

A Retreat on Europe's Next Chapter: the European Democracy Shield

18 Nov 2024
Brussels, Belgium

Democracy Retreat

Brussels, Belgium
18 November 2024 | 10.00-18.00

During Ursula von der Leyen's first term as President of the European Commission, **remarkable strides were made within the sphere of democratic innovation** and citizen participation. A hallmark of this effort was the Conference on the Future of Europe, followed by the continuation of European Citizen Panels and the release of the Defence of Democracy (DoD) Package, both reinforcing the **EU's commitment to strengthening democratic institutions**.

In her address to the European Parliament before her confirmation in July 2024, von der Leyen proposed the **creation of a European Democracy Shield**, later integrated into the Mission Letters of Commissioner-designates Michael McGrath and Henna Virkunen. This initiative aims to enhance the EU's capacity to combat disinformation and malign influences from external actors, reflecting a proactive approach to safeguarding EU democracies.

While the Democracy Shield stands as a **vital component of the EU's ongoing efforts** to promote resilience in democratic governance by addressing external threats, it must be **balanced with ongoing initiatives** to protect democracies internally. This aligns further with von der Leyen's commitment to working closer to Europeans and engaging civil society to address growing disenchantment and disengagement within EU Member States.

Under Chatham House rules, this retreat will explore whether this Democracy Shield represents a continuation of the Commission's work or if **it introduces fresh initiatives**. Despite a slight relief after the recent election results, **internal pressures on democracy persist**, and democratic innovations to increase resilience internally should not be sidelined. In that regard, the protection of democracies from external threats also passes by the **reinforcement of democratic integrity** within its own borders through democratic innovations. With these issues as a timely backdrop, this full-day retreat will explore how the new Commission can craft a compelling narrative in defence of democracy while ensuring that a **diversity of voices**, civil society, media and citizens are meaningfully involved.

Programme At a Glance

18 November 2024 | 10.00-18.00

9:30 - 10: 30: *Registration and networking breakfast*

10:30 - 12:15: **Innovating democracy together: Strategies for the European Democracy Shield**, moderated by Anthony Zacharzewski (Director, The Democratic Society)

ANTHONY
ZACHARZEWSKI



Director, The
Democratic Society

12:15 - 13:00: *Lunch break*

13:00 - 16:20 **Engaging voices: Working sessions with leading democracy NGOs and networks across Europe**

ALEKSANDRA
ZIĘTEK



Project Coordinator,
Eurocities

16:20 - 16:30: *Coffee Break*

16:30 - 17:40: **Charting the future: wrap-up discussions and exploring new avenues**, moderated by Aleksandra Ziętek (Project Coordinator, Eurocities)

18:00 - onwards: *Walking drinks*

About Nets4Dem

This full-day 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, practitioner, and democracy researchers.

Meet our Sessions

13:00-14:30: Session 1 **Strengthening European Democracy: Deliberation, Citizen Engagement and the Democracy Shield**

The Institute for Philosophy and
Social Theory, University of
Belgrade

Deliberative institutions and democratic innovations are vital for enhancing citizen engagement and strengthening EU governance. As the **European Democracy Shield** aims to **safeguard democracy against external threats**, this session will explore **how these innovations can complement this approach** by enhancing participation and standards and contributing to trust-building internally. By **reviewing recent progress and contributions** from research initiatives (Democratic Innovation Database), the session will showcase examples of large-scale citizen engagement and their impact on shaping democratic futures.

Strengthening democracy in Europe's next chapter calls for new **ways to integrate innovations into democratic institutions**. In this workshop, Demos Helsinki's experts, Sahib Singh and Johannes Mikkonen, will share findings from their **2024 study on how European policy-makers embed democratic innovations** into institutions and societal practices. Following this presentation, a **co-creative session will explore strategies** for addressing the challenges identified and creating future policy pathways.

14:50-16:20: Parallel Session 2 **Learning from Policy Challenges and Future Directions for embedding Democratic Innovations in Europe**

DEMOS Helsinki

14:50-16:20: Parallel Session 3 **Aligning capacity-building programmes to foster democratic innovation: Europe's Path to a Democracy Shield**

Coglobal, the Democratic
Society and People Powered

While external threats such as disinformation are important, internal challenges such as **polarisation, civic disengagement and uneven democratic practices are key concerns**. Participants will discuss **how to provide tailored support to policy-makers and organisations** to strengthen European democratic processes, foster public deliberation, and build capacity for democratic innovation. The goal is to **develop recommendations that balance defensive strategies with proactive efforts** to renew democratic participation and resilience.