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Team Europe Democracy Initiative (TED) **Newsletter**

Updates on the Team Europe Democracy Initiative:
Provided by TED Secretariat

Dear Team Europe Democracy Network Members and Partners,

Maria Pawłowska-Pławińska
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Thank you for the opportunity to address you not only as a representative in TED, but also as a member of the Polish Presidency Team. This is also a timely occasion to reflect on the current state of democracy around the world.

Every day we witness how geopolitical shifts are accelerating. In recent years, many governments have moved towards shrinking civic space and silencing independent voices. These troubling trends deeply affect our democracies and put their resilience to the test.

This grim picture should not discourage us in our efforts to protect democracy. On the contrary, our commitment is more crucial than ever. That is why, during its current Presidency of the Council of the EU, Poland places particular emphasis on reinforcing democratic institutions and countering the harmful impact of disinformation on human rights and democracy. Democratic resilience is essential to safeguarding free, independent, and credible democratic processes globally. Supporting independent voices is especially important in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, where democratic backsliding is evident in some countries, and where reinforcing European aspirations remains vital.

As Presidency Team, we are eager to contribute our experience wherever it can help protect democratic order and fundamental freedoms. I believe TED offers a unique opportunity to introduce new, concrete proposals for enhancing democratic resilience, developing strategic responses to disinformation, and advancing media freedom.

Let me extend my sincere thanks to all TED colleagues and partners. Your unwavering commitment to advancing democracy in Europe and beyond is deeply appreciated. Our task is to make democracy stronger and more resilient. I firmly believe that together – as members of the Team Europe Democracy Initiative – we can achieve this.

Enjoy the read,

Maria Pawłowska-Pławińska

Counsellor, Multilateral Cooperation Unit, Department of Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Republic of Poland

Updates

Interview with Ariadna Pop

Ariadna Pop
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In times of growing pressure on democratic governance, Switzerland sees democracy diplomacy and inclusive dialogue as vital tools for resilience.

In this interview, Ariadna Pop, Head of the Democracy Section at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, reflects on Switzerland's priorities within the Team Europe Democracy Initiative. She shares insights on supporting democratic "bright spots" like Guatemala, engaging with political actors, and the importance of adapting to complex reform dynamics while fostering democratic values through both bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Read full interview:

» <u>Safeguarding Democratic Resilience: Insights from Switzerland's Approach | Capacity4dev</u>

Working Group 1 Strengthens Efforts: Advancing Rule of Law & Anti-Corruption for Global Investments

Maira Martini, CEO of Transparency, thematic lead of WG1.2
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Building on a successful year, TED Working Group 1 is sharpening its focus on the evolving EU and TED Member State priorities. With Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption at the core of fostering private sector engagement and investment, WG1 will articulate TED's value in creating an enabling business environment.

Our goal is to carve out where these efforts can make concrete contributions to the EU's Global Gateway partnerships. To drive this agenda forward, we are preparing two upcoming webinars:

- *Curing Corruption: Mainstreaming Integrity Measures for Stronger Health Systems* (3 April 2025) – part of our series of mainstreaming Anticorruption measures in the Global Gateway pillars.
- *Creating Enabling Environments for Global Gateway Investments: Leveraging People-Centered Justice to Navigate Land Rights* (May 2025) – the third session in our ongoing Rule of Law clinic series.

Your participation is highly valued. WG1's strategic shift will also shape our 2025-2026 work plan, which we will discuss together at this year's TED Annual Event – your insights will be key in setting the direction.

As of beginning 2025, we welcome two additional partner countries. WG1 is supporting Kyrgyzstan (criminal justice reform) and Ethiopia (transitional justice), contributing to stability as an essential foundation for Global Gateway partnerships.

Our thematic leads have been very active and published essential research, such as: Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index which highlighted the negative impact corruption is having in the climate crisis.

Colleagues dealing with the accountability and anti-corruption topics were present at the OECD Global Anti-corruption and Integrity Forum 2025 on 26-27 March, taking active part in the sessions while also networking together as Team Europe with representatives from the business, civic and public sectors. Over formal and informal exchanges, the workstream located allies to further the goal of mainstreaming anti-corruption across our development portfolio while also pinpointed tools that can be utilised for engaging the private sector in cooperative efforts to improve integrity.

Bridging the Gap Between Action and Reflection: Interview with Christian Kuitert on the Role of KPSRL and TED

Christian Kuitert
© private

In a time of growing polarisation, shrinking civic space, and urgent global crises, is there still room for reflection and learning?

In this interview, Christian Kuitert explains why knowledge networks like KPSRL and TED are not a luxury, but a necessity. He reflects on the value of safe spaces for innovation, cross-regional learning, and building partnerships that go beyond short-term projects. Dive into this timely conversation on the future of democracy support.

Europe Must Step Up: Working Group 2 Provides the Roadmap

The global democratic landscape is shifting rapidly, calling for a strong and united European response. The warning signs are clear: shrinking democratic space, weakening institutional integrity, and the disruption of once-reliable international partnerships in democracy support. To ensure lasting impact, EU and Member State efforts must be strategic, coordinated and focused.

TED's WG2 is honing its focus on three key activities to navigate this evolving reality. The WG2 has launched two mapping analyses commissioned by DG INTPA and several Member States, carried out by Elbarlament-Democracy Reporting International, focusing on civic space (both online and offline) and local democratic governance initiatives.

Building on the October 2024 webinar "Strengthening Local Democratic Resilience – Entry Points for Supporting and Engaging with Local Communities and Actors in Fragile Contexts" WG2 is facilitating two thematic LABs, on April 9 and 16, led by ALDA and UNDP-Platforma respectively. These LABs will experiment with ad hoc roundtable discussions, bringing together interested local actors, democracy practitioners and representatives from the EU and Member States to transform dialogue into actionable recommendations for strengthening local democratic governance in situations of fragility.

Additionally, the newest WG2 Thematic Lead, the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), will lead a webinar in May exploring three thematic pillars – civic engagement, institutional frameworks and information integrity – across three timeframes: post-election (transition), mid-cycle (resilience) and pre-election (preparedness). Through this 3x3 approach and case analysis, advice and best practices will be shared to support democracy programming during these critical in-between election periods. TED Network Members' participation is highly valued in the WG2 activities.

Working Group 3: Media and Digital Advances Amidst Global Challenges

Current developments have hit independent, pluralistic media particularly hard, with closures, funding cuts and a reliance on short-term, project-based funding that threatens their independence. In this ecosystem, WG3 offers a platform for various actors to exchange and learn from the experiences. After its creation in May 2024, Working Group 3 has been active over the past months in pursuing its workplan and providing the groundwork for further activities. To start of the activities Working Group 3 conducted the study "European Commission & Donor Trends in Media Support. Matching Donor Practice to International Best Practice & Principles" which was presented to TED Member States for discussion on February 4th. The study draws from the findings of OECD Mapping ODA to Media and Information Integrity 2002-2022, as well as an analysis of the Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA) of ODA to Media 2010-2019. It combines these findings with data from the European Commission on Media Support. It will be circulated to TED Members.

Drawing on these conclusions of WG3 is currently preparing a toolkit of the "OECD Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment" which will be developed by GFMD.

The next topic of WG3 Webinar series on information integrity will be "Information Integrity: Promoting a healthy online information ecosystem through diverse approaches." The Webinar is held on April 4th and will introduce the Freedom Online Coalition Taks Force's Blueprint on Information

Integrity, as well as the OECD Recommendations on Information Integrity. It will feature a discussion and Q&A.

Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) Launched in Brussels

Traditional media are under pressure worldwide. Beyond attacks in authoritarian states, the biggest challenge is the decline of the business model, which is affecting media outlets across the globe. Against this backdrop, the Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) was created to provide the international development community with a shared framework. The manifesto was officially launched in Brussels on January 28, 2025. For the TED Working Group 3 "Media & Digital", this document will also serve as a key reference for future discussions.

Read more »

Support of Transparency and Accountability in Zimbabwe

In the backdrop of the 2023 general elections and the ongoing humanitarian and economic crises, the Zimbabwean government has set the priority of advancing its arrears clearance and debt settlement plans as a means to stabilise its economy. The EU Delegation (EUD) to Zimbabwe has identified important fields of engagement for joint EUD and EU Member States interest, including support to Transparency, Accountability and Anticorruption, as a key sector for fostering an enabling environment for Global Gateway investments.

The Secretariat organised a public sector transparency and accountability scoping mission to provide the EUD, EU Member States (MS), and other partners (including the TED) with an interest in Zimbabwe's Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution Process (ACDRP), with recommendations on potential actions that can be taken towards the successful implementation of the public sector transparency and accountability reforms.

- 3 April: Curing corruption: Mainstreaming integrity measures for stronger health systems

- 4 April: Asia Global Democracy Forum 2025 – Bangkok, Thailand
- 13-14 May: Copenhagen Democracy Summit
- 22-23 May: EADI Jubilee Event

Publications

Empowering Local Democracy: A Wealth of Expertise for Resilience
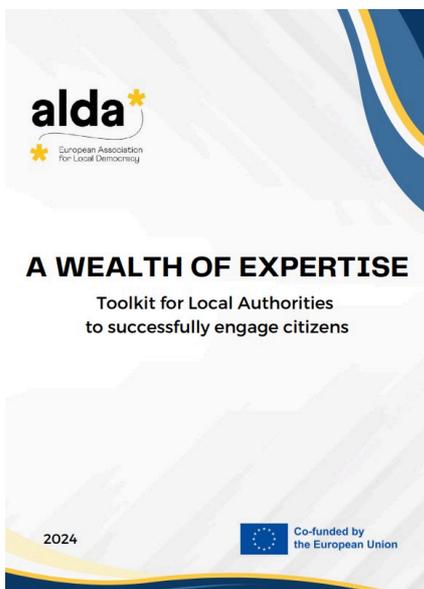
Citizen engagement thrives when democratic ideals are matched with practical tools and local ownership.

ALDA's new toolkit distils over 20 years of experience into actionable strategies for building resilient local democracies. From participatory gardens in Denmark to youth-led initiatives in Tunisia and civic innovation in Ukraine, the toolkit showcases real-world examples across seven thematic hubs.

It offers a resource for strengthening inclusion, transparency, and collaboration at the local level – driving democratic renewal where it matters most.

Further Information and Download »

Towards Meaningful Civil Society Participation at the International Level: Success factors, Opportunities and Challenges

International institutions are under pressure to deliver more inclusive, accountable governance, yet civil society still struggles to access real influence.

A new OECD working paper offers insights into how international organisations can move from token consultations to structured, impactful engagement.

Drawing on 25 mechanisms and over 40 expert interviews, it highlights the building blocks of meaningful participation: legal guarantees, transparent selection, civic space protections, and long-term support structures.
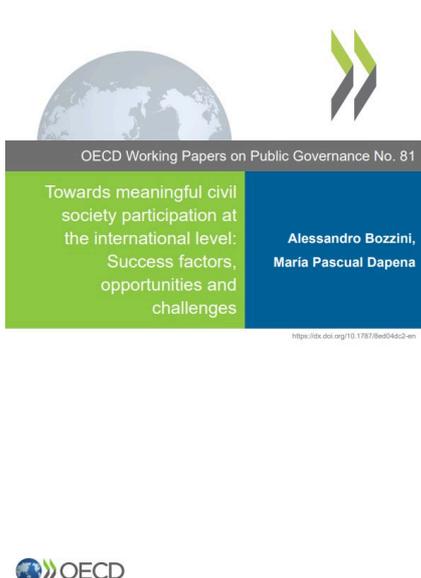
Further Information and Download »

AI-Generated Disinformation in Europe and Africa: Use Cases, Solutions and Transnational Learning
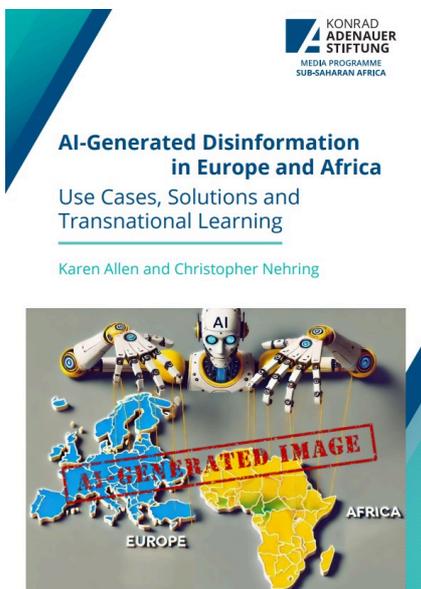
AI is reshaping the information battlefield, with disinformation campaigns becoming more targeted, more believable, and harder to trace.

A new comparative study explores how generative AI is being weaponised in both Europe and Africa, distorting political narratives, fuelling polarisation, and undermining democratic resilience.

With over 100 real-world examples and a focus on solutions, it highlights why cross-regional learning, strong legal frameworks, and multi-stakeholder responses are essential to counter this fast-evolving threat.

Further Information and Download »

Measuring and Analysing the Rule of Law: A Practical Guide by V-Dem

Tracking the rule of law is essential for democratic governance, but inconsistent definitions often complicate policy responses.

A new V-Dem policy brief offers a practical framework grounded in international human rights standards, combining legal-procedural and substantive indicators.

With accessible tools and comparative data, it helps policymakers and democracy practitioners assess trends, detect early warning signs, and design more targeted interventions to defend or advance the rule of law.

Further Information and Download »

Megatrends Afrika Collaboration: Lessons from the Sahel and Kenya

How can international actors navigate democratic fragility and support inclusive governance in African contexts? Two new publications from Megatrends Afrika collaboration examine this question from different angles.

A policy paper on the Sahel explores the strategic dilemma Western policymakers face in the wake of recent coups. While maintaining influence and avoiding legitimising unconstitutional regimes, many turn to CSOs as potential allies. Yet, as the case of Niger illustrates, CSOs often operate within blurred lines of state influence and shifting political dynamics. The paper calls for up-to-date contextual knowledge, flexible funding tools, and a clear political strategy when engaging with CSOs in such contested environments.

A policy brief on Kenya takes a closer look at public participation in Nakuru City, a secondary city shaped by the country's 2010 constitutional reforms. While citizen engagement has helped promote social justice, the brief finds that deeper impacts on governance effectiveness and legitimacy remain limited. A lack of elite responsiveness, legal ambiguities, and narrow participatory channels continue to constrain democratic accountability at the local level.

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