

Information Documents

SG/Inf(2025)14

29 April 2025

Roadmap Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe *Building a resilient, inclusive and agile democracy*

I. Background

The New Democratic Pact for Europe aims at redefining democracy to make it stronger, more adaptable and more inclusive. Through innovation, technology, and collective action, it aims to empower people, strengthen institutions, and protect democratic values.

Today's challenges to democracy reflect unmet expectations and broken promises. The New Democratic Pact for Europe is about learning from past failures so that democratic institutions truly serve everyone. It is a future-focused vision, led by the people and safeguarded by the Council of Europe and its member states.

For 75 years, Europe has built security, stability, and prosperity through democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, anchored in the Council of Europe (CoE) values, as enshrined in its Statute and in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Council of Europe (CoE). This system, born in the aftermath of the devastation of World War II, has been weakened by internal and external pressures, and a world where the notion of power overriding freedom is emerging. Russia's war against Ukraine shows what is at stake – democracy itself must be defended.

At the 2023 Reykjavík Summit, European leaders committed to fighting democratic backsliding, adopting the Reykjavík Principles of Democracy as a common framework to address current and future challenges.

Just released, the Secretary General's 2025 report "Towards a New Democratic Pact" offers a vital contribution to the ongoing process, helping to revitalise democracy in Europe by grounding the debate in the realities our societies face and the principles we must uphold. The report highlights concerning trends, including increased pressure on freedom of expression – reflected in threats to journalists, disinformation in elections, and challenges to public service media – alongside a narrowing civic space due to regulatory constraints on civil society and media, and signs of democratic backsliding such as restrictions on protests and concerns over judicial independence.

One thing has also become clear: security cannot be defined solely in military terms. Democratic security – the resilience of our democratic institutions, freedoms, and values – is also security. It is our first line of defence. As the Council of Europe's Heads of State and Government highlighted in the Reykjavik Declaration: *"We see democratic security as key for member States to address current and future challenges together and to secure peace and prosperity in Europe."*

The biggest challenge is restoring trust in democratic institutions. As it did 75 years ago, the Council of Europe must lead once again, innovating to defend democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Council of Europe as a whole, with its unique structure, tools and partnerships, will drive the New Democratic Pact for Europe. All Council of Europe's bodies, the Secretary General and the entire secretariat, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and all Convention bodies will contribute to this important mission for Europe. The European Court of Human Rights, as the main judicial body of the Council of Europe, will also play a crucial role in this endeavour.

II. A New Democratic Pact for Europe: overall objective and approach

The overall objective of the *New Democratic Pact for Europe* is to restore citizens' trust in democracy and show that democracy is the best system to ensure peace, equality and prosperity in Europe. It will focus on practical, interconnected goals that highlight democracy's various facets, foster alliances within and beyond Europe, and craft a compelling new narrative of hope and relevance for all Europeans.

The *New Democratic Pact for Europe* will address the urgent challenge of democratic backsliding through a collective, inclusive and complex process. about the New Democratic Pact for Europe will not aim to reinvent democracy, but rather to reinforce its foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovating its form to make it resonate with all citizens, in particular with younger generations.

By the end of 2026, the outcomes of the initiatives outlined – though not exhaustively – in the Appendix I will be compiled into a publication, which will serve as a foundation for shaping how the Council of Europe addresses democratic backsliding and revitalises democracy in Europe. Such outcomes will provide guidance in the next Programme and Budget.

III. Key Pillars of Action: HOW we want to achieve our objective?

The New Democratic Pact for Europe is articulated around three pillars:

1. Learning and Practising Democracy

This pillar fosters democratic engagement through formal and informal learning, while advocating for inclusion and dialogue across political, generational, cultural, and digital divides.

Throughout the process, the aim will be to:

- promote dialogue across divides – political, cultural, generational – and ensure space for dissent, critical thinking, and diverse voices;
- develop a shared understanding of democracy on the basis of democratic values enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the [Reykjavík Declaration](#) and its 10 Principles of Democracy, placing human dignity and pluralism at the centre and promoting cultural and historical awareness; the CD-DEM Parameters (almost finalised) will also be crucial to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles;
- invest in civic education, including digital and media literacy;
- elevate youth voices and foster civic engagement, using innovative tools and inclusive narratives to connect younger generations to democratic processes.

2. Protecting Democracy

This pillar focuses on rooting democracy in the rule of law, safeguarding the structural integrity of democratic systems while addressing the socio-political roots of disillusionment, extremism, and polarisation.

Throughout the process, the aim will be to:

- strengthen trust in democratic institutions through transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' needs and concerns;
- promote social rights and address the impact of socio-economic inequalities on the lack of trust in what democracy can offer to all, leaving no one behind;
- safeguard the independence of the judiciary, ensure electoral integrity and uphold the rule of law as a non-negotiable pillar of democratic governance;
- intensify the fight against corruption, which undermines public trust and weakens democratic institutions from within;
- counter disinformation and protect the integrity of public debate, ensuring that citizens can access accurate, trustworthy information in a free and pluralistic media environment;
- advance equality and combat all forms of discrimination, ensuring full participation and representation of women and marginalised groups in democratic life.

3. Innovating for Democracy

By designing inclusive spaces and participatory systems, as well as promoting a positive use of digital technologies, this pillar ensures innovation is harnessed to broaden access, increase transparency, and restore citizens' trust in democracy especially those underrepresented and digitally excluded.

Throughout the process, the aim will be to:

- Promote a positive use of digital technologies, including AI, for the good of humanity, and fight against their malign use;
- encourage democratic innovation and engage citizens, leveraging deliberative and participatory models to renew and adapt democratic systems to current challenges;
- highlight democratic promising practices globally, including from the Global South;
- address the triple planetary crisis – climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss – and its impact on democracy;
- use new collective intelligence methodologies to enhance innovative ideas, such as prospective games – participatory tools designed to imagine, explore, and shape democratic futures.

IV. Conclusion

The Roadmap is more than a linear plan – it is a shared invitation to reimagine and rebuild democracy together. The New Democratic Pact for Europe is a commitment to action, solidarity and renewal.

By uniting creativity, inclusivity, and collective responsibility – from hackathons and citizen-led assessments to high-level political consultations – the Pact aims to shape resilient, future-ready democracies that will serve present and future generations, while acknowledging the political challenges inherent in making democracy more resilient.

All contributions – whether from governments, civil society, youth, or individuals – will feed into a dynamic, evolving process. Insights, proposals, and experiences will be collected, shared, and transformed into concrete policy recommendations, institutional reforms, and new democratic practices.

This is not just about dialogue – it is about delivering.

The ultimate outcome is a Europe where democracy works better, reaches further and includes everyone. A Europe where citizens feel heard, empowered and protected. A Europe that proves – through action – that democracy is not only worth believing in, but worth building every day.

Appendix I - Timeline/key milestones (2025–2026)

The New Democratic Pact for Europe will be fuelled by a broad and inclusive consultation process. The main events are listed below (note: the list below is not exhaustive and is evolving). **The aim is to highlight the main democracy-related initiatives of the Council of Europe, strengthen and complement them with best practices identified by member States, observer States, CoE bodies and key partners, and ensure that the outcomes are consolidated at the end of the process to guide how the Council of Europe will address the identified challenges in the next few years.**

◆ October 2024 – May 2025: Foundations of Dialogue

The consultations for the New Democratic Pact for Europe, held with Ambassadors in October 2024 and then through Council of Europe's inter-secretariat meetings, highlighted shared concerns over democratic backsliding in Europe. The discussions emphasised the need to reconnect with youth, support civil society, and promote civic education to counter polarisation and disengagement. Ambassadors valued the inclusive, early-stage approach and endorsed a strategy grounded in the Reykjavik Principles, calling for a revitalised, resilient democracy anchored in transparency, independent judiciary, election integrity, and digital responsibility.

There are also regular consultations on the New Democratic Pact in the framework of GR-DEM meetings (first one took place in April 2025 related to social rights and democracy); there was also a first exchange of views on the topics of freedom of the media and media public service.

◆ March 2025: The European Conference of Presidents of Parliament

Main themes were: Safeguarding democracy; Guaranteeing freedom of expression in times of polarisation and uncertainty; Violence against politicians.

◆ 10 March 2025: Threats and Opportunities of Digital Technologies: Women in the Public Eye, UN Commission on the Status of Women side-event

◆ 3-4 April 2025, Strasbourg: Mid-Term Review Conference on the Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027

◆ 24 April 2025, Strasbourg: Secretary General's exchange with Chairs of Intergovernmental Committees on how such committees' work can contribute to the New Democratic Pact

◆ May 2025: Ministerial Meeting #1

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 46 member States of the Council of Europe gather to discuss the process leading to the New Democratic Pact and share their views on the process and future political commitment. National/EU/multinational initiatives carried out to revitalise democracy in Europe are shared and clear signals for the next are set.

◆ 12 May 2025: EuroDIG 2025

EuroDIG is a platform for discussion and the exchange of ideas on emerging issues and challenges concerning the Internet. This year's outcomes will feed the process of the New Democratic Pact.

◆ **20-21 May 2025: Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) Annual meeting**

This network of education policy makers is mandated to promote democracy and human rights in and through education and in particular implementation of the Education Strategy Learners First 2024-2030

◆ **27-28 May: Digital Citizenship Education Forum: Let's Act Now!**

The European Year 2025 aims to increase awareness of the critical role digital citizenship education plays in raising responsible citizens in a digitally connected world and the importance of education for fostering competences for a democratic culture in order to protect social cohesion and human rights and freedoms.

◆ **6 June 2025: Conference in the framework of the 70th anniversary of the Europe Prize : "Democracy under attack: how cities hold out the hope of European values"**

◆ **11-13 June 2025: 4th Forum of History Education intergovernmental programme : Educating for diversity and democracy: teaching history in contemporary Europe**

The Forum will explore the impact of digital technologies on history teaching and emphasise learners' engagement with history, aligning with the CoE's efforts to counter democratic backsliding and strengthen inclusive, high-quality education as a pillar of democratic societies.

◆ **20 June 2025: Digital Firewalls for Democracy – Hackathon Democracy in Strasbourg**

A dynamic, youth-driven innovation sprint where participants design tools, strategies, and campaigns to fight disinformation and protect democratic integrity online – turning digital spaces into strongholds for truth and civic engagement.

◆ **20 June 2025: Democracy Hackathon Satellite event at the European Youth Centre Budapest**

The satellite event in the EYCB will connect to the main event at key moments (keynotes, expert presentations, exchange of views, etc.), its participants will tackle the same problem statement as the main event's teams but in a workshop/brainstorming format supported by local expert roundtables, and they will report back their proposals to the main event via video conference. They will also have a dedicated timeslot for direct (online) exchange with the Secretary General on the theme of the Hackathon and on the variety of issues at the centre of the New Democratic Pact.

◆ **19 - 20 June 2025: Supporting Young Refugees: The Next Chapter, European Youth Centre Strasbourg**

The seminar will take place in parallel with the Democracy Hackathon and contribute to the democratic debates held on this occasion. The seminar will discuss the preliminary findings of the review process of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4: Supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood and propose measures to follow-up. The seminar will also be an occasion to mark World Refugee Day together with participants of the seminar.

◆ **June 2025: No Hate Speech Week**

The week is an opportunity to exchange on recent legal, policy and other developments and good practices, and to foster synergies between key partners in the field of preventing and combating hate speech.

◆ 10 - 11 July 2025: Consultative Meeting on support to the management, sustainability and democratic leadership of youth organisations

The meeting will examine current threats and challenges faced by civil society youth organisations and make proposals to support youth organisations resilience and democratic leadership through the youth sector in co-operation with other stakeholders at European level.

◆ Summer 2025: Shaping the Future Begins – Collective brainstorming methodology introduced

The first of four sessions (targeting CoE Secretariat, Permanent Representations, representatives of PACE and Congress) launches a reflection on an innovative methodology on the change of paradigm. Participants reimagine democracy through narrative coaching, systems thinking, and imagination — crafting visionary alternatives grounded in practical change.

◆ September 2025: Strategic Momentum

Launch of the Communication Strategy for the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The launch of the Communication Strategy for the New Democratic Pact for Europe marks a vital step in our collective effort to revitalise democracy across the continent. At a time when democratic values are being tested by rising authoritarianism, disinformation, polarization, and public disillusionment, we cannot take democracy for granted. This Pact is not just a vision – it is a commitment to rebuild trust, participation, and accountability at all levels of European society.

But reform and renewal alone are not enough – communication will be crucial. Through this strategy, we aim to engage the right audiences – from citizens and youth to policymakers and media – with a clear, inspiring, and honest message: democracy delivers, democracy matters, and democracy needs you.

Key thematic Conferences which will feed the New Democratic Pact's process in 2025:

17 September 2025: Media & Disinformation (Malta)

The Conference will bring together Government representatives, members of Parliament and regulatory authorities, civil society actors, experts and representatives of the technology sector to discuss effective approaches to building democratic resilience against disinformation. The aim is to discuss the multifaceted threats posed by disinformation to democratic institutions, values, and public trust, while identifying comprehensive responses involving public authorities, including election authorities, as well as institutions and actors in the fields of culture, education, youth, and foreign relations, but also media, platforms and other private stakeholders, as well as the civil society and individuals/citizens themselves.

18 September 2025: GEC Annual Conference (Malta)

The 2025 Annual Conference of the Gender Equality Commission will address the pressing issue of violence and sexism against women in politics, with a specific focus on combating such challenges within political parties and institutions. The conference aligns with the objectives of the Strategy and with the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, which call for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the promotion of equal political participation.

◆ 8 – 9 October 2025: 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth

The conference titled Young People for Democracy: Youth Perspectives in Action, will take place in Valletta, Malta and will bring together ministers, youth representatives, and key stakeholders to assess progress in youth policy since 2012 and set strategic priorities for the years ahead. Building

on the Reykjavik Declaration and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030, the Conference will focus on strengthening youth participation in democracy, promoting youth rights, fostering inclusive societies, and supporting youth work.

◆ **13-14 October 2025: European Space for Citizenship Education (Montenegro)**

The European Space for Citizenship Education aims to strengthen democracy across Europe by promoting quality citizenship education so that education systems effectively prepare young people to become active and engaged citizens.

◆ **Autumn–Winter 2025: Deepening the Dialogue**

Methodology/Prospective Game – Session 2 (Winter 2025)

Thematic Seminars which will feed the New Democratic Pact's process:

- **Education & Civic Participation in the Digital/AI Age**
- **Equal Participation in Democracy**

Each one co-organised with civil society, think-tanks, universities, and international partners.

◆ **November 2025: The World Forum for Democracy (WFD)**

Media-focused, high-profile, and youth-powered – building large visibility and political momentum.

◆ **18-19 November 2025: “Democratic Future : Digital Citizenship Education” closing conference of the European Year for Digital Citizenship Education 2025 (Slovenia)**

The closing conference of the European Year 2025 will summarise the achievements during the year and will encourage member states to define new priorities and agree on a road map for the democratic future of the digital citizenship education in Europe and beyond.

◆ **25-26 November 2025: 2nd European Conference on Academic Freedom Protection: Preserving the Cornerstone of Democracy**

The "Academic Freedom in Action" Conference marks the second working conference under the Council of Europe's renewed initiative on the democratic mission of higher education. It reflects the long-standing commitment to protect and promote the fundamental values of higher education and to advance the work of the premises given in the foundational recommendations, while working on adapting the legal instruments and policy frameworks of the Education Department to meet new realities and to address increasing threats. By advancing academic freedom as a democratic imperative, the initiative contributes to strengthening democratic institutions, public trust, and the resilience of higher education in Europe.

◆ **December 2025: Launching Conference: Towards a Council of Europe Student Rights Charter**

This conference jointly organised with the European Students Union will mark the launch of the Council of Europe's Student Rights Charter development process, a key initiative foreseen in the “Learners First” Strategy 2024-2030 to strengthen student rights and democratic participation in the governance of Higher Education across Europe.

◆ **December 2025: Conference “Democracy at a Crossroads: Why Youth Work Matters”**

The conference will help youth organisations to network, share strategies and counteract the global trend of democratic erosion. Likely to bring in partners from US, Japan, North Africa therefore can also contribute to broaden the discussion on youth role at a global level.

◆ **February/March 2026: Protecting and strengthening democracy: the role of national youth councils, European Youth Centre Strasbourg**

One of the key features of democratic backsliding is the restriction of the right to associate (shrinking space for civil society) and in this respect youth civil society is heavily impacted in conjunction with the effects of the Covid pandemic. National youth councils (NYCs) are key platforms for youth civil society in their work to advocate youth interests and influence policy at national level. The seminar will address the situation of national youth councils and ways in which they can be strengthened through a comprehensive package of measures.

◆ **Spring 2026: Grounding Vision into Action**

Key thematic Conferences which will feed the New Democratic Pact’s process in 2026:

High Level Conference on the European Social Charter (19 March 2026, Republic of Moldova)

Following on from the Reykjavik and Vilnius Declarations, a main objective of the High-Level Conference will be to increase the commitments of member States to the Charter system. A treaty event will provide an opportunity for States to accept additional Charter provisions, the collective complaints procedure and even the Revised Charter for those who have not yet done so.

Democratic Resilience & Election Integrity (March-May 2026) (Joint event PACE-Congress-Venice Commission)

Democratic Resilience and Election Integrity are essential to safeguarding democracy against rising threats such as disinformation, polarisation, and external interference. Strengthening these areas ensures that democratic systems remain legitimate, responsive, and capable of adapting to evolving challenges.

Thematic Seminars which will feed the New Democratic Pact’s process in 2026 (co-organised with civil society, think-tanks, universities, and international bodies):

- **Elections: rights of domestic observers and turnout at elections**
- **Rule of Law & Judicial Independence**

◆ **April 2026: Human Rights Institutions in Focus**

A dedicated Meeting of NHRIs and Ombudspersons explores how democratic oversight bodies can safeguard rights, fairness, and public trust in shifting political landscapes.

◆ **22-24 April 2026: Conference on the Prevention pillar of the Journalists matter Campaign and a mid-term review of the Campaign**

◆ **April 2026: Ensuring checks and balances: the separation of powers and multilevel governance (Chisinau, Republic of Moldova)**

Conference organised by the Congress to explore recent challenges to the separation of powers and the preservation and operation of multilevel governance in Council of Europe members states (potential partnership with DG1 and its Venice Commission).

◆ **May 2026: Ministerial Meeting #2**

Progress reporting on main achievements. Release of a **publication/interactive tools** summarising 18 months of democratic innovation and engagement.

◆ **June 2026: Civic Tech in Action**

The second Hackathon Democracy turns ideas into concrete projects – this time even bolder and better connected.

◆ **June 2026: No Hate Speech Week**

Debates, creative campaigns, and public conversations drive forward the effort to make democracy a space of respect, inclusion, and trust.

◆ **Summer 2026: Final workshop on innovative methodology**

The session contributes to reach a renewed and collective narrative of European democracy.

◆ **November 2026: The World Forum for Democracy (WFD)**

A testbed for democracy diagnostics, with a pilot methodology (implementation of Parameters for self-assessment of democracy health by member States) based on the Reykjavik Principles. Citizen panels and participatory evaluations will inform future national democracy pacts.

◆ **End of 2026: presentation of key outcomes of initiatives under the New Democratic Pact for Europe and decisions on next steps.**