World Forum for Democracy

STRASBOURG AT THE HEART OF GLOBAL ISSUES

13TH EDITION

5 > 7 NOVEMBER 2025

DEMOCRACY AT RISK: HOW CAN WE REVIVE IT?

PROGRAMME 2025

THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
AND THE TRIENNIAL CONTRACT FOR STRASBOURG EUROPEAN CAPITAL 2024-2026

MINISTÈRE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES
Liberté Égalité Fraternité

La Région **Grand Est**

ALSACE Collectivité européenne

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER > HEMICYCLE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE *- Interpretation: FR/EN*

09.30-10.30	**Time for Facts**
10.30-11.30	**Opening Session**
11.30-13.00	**Plenary Session 1: How is the transformation of media impacting Democracy?**
13.00-1400	**Lunch Break**
14.00-14.30	**Inauguration of the Maltese and Ukrainian exhibitions, Lobby of the Hemicycle**
14.30-16.00	**Plenary Session 2: How can culture and cultural policy strenghten Democracy?**
16.00-17.30	**Plenary Session 3: What future for citizen participation?**
17.30-17.45	**Inauguration of the Tapestry "El Holocausto"**
17.45-18.45	**Artistic Performance by Gogol Bordello**
18.45	**Reception**

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER > MEETING ROOMS OF THE PALAIS DE L'EUROPE *- Interpretation: FR/EN*

10.00-12.30	**TIME FOR IDEAS**	
Ideas - session 1	**Beyond the ballot: youth-led innovations boosting Democracy**	Room 9
Ideas - session 2	**Local initiatives to revitalize democracy**	Room 7
Ideas - session 3	**AI and Democracy**	Room 1
Ideas - session 4	**How culture and the arts strengthen Democracy**	Room 6
Ideas - session 5	**Who said boring? Games and art speak your language against disinformation**	Room 3
Ideas - session 6	**Learn, play, deliberate - preparing young people for participatory democracy**	Room 2
Ideas - session 7	**Renewing the civic mission of education**	Room 8
12.30-14.30	**Lunch Break**	

14.30-16.00	**TIME FOR ACTION**	
Action - session 1	**How to best assess the quality of democracy?**	Room 2
Action - session 2	**What are ways to make deliberative democracy an integral part of decision-making in your community?**	Room 8
Action – session 3	**Can cultural policies/actions be more participatory?**	Room 6
Action – session 4	**From crisis to civic engagement: can building education systems resilience be a blueprint for democratic innovation?**	Room 3
Action - session 5	**Is Social Media Strengthening or Weakening Democracy?**	Room 9
Action – session 6	**When Images Lie: How to Outsmart Visual Disinformation?**	Room 1
Action - session 7	**AI and Elections**	Room 7

16.00– 17.30	**TIME FOR CREATIVITY**	
Creativity – session 1	**Music is a force - Storytelling with Gogol Bordello**	Room 1
Creativity – session 2	**Culture on screen, stories of resistance – Eurimages**	Room 9
Creativity – session 3	**Screening of the "The Truth Effect" docuseries – Pedro Calado**	Room 7
17.30	**Reception**	

FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER > HEMICYCLE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE *- Interpretation: FR/EN*

09.30-11.00	**Plenary Session 4: Learning from history: strenghening Democracy**
11.00-11.45	**Reporting**
11.45-12.30	**Democracy innovation Award Ceremony and Closing Speech**
12.30-12.45	**Closing Performance by Del Aguila Y Amigos**

This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

LINK TO THE PROGRAMME

Democracy at risk: how can we revive it? Strasbourg, 5-7 November 2025

According to global survey data citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with democracy for reasons which include, *inter alia*, the growing economic inequality, the seismic shifts in technology, and the feeling that citizens' voices are ignored. The lack of trust in democratic institutions and processes undermines democratic legitimacy, stability and resilience to external and internal threats. When citizens are no longer invested in democracy, they may gradually withdraw from voting and other forms of participation in civic life, leaving the fundamental freedoms that underpin democratic institutions increasingly vulnerable. This vulnerability creates an environment in which populists and autocrats have greater latitude to weaken institutional checks and balances, undermine constitutional protections, and restrict freedoms such as freedom of expression and association. These actions further weaken the democratic culture necessary for safeguarding public authorities' accountability and pluralism, entrenching autocrats' hold on power.

Journalism, arts, and culture are essential elements of democratic resilience, serving as vital channels for pluralism, inclusiveness, and public engagement. Quality journalism and creative pursuits contribute to a deeper understanding of societal realities, help shape values and perspectives relevant to political choices, and enable informed public participation. However, these actors are often among the first targets of authoritarian regimes which further undermines the pluralistic and informed public debate and democratic opposition.

In addition, advanced digital technologies such as AI can enable autocrats to use sophisticated forms of (electoral and other) manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and the amplification of divisive and polarising content. Large technology companies and social media platforms have significant power to determine what users access on these platforms; they can limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and create a narrow version of reality for their users, driven by their owners' corporate interests or external pressures such as the demands of autocratic regimes. Moreover, the business models of large social media and other platforms reward engagement above all else and incentivise the spread of polarising content. These issues underline the need for platforms to be better aligned with democratic values also because these same platforms, if effectively governed, have immense potential to process information efficiently, support complex participatory processes, amplify reliable information, and help build more cohesive and resilient societies.

Young people are the most active users of digital platforms but also are, in many societies, a demographically declining group which raises many questions about ways in which their participation in, and influence in democratic institutions and processes, can be reinforced, and how their engagement can help safeguard democratic freedoms.

Some of the following goals derive from these challenges:
- identifying **social, economic, cultural and other reasons** driving people away from democracy and exploring ways to address them;
- discussing approaches to building a solid **democratic culture** which enables citizens to detect disinformation and resist populist "solutions" and autocratic shifts, to mobilise when their democratic rights and freedoms are under threat, and be willing to actively and competently engage in both representative and participatory democracy processes;
- exploring methods of **reinforcing the will and capacity of public authorities** to protect the integrity of public debate and democratic principles in the context of online platforms;
- **finding ways to protect media freedom**, independence and pluralism, and increase the capacity and **freedom of artists** to contribute meaningfully to public debate.

Key questions:
- What are the social and economic reasons causing indifference and mistrust in democracy and how to respond to them?
- What is the role of actors such as political parties, civil society organisations and movements, formal and non-formal education, media and internet service providers and public institutions at all levels in re-building democratic culture and restoring trust in democracy?
- How can public policies and the contribution of non-state actors help reinforce access to and participation in culture and the freedom and diversity of cultural life?
- What tools can we mobilise to ensure that democratic public authorities are able to protect the integrity and pluralism of the public information space?
- How can we effectively foster an informed and pluralistic public debate, support artistic freedom, promote diversity and enable more equitable and meaningful public participation?
- Can democracy innovations such as deliberative and participatory mechanisms, citizens chambers, sortition etc. help renew democracy, rebuild trust and bring citizens on board?

This event is a contribution towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe, which is a strategic and political consultation process launched by the Council of Europe to find solutions to reinforce the foundations of democracy, amplify its benefits, restore trust and innovate its form. The results will shape the future work of the Council of Europe to make democracy tangible and meaningful for all.

Wednesday, 5 November

Hemicycle of the Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe – Interpretation FR/EN

Maître de cérémonie : **Alex TAYLOR,** European journalist, France/United Kingdom

09.30-10.30   ## Time for Facts
Moderator:
Matjaž GRUDEN, Director for Democracy, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe

Panel:
Helmut ANHEIER, Indicator Framework on Culture and Democracy, Hertie School of Governance, Germany
Staffan LINDBERG, Director, V-Dem, Sweden
Quinn McKEW, Executive Director, Article19, United Kingdom
Laura SILVER, Associate Director of Global Research, PEW Research Center, United States of America

10.30-10.35   *Words by **Theodoros Rousopoulos**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*

10.35-10.40   *Words by the Representative of the Presidency of Malta of the Committee of Ministers, **Dr Jonathan ATTARD**, Minister for Justice*

10.40-11.00   *Welcoming by the co-organisers*
Salina GRENET-CATALANO, Director of Global Affairs at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs**,** France
Brigitte TORLOTING, Vice-President of the Region Grand Est
Pascale PFEIFFER, Alsace Councillor, Delegate for Strengthening Democratic Engagement and European Democracy, European Collectivity of Alsace
Jeanne BARSEGHIAN, Mayor of Strasbourg

11.00-11.05   Musical Interlude by Bohdana PIVNENKO, Ukrainian Violinist

11.10- 11.30   *Address by **Alain BERSET**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe*

11.30-13.00   *Plenary Session 1 – How is the transformation of media impacting democracy?*

Quality journalism is key to a resilient democracy—driving pluralism, public engagement, and informed debate. But today, it's under threat from authoritarian pressure, AI-driven manipulation, and profit models that reward division. This session explores how to support quality journalism and reform media governance to better promote trustworthy information, inclusive participation, and stronger, more cohesive democracies.

Moderator:
Tom GIBSON, Deputy Advocacy Director, Committee to Protect Journalists, Belgium

Panel :
Divina FRAU-MEIGS, Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle, France
David KAYE, Member of the European Commission for Democracy through Law – the Venice Commission, United States of America
TANAKA Akihiko, President of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan
Gayathry VENKITESWARAN, Assistant Professor at the School of Humanities, University of Nottingham in Malaysia

13.00-14.15   **Lunch Break**

14.00 – 14:30   Inauguration of the Maltese and Ukrainian Exhibitions, Lobby of the Hemicycle

14.30-16.00 *Plenary Session 2 – How Can Culture and Cultural Policy Strengthen Democracy?*

A vibrant cultural life is the backbone of democratic security. Arts and culture foster pluralism, critical thinking, and public reflection—strengthening resistance to authoritarianism. But when artistic freedom is restricted, democratic backsliding often follows. While technology has expanded creative expression, it has also enabled mass manipulation. This session will explore how cultural policies can safeguard artistic freedom, promote democratic values, and empower artists to shape public debate and foster engagement in a technology-driven world.

Introductory Address:
Zhanna ANDREASYAN, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, Armenia
Heidy PURGA, Minister of Culture, Estonia

Moderator:
Kattia HERNÁNDEZ OCAÑA, Strategic Communication Advisor & Producer for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Mexico

Panel**:**
Zhanna ANDREASYAN, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, Armenia
Parul Joy MUKHERJI, Dean and Professor, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
Heidy PURGA, Minister of Culture, Estonia
Mimiko TÜRKKAN, visual and performative artist, Türkiye
Volodymyr YATSENKO, co-founder of the ForeFilms, Member of the European Film Academy, Ukraine

16.00-17.30   *Plenary Session 3 – What Future for Citizen Participation?*

When citizens disengage from democracy, core freedoms and checks and balances begin to erode. Participation— through voting, civil society, and political engagement—is essential to keeping democracy alive. New technologies bring both risks and opportunities for more direct, inclusive, and informed democratic participation. This session explores whether and how tools like deliberative forums, citizen assemblies, and other forms of public engagement can break down barriers to engagement, rebuild trust, and help revive democracy.

Moderator:
Petra BAYR, Chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Austria

Panel:
Kevin CASAS ZAMORA, Secretary General, International IDEA
Edmundo GONZALEZ URRUTIA, Sakharov Prize Laureate 2024, Venezuela
Michael O'FLAHERTY, Human Rights Commissioner, Council of Europe
Salina GRENET-CATALANO, Director of Global Affairs at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs**,** France
Julian SASTOQUE, Kofi Annan NextGen Democracy Award winner 2025, Colombia

17.20   Address by Mattias GUYOMAR, President of the European Court of Human Rights

17.30   Inauguration of the Tapestry "El Holocausto"

17:45   Artistic performance by Gogol Bordello

Followed by a   Reception

Thursday 6 November

The detailed programme of the sessions can be found at pages 8-17

Meeting Rooms of the Palais de l'Europe   *Interpretation: FR/EN*

10.00-12.30   TIME FOR IDEAS

Ideas - session 1	Beyond the ballot: youth-led innovations boosting Democracy	Room 9
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Ideas - session 6	Learn, play, deliberate - preparing young people for participatory democracy	Room 2
Ideas - session 7	Renewing the civic mission of education	Room 8

12.30-14.30   Lunch Break

14.30-16.00   TIME FOR ACTION

Action - session 1	How to best assess the quality of democracy?	Room 2
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Creativity – session 1	Music is a force Film screening and Storytelling with the Gogol Bordello	Room 1
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17.30 Reception

Friday, 7 November

Hemicycle of the Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe – Interpretation FR/EN

Maître de cérémonie :   **Alex TAYLOR,** European journalist, France/United Kingdom

09.30-11.00   **Plenary Session 4: Learning from history: strengthening Democracy**

How has democracy been understood and taught through history? From Athens to today, each era shapes our view of democracy's promises and challenges. History education shapes how we see democracy now and can help prevent past mistakes. In a time of rising populism, weakening rule of law, and global crises, this session explores history's role in nurturing informed citizens and protecting democracy's future.

Moderator:
Matjaž GRUDEN, Director for Democracy, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe

Panel:
Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Culture, Education and Democratic Values and Rapporteur on "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship", the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Spain
Francine MAYRAN, Psychiatrist, and artist engaged in preserving the memory of the Shoah, France
Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, social psychologist, Professor of Comparative Public Policy, LUISS Guido Carli, Italy
Lorena ZUCCOLO, Development officer, ATRIUM-Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th Century in Europe's Urban Memory, Culture Route of the Council of Europe, Italy

11.00-11.45   **Reporting**

11.45-12.30   **Closing Session and Ceremony for the Democracy Innovation Award**

Moderators:
Marja RUOTANEN, Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe
Board member, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe

Voting for the winner of the Democracy Innovation Award

Presentation of the Democracy Innovation Award and closing speech **Alain BERSET**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

12.30 – 12.45 Closing Performance by Del Aguila yAmigos

DETAILED PROGRAMME

Thursday, 6 November

Meeting rooms at the Palais de l'Europe – Interpretation FR/EN

The Descriptions of the initiatives were submitted by the presenters
Rapporteurs of these sessions are students
In each session youth delegates will mainstream the youth perspective

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10.00 - 12.30   *TIME FOR IDEAS*

These breakout sessions include short presentations by academics, policy-makers and other experts and the presentation of innovative initiatives, followed by an extensive discussion with the audience.

The description of the initiatives

IDEAS - SESSION 1 : BEYOND THE BALLOT: YOUTH-LED INNOVATIONS BOOSTING DEMOCRACY
ROOM 9

In co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

This session explores how young people are reshaping democratic participation beyond traditional voting. It will examine innovative approaches, civic engagement strategies, and technology-driven solutions that empower youth to strengthen democratic institutions.

Moderator:
Valentina GRIPPO, Member of the Italian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, PACE General Rapporteur on media freedom and safety of journalists

Panel:
Roman BANARI, Republic of Moldova, Council of Europe Consultant, Former Secretary General of the National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM)
Vladimir MISEV, North Macedonia, Council of Europe Electoral Expert
Erjon TASE, Albania, Executive Director of the Academy of Political Studies

Initiatives:
France - Plan Procu
Presented by: Caroline SPAN, Financial Officer of A Voté

"Plan Procu" is an original initiative by A Voté to promote proxy voting among young voters. Its name playfully echoes the slang *"plan cul"* to grab the attention of a generation used to bold cultural references.
Launched during the 2022 presidential election and expanded for the 2024 European elections, Plan Procu will return for upcoming municipal votes. It combines a secure web platform with a bold communication campaign. On planprocu.fr, users can easily find a trusted voter in their municipality to vote on their behalf, using a system inspired by dating apps — hence its nickname, *"Tinder for voting."*

To reach 18–35-year-olds — a group often absent from the polls — A Voté launched a humorous, pop-culture-driven campaign on social media, supported by civic tech experts like Citipo and digital strategists from Datack, along with student collectives and influencers.

Plan Procu is open and transpartisan, designed for all voters regardless of political affiliation. Its goal: make proxy voting easier and more accessible, and shift how young people view electoral participation — from a formal obligation to a collaborative, empowering civic act

Nigeria - Youth-led Electoral Reform Project (YERP-Naija)
Presented by: Israël Chigekwu ORJI Programme Manager, Catch Them Young Community

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In Nigeria, where young people aged 18–34 make up nearly 40% of the 93.5 million registered voters, youth engagement in the 2023 general elections reached unprecedented levels. However, post-election surveys by the Youth-led Electoral Reform Advocacy Consortium revealed significant dissatisfaction, with 94% of respondents calling for urgent constitutional and legal reforms. In response, the Consortium-comprised of youth-led civil society organizations including Catch Them Young Community Initiative-convened 12 youth forums across all six geopolitical zones, engaging over 400 youth leaders to identify pressing electoral reform needs. These consultations led to the development of 35 prioritized reform proposals, refined into 13 key recommendations through expert reviews and a National Multi-Stakeholders Forum.

The initiative's goals are to increase youth participation in governance, strengthen Nigeria's democratic processes, and advocate for transparent, inclusive, and credible elections. Key actions include stakeholder forums, legislative advocacy, and policy dialogue. So far, the initiative has engaged over 27 senators and members of the House of Representatives to push for constitutional reforms. Participants include youth leaders, electoral experts, civil society actors, and lawmakers. Partners include Catch Them Young Community Initiative and other members of the Consortium. This youth-led movement exemplifies how young people are shaping the future of democracy in Nigeria through inclusive dialogue and strategic advocacy.

South Africa – MyRepresentative
<u>Presented by</u> : Ella ALCOCK, Product Manager, Open Cities Lab

MyRepresentative originated from Open Cities Lab's community-based research in the lead-up to South Africa's 2019 general elections. Fieldwork revealed that many voters lacked access to basic information about their candidates or ward boundaries, often voting along party lines without knowing who was running in their area. One common refrain—"I don't even know my councillor's name"—highlighted a widespread disconnect between citizens and their local representatives.

In response, OCL developed MyCandidate, a lean, address-based voter information platform that launched just two weeks before the election. Despite limited promotion, the tool garnered over 118,000 users and widespread engagement, confirming a critical need for more accessible civic information. Importantly, post-election feedback revealed a new challenge: while voters now had information at the ballot box, they lacked ways to stay informed and connected in the months and years that followed.

This insight laid the foundation for a broader concept—MyRepresentative—that would support informed civic engagement both during and between elections. It was further shaped by deliberative democracy theory and the recognition that democratic participation must be continuous, not episodic.

Subsequent international deployments of MyCandidate in Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone reinforced the need for a year-round platform that supports not only informed voting but also local accountability—ultimately inspiring the development of the MyCouncillor tool.

IDEAS – SESSION 2 : LOCAL INITIATIVES TO REVITALIZE DEMOCRACY   ROOM 7
In co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Sponsored by the European Collectivy of Alsace

Democracy today faces unprecedented challenges: declining trust, growing polarization, and rapid societal change. At the same time, citizens are demanding greater accountability, inclusiveness, and tangible opportunities to shape decisions that affect their lives. Against this backdrop, local and regional authorities stand at the frontline of democratic renewal.
This panel will highlight how local initiatives can revitalize democracy by putting citizens at the heart of decision-making. Building on the Council of Europe's New Democracy Pact, the discussion will address how municipalities can translate its vision into practice: through transparent governance, proximity to citizens, as well as innovative participatory tools that can help rebuild citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

<u>Moderator</u>:

Ramon TENA PERA, Municipal Councilor responsible for youth and citizenship, Escaldes-Engordany, Andorra

Panel 1:
Francesca GIUDICE, Youth Delegate to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Malta
Güneş PEHLIVAN, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Provincial Councillor, Canakkale, Türkiye
José DUARTE D'ALMEIDA, Member of the Cascais City Council, Portugal
Xavier CADORET, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Mayor of Saint-Gérand-le-Puy, France

Panel 2:
Cécile DELATTRE, Councilor, Collectivité européenne d'Alsace, France
Jewel MIAH, Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Leader of Charnwood Borough Council, United Kingdom
Lisett HANSEN, Youth Delegate to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Estonia

<u>Initiatives</u>:

India - Democracy Local From Why Vote to Why Not

Presented by: Sadanand RAWOOL, Co-Initiator of Democracy Local

The platform and model of Democracy Local helps citizens alert others about local matters, participate in votes, suggest options, and feature those making a difference. Imagine blend Google Maps and Reddit, and you have Democracy Street.

People in the community post pictures or reports of public problems such as broken lights or paths that are missing. The applications are checked by Startup Nations, then opened to voting, and finally united with the grassroots solutions suggested by the local community. Popular project ideas are supported through programs, working with local education officials, or grant programmes.
We merge digital platforms (WhatsApp bots, special dashboards, social media, storytelling) with live activities (Do-It-Together walks, democracy groups in schools, and street actions). The purpose is to make being involved in democracy more fun, inclusive, and focused within your community, so instead of saying chalta hai (it's okay), you say chal pade (let's make a difference)!

Türkiye - The Urban Rights Monitoring Index
Presented by: Hüseyin Murat LEHIMLER, President – SÜRKAD

The Urban Rights Monitoring Index (Kentli Hakları İzleme Endeksi **-** KEHİM) is an innovative, data-based tool developed by the Association for Sustainable Development and Urban Research (SÜRKAD) to assess urban inequalities and promote rights-based policymaking. The initiative aims to strengthen democratic governance and civic resilience by making the distribution of public services more transparent and accountable.
Implemented in four diverse districts of Istanbul (Eyüp, Kağıthane, Beşiktaş, Sarıyer), KEHİM combines citizen surveys, focus groups, and expert panels to collect evidence on the lived experiences of residents. It produces measurable indicators in five core areas: housing, mobility, access to public services, environmental justice, and civic participation.
The project engaged over 2,000 participants and involved local NGOs, municipalities, and academic researchers. Its findings were integrated into the strategic planning processes of three municipalities and publicly shared to raise awareness about urban rights.
KEHİM sets a replicable model for inclusive, participatory governance and encourages public institutions to adopt rights-based accountability standards. It demonstrates how democratic innovation can emerge from civil society to influence policy design and implementation.

Cameroon – Unlocking the Initiative Power of Youth from Neighborhood Committees for Better Governance in Yahounde IV (VoiceYouthFem)
Presented by: Joseph Bertrand KENMOGNE CHETEU, President of Humanees

#VoiceYouthFem is an initiative of the Cameroonian association Humanees, implemented in partnership with CAPS and the Yaoundé IV City Council. It aims to promote more inclusive local governance by placing youth and women — including people with disabilities and internally displaced persons — at the heart of public action. The initiative is part of the WYDE Civic Engagement program, led by ALDA, People in Need, and Elbarlament, with support from the European Union and the European Partnership for Democracy.

Between April and December 2024, 63 representatives from 22 Neighborhood Committees co-developed a participatory action plan with local authorities, following a citizen forum. An active citizenship campaign raised awareness among more than 9,600 students and generated over 67,000 impressions on social media. Through intensive training, 52 young people strengthened their skills in leadership, local governance, and community mobilization. Seven innovative projects promoting urban sanitation were awarded. Today, these youth lead community dialogues, initiate collective actions, and actively participate in local consultation platforms. They embody a competent, committed youth that champions democratic peace.

IDEAS - SESSION 3 : AI AND DEMOCRACY   ROOM 1
In co-operation with the Committee on Artificial Intelligence of the Council of Europe
Sponsored by the Region of Grand Est, France

This session will explore the intersection between artificial intelligence and democracy, examining both the transformative potential and the challenges AI presents. It will discuss how AI interacts with democratic processes and public decision-making, how it can enhance transparency and civic participation, and how to uphold integrity, trust, and accountability in its application within the democratic sphere.

Moderator:

Jean-Baptiste CUZIN, Director in charge of cross-border, European and international cooperation, Region Grand Est, France

Panel:
Alessandra CARDACI, Head of Programming and Operations, Debating Europe, Belgium
Raquel DE HARO I PEREZ, PhD candidate at ETH Zurich, Switzerland and International Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Protecting Women Online of The Open University, UK

Mario HERNANDEZ RAMOS, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), Spain
Bruce SCHNEIER, Harvard Kennedy School, United States of America

<u>Inititatives</u>

Austria - "parlament.fyi"
<u>Presented by</u>: Christina HELF, Co-Founder, parlament.fyi; Platform Director, The Innovation in Politics Institute, Association for Digital Politics and Artificial Intelligence

The goal of parlament.fyi (for your information) is simple: make political information clear, accessible, and useful. We built an AI-powered platform that sifts through Austria's vast **parliamentary open data set**, **summarizing** complex political discussions into something that actually makes sense. By using the model ChatGPT 4.0 from the company Open AI, our AI processes over **10,000 speeches and 900 resolutions** from the last legislative period of the former ÖVP-Green government as well as the new and current ÖVP-SPÖ-NEOS government, analyzing not just what was decided, but also who said it and how arguments evolved over time. This allows us to highlight patterns in political language, shifts in party positions, and emerging trends in legislative decision-making. parlament.fyi offers AI-generated summaries of parliamentary debates, empowering citizens and media to understand government actions, promote accountability, and reduce misinformation. Using AI, it automates analysis of parliamentary data since 2019 until today, saving time for journalists and political professionals and ensuring real-time access to legislative developments for better reporting and engagement. Moreover, the platform supports political education by providing accessible data and summaries, enhancing research and critical thinking on political discourse for students and academics. Since launching, parlament.fyi has sparked growing interest in not just summarizing parliamentary resolutions but also **analyzing politicians' speeches: their tone, arguments, and rhetorical strategies.**

France – AI For Democracy: The 'Democratic Commons
<u>Presented by</u>: Clarie ALSPEKTOR, Head of Research Projects, Democratic Commons Programme Coordinator

AI For Democracy: The 'Democratic Commons' is the first global research programme dedicated to building AI in service of democracy. Coordinated by Make.org, it brings together leading institutions such as CNRS, Sorbonne University, and Sciences Po to address the democratic risks of generative AI and harness its potential to strengthen citizen participation.

Goals: - to determine the democratic principles generative AI should abide by - to characterize AI democratic biases - to develop technological protocols to correct LLM biases - to develop an Open-Source "safe for democracy" LLM - to develop open-source participation platforms powered by this corrected LLM
One year following its launch, we present the key results of our Programme:
- A theoretical framework to define the democratic principles applied to AI
- The characterisation of AI democratic biases
- 3 new concrete use cases on our AI-Powered platform to simplify the understanding of complex topics to the general public : on nuclear energy in France, on the February elections in Germany, on the European Committee of the Regions.

Democratic Commons is one of seven winners of France's Public Investment Bank 'Digital Commons for Generative AI' call for projects, conducted as part of the France 2030 investment plan. The project has been endorsed by key leaders in ethical AI.

Indonesia - Digital Nusantara - Youth Dem in the age of algorithms
<u>Presented by:</u>Muhammad Dhirham ZAKARIA, Lead Coordinator, Digital Nusantara Youth Coalition

The age of algorithms presents unprecedented challenges to democracy—most notably disinformation, digital polarization, and civic apathy. In response, Digital Nusantara: Youth, Democracy, and Resilience in the Age of Algorithmsis a youth-led initiative from Indonesia that empowers meaningful participation and counters disinformation through inclusive, emotionally attuned civic innovation.

The initiative delivers workshops on digital civility, paired with mental health campaigns to address digital burnout and climate anxiety—key factors driving youth disengagement. So far, over 10,000 youth across Indonesia and Southeast Asia have engaged with the program's hybrid model and multidisciplinary support framework.

Digital Nusantara partners with leading organizations including World Vision South Asia Pacific, the United Nations Association of Indonesia, Indonesian Youth Diplomacy, and TikTok's Global Youth Council to broaden its reach and amplify impact.

At its core, the initiative seeks to transform social media from a space of hate and disinformation into a platform for civic expression and democratic dialogue. By combining data-driven storytelling with regional advocacy, Digital Nusantara empowers the next generation to reclaim online spaces and participate in shaping democratic futures—not as passive consumers, but as courageous civic agents.

IDEAS - SESSION 4 : HOW CULTURE AND ARTS STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY?   ROOM 6

Culture and the arts give democracy its voice and capacity for societies to dream and move forward thus making culture and the arts not mere ornaments of a democratic society but its important driving forces. Culture and the arts are on the front line of resilience, especially in times of wars and in face of autocratic attempts. In times of crises, war in Europe, the backsliding of democracy and uncertainty, culture and its actors help societies make sense of our times, defend human rights, celebrate diversity and critically think how to overcome the challenges. They open spaces for dialogue and reflection, allowing citizens to imagine a shared future beyond the limits of politics or ideology. They remind us that democracy is not just a system of government, but also living civic experiences sustained by creativity and courage. Equally, the freedom to create, to express, and to dissent is itself a cornerstone of democratic life. When those freedoms are threatened, when art is censored or voices are silenced, it is not only artists who suffer - it is democracy itself that begins to erode.

The session will include short presentations by academics, policymakers and advocacy actors on the topic of culture and democracy and the presentation of innovative initiatives, followed by a discussion with the audience. In an open floor debate, the experts and participants will have the opportunity to debate on how culture contribute to democracy in times of crises and to comment on the selected initiatives.

Moderator:

Sini PAUKKUNEN-MYKKÄNEN, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Council of Europe

Panel:
    Olivier GÖBEL, Compendium for Cultural Policies and Trends, Germany
    Katalin KRASZNAHORKAI, Art Historian, Curator, Curator of the Council of Europe digital exhibition "Free to Create – Create to be Free", Germany
    Sanjay SETHI, Artistic Freedom Initiative's Co-Executive Director, USA
    Representative of the Compendium for Cultural Policies and Trends (**TBC**)

Initiatives:
    USA - Jimmy Carter Jamboree
    Presented by: Barbara McVEIGH Director of the Jimmy Carter Initiative

As the daughter of the 1981 US National Strike, I learned deep lessons about civic responsibility and hard choices we need to make when we recognize dishonest leadership.Most of the union members of the 1981 National Strike had been Vietnam Veterans who understood unfortunate choices leadership can make. Therefore, it is a duty for private citizens to stand for truth. However, I also learned the hard consequences of losing almost everything when you strike, which my family and many others endured following that nonviolent national strike against the federal government, including prison, loss of jobs and poverty.
I am determined there is a far better way to make an impact in our society when we are faced with dishonest leadership and that is by creation, rather than destruction. And we have had great leaders in the past to be inspired by. One of those leaders was US President Jimmy Carter who demonstrated to us a path as a private citizen, using his influence in community building and how when we work together, as the people, we can impact our society creating a better world for all. His work with Habitat for Humanity on housing, as well as his approach to peace, diplomacy, honesty and humility is the medicine we need for our society today. As the Jimmy Carter Initiative expands, our drive is to "Jimmy" our societies back into being kind, generous, collaboration, trust and humility and live into the values that Jimmy Carter stood by during his presidency and post presidency, and help drive unity.

UK - Making Democracy Fun again Why we need more Democracy Festivals
Presented by: Peter O'NEILL, Vice-Chair International Democracy Festivals Association, Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas & Politics

We want to showcase the innovative role of festivals in creating inclusive public spaces for the promotion of democratic values and practices. Democracy Festivals are innovative methods for fostering and sustaining meaningful political engagement, especially for young people, women and ethnic minorities. They are important and dynamic cultural initiatives affirming democratic values, active citizenship and open debate which can also be a fun and exciting way to promote democracy. Many of these festivals attract over 35,000 participants over an annual 2 to 5 day period and the model has been exported to other counties around the world. Participants can therefore include thousands of people normally not involved in 'formal' politics but interested in cultural activities and single issue campaigns. Hundreds of partners are normally involved in the organisation of democracy festivals creating an eclectic ecosystem of democracy stakeholders.

Mozambique - Art by Truth
Presented by: Liscay Afonso SILVA, Coordinator, Como Queremos Demostrar Jovens

The "Art by Truth" initiative aims to revitalize democracy by promoting artistic freedom an supporting artists who face censorship after revealing truths in their works as the AZAGAIA of Mozambique who was persecuted for revealing information about false democracy Mozambique.

Initiative Actions:Free Art Festival: Organizing a festival where artists of diverse expressions (music, theater, visuarts) can present their works that address social and political themes. The event will serve as

platform to express truths and promote dialogue. Create social media campaigns and offer legal assistance to censored artists, ensuring they have support defending their freedom of speech. Artistic Residences and Establish residency programs that provide a safe space for artists to create their works without fear of retaliation, stimulating free and critical artistic production. Assemble exhibits that present censored works, accompanied by artists' stories, to sensitize the public about challenges faced and the importance of artistic freedom in democracy. "Art by Truth" seeks to create an environment where creative expression is valued and protect thus strengthening the pillars of democracy

IDEAS – SESSION 5 : *Who said boring? Journalism, art, and games against disinformation*

Room 3

In co-operation with the Division on Freedom of Expression and CDMSI of the Council of Europe

Disinformation thrives by appealing to emotions. On the contrary, many counter-disinformation resilience tools, such education to improve critical thinking or initiatives to enhance and support fact-checking of news or statements, often rely on rational processes. In doing so, they may just miss their target. The panel explores, through expert discussion and the presentation of relevant initiatives, how this gap between aims and means can be bridged. Which additional approaches that engage people not only rationally but also creatively are necessary? The panel discussion will explore the challenges and implications of alternative languages and tools, for journalism, art, satire and educational gaming, as well as tailored communication for diverse groups, including youth, seniors, and speakers of non-mainstream languages.

Moderator:
Marijana GRBEŠA, Full Professor at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science, Croatia

Panel:
Ngina KIRORI, investigative journalist, fellow at the Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism
Michaël OPGENHAFFEN, Associate Professor Digital Media and Journalism, KU Leuven, Researcher at factcheck.vlaanderen, Member of BENEDMO, Flemish-Dutch collaboration against disinformation

Initiatives:

Austria - Escape Fake 2.0
Presented by: Irina PARASCHIVOIU, Strategist and COO, **Polycular e.U.**

How can we effectively teach media literacy to young people in an engaging way amidst the growing challenges of disinformation? In 2018, we asked ourselves this question and, finding no clear answer, created Escape Fake: an immersive augmented reality (AR) experience that fosters critical thinking and media literacy skills.

In Escape Fake, players collaborate with a virtual guide - a quantum reality hacker - to debunk fake news and understand the impact of disinformation. Using an AR-powered escape room format accessible on phones and tablets, they solve puzzles that strengthen their ability to identify and counter misinformation.

From exploring a dystopian future museum to dissecting social media algorithms on the traces of a lifestyle blogger, the game blends digital storytelling and experiential learning.

Since its beginnings, Escape Fake has evolved into a broader ecosystem, with a toolkit, media literacy labs, workshops, and an exhibition that contextualizes the misinformation topics featured in the game. Blending playful learning with education, engagement and media art, we build critical skills needed to navigate the digital world. Escape Fake has been honoured with multiple awards and nominations, including the WSA in the Education Category (Austrian finalist, 2019), GESA Awards (Semifinalist, 2024), and the Ars Electronica x Culttech Award (Winner, 2024).

Norway - Building Bridges – Defending Artistic Freedom
Presented by: Sverre PEDERSEN, Executive Director Freemuse

Freemuse is an independent international non-governmental organization advocating for freedom of

artistic expression and cultural diversity. Freemuse has United Nations Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC) and Consultative Status with UNESCO.

Freemuse operates within an international human rights and legal framework which upholds the principles of accountability, participation, equality, non-discrimination, and cultural diversity. We document violations of artistic freedom and leverage evidence-based advocacy at international, regional, and national levels for better protection of all people, including those at risk. We promote safe and enabling environments for artistic creativity and recognize the value that art and culture bring to society.

Freemuse remains the only global organization that systematically collects and analyses cases and data of artistic freedom violations. The organisation's combined research and advocacy activities have led to Freemuse becoming one of the world's most authoritative voices and influencers in this field. Based on its solid and ground-breaking research, Freemuse disseminates results and findings to its varied specialist and non-specialist audiences as it—independently and with partners—pushes for positive, progressive, and measurable changes in laws, policies and practices, both in the public sphere and behind closed doors. Freemuse also continues to mobilize, support, and build or strengthen capacity with

established and new partners and constituencies—independently and with partners—across the globe who undertake actions to promote and protect freedom of artistic expression. Freemuse has further co-developed advocacy strategies and monitoring frameworks in collaboration with several international UN bodies and arts councils as well as bodies hosting artists at risk.

Nigeria - Speaking their Language
Presented by: Hannah AJAKAIYE, Journalist, FactsMatterNG

FactsMatterNG's initiative focuses on using Pidgin English to tackle misinformation and promote media literacy among young people and underserved communities in Nigeria.
The main goal is to help people access accurate and credible information in a language they understand. Through fact-checks, civic explainers and digital literacy content produced in Pidgin, we are making important information easier to understand and more relatable, especially during elections and major national issues.
At the World Forum for Democracy, our founding editor Hannah Ajakaiye will share how this initiative is helping young people engage more meaningfully in civic life, thereby enhancing democratic participation. The approach is helping to build trust, especially among audiences that are often ignored by traditional media.
Our work involves creating engaging content for social media, videos, civic education campaigns, and partnerships that help take the message further. We work closely with content creators, influencers, media and civil society organisations to ensure the information reaches the right audiences.
Through strategic partnerships and creative storytelling, this initiative is building a stronger, more informed democratic culture in West Africa

IDEAS - SESSION 6 : LEARN, PLAY, DELIBERATE - PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY *ROOM 2*

In co-operation with the Democratic institutions and Freedoms Department

This session will explore innovative approaches to engaging young people in democratic life through education, creativity, and dialogue. By combining learning, play, and deliberation, this session aims to discuss whether the next generation is equipped with the skills, confidence, and critical thinking necessary to participate meaningfully in civic processes. The discussion will highlight practical examples of youth-led projects, participatory education tools, and gamified learning methods that foster collaboration, empathy, and a deeper understanding of democratic values.

Moderator:
Stefan SINDELAR, Innovation in Politics Institute, European Capital of Democracy, Austria

Panel:
Marjan Horst EHSASSI, Director for North America, Federation for Innovation in Democracy (FIDE)
Sergejus MURAVJOVAS, Strategist at Transparency School, Board Member of European Compliance Professionals Association, Chair of International Advisory Board at Access Info Europe, Lithuania
Alexis PROKOPIEV, Director, Governance and Democratic Innovation, Make.org

Initiatives:

Romania - AMPLIFY Citizens
Presented by: Alin GRAMESCU, President at Station Europe

AMPLIFY: Citizens is a collaborative platform that empowers young people to explore new forms of participatory solutions and become equal creators in building a better future.
We believe in the power of creativity to connect people and break down barriers. All our actions aim to empower young people to engage in participatory democracy, embrace creative activism, and design policy recommendations that reflect their communities' needs. We managed to secure a grant from the European Parliament DG COMM. That's like getting a gold star from the teacher everyone respects. We teamed up with our friends from People Powered to create more participatory formats and more methods to involve young people in policymaking. We made a Policy Toolkit, which will basically teach our future participants what participatory democracy is all about, how policies are made, and why young voices are so important in this process. We also obtained a grant from ALDA Europe. This one's all about helping young people and local authorities work together to make their communities stronger.
AMPLIFY: Citizens is powered by young people. In this first year, we welcomed 45 volunteers to our team because, you know, 44 wasn't enough. We are also glad to have 12 educators who are supporting our volunteers in their regions. This is us. A group of people making democracy look cool.

Brazil - Co-Councillors (Co-Vereadores) A Shared Mandate for Participatory Democracy
Presented by: Samuel FRANCO FERNANDES, Coordinator of the Co-Vereadores initiative

"Co-Vereadores" is a democratic innovation developed within the mandate of Councilman Gabriel, at the City Council of Belo Horizonte. The initiative aimed to decentralize decision-making and foster civic engagement by allowing citizens to collectively occupy one council seat through an open public selection process.

In its first edition (2021), over 50 candidates applied, with 9 Co-Vereadores elected through digital voting by local residents. In 2023, the program expanded: more than 200 candidates ran, 27 were elected, and over 3,000 citizens voted. Each representative covered one of the city's nine administrative regions, with gender parity (two men and two women per region).

Participants engaged in weekly meetings, legislative monitoring, and public policy debates. Over four years, the group submitted more than 1,000 formal requests to the executive, reporting on issues like transportation, lighting, and public health.

The initiative was coordinated by political advisor Samuel Franco and supported by a multidisciplinary team. Key partners included the municipal executive and the civic education NGO Politize!, which provided leadership training.

"Co-Vereadores" proved that participatory governance can be structured, inclusive, and institutional. Its success has inspired similar efforts in other municipalities and demonstrated a viable model for democratic renewal.

Portugal - civic participation, virtual reality game, civil agents
Presented by: Gabriela MOUTINHO, Project Manager, Mypolis

Recently, MyPolis has expanded its mission and experience further and challenged other countries to make democracy engaging and fun! The Citizenship Agents, an EU funded project under CERV, empowers young Europeans through civic education, promoting democratic engagement, addressing climate change, sustainability, solidarity, media literacy, and misinformation. Using the Citizenship Agents board game, students and teachers take on the role of citizenship agents to tackle threats and develop civic proposals to improve their territory, allowing them to take ownership and responsibility for it.

By translating into other languages and working with our 11 partners to culturally adapt and implement the game, we're empowering students, teachers, and political representatives across Spain, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Belgium to foster participatory democracy and citizenship education. The ultimate goal is to enhance their ability to implement participatory sessions (Assemblies) within their own communities, assuring a participatory democracy and better integration within the community.

IDEAS – SESSION 7: RENEWING THE CIVIC MISSION OF EDUCATION

In co-operation with Departement of Education of the Council of Europe
Sponsored by the City of Strasbourg   ROOM 8

In the face of mounting challenges to democratic values, growing societal tensions and a sense of disconnection among many young people from democratic processes, the need for action and renewal is clear. Competences such as self-efficacy, critical thinking, empathy, civic-mindedness and responsibility are essential in preparing learners to become active and informed participants in a cohesive and democratic society.

Digital transformation, largely underpinned by recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI) over the past decade, has dramatically impacted our lives and societies. Therefore, it is essential to understand their impact and tackle the situation, become active and informed citizens.

By combining policy and practice, this session aims to generate new ideas for these initiatives, inspire others, and provide a springboard for action to renew the civic mission of education.

Moderator:

Andreu JORDI TOMÀS, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Andorra to the Council of Europe

Panel:

Raphaël CULLIFORD, Délégué général de Parlons Démocratie, France
Rolf GOLLOB, Professor Emeritus, Zurich University of Teacher Education; Chair of the Council of Europe Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) and Member of the Swiss UNESCO-Commission
Ron SALAJ, Researcher, University of Turin, Italy
Sarah KEATING, Head of the Formal and Non-formal Education Division, Council of Europe Education Department

Initiatives:

USA - social media and AI
Presented by: Jane KIM, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, KindEd

KindEd is an education initiative that helps students build self-awareness, agency, and healthier digital habits through social media and AI literacy. The curriculum focuses on the everyday ways platforms shape how young people think, feel, connect, and participate, particularly in communities with limited access to digital support. KindEd combines cognitive behavioral methods with inquiry-based learning to center student voice. Through real-life scenarios and discussion, students reflect on their habits, examine how platform design and peer influence affect them, and create shared norms for intentional technology use. Lessons explore misinformation, cancel culture, algorithmic bias, echo chambers, and polarization, helping students understand how their digital experiences shape their lives and society. The curriculum is available in print and digital formats and includes training and support for educators. It is designed to be flexible and

relevant, helping students think critically about how technology impacts their identity, relationships, and choices. With support from the University of Chicago and partners such as UNESCO, KindEd is hosting its first social media literacy summit. The goal is to change how schools prepare students to participate in civic life. In a world shaped by platform design, we help students take back control.

Afghanistan - Community Legal Pathways for Democratic Resilience (CLPDR)
<u>Presented by</u>: Salem HELALI, Managing Director/Technical Advisor

In Afghanistan's current context under Taliban governance—where formal democratic institutions are dismantled—Community Legal Pathways for Democratic Resilience (CLPDR) focuses on promoting democratic values through legal empowerment and rights-based awareness in five provinces: Kabul, Balkh, Bamyan, Nangarhar, and Badakhshan.
Goals include enhancing access to justice and fostering civic agency by equipping marginalized populations—especially women, returnees, and IDPs—with knowledge of their rights under Afghanistan's current legal framework and Sharia-influenced customary law.
Actions involve delivering mobile legal literacy sessions, training community paralegals, and facilitating safe legal counseling through trusted local actors. The initiative also conducts village-level legal dialogues to strengthen collective problem-solving, transparency, and equitable dispute resolution.
Scope: Over 2,500 individuals across five provinces will benefit, with a focus on conflict-affected and underserved communities.
Participants: Women heads of households, youth leaders, displaced families, and informal justice actors (elders, mullahs, community mediators).
Partners: Implemented by SEO International in coordination with informal legal actors, civil society networks, faith/community leaders, and under technical support from international legal NGOs operating remotely (e.g., IDLO, Open Society Foundations).
This initiative provides a legally feasible, community-driven model for nurturing democratic values under authoritarian constraints.

Brazil - The new faces of Brazilian Democracy shaping qualified leaders for a renewed politics
<u>Presented by</u>: Gabriel MORAIS, Director of Institutional Relations

The Leadership Training Program is RenovaBR's flagship initiative, created to prepare new political leaders committed to democracy, ethics, and good public governance. The program emerged in response to Brazil's crisis of representation and is grounded in the belief that education is a key tool for strengthening democratic institutions through the development of new leadership.
To achieve this goal, the initiative offers a free annual training journey for individuals interested in entering politics or public administration. The program combines online classes, mentoring, and in-person events, and is structured around ethical values, practical tools, and essential policy themes.
National in scope and nonpartisan in nature, the initiative has trained more than 3,500 leaders in 1,100 Brazilian cities since 2018. In 2024, over 1,600 participants completed 236 hours of training, and 365 of them were elected to municipal offices such as mayor, vice mayor, and city councilor. In 2025, 200 new students will be selected for the next cycle, focused on the 2026 national elections, when Latin America's largest democracy will elect members of Congress, governors, and the president.
Beyond technical quality, the program stands out for its commitment to inclusion and diversity, fostering racial, gender, regional, and ideological balance in a plural and democratic learning environment.

14.30 - 16.00   TIME FOR ACTION

These breakout sessions will seek responses to specific democracy challenges proposed by the Council of Europe member States or other stakeholders. With the help of a facilitator and experts, the participants will explore a range of responses/solutions through debate.

Rapporteurs are students from

ACTION – SESSION 1 – HOW TO BEST ASSESS THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY?   ROOM: 2

In co-operation with the Steering Committee for Democracy of the Council of Europe

Assessing the quality of democracy goes beyond institutional indicators and expert analyses — it also depends on citizens' own perceptions and experiences. This session will invite participants to reflect on what defines a healthy and responsive democracy today. Through dialogue and collective exchange, the discussion will explore which could be the key measures of democratic resilience, and how citizens themselves can contribute to evaluating and strengthening democratic life.

Facilitator: **Vebjørn HEINES,** Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Norway at the Council of Europe

Panel:
Fred EBOKO, Senior Research Fellow, IRD, Africa
Seema SHAH, Head of Democracy Assesment, International IDEA, Sweden
Alexander VOGT, Former Policy Officer, Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM), Council of Europe, Luxembourg
Seema SHAH, Head of Democracy Assesment, International IDEA, Sweden

ACTION – SESSION 2 – WHAT ARE WAYS TO MAKE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AN INTEGRAL PART OF DECISION-MAKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

ROOM: 2

This session explores practical strategies to embed deliberative democracy into community decision-making. Participants will discuss methods for fostering inclusive public dialogue, building trust between citizens and leaders, and creating structures that encourage shared responsibility in policymaking. Through interactive discussion, attendees will identify concrete actions and tools—such as citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, and community forums—to ensure that diverse voices shape decisions that affect their community's future.

Facilitator:
Yves DEJAEGHERE, CEO, FIDE

Panel:
Caitríona DOYLE, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Ireland at the Council of Europe
Yves DEJAEGHERE, CEO, FIDE

Kyle REDMAN, Project manager, FIDE

ACTION – SESSION 3 – CAN CULTURAL POLICIES/ACTIONS BE MORE PARTICIPATORY?

ROOM: 6

In co-operation with the Division on Culture and Heritage of the Council of Europe

Participation in culture fosters a form of democratic citizenship and exercise of democracy. Participatory cultural policies make democracy more inclusive and resilient. They allow diverse voices to influence collective priorities, strengthening social cohesion and public trust. It is also a question of exercising cultural rights and legitimacy. Upholding these rights means ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to cultural resources, the freedom to express themselves, and the opportunity to participate in shaping the policies that affect the whole society. Making cultural policies more participatory, implies rethinking how decisions are made, how resources are distributed, and how citizens are invited to contribute. Civil society organizations are indispensable partners in this process. Youth participation is equally critical. Young people are redefining what culture means and how it is shared today through digital platforms, creative activism, and other forms of collaboration and expression. This can bring new life into democratic participation, especially as traditional forms of political engagement lose appeal among younger generations. Empowering youth in culture is, in many ways, an investment in the future of democracy itself.

This session, in an open debate, will explore ways on how participation in cultural policies and practices can help reinforce democracy and democratic practices.

Facilitators:

Gaia CLARK NEVOLA, Research assistant in Digital Media, University of Uppsala (Sweden), International Assistant Curator, Casa Hoffmann

Simon MUNDY, Honorary Research Fellow for Cultural Advocacy, Queen Mary University, United Kingdom

Panel:
Inês Fialho BRANDÃO, Head of Cultural and Digital Mediation, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Portugal
Sanjay SETHI, Artistic Freedom Initiative's Co-Executive Director, USA

ACTION - SESSION 4: FROM CRISIS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: CAN BUILDING EDUCATION SYSTEMS RESILIENCE BE A BLUEPRINT FOR DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION?

ROOM: 3

In co-operation with the Department of Education of the Council of Europe and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia Region

This action explores the resilience of communities when facing complex and long-term crises – most notably, the lack of democratic participation among younger generations, and if that can be treated as a structural crisis. Can building up education systems resilience to crisis be a real investment and a true extensive and inclusive participatory process, where educational institutions and local authorities trigger enhance youth participation and critical thinking to safeguard democratic freedoms?

This session will include:
- Special address by **Alessia ROSOLEN**, Regional Minister for Labour, Training, Education, Research, Universities, and the Family of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy.
- Case-study: Can Council of Europe's EDURES initiative be a driver of democratic innovation, fostering a new participatory culture rather than "just" a tool for resilience and guidelines for authorities?

Facilitator: **Gennadiy KOSYAK**, Head of Unit, Education Department, Council of Europe, France

Panel:
Daniele DEL BIANCO, Director of the Istituto di Sociologia Internazionale di Gorizia (ISIG), Italy
Svetlana STEFANOVIĆ, Executive Director of the Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society, Serbia

ACTION - SESSION 5: SOCIAL MEDIA: FRIEND AND FOE?

ROOM: 9

Social media has become a powerful arena for expression, debate, and civic engagement – but also a breeding ground for disinformation, polarisation, and manipulation. Generative AI is now amplifying these dynamics, accelerating the creation and spread of synthetic content, deepfakes, and persuasive narratives at an unprecedented scale.

This session will examine how digital platforms are reshaping democratic life, influencing political beliefs, disrupting trust in institutions, and challenging the balance between freedom of expression and the integrity of public debate. It will explore how mature democracies can respond in a human rights-compliant way, so that online spaces empower citizens rather than undermine them, and do not risk becoming, or appearing to be, lawless arenas.

Facilitator:
Dan Corder, Talk Show host, South Africa

Panel:
Dan Corder, Talk Show host, South Africa
Rasa NEDELJKOV, Program Director, CRTA, Serbia
Nuray SIMSEK, défenseure des droits humains, Türkiye

ACTION – SESSION 6: WHEN IMAGES LIE: HOW TO OUTSMART VISUAL DISINFORMATION?

In co-operation with the Agence France-Presse (AFP)

This session examines the growing challenge of disinformation spread through manipulated photos, videos, and AI-generated content. We will explore how these distorted visuals shape public perception, erode trust in information, and influence democratic debate, while also discussing tools and strategies to recognize and resist such manipulation.

Facilitator:
Pap NDIAYE, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the Council of Europe

Panel**:**

Florian GAUTHIER, Co-founder of Reponse.tech, France
Ange KASONGO, Trainer, Journalist, and Author, France
Florian GAUTHIER, Co-founder of Reponse.tech, France
Suy KAHOFI, Journalist and fact-checker at AFP, Côte d'Ivoire

- Case-study: The Fact Checking Foxes, winners of the Hackathon on Demorcracy, organised by the Council of Europe represented by:
  Lucia BERTOLDINI, Journalist, Facta, Italy
  Leonardo ZILLI, Researcher, University of Bologna, Italy

ACTION - SESSION 7 AI AT THE BALLOT BOX: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS?

In co-operation with the CAI and PACE of the Council of Europe

As artificial intelligence increasingly shapes political communication and voter engagement, it also raises legitimate concerns about manipulation, disinformation and bias. This session, co-organised by PACE and CAI, explores how the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and ongoing PACE work and initiatives on democracy and human rights can help ensure that AI strengthens, rather than undermines, electoral integrity and public trust in democratic processes.

Facilitator:
George PAPANDREOU General Rapporteur on Democracy of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, (Greece, SOC)

Panel:
Laura CASTEL, member of the Spanish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly and member of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections, Spain
Mario HERNANDEZ RAMOS, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), Spain

Laura SILVER, Associate Director of Global Research, PEW Research Center, United States of America

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16.00 - 17.30   TIME FOR CREATIVITY

Music is a Force
Storytelling with the band Gogol Bordello

Sponsored by the Division for Cooperation on Freedom of Expression

Since its founding in New York in 1999, Gogol Bordello has fused immigrant roots and Eastern European influences into its distinctive "gypsy punk" sound. Led by Ukrainian-born Eugene Hütz, the band has long used music as a vehicle for activism and cultural identity.
Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Gogol Bordello has been outspoken in condemning the war, raising relief funds, and dedicating tours, songs, and projects to supporting Ukraine. Their initiatives include collaborations such as *Man with the Iron Balls* and benefit concerts worldwide.
This session features a conversation with Eugene Hütz and the band, exploring music as a force for democracy, human rights, and artistic freedom. Topics include political activism by artists, safeguarding Ukrainian culture, and the challenges posed by AI to musicians.
The talk will also feature excerpts from *Scream of My Blood: A Gogol Bordello Story*—a critically acclaimed documentary retracing the band's journey and their fight for Ukraine's sovereignty through music.

Culture on screen, stories of resistance
Presented by Eurimages and the Pilot Programme for Series Co-Productions.

As democracy faces erosion and trust declines, cultural expression proves essential to civic resilience. Series and cinematographic works reveal how narratives defend pluralism and engage citizens, especially young audiences. The panel highlights the role of audiovisual storytelling in renewing democratic practices and civic participation. In a dialogue with creators, producers, filmmakers and policy experts, the panel places culture at the heart of our shared new democratic future.

Moderator:
Pauline DURAND VIALLE, Executive Director, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe - France

Panel :
Lukáš HANULÁK, Creator, Director & Co-Producer of the "Moloch Files" series (supported by the Pilot Programme for Series Co-Productions) – Slovak Republic
Matīss KAŽA, Writer & Producer "Flow" (supported by Eurimages) – Latvia
Noël MAGIS, Managing Director, screen.brussels – Belgium
Kateryna VYSHNEVSKA, Executive Producer & International Scripted Consultant – Ukraine/United Kingdom

Screening of the **"The Truth Effect" docuseries – Pedro Calado**
How does a society function when the boundary between truth and lies begins to blur — even at the highest levels of power?

This compelling three-part docuseries, The Truth Effect, delves into that very question. After supporting 121 initiatives fighting disinformation across Europe, the European Media and Information Fund (EMIF) set out to document the human stories behind these efforts. The series follows journalists, technologists, and educators on the frontlines of truth — from fact-checkers navigating the presidential elections in Romania, to researchers seeking to harness AI for the public good, and teachers equipping young people with critical media literacy skills. In total, The Truth Effect brings together stories from 15 projects across seven countries, painting a vivid portrait of Europe's struggle for reliable information.

The festival screening will feature two episodes — Information Manipulation and Foreign Interference and Media Literacy. Following the screening, a conversation with the director, Andrii Pichyienko, and producer, Youssef Zeineddine, will be held, moderated by Pedro Calado, Chair of EMIF's Management Committee.
Moderator:
Pedro CALADO, Chair of EMIF's Management Committee, Portugal

Panel:
Andrii PICHYIENKO, Director of *"The Truth Effect"* Docuseries, Italy
Youssef ZEINEDDINE, EMIF's Communications Associate and Producer of *"The Truth Effect"* Docuseries, Portugal

WFD SHOW – Democracy in conversation

In a first for WFD, we are featuring experts from many different sessions on our very own TV talk show, hosted by South African professional late-night TV talk show host, Dan Corder. On The WFD Show, Dan will speak with guests from around the world on all of the different key issues that WFD 2025 is tackling in this year's program. So if you cannot attend all of the panels you wish to, join Dan and his brilliant interviewees, and participate in all of the most vital discussions of WFD 2025 in one session, on our very own entertaining, informative TV talk show.

Talk Show Host

      Dan Corder, Talk Show host, South Africa

Guests:

16:00 – 16:30

      Alessandra CARDACI, Project Manager at Debating Europe, Belgium. Alessandra is Project Manager at Debating Europe

      Gennadiy KOSYAK, Head of Unit, Education Department, Council of Europe, France

      Véronique BERTHOLLE, Congress Spokesperson on Youth and Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg

16:30 – 17:00

      Katalin KRASZNAHORKAI, Art Historian, Curator, Curator of the Council of Europe digital exhibition "Free to Create – Create to be Free", Hungary

      Julian SASTOQUE, Kofi Annan NextGen Democracy Award winner 2025, Colombia

17:00 – 17:30

      Ngina KIRORI, investigative journalist, Senior Crimes and Investigative Reporter, Nation Media Group, Kenya, and 2025 journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

      Raquel DE HARO, PhD candidate at ETH Zurich, Switzerland and International Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Protecting Women Online of The Open University, UK

ART EVENTS and EXHIBITIONS

Tapestry "El Holocausto" – Lobby of the Hemicycle
A monumental piece of art measuring approximately 4x3 meters. It was woven in 2019 by the renowned French atelier Pinton in Aubusson, the same that wove one of the tapestries reproducing Picasso's *Guernica*.
While "El Holocausto" clearly depicts suffering, it is also **a** call for remembrance and a solemn reflection on humanity. El Holocausto's message should be reframed to show what it stands for: humanity, solidarity and resilience. The figures are not just mourners. They are witnesses and caretakers, bound together by love and empathy. They illustrate what must endure: the shared dignity, the capacity to remember, and the strength when we stand together. It is a place to grieve, and to affirm life, empathy, and justice. The figures mourn what was destroyed and honor what we must protect. It is as much about what was lost as what can still be saved. They hold space for both memory and action, thus challenging the viewer to be more than witnesses to the past. They call upon us to be defenders and activists for dignity, justice, and human rights.

Fragile Foundations – Lobby of the Hemicycle
Exhibition by Francesca Balzan, Rebecca Bonaci, Shaun Grech and Kane Cali
Existence moves in cycles: creation, growth, erosion, renewal. These rhythms echo through nature and through the human spirit, in the ways we form and decay, remember and forget, build and erode. The exhibition traces the nonlinear pulse of being, the ceaseless oscillation between becoming and unravelling, a fragile balance where opposites meet.
The works gathered here reflect a world in constant renewal, one where forms and identities pass through cycles of replication and change.
Through this dialogue between serenity and violence, the exhibition unfolds as a meditation on resilience and the cyclical nature of existence. In tracing the rhythm of creation and collapse, we glimpse our own humanity, fragile yet persistent, shaped again and again by the will to endure
The spatial arrangement follows a transition from emergence to disintegration, mirroring the exhibition's conceptual journey. The first room invites touch and recognition, while the second immerses the viewer in emotional and material upheaval, concluding with renewal through resilience.

The House Where Ukrainian Diplomacy Was Born – Lobby of the Committee of Ministers
This exhibition, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, offers an immersive journey through the evolution of Ukrainian diplomacy — from the first efforts of international recognition of the Ukrainian People's Republic on February 9, 1918 to the modern-day achievements of Ukraine's diplomatic service. It features key milestones, virtual reconstructions of diplomatic offices, archives, and stories of outstanding Ukrainian diplomats.

Letters from Lukashenka's Prisoners – Hall of the Palais de l'Europe
This exhibition is for and about political prisoners in Belarus. It represents an effort to ensure that political prisoners in Belarus are not forgotten that the inhumane and degrading treatment they are being subjected to is more widely known about and denounced. The yellow colour that forms the exhibition's background recalls the yellow tags that political prisoners are forced to wear on their uniforms to indicate their status as prisoners of conscience.

Concert by Gogol Bordello, 5 November 2025 – 17h30 - Hemicycle
Gogol Bordello is an American punk rock band from the Lower East Side of Manhattan, formed in 1999 by musicians from all over the world and known for theatrical stage shows and persistent touring. "Gogol" comes from Nikolai Gogol, a 19th-century writer of Ukrainian origin. He serves as an ideological influence for the band because he "smuggled" Ukrainian culture into Russian society, which Gogol Bordello intends to do with Romani/East-European music in the English-speaking world.

Cartoons by Laurent Salles, 5 and 7 November - Hemicycle
All plenary sessions will be illustrated live by the caricaturist and cartoonist Laurent Salles.
Laurent was born in Nîmes, France. After obtaining a degree in Applied Arts, he entered the "Arts Déco" school in Strasbourg in 1990 and made his television debut while still a student. His sharp pen and humor were quickly noticed, particularly through *Les dessins de Salles*, a weekly cartoon column on Alsatian regional news. Since 2010, his cartoons have been published in regional daily newspapers. In 2016, he joined the collective of artists *Cartooning for Peace*.