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LIMITE

**AG 2
POLGEN 6
FREMP 3
JAI 25
DISINFO 1
HYBRID 2
AUDIO 1
EDUC 7**

NOTE

From: Presidency

To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: European Democracy Shield: empowering strong and resilient democracies
- Presidency steering note

Delegations will find in the annex a steering note by the Presidency for the policy debate to be held on the abovementioned topic at the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 26 January 2026.

European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies

Presidency Steering note

On 12 November 2025, the Commission adopted the **Communication on a European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies**. The actions announced in the initiative should be gradually implemented by 2027. Together with an EU strategy for Civil Society, the Democracy Shield forms part of a ‘Democracy package’ that follows previous similar packages, namely the 2018 Securing Free and Fair Elections package, the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan and the 2023 Defence of Democracy package.

The aim of the Democracy Shield is to provide a strategic approach to safeguard, strengthen and promote democracy in the long run. A presentation was provided at the General Affairs Council in November 2025, where the Commission highlighted the need for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. The proposed actions are grouped in three areas: Reinforcing situational awareness and support response capacity to safeguard the integrity of the information space; Strengthening democratic institutions, free and fair elections and free media and Boosting societal resilience and citizens engagement. Additionally, the initiative proposes a new European Centre of Democratic Resilience and EU funding for ‘investing in democracy’

The proposed new **European Centre of Democratic Resilience** is envisaged primarily as a coordination and information sharing network/dedicated hub between the EU institutions and Member States, linking together existing networks and structures to support operational cooperation and capacity building, with the primary focus on threats posed by foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and disinformation. Its work should also contribute to consolidating the EU’s whole-of-society approach to strengthen preparedness, increase awareness and build democratic resilience. Its activities would be carried out in full respect of the competences of the Member States.

In a letter dated 15 December 2025, Commissioner McGrath invited ministers to nominate a national coordinating point of contact at senior level to facilitate the participation of relevant national entities in the activities of the Centre and announced a kick-off meeting at ministerial level back-to-back with the General Affairs Council on 24 February 2026 that should be preceded by a technical meeting with national representatives at senior level in Brussels on 29 January 2026.

The European Council in December 2025 recalled the importance of strengthening Europe's democratic resilience. It stressed the need to tackle disinformation and FIMI and to protect free and pluralistic media. In this context, the European Council highlighted the legal responsibility of platforms in fighting the dissemination of disinformation and illegal content and reaffirmed the EU's regulatory autonomy in the digital sphere.

Attacks on democracy - including disinformation, foreign interference, pressures on media freedom, hate speech and electoral manipulation - pose a serious threat to the EU foundations and core values, with particularly acute risks for children exposed to harmful online content. The timing of this policy debate in the General Affairs Council demonstrates the commitment of the Presidency to work closely with the Commission and Member States to strengthen democratic resilience.

In addition to further policy debates at Ministerial level and without prejudice to the negotiations on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework in relation to EU funding for democracy, the Presidency suggests a dedicated follow-up at technical level that should include inter alia a structural discussion in the General Affairs Group of topics related to strengthening democratic resilience.

In light of the above, Ministers are invited to respond to the following questions:

- 1) *What topics and actions should the Presidency prioritise when advancing work in the Council on the implementation of the European Democracy Shield and more broadly for strengthening democratic resilience?*
 - 2) *How can the actions announced in the European Democracy Shield complement existing national efforts and existing tools at EU level and contribute to a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach?*
 - 3) *Regarding the announced European Centre of Democratic Resilience, what aspects are particularly important to ensure its added value?*
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Agence Europe