia. Up to EUR 20 million will be made available. The objectives are to strengthen the resilience of journalists and media outlets at risk; combat hate speech, extremism, and disinformation; provide young journalists operating in difficult conditions access to professional development and learning opportunities; build and consolidate cross-border networks of media development organisations and CSOs.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Media Freedom and Rapid Response IJ4 EU – Investigative Journalism for Europe Handbook for Safety of Journalists International cooperation and development – Calls for proposals and tenders Home - SafeJournalists The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) (democracyendowment.eu) WB6 MEDIA Support to Media Freedom and Pluralism in the Western Balkans</p>
	<p><i>Set up expert group on SLAPPs to gather and exchange best practices on legal support for journalists and other actions</i></p>	<p>The expert group on SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) was set up in 2021 and assisted the Commission in the preparation of the anti-SLAPP package. The group, composed of legal practitioner and partitioners' associations met 8 times. The group continues to support Member States in the implementation of the Recommendation.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Expert group against SLAPP</p>
	<p><i>Present initiative to protect journalists and civil society against SLAPPs</i></p>	<p>In April 2022, the Commission put forward a package of measures against SLAPPs, proposing legislative safeguards to curb abusive litigation against journalists and human rights defenders, as well as wide range of non-legislative measures to support action at national level to address some of the root causes of SLAPP, such as defamation rules. On 30 November, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional political agreement on the anti-SLAPP directive.</p> <p>With regard to the Recommendation, Member States should report the aggregated data collected at national level to the Commission on a yearly basis starting from the end of 2023, in full respect of data protection requirements. The Commission will publish a yearly summary of the received contributions.</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Proposal for a Directive on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation)</p>
	<p><i>Support EU cooperation between national media councils, other media self-regulatory bodies, independent media regulators and networks of journalists, and initiatives fostering journalistic partnerships and standards</i></p>	<p>The Commission supports cooperation between national media councils, other media self-regulatory bodies, independent media regulators and networks of journalists, and initiatives fostering journalistic partnerships and standards, notably via financial support to projects under various programmes (e.g. Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, Creative Europe).</p> <p>One example is the pilot project “Media Councils in the Digital Age” focusing on highlighting the important role of press and media councils in times of decreasing trust towards journalists and media outlets combined with increasing disinformation on new media. It looks at the digital challenges through 4 main components: academic work to provide data and analysis regarding existing press councils, awareness campaign to promote media self-regulation, visibility and exchanges of media councils’ works on the international scene and strengthening of existing organizations or support to future organizations. This project will be continued by the “Media Councils in the Digital Age 4” project, running from July 2023 to June 2025. Other projects include projects under the Horizon Europe call “Media for democracy – democratic media” or project ‘European Excellence exchange for journalism’ (funded from the Creative Europe programme) that provides a knowledge hub for journalists to connect, based on mutual trust and common rules</p> <p>Another example is the programme “Strengthening Quality News and Independent Journalism in the Western Balkans and Turkey II” (EUR 2.2 million; Jan 2023 – Dec 2025), to strengthen trust-based engagement of citizens and media, provide resources and establish conditions for media and journalists to produce high quality content through education, training, mentoring and editorial support, technical and financial support, publishing and promoting outstanding achievements in quality and investigative journalism.</p> <p>Under the EU-Council of Europe Horizontal Facility, regional and country specific allocations in the Western Balkans aim at ensuring the respect of both rights and obligations of journalists, associations of journalists, self-regulatory bodies, and other media organisations, in line with the European Court of Human Rights case-law system and Council of Europe’s standards , including by working with Media Regulatory Authorities and the justice sector (EUR 4 million Jan 2023-Dec 2026).</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Media Councils in the Digital Age</p> <p>Promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media - Horizontal Facility (coe.int)</p> <p>Horizon Europe projects on the future of liberal democracy</p>

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	<p><i>Set up the Media Ownership Monitor and develop further possible guidance on the transparency of media ownership</i></p>	<p>The Pilot project on the Media Ownership Monitor started in September 2021 and its second phase concluded in September 2023. It provides a database with information on ownership and control of the most relevant news media in 27 Member States. The project covers the most relevant media, which have been selected in terms of demand (market share) and/or agenda (quotation and/or recommendation by other news services). The samples include both national and regional media. All data was collected from publicly available sources.</p> <p>In September 2023, the Commission adopted a proposal for a European Media Freedom Act regulation and an accompanying recommendation on internal safeguards for editorial independence and ownership transparency in the media sector. The Regulation sets a number of information requirements for media service providers: legal name, contact details, names of direct, indirect and beneficial owners. The Recommendation encourages Member States to entrust regulators with developing and maintaining a dedicated online media ownership database with disaggregated data about different types of media. Interinstitutional negotiations are ongoing.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Euromedia Ownership Monitor European Media Freedom Act regulation Recommendation on internal safeguards for editorial independence and ownership transparency in the media sector</p>
	<p><i>Foster measures for the transparent and fair allocation of state advertising</i></p>	<p>The European Media Freedom Act proposal, adopted by the Commission in September 2022, provides for requirements for the allocation of state advertising to media, so that it is allocated according to transparent, objective, proportionate and non-discriminatory criteria and through open, proportionate and non-discriminatory procedures. Member States would have to make public the amounts spent and the beneficiaries of state advertising. Interinstitutional negotiations on the proposal are ongoing.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>European Media Freedom Act regulation Recommendation on internal safeguards for editorial independence and ownership transparency in the media sector</p>
	<p><i>Map options for further support for media diversity and foster a European approach on the prominence of audiovisual media services of general interest</i></p>	<p>An independent study on media plurality and diversity online was published on 16 September 2022. It maps legislative measures and industry practices related to the prominence and findability of general interest content and services in addition to assessing the effectiveness of such measures. The study found that content and services with increased prominence can have an impact on exposure diversity and media pluralism. However, assessing the real-life impact that the current industry measures on content prioritisation may have on media pluralism and on users' exposure to media diversity is challenging. The reasons are linked to the use of algorithm-driven content recommendations and the sheer lack of access to data. The</p>

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		<p>study then proposes and discusses policy options and recommendations on how to develop transparent and accountable prominence regimes.</p> <p>Exchanges of best practices and a workshop concerning the prominence of general interest content in European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services ('ERGA') took place over the course of 2021 and resulted in a report. A workshop feeding into the final deliverable was organised in September. ERGA's work continued in 2022 through further guidance/analysis concerning the effectiveness of algorithms and recommendation systems in ensuring the appropriate prominence of audio-visual media services of general interest, as well as the prominence of European works. The appropriate prominence of audiovisual media services of general interest under Article 7a of the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is one of the areas in which the new European Board for Media Services is to issue guidance under the future European Media Freedom Act.</p> <p>The Commission also dedicates a full budget line ("Multimedia Actions") to support the production of independent news on EU affairs. Beneficiaries include Euronews, radio networks, data-journalism initiatives or the European Newsroom bringing together leading European news agencies. This is complemented by a number of pilot media and citizen empowerment projects, such as the European Media Platforms, aiming to improve EU citizens' access to trusted information, or a call to provide young people with news on matters of relevance and importance across Europe, thereby increasing their democratic engagement. Other grants are available to support small scale online media in running research and media literacy activities to support the fight against disinformation, as well as supporting news media in the face of "news deserts".</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Study on media plurality and diversity online European media platforms ERGA – European Regulators Group for Audio-visual Media Services report Multimedia actions Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu)</p>
<p>Countering dis-information and information manipulation</p>	<p><i>In this context, the Commission services and the EEAS will work with Member States, civil society and industry towards refined common definitions and methodologies in order to</i></p>	<p>The EEAS, in cooperation with the Commission, Member States, international partners and other stakeholders advanced the work towards a common understanding and terminology and in June 2021 a non-paper with a proposal for the conceptual definition of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference ('FIMI') that better characterizes the threat faced in the information environment was distributed. The terminology has since been used in multiple documents of the European</p>

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	<p><i>address different categories of disinformation and influence activities.</i></p>	<p>Union as well as outside, including the G7 Foreign Ministers Communique 2022 and the Joint Statement on EU-NATO Cooperation 2023.</p> <p>Civil society, academia, industry and other stakeholders were consulted through a dedicated series of expert round tables held throughout 2021-22 and collaboration to promote a common understanding and ensure that analytical capabilities are in place to match FIMI criteria. Work will continue, including through dedicated projects, to further refine the understanding of the different building blocks of the FIMI definition. Civil society has also taken note of the definition, as exemplified by a report of EU DisinfoLab in 2023.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>EU Strategic Compass on Security and Defense FIMI Conclusions (July 2022) EUvsDisinfo EEAS Stratcom Activity report 2021; EEAS Stratcom Activity report 2022 G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Annual Report 2021 G7 Foreign Ministers Statement 2022 Joint Declaration on EU-NATO cooperation EU DisinfoLab – FIMI : towards a European redefinition of foreign interference</p>
	<p><i>Develop the EU's toolbox for countering foreign interference and influence operations, including new instruments that allow imposing costs on perpetrators, as well as strengthening the EEAS strategic communication activities and taskforces</i></p>	<p>The EEAS provided a joint EEAS-EC concept paper on the FIMI Toolbox in April 2021, identifying four dimensions of the FIMI Toolbox: situational awareness, resilience building, disruption / regulation, and measures related to EU external action, including CFSP and diplomatic responses. Each area comprises different types of instruments, with the potential to either prevent or lower the impact of FIMI, to deter them from pursuing these activities or to respond to them. In March 2023 the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats (HWP ERCHT) acknowledged the updated concept paper on FIMI and the existence of the toolbox.</p> <p>Council Conclusions on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) were adopted by the Council in July 2022. The EEAS and Commission services have continued discussions with Member States regarding instruments that allow raising costs on perpetrators.</p> <p>Efforts are ongoing to further strengthen internal capacities and capabilities of the EEAS Strategic communication teams and taskforces, including the network of 27 Stratcom Officers to guide strategic communication efforts on the ground.</p> <p>The EU has also made use of its diplomatic tools to address FIMI by state actors. Most notably, from March 2022, the EU imposed sanctions on Russia Today (RT), Sputnik and other outlets for their crucial role in information manipulation and interference related to the aggression against Ukraine (full list in annex XV to Regulation 833/2014). In addition, public</p>

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		<p>channels, such as EUvsDisinfo, continue to raise awareness about pro-Kremlin information manipulation and interference and to expose its coordinated nature. In 2022, the EUvsDisinfo project reached over 2,7 million people via their website and 19,3 million more via their social media channels.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Strategic Compass FIMI Conclusions (July 2022) EUvsDisinfo EEAS Stratcom Activity report 2021; EEAS Stratcom Activity report 2022 EU sanctions map</p>
	<p><i>Put in place a new protocol to strengthen existing cooperation structures to fight disinformation, both in the EU and internationally</i></p>	<p>EU action in response to the unprecedented waves of foreign information manipulation and interference and disinformation in the current geopolitical context has shown that cooperation between different EU institutions works well. The existing cooperation structures have proven to be flexible and responsive to changing needs, without needing to put in place new formal arrangements. Engagement in the respective networks, such as the Rapid Alert System and the Network against Disinformation, has proven highly useful to ensure timely sharing of analysis, insights and products as well as of communication plans and strategies.</p> <p>The EEAS works on addressing foreign information manipulation and interference ('FIMI') including disinformation through the EEAS Stratcom and the EEAS-managed Rapid Alert System (RAS), to facilitate daily exchanges with EU Member States and international partners.</p> <p>The Commission services tackle different aspects of disinformation within the EU (e.g. on elections, cybersecurity, media freedom, online platforms). Since 2018, the Commission has stepped up its internal coordination via the Network against Disinformation (NaD) composed of the Commission services and Representations in EU MSs, with EEAS and European Parliament as observers. Through the network the Commission pools and leverages the capacities so that it can offer a powerful response possible to disinformation through coordinated action. Immediately after the invasion of Ukraine, the Commission intensified its cooperation with online platforms to monitor the implementation of the sanctions against Russian media outlets and to coordinate their efforts to fight disinformation related to the conflict.</p> <p>The Commission and Member States also work together in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections to discuss the cases of interference in the electoral processes and exchange on best practices. Cooperation between the relevant networks is crucial. Therefore, the Rapid Alert System held a joint session with the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats as well as the European Cooperation Network on Elections in December 2023.</p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		<p>In its external action, the EU has also funded independent regional organisations engaged in promoting Civic Tech for Democracy and the access to reliable information around electoral processes.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Activity Report 2021 Activity Report 2022 EEAS Stratcom Report on FIMI Threats Management Plan 2022 DG Communication</p>
	<p><i>Develop a common framework and methodology for collecting systematic evidence on foreign interference and a structural dialogue with civil society, private industry actors and other relevant stakeholders to regularly review the threat situation</i></p>	<p>The EEAS has proposed a common analytical framework and methodology to collect systematic evidence of FIMI activity. This methodology will support even more effective and collaborative information sharing and analysis both within the EU and internationally. The first EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats was published in February 2023, which aims to provide a proof-of-concept for the common framework that enables mutual sharing of complex insights in a timely, interoperable fashion and at scale. In this vein, the EEAS is facilitating a community approach to information sharing in the form of an Information Sharing and Analysis Centre (ISAC), which aims to facilitate the collection and sharing of data on FIMI incidents among trusted partners.</p> <p>The commitment of the EU and the United States in the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) includes a shared standard for structured threat information exchange on FIMI between the European Union and the United States, as well as the underlying common methodology for identifying, analysing and countering FIMI. Moving forward, the European Union and the United States plan to support the use of this standard by stakeholders across the globe. In October 2023, during the EU-US Summit both sides agreed to expand collaboration on countering FIMI based on common principles, such as dedicated strategies, internal organizational structures, capacity, civil society and multilateral engagement. This cooperation should aim to support like-minded partners in countering FIMI, including via US and EU coordinated activities, while safeguarding freedom of expression, together with partner countries. Continued dialogue with civil society, private industry and other relevant stakeholders has been established. Dedicated exchanges with experts, including expert roundtables on threat assessment to ensure insights from external stakeholders on the situational awareness on FIMI and inform approaches.</p> <p>A new EU project was launched implemented by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) (EUR 3 million) to develop practical support tools to facilitate the sharing of FIMI information, insights and evidence between different actors.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p>

EDAP area	Objectives and Actions	State of play/ Deliverables
		The 1st EEAS Report on FIMI Threats FPI project on Countering Foreign Interference
	<p><i>Increase support for capacity-building of national authorities, independent media and civil society in third countries to detect and respond to disinformation and foreign influence operations</i></p>	<p>In October 2022, to mark the Global Media and Information Literacy Week, EUvsDisinfo launched a “LEARN” section, a dedicated webpage explaining the mechanisms, tactics, common narratives and actors behind FIMI and disinformation and information manipulation.</p> <p>In the Western Balkans region, the EU has engaged in proactive and factual communication and capacity building of institutions to deal with FIMI threats. In 2022, the EU supported over 250 journalists discussing effective ways of promoting professional journalism in the region. In 2021, support was provided to organise the EU-Western Balkans Media Literacy Conference to discuss disinformation, the challenges of professional journalism, the importance of media literacy in the new media environment and resilience strategies. Support was also provided to new studies such as: “Evolution of Propaganda Narratives on Ukraine” and a capacity building initiative “Connecting media community in the age of disinformation” (Sarajevo, 24 February 2023).</p> <p>The Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye also includes a number of actions aimed at countering disinformation in IPA III beneficiaries. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Building Trust in Media in South East Europe: Support to Journalism as a Public Good” (EUR 3 million Jul 2023 - Jul 2026)“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue” (EUR 1.3 million; Feb 2023 – Jan 2025) - “Reporting Digital Rights and Freedoms” (EUR 1.3 million; Jan 2023 - Dec 2025) to enhance knowledge and skills of media and civil society on the link between digital rights violations and disinformation . - “SEECheck network – fighting disinformation and misinformation through a network of fact-checkers” (EUR 1.24 million; Jan 2023 - Jun 2026) aim at strengthening professional networks, independent media and CSOs. <p>With the Eastern Partnership, the EU COVID-19 Solidarity Programme adopted in 2020 included a EUR 10m component to enable local CSOs to mitigate the effects on the most vulnerable groups and those disproportionately affected. This component includes support to watchdog and advocacy activities of local CSOs related to countering disinformation on COVID-19, monitoring and reporting on measures restricting civic freedoms and their repeal.</p> <p>The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility has supported in 2019 the creation of a regional South Caucasus research lab on digital forensics, building a network of research specialist tackling notably Kremlin-influenced disinformation. In addition, assistance is given through the EUR 8 million EU for Independent Media programme that provide support to</p>

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		<p>improve the immediate and long-term financial viability of independent media outlets in the region. Overall, the EU is currently supporting the independent media landscape in Eastern partner countries with more than EUR 30 million .</p> <p>Support was also provided to independent media and CSOs countering FIMI and disinformation in Ukraine and Moldova. Through the Eastern Partnership’s regional EU4Independent project journalists from the region were invited to raise awareness about the EU and to foster regional contacts. In June 2022, 80 representatives of fact-checkers, journalists and CSOs from the Eastern neighbourhood and Central Asia were invited to Brussels.</p> <p>The EU has also been providing support to Russian independent media forced to flee the Russian regime and has also worked to countering Kremlin information manipulation and disinformation.</p> <p>In the Southern Neighbourhood, the Media package for the South from 2021 (EUR 15 M, 2022-2026) provides comprehensive support to the independent media sector to ensure it remains independent, plural and resilient, and is able to defend against current threats and can promote critical civic-minded thinking. It further promotes the cooperation and coordination among media support organizations to counter disinformation and work with the most vulnerable and independent media via support to European Endowment for Democracy.</p> <p>In the MENA region, the work of the EU Regional Media Officer (RMO) provided an additional tool for the EU to engage with Arabic-speaking audiences. Engagement with local experts from civil society, academia and media has taken place to follow the evolution of the multi-faceted FIMI threat in the region and to raise awareness. Since February 2022, the RMO conducted more than 150 interviews with pan-Arab channels on the Russian invasion of Ukraine to counter FIMI led by the Kremlin.</p> <p>In the Indo-Pacific region work has been initiated to cooperate with CSOs and provide support to independent media outside of EU’s immediate neighbourhood.</p> <p>Sub-Saharan Africa Task Force has been established in response to the urgent need to strengthen the EU’s stratcom capabilities in context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and mounting foreign information manipulation and interference in the region.</p> <p>As part of wider efforts to tackle FIMI, along with adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, since 2022 a pilot support to selected CSDP missions and operations has taken place, both civilian and military, to building resilience against FIMI.</p> <p>In addition, TAIEX has been actively supporting enlargement and neighbourhood countries in countering disinformation. In the Western Balkans, an online TAIEX Regional Workshop was organised in 2022, followed by country-specific events for Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo. Several TAIEX workshops were held in 2023, namely a Workshop on</p>

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		<p>Challenges and changes to existing mechanisms aimed at sanctioning the spread of disinformation and a TAIEX Study Visit on Models of cooperation mechanisms for establishing a monitoring body to combat disinformation and hate speech. In the neighbourhood, a two-day TAIEX multi-country workshop on Strategies to Counter Disinformation was organised in February 2023 to provide support to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to detect, analyse and devise adequate responses to disinformation. As follow-up, TAIEX workshops are planned in 2024, upon requests submitted by Moldova and Ukraine, articulated, respectively, around the thematic of elections and FIMI and collaboration with African counterparts in countering disinformation.</p> <p>The new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement on Protecting Independent Media aims at building the capacity of media actors to counter disinformation, among other objectives. It will make up to EUR 20 million available in 2023-2027. Under NDICI – Global Europe, an action is in place to improve awareness and resilience to disinformation in the age of AI. This action includes the development of relationships between actors in Europe and a select number of countries in Africa and LAC, and the strengthening of south-south cooperation.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Newly-funded Horizon Europe projects (under 2021 and 2022 calls) on democratic politics and the rule of law in the EU’s neighborhoods (East and South) and EU candidate countries</p> <p>TAIEX online workshop on the new geopolitical consequences of disinformation in the Western Balkans</p> <p>TAIEX Workshop on Challenges and changes to existing mechanisms aimed at sanctioning the spread of disinformation</p> <p>TAIEX Workshop on Challenges and changes to existing mechanisms aimed at sanctioning the spread of disinformation</p>
	<p><i>Issue</i> <i>Guidance</i> <i>for</i> <i>strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation</i></p>	<p>On 26 May 2021, the Commission published guidance on how to strengthen the Code of Practice on Disinformation, following an evaluation of its functioning since the setting up in 2018.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>Commission Guidance COM(2021) 262 final</p>
	<p><i>Convene the signatories of the Code of Practice and relevant stakeholders groups to strengthen the code according to the guidance</i></p>	<p>The strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation has been signed and presented on the 16 June 2022 by 34 signatories including major online platforms, actors from the online advertising industry, smaller or specialised platforms, research and civil society organisations, fact-checkers and providers of technical solutions to counter disinformation.</p> <p>The new Code aims to achieve the objectives of the Commission’s Guidance presented in May 2021, by setting a broader range of commitments and measures to counter online disinformation. These include demonetising the dissemination of disinformation; guaranteeing transparency of political advertising; empowering users; enhancing cooperation with fact-checkers; facilitating researchers access to data; and ensuring the integrity of the platforms’ services by implementing and promoting safeguards against a list of manipulative behaviour and practices that are not permitted across their services. The</p>

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		<p>list includes forms of manipulative behaviour which can spread disinformation, such as the creation of inauthentic accounts or botnets, the deployment of deceptive manipulated media (such as “deep fakes”, “cheap fakes”), and the inauthentic coordination of content creation or amplification, including attempts to deceive/manipulate platforms algorithms (such as ways to mislead people about popularity of content). On that basis, signatories committed to adopt, reinforce and implement clear policies, covering the range of behaviours and practices identified. Given the evolving nature of such tactics, techniques and procedures employed by malicious actors, this list will be periodically reviewed.</p> <p>Commission services and the EEAS have also intensified their cooperation with online platforms to coordinate efforts to fight FIMI and disinformation related to the major geopolitical crises. The Commission, within the framework of the Code, has been closely following the implementation of the EU sanctions on RT, Sputnik and other sanctioned outlets by the platforms. The signatories of the Code are holding regular meetings to exchange information and coordinate their actions to curb disinformation related to specific crisis situations in the framework of the Permanent Task-force and its Crisis Response Subgroup.</p> <p>European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) has created a dedicated task-force which monitors the situation regarding disinformation campaigns linked to the war in Ukraine. Since 24 March 2022, the EDMO fact-checking network has produced by October 2023 more than 2,500 fact-checks on the war and several related investigations, reports and dedicated periodic insights.</p> <p>In addition to this, Member States can request support under the technical support instrument to develop the required capacity in order to manage disinformation and address foreign interference campaigns effectively.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation European Digital Media Observatory EDMO Task Force on disinformation on the war in Ukraine Technical Support Instrument (TSI) (Europa.eu)</p>
	<p><i>Set up a permanent framework for the monitoring of the code</i></p>	<p>The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation comes with a strengthened monitoring framework based on qualitative reporting elements and service-level indicators measuring the effectiveness of its implementation. Signatories agreed to set up a Transparency Centre, providing a clear overview to the public of the policies they put in place to implement their commitments, and will update it regularly with the relevant data.</p> <p>End of January 2023, signatories of the Code of Practice have submitted their first baseline reports, providing an initial state of play of the steps taken to implement commitments and measures and a first set of qualitative and quantitative reporting covering the first month of implementation. Signatories who have been designated as Very Large Online Platforms, as</p>

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		<p>defined in the Digital Services Act (DSA) report every six-months on their actions taken under the Code, while other signatories report once per year. All major online platform signatories of the Code (Google, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok) have delivered a second set of reports in September 2023, covering a full 6-month period of implementation. For the first time, the reporting exercise also includes the publication of an initial set of Structural Indicators, providing insight about disinformation on platforms' services.</p> <p>All the reports are publicly available in the Transparency Centre, launched in February 2023.</p> <p>Signatories also agreed to establish a framework for further collaboration through a permanent Task-force and several Subgroups, with specific work strands and deliverables. Signatories will continue to meet on a regular basis to ensure the Code remains fit for purpose, including to reduce disinformation around the war in Ukraine.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation; https://disinfocode.eu/</p>
	<p><i>Support new innovative projects to fight disinformation under various EU programmes, in particular by civil society organisations and higher education institutions, with journalists' involvement</i></p>	<p>EU allocates resources on an annual basis to support projects to counter foreign information manipulation and interference, including disinformation and hybrid threats, for instance under the Union programs Horizon Europe or Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV), Erasmus+ and through projects financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).</p> <p>Under Erasmus+, support is available to develop young people's digital competences and media literacy with a view to increasing young people's resilience to disinformation, fake news and propaganda. 2021 eTwinning activities focussed on media literacy and disinformation, with a dedicated conference in October 2021, a toolkit for teachers entitled "spot and fight disinformation", and numerous eTwinning collaborations such as "Lie Detectors", "Better Internet for Kids", and "Anne Frank House".</p> <p>In March 2022 the Commission launched the updated Digital Competences Framework (DigComp) 2.2, which proposes a common understanding of what it means to be digitally competent in 21 century, including specific reference to the need for critical engagement with information online, disinformation, misinformation and others.</p> <p>Research projects also continued to be funded under Horizon Europe. Under the work programme 2021-22 projects started to work on research on disinformation in the context of a post-pandemic world (EUR 9M), politics and the impact of online social networks and new media (EUR 9M), on combatting disinformation and restoring trust in the digital world (EUR 8M), and on tools to fight disinformation based on AI for both media professionals and citizens (EUR 18M). The work-programmes for 2023-2024 of Horizon Europe have earmarked some additional EUR 30M to fund research on foreign</p>

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		<p>information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and on AI-based solutions to ensure pluralistic access to meaningful information, quality content and trustworthy online interaction for media professionals and citizens.</p> <p>In addition, the European Commission in October 2022 published guidelines for teachers and educational staff to promote digital literacy and tackle disinformation through education and training as part of its Digital Education Action Plan. The guidelines, available in all EU official languages, were developed with the support of the education and training community, academia, NGOs, broadcasters and the private sector.</p> <p>The EU supported the development of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). Since 2020 EDMO has built a dedicated community that leads the way in tracking, exposing and countering disinformation. EDMO comprises a central digital platform and national and regional hubs that leverage their knowledge of local information environments to detect, analyse and expose disinformation campaigns in Europe. With 14 EDMO hubs now in place, the EDMO network covers all 27 EU Member States as well as Norway, in the EEA.</p> <p>The work of EDMO and its hubs has been instrumental in the context of the war in Ukraine and Russian propaganda, identifying thousands of disinformation instances related to the war through fact-checks and issuing reports and investigations on emerging and trending narratives. Building on this, EDMO is setting up a special European elections task force dedicated to detect early signs of potentially dangerous disinformation campaigns that might spread across the EU and coordinate dedicated media literacy activities. The task force will also provide its expertise to European institutions in the framework of the preparation to the European elections.</p> <p>The Commission also supported the development of the Code of Professional Integrity for European fact-checkers which was published on 15 September 2022¹. The Code's standards, which cover matters ranging from quality sourcing to non-partisanship and financial transparency, must be adhered to for fact-checking organisations to become verified members of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), which is a network of fact-checking organisations operating independently, ethically and with a commitment to serving the public interest.</p> <p><i>Useful links:</i></p> <p>European Digital Media Observatory Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu) European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN)</p>

¹ The Code has been developed through a project involving fact-checking organisations from more than 30 countries across Europe. The final version of the Code was approved by 44 out of the 45 organisations that took part.

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		<p>Newly-funded Horizon Europe projects (under 2021 and 2022 calls) on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools to fight disinformation based on AI for both media professionals and citizens • AI-based solutions to ensure pluralistic access to meaningful information, quality content and trustworthy online interaction for media professionals and citizens <p>Horizon 2020 projects on debunking fake news and providing journalists with tools to counter disinformation and misinformation (already finalised) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FANDANGO - FAke News discovery and propagation from big Data ANalysis and artificial intelliGence Operations • WeVerify - WIDER AND ENHANCED VERIFICATION FOR YOU • TRUTHCHECK - Fake News Recognition applying Service-based Cross-Media Analytics • NEUTRAL - First real-time fact-checking tool to fight against the fake news and disinformation • Factmata - A SCORING SYSTEM FOR ONLINE CONTENT • DYNNET - Opinion Dynamics • GoodNews - Fake news detection in social networks using geometric deep learning • AI4Dignity - Collaborative AI Counters Hate <p>Horizon 2020 projects providing capacity building activities for civil society, media industry and other professionals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU-HYBNET – Empowering a Pan-European Network to Counter Hybrid Threats (euhybnet.eu), network funded by Horizon 2020 • Horizon Europe: Detecting, analysing and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (europa.eu) (ATHENA, ADAC.io, SAUFEX) and • Developing a better understanding of information suppression by state authorities as an example of foreign information manipulation and interference (europa.eu) (RESONANT, ARM, DE-CONSPIRATOR)
	<p><i>Increase support and funding for and diversifying initiatives, including by civil society organisations, to promote media literacy and help citizens identify disinformation, within the EU and beyond</i></p>	<p>Creative Europe programme supports the promotion of media literacy mainly under the CROSS-SECTORAL strand.</p> <p>The Media Literacy scheme under the Creative Europe Programme aims at allowing citizens to develop a critical understanding and use of the media. To this end, media literacy actions encourage knowledge sharing and exchanges on media literacy policies and practices. Support envisages the development of innovative cross-border media literacy initiatives and communities across Europe, in a continuously changing digital media landscape and taking into account current user behaviour among various age groups. This runs in parallel to the support offered to news media in making adjustments to the structural and technological changes faced by the sector.</p>

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		<p>On 19 December 2022 the Commission launched a 990.500 EUR call for proposals on the European Festival of Journalism and Media Information Literacy, aimed at reinforcing dialogue, cooperation and partnership in the EU among journalists, media outlets including public service media, civil society organisations and media literacy professionals. Special attention will be on youth, including journalists’ students, people and social media.</p> <p>The Media Literacy Expert Group continues to deliberate, raise awareness and disseminate information about media literacy initiatives across Europe. The group meets formally twice a year.</p> <p>Continued funding is also available through Erasmus+ (i.e. 387 projects dealing with media literacy and tackling disinformation have been selected for funding in 2021) and the European Solidarity Corps (i.e. 46 projects dealing with media literacy and tackling disinformation” have been funded and another 39 with digital safety in 2021-22).</p> <p>The ACP-EU Culture Programme (EUR 40 m) in support to Cultural and Creative Industries in ACP countries aims inter alia to promote a number of cross-cutting societal issues such as visual literacy and a culture-based approach to education. By providing cascading grants on the ground, it contributes to educate and initiate young people to critical thinking, to distinguish between what is true and false, to promote the values of citizenship, question stereotypes, and other forms of discrimination.</p> <p>The EU-UNESCO Expert Facility also supports pluralistic media (e.g. voices of indigenous people in Mexican media and radios). A new round of the EU-UNESCO expert facility is in the inception phase.</p> <p>The Civil Society Facility and Media Programme includes a number of actions aimed at increasing media literacy in IPA III beneficiaries (see above for examples, such as the “building Trust in Media in South East Europe” project). The recently-started project “Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue” (EUR 1.3 million; Feb 2023 – Jan 2025) further promotes greater media and information literacy by engaging media professionals and self-regulators, as well as youth in media freedom activism.</p> <p>In the Southern Neighbourhood, the Media package for the South from 2021 (EUR 15 million, 2022-2026) provides comprehensive support to the independent media sector to ensure it remains independent, plural and resilient, and is able to defend against current threats and can promote critical civic-minded thinking.</p> <p>Through its Regional and Urban Policy, the Commission also works to promote journalism and media literacy through a series of training and awareness raising activities. This includes (1) a specific open online teaching module for journalism higher education institutions with a focus on the EU and its cohesion policy, (2) the so-called “EUinMyRegion Media Trips” for local and regional journalists, followed todate by some 150 journalists, (3) a programme offering training, mentorship and practical training to journalism students and young journalists (“Youth4Regions”) as well as (4) a dedicated budget line of EUR7m under the information measures for the EU cohesion policy, which funds 12-month long information and communication actions on the added value of EU cohesion policy to citizens’ lives. To date more than 150 organisations</p>

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		<p>have received grants allowing their communication activities to reach millions of people through the press, TV and radio, events, and online platforms in 25 Member States.</p> <p>The NDICI Rapid Response pillar has been mobilised over EUR 50 million to support civil society and media across the world, including in the Western Balkans, Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, Central Asia and Africa, to reinforce resilience of the information environment and societies at large to disinformation (through fact checking training, support to independent and investigative journalism i.a.).</p> <p>A successful initiative, set up under the previous MFF/Instrument contributing to Stability is still ongoing. A partnership with UNESCO, Social Media for Peace focusses national multi-stakeholder as an innovative solution to address content moderation issues at global, regional, and national level and bridge the gap between regulators, platforms, and civil societies.</p>