



European
Partnership for
Democracy

The European Centre for Democratic Resilience Stakeholder Platform:

A Blueprint from Civil Society

JULY 2026

European Democracy Shield

The European Centre for Democratic Resilience (ECDR) is one of the centrepieces of the European Democracy Shield agenda. Launched in February 2026 at a session of the General Affairs Council, in the initial months it has started its operations in close cooperation with the EU Member States. Indeed, the ECDR is primarily aimed at the Member States in order to give them a space to exchange information and best practices, and implement projects together based on those exchanges. With an initial focus on countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and disinformation, the Centre's work is expected to expand towards other areas of democratic resilience to allow for a more holistic approach.

It goes without saying that a whole-of-society approach to democratic resilience cannot be limited to Member States and EU institutions. **When democratic institutions weaken, civil society, including independent media, is often the first line of defence and the last bastion.**

This work includes monitoring of elections and election campaigns; exposing and countering information manipulation; defending media freedom and information integrity; designing and offering media literacy training; providing legal assistance; improving citizen participation in decision-making processes; investigating corruption. In short, civil society performs a crucial watchdog function, holds those in power accountable, and works directly with citizens to help them navigate pressures on democracy. In short, **civil society is an integral part of democratic infrastructure and resilience itself.**

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The European Democracy Shield acknowledges this by proposing the establishment of a **Stakeholder Platform for 'non-institutional stakeholders'**, including civil society, with three main aims:

- To bring a broad set of stakeholders and communities together to enable contributions and feed them into the Centre's work;
- To facilitate the exchange of information, expertise and advice;
- To support the dissemination of outputs, including research.

Enthusiasm for the Stakeholder Platform is widespread. But how should it be formed? And what should it look like? Civil society organisations often engage in a large number of consultation processes. However, they are **rarely able to feed into the conceptualisation and development of such mechanisms before they are launched.** This brief will propose a series

of recommendations regarding the format and content of the Platform, in order for it to be more than a standard consultation platform and for it to effectively contribute to the implementation of the Democracy Shield, and strengthen democratic resilience by extension.

Format

Discussions on the Stakeholder Platform often centre on which stakeholders will be included and what topics they will cover, but this misses an important step. It is not yet clear what status the Platform will have in relation to the ECDR.

This brief proposes for the Platform to be an advisory body connected to, but independent from, the ECDR. With such a set up, *stakeholders can be integrated into the platform's governance and allow for meaningful exchanges with policy- and decision-makers represented in the ECDR framework*, while respecting the competencies of Member States. The Platform should be awarded a level of authority that allows for its recommendations to be taken into account proportionally.

Operational recommendations:

1. **Include stakeholders, like CSOs and independent media, in the design of the platform** to ensure it serves the needs of the Centre and linked EU institutions, the Member States and the stakeholders themselves.
2. **Create a balanced selection procedure of stakeholders** and ensure a plurality of perspectives, while limiting the number of organisations to allow for in-depth discussions and reflections. The Platform should avoid being too large a group, so that discussions on substance are not watered down, while ensuring that the chosen organisations represent a diversity in perspectives, including but not limited to thematic and technical expertise, geography, belonging to vulnerable groups, etc. As such, **the membership should aim to include between 25-35 members**. As with the Civil Society Platform, the ECDR Stakeholder Platform should prioritise members that meet multiple criteria, such as network organisations. This procedure should include both inclusion and exclusion criteria to prevent co-option of the platform by anti-democratic actors, while remaining open to a range of critical voices.
3. The Stakeholder Platform should enable **different levels of participation**. In addition to full members, the Platform should have

the possibility to invite organisations to supplement the Platform's expertise and insights. This division could borrow from the UN model within specific committees where states acquire voting rights by being elected from among the states represented in the committee. If members identify a need for more targeted discussions or collaborations, individual thematic Working Groups could be set up to feed into the Platform's broader work.

4. In line with its advisory role, **the Stakeholder Platform should aim to produce written outputs** to feed into the ECDR's work, such as joint recommendations and individual Working Group analyses. The Platform should also be invited to provide advice on the ECDR Work Programme. ECDR representatives should be well-informed by the secretariat about the expertise available to them through the Stakeholder Platform, and their ability to call on specific experts within the platform to support the ECDR's work. The ECDR should report back to the Stakeholder Platform on the way its work has been integrated into that of the Centre. This should consist of a written report followed by a joint meeting to ensure multidirectional feedback between the ECDR and the Stakeholder Platform.
5. The Stakeholder Platform should have a **regular and predictable timeline** of meetings, while leaving the possibility open for ad hoc meetings if necessary. Members should have the possibility to propose agenda items and invite external observers/contributors, similar to the co-creation principle applied in the Civil Society Platform. Proposals should be seconded by several other members in order for them to be considered by the secretariat.
6. Furthermore, Platform members should have the **ability to invite participants/observers from among Member State representations and the European Parliament**. This would strengthen thematic deliberations and ensure political buy-in and follow up by all relevant actors within the ECDR.
7. It should go without saying that for the ECDR and its associated Stakeholder Platform to be effective, **appropriate budget allocations** should be made within the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework. As proposed in the EUDS parliamentary report, **the Platform's budget should be supplemented by employing the polluter pays principle**. This would entail that companies or organisations whose activities directly or indirectly harm democratic resilience have to compensate for this harm by contributing to the budget of the ECDR and the Stakeholder Platform. In addition to compensating for negative

externalities, this alleviates the financial burden on Member States and further encourages their active participation.

8. Any **funding managed or dispersed by the Stakeholder Platform** should be accessible to representatives of the various sectors included in the Platform, not just to members of the Platform. This should ensure a broad benefit from the Platform, while making its governance and deliberations manageable through a limited number of members. It will also contribute to a collaborative atmosphere in the various sectors and prevent participation in the Platform from becoming an issue of access to funding.
9. **Build flexibility into the mechanisms of the Platform** so that it can evolve along with the needs of its members and the ever-evolving societal context.

Content

As laid out in the section on the SP's format, **the topics dealt with by the Platform should evolve along with the changing democratic landscape**. While the initial focus should **follow the priority areas outlined in both the EC communication and the EP report**, priorities will have to shift for the platform to maintain its relevance and impact.

This section will build on the thematic priorities already established by the EUDS framework - *digital democracy, information integrity, support for public interest media, election integrity, citizen participation, societal resilience, media literacy, civic tech, to name but a few* - and focus on the ways in which the Stakeholder Platform can ensure that it keeps up with current and changing circumstances.

Broadly speaking, the Stakeholder Platform should allow for in-depth discussions and deliberations for which there are no other channels available between the different stakeholders. Rather than a space for dialogues where each stakeholder defends their own interests, the Platform could be a unique forum in which stakeholders work together towards outcomes that work in the stakeholders' common interest, namely the strengthening of our democratic systems.

Further content considerations:

1. **Ensure a balance between internal and external threats to democracy**. Many challenges facing democracy are inherently cross-

border in nature, such as information manipulation. In such cases, the division between internal and external dimensions serves to dilute efforts to deal with the core issue at hand, which is often shared.

2. In the case of information integrity, the Stakeholder Platform should **prioritise addressing the systems that enable and amplify information manipulation**. While on-going work to counter disinformation narratives is valuable, it does not address the overarching structure that allows for their dissemination and amplification and ensures the growing share they occupy of the information space. The Platform should work to boost the transparency of these mechanisms, including content moderation and monetisation systems, and propose fitting policy actions to redress identified harm caused to the information environment. In doing so, specific care should be taken that any such policy proposals do not restrict the information space in such a way that it negatively affects citizens' freedom of expression.
3. While the organisation of elections remains, and should remain, a national competency, the Stakeholder Platform can do valuable work on **highlighting emerging threats to democratic processes and electoral integrity**, and supporting national (election) authorities in addressing associated risks. A structured link with ECNE should be established to strengthen coordination, avoid duplication, and promote the systematic exchange of information and good practices.
4. **Candidate countries need to be included both rhetorically and operationally** in the work of the Stakeholder Platform. Already, the Commission increasingly recognises that democratic resilience does not stop at the EU's borders. However, not all governments of candidate countries are equally committed to democratic reform as part of their EU integration. It is therefore of increased importance to ensure the participation of democratically oriented stakeholders from these countries in the Stakeholder Platform. Stakeholders from candidate countries have valuable expertise that is applicable to internal challenges to EU democracy, as well as insights into potential challenges, which the EU neighbourhood is already facing or has faced. As such, two seats of the Stakeholder Platform should be explicitly reserved for members from candidate countries, with the possibility of selecting more.
5. The Stakeholder Platform should **contribute to the identification of vulnerabilities in democratic societies** through collective data gathering and analysis in order to inform preventative measures that strengthen democratic resilience.