



## European Democracy Action Plan: making EU democracies stronger

Brussels, 3 December 2020

The European Commission is presenting today its [European Democracy Action Plan](#) to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU.

Standing up to challenges to our democratic systems from rising extremism and perceived distance between people and politicians, the Action Plan sets out measures to promote free and fair elections, strengthen media freedom and counter disinformation. More concretely, the Commission will propose legal action on political advertising that will address the sponsors of paid content and production and distribution channels, including online platforms, advertisers and political consultancies, clarifying their respective responsibilities. The Commission will also recommend measures to tackle safety of journalist and present an initiative to protect them from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). Finally, the Commission will steer efforts to overhaul the existing Code of Practice on Disinformation, strengthening requirements for online platforms and introducing vigorous monitoring and oversight.

European Commission President Ursula **von der Leyen** said: *"With the digital revolution under way, citizens must be able to make choices where views can be expressed freely. Facts have to be distinguished from fiction, and free media and civil society must be able to participate in an open debate, free from malign interference. Therefore the EU is taking action to make our democracies in the EU more resilient."*

Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra **Jourová**, said: *"Democracy cannot be taken for granted; it needs to be nurtured and protected. Our plan aims at protecting and promoting meaningful participation of citizens, empowering them to make their choices in the public space freely, without manipulation. We need to update the rules to harness the opportunities and challenges of the digital age. The plan proposes actions to increase protection of journalists and fight disinformation and interference, while fully protecting freedom of speech."*

With the digital revolution under way, citizens must be able to make choices where views can be expressed freely, facts distinguished from fiction, and free media and civil society are able to participate in an open debate, free from malign interference. Challenges faced by the EU are not

confined to its borders, so any action taken at home will have impact abroad.

The European Democracy Action Plan sets out measures around three main pillars:

### 1. **Promote free and fair elections**

The Commission will propose legislation on **transparency of sponsored political content (“political advertising”)**. The Commission will also revise the **rules on the financing of European political parties**. Through the European Cooperation Network on Elections, the Commission will enhance cooperation among Member States and launch a new operational mechanism, which will support efficient and timely exchanges on elections' integrity related issues such as the cyber-security of elections.

The Commission will organise a **high-level event** bringing together various authorities to address the challenges related to electoral processes as well as empowering citizens to participate as voters and candidates in the democratic process. A healthy democracy relies on citizen engagement and an active civil society, not only at election times. To that end, the Action Plan promotes the use of **EU structural funds** and the funding available under the new **Creative Europe Programme** as well as highlights the importance of active participation among young people, a key element of the **EU youth strategy**. The EU will also consolidate the capacity of **EU elections observation missions** in third countries.

### 2. **Strengthen media freedom and pluralism**

In recent years, the safety of journalists has continued to deteriorate – physical and online threats and attacks on journalists are on the rise in several Member States. This is why the Commission will propose in 2021 a **recommendation on the safety of journalists**, drawing particular attention to threats against women journalists, and an **initiative to curb the abusive use of lawsuits against public participation** (SLAPPs). The Commission will also work closely with Member States through a structured dialogue and provide a **sustainable funding** for projects on legal and practical assistance to journalists in the EU and elsewhere. Finally, the Commission will also put forward further measures to **support media pluralism** and to strengthen transparency of media ownership and state advertising, among others, through the new **Media Ownership Monitor**.

The European Democracy Action Plan goes hand in hand with the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan, which aims to help the sector recover and make the most of the digital transformation.

### 3. **Counter disinformation**

The Action Plan proposes improving the existing EU's toolbox for countering foreign interference, including new instruments that allow **imposing costs on perpetrators**. The Commission will steer efforts to overhaul the Code of Practice on Disinformation into a **co-regulatory framework** of obligations and accountability of online platforms, in line with the upcoming Digital Services Act. To that end, the Commission will issue guidance to **enhance the Code of Practice** in spring 2021 and set up a **more robust framework for monitoring** its implementation. The Commission and the High Representative will also take further measures that strengthen the resilience of our societies and foster international partnerships.

### **Next steps**

The Commission will gradually implement the European Democracy Action plan until 2023 - a year ahead of the elections to the European Parliament. The Commission will then also assess progress made and whether further steps are needed.

The Commission will continue engaging with the European Parliament and the Council as well as with the wide circle of national actors, public and private, beyond government authorities – all key to strengthening the resilience of our democracies.

### **Background**

This European Democracy Action Plan, taken together with the new [European rule of law mechanism](#), the new Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, Media and Audiovisual Action Plan as well as the package of measures taken to promote and protect equality across the EU, will be a key driver for the new push for European democracy to face the challenges of the digital age. The commitment to democracy is also embedded in the EU's external action, and a central pillar of its work with accession and neighbourhood countries.

The European Democracy Action Plans is one of the major initiatives of the [Commission's Work Programme for 2020](#), announced in in the [Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen](#).

## **For More Information**

European Democracy Action Plan – [Website](#)

European Democracy Action Plan – [Factsheet](#)

European Democracy Action Plan – [Questions & Answers](#)

European Democracy Action Plan – [Public consultation results](#)

[SLAPP – call for experts](#)

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