

*Invitation*

# The European Democracy Shield: from intention to reality

21 April 2026  
10:00 - 17:30 CET  
Brussels, Belgium

# Democracy Retreat

Fundation Universitaire, 11 Rue d'Egmont, 1000, Brussels, Belgium  
21 April 2026 | 10:00-17:30 CET

On 12 November 2025, building on the European Democracy Action Plan and the Defence of Democracy Package, the European Commission launched the **European Democracy Shield (EDS)**, the EU's roadmap for democracy support. With around 50 proposed actions across three priorities (information integrity, media and elections, and citizen engagement) the EDS demonstrates a **strong commitment to defending democratic values and the rule of law**. Designed to be both protective and proactive, the Shield includes several provisions that are still being refined and operationalised.

One of the core 'protective' proposals is the establishment of the **European Centre for Democratic Resilience**. The Centre, which began its work on 24 February 2026, is conceived as a voluntary coordination mechanism drawing on Member State expertise and linking existing EU tools, including the Rapid Alert System managed by the European External Action Service. The creation of a Stakeholder Platform also signals an intention to engage civil society, researchers and other actors. As the Centre begins its work, an important discussion concerns **how it can operate in practice and maximise its ambition and effectiveness within the EU's broader democratic resilience framework**.

While much of the Shield focuses on contrasting FIMI and disinformation, it importantly also recognises that proactively **promoting citizens' engagement in the democratic life, through support to participatory and deliberative tools**, is needed to **reinforce ownership, empowerment and public trust**. Measures under this pillar include strengthening media and digital literacy, enhancing citizenship education, supporting participatory initiatives at local and youth levels, and encouraging innovative civic tech solutions and pilot projects. These provisions indicate that the EDS is intended not just as a protective framework, but **also as a platform for democratic innovation**.

Focusing on these two dimensions, this Democracy Retreat **will examine ways to operationalise the EDS beyond policy commitments**, ensuring that it does not give in to its critique of being a mere protective sheet against foreign interference, but that it represents a truly enabling framework for boosting societal resilience.

The event is co-organised by [TEPSA](#) and [The Egmont Institute](#) in the context of the Horizon Europe Project Networks for Democracy ([Nets4Dem](#)).

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The event will bring together policymakers, practitioners, democracy researchers and Nets4Dem experts **around two interactive roundtable sessions**, to tackle the following topics:

## **The EDS and the Centre for Democratic Resilience: maximising scope and impact**

*This session will explore the current state of play, including pressures on European democracies such as FIMI and disinformation, and how the Centre is being operationalised to maximise its potential and added value. Guiding questions include: How will the Centre respond in practice to current and emerging threats to democracy, such as FIMI and other information pressures? Is the Commission preparing to widen the scope or mandate of the Centre? How does this align with how civil society, think tanks, and academics assess what the Centre should deliver? How can the Centre and its Stakeholder Platform effectively engage civil society and other actors to maximise cooperation and impact?*

## **Democratic innovation and citizens engagement: boosting societal resilience**

*Citizen participation, supported by media and digital literacy and citizenship education, is central to making the European Democracy Shield both protective and proactive. This session will explore how engagement can be embedded across the Shield, including via the Democracy Guide for Citizens, the European Citizens' Panel on Democratic Resilience, and civic tech initiatives that enable scalable, innovative forms of participation. Guiding questions include: How can these participatory tools form a coherent framework rather than isolated initiatives? How can they be implemented to actively empower citizens in strengthening democracy and the rule of law? And what practical steps can ensure these initiatives translate into tangible democratic impact across Europe?*

# Programme At a Glance

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- 10:00 - 10:30 *Welcome coffee & registration of participants*
- 10:30-12:30 **Morning session**  
**The EDS and the Centre for Democratic Resilience: maximising scope and impact, with**  
[Marie-Helene Boulanger](#) (European Commission)  
[Tudor P. Fabian, PhD](#) (European External Action Service)  
[Jean-Louis de Brouwer](#) (Egmont Institute)  
[Emma Quaedvlieg](#) (European Partnership for Democracy)  
[Paul Zoubkov](#) (Democracy Reporting International)
- 12:30-13:30 *Lunch break*
- 13:30-14:00 *Registrations for the afternoon session*
- 14:00-16:00 **Afternoon session**  
**Democratic innovation and citizens engagement: boosting societal resilience, with**  
[Arne Kubitza](#) (General Secretariat of the Council)  
[Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul](#) (European Commission)  
[Gazela Pudar Draško](#) (IPST, University of Belgrade)  
[Anthony Zacharzewski](#) (Democratic Society)  
[Julie Hervé](#) (Eurocities)  
[Andrés Falck](#) (Co-Global)
- 16:00-17:30 *Networking session*

## About Nets4Dem

This retreat is organised as part of Networks of Networks 4 Democracy (Nets4Dem), an Horizon Europe project coordinated by Democratic Reporting International. To enhance and transform the landscape of democracy initiatives, Nets4Dem brings together more than 200 cities, over 50 think tanks and universities, and dozens of democracy-focused NGOs across 38 European countries. Co-organised by the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) and the Egmont Institute, this [series of retreats](#) aims to equip stakeholders with cutting-edge strategies to strengthen and renew democratic processes in Europe. Additionally, by promoting innovative approaches to democratic governance, these events foster knowledge-sharing and collaboration among policy-makers, practitioners, and democracy researchers.