

# Team Europe Democracy (TED) Initiative

Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network Annual Meeting - Working Group 2 (WG2) Session  
*Power in Participation: A Speed Date with WG2*  
17<sup>th</sup> of September 2025 (10:15-13:30 CET)

## OUTCOME AND REFERENCE REPORT

### I. Context and Objective

Co-chaired by Belgium and Ireland, the Team Europe Democracy (TED) Working Group 2 (WG2) session “*Power in Participation*” (40 participants) unfolded against a rapidly shifting global landscape shaped by three interconnected dynamics: an unprecedented wave of autocratisation<sup>1</sup> and polarisation narratives; declining Official Development Assistance (ODA); and intensifying geopolitical competition. The EU’s Global Gateway signals a strategic pivot towards infrastructure investment, raising questions about the place and visibility of democracy support within this broader agenda. Yet, amid these pressures, signs of democratic resilience - even “U-turns”<sup>2</sup> - are emerging social, economic and community movements are (re)claiming their space in public life, while the latest CIVICUS Monitor report upgraded 9 countries’ civic space ratings, suggesting that democratic recovery remains possible<sup>3</sup> and polarisation itself may serve as a wake-up call for reform.

Framed as a “practical engine” of TED, WG2’s session took stock of progress, shared experiences and identified priorities for more coordinated and adaptive democracy support in the 2025-2026 TED workplan. Positioned as a bridge between WG1 (Rule of Law and Accountability) and WG3 (Digital and Media), WG2 links civic and political participation with the institutional and information integrity dimensions of democratic governance. Beyond bridging themes, WG2 also seeks to hold European initiatives accountable to its 4 core priorities: inclusivity of marginalised groups; protection of civic space; local democratic governance and sustaining democracy in-between election periods. Through its activities, WG2 amplifies local voices and promotes exchanges on context-responsive approaches, aiming to ensure that European programming delivers democratic outcomes and strengthens the capacity and resilience needed for sustainable democracy.

### II. Background: Recap WG2’s 2024-2025 Activities

During the last 2024-2025 workplan, WG2 advanced on:

- 1. Civic Space Strengthening:** the TED WG2 and [European Centre for Development Policy Management \(ECDPM\)](#) report “[\[explored\] EU and Member States’ approaches and options to addressing the shrinking civic space](#)” (October 2024) analysed 6 country case studies across Latin America, Asia and Africa. It identified intersecting triggers (e.g. political pressures, restrictive laws, economic constraints, psychological/physical threats and digital surveillance) and assessed EU and MS approaches (align diplomacy/political and operational efforts, use early warning systems, CSO Roadmaps, political economy analysis (PEA)). The report called for strategies to establish a common definition of civic space (e.g. OECD), combine “resistance” (immediate protection) with “resilience” (long-term sustainability of civic ecosystems), engage “unusual suspects” in (new) alliances and leverage Team Europe coordination to strengthen civic space.
- 2. Local Democratic Governance:** the WG2 webinar “[Strengthening Local Democratic Resilience: Entry Points for Supporting and Engaging with Local Communities and Actors in Fragile](#)”

<sup>1</sup> V-Dem, Democracy Report 2025, “[25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?](#)” (March 2025) and Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025, “[The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights](#)” (2025).

<sup>2</sup> V-Dem, Policy Brief No. 42, Marina Nord and Staffan I. Lindberg, “[U-turns – The Hope for Democratic Resilience](#)” (January 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Civicus, Monitor Tracking Civic Space 2024, “[Global Findings 2024](#)” (2024). Bangladesh (closed to repressed civic space), Fiji, Liberia, Poland, Botswana, Trinidad and Tobago (obstructed to narrowed civic space), Jamaica, Japan and Slovenia (opened civic space).



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*Contexts*” (October 2024) set the stage for the [two-part LAB series](#) (April 2025) led by [European Association for Local Democracy \(ALDA\)](#), [UNDP](#) and [Platforma](#). Drawing on experiences from +20 countries, the exchanges highlighted that local leaders, communities, CSOs, women and youth are often the first to uphold democratic practices and sustain basic services when central institutions falter, are contested or absent. Empowering local actors, authorities or intermediaries through community-led initiatives, city-to-city/triangular partnerships, participatory planning and codesign strengthens governance, aligns services with local needs and builds trust, countering authoritarian appeal. Discussions also highlighted digitalisation as both a tool and a risk. A recurring theme for “staying engaged” in fragile contexts was the preference for small-scale (grants), adaptive interventions, thus “light-touch” approaches rooted in local realities and participatory approaches.

- 3. Democracy In-Between Election Periods: (Between the Ballots):** the WG2 webinar [“Democracy Between the Ballots: Sustaining Engagement and Integrity Beyond Election Day: Strengthening institutions, engaging citizens and safeguarding democratic integrity between elections”](#) (May 2025) emphasised that democracy is not defined by elections alone but is built in the spaces between. Contributions from [European Centre for Electoral Support \(ECES\)](#), [Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy \(NIMD\)](#), [UNESCO](#) and [The Carter Center](#) highlighted three interconnected pillars: (1) civic engagement through youth mobilisation, women’s participation, civic education and grassroots coalitions; (2) institutional architecture and rule of law via credible electoral bodies, inclusive dialogues, functioning parliaments and accountable courts and security forces; and (3) information integrity, including countering disinformation, safeguarding digital rights, recognising influencers/content creators/digital actors as electoral actors (both in undermining and reinforcing) and strengthening independent media literacy. Case examples from Mozambique ([Institute for Multiparty Democracy \(IMD\) Mozambique](#)) and Guinea ([EU Delegation in Guinea](#)) showed how post-election violence or prolonged transitions during the mid and pre periods in-between can either erode or open opportunities for reform, depending on the space given for civic and political participation.
- 4. Civil Society Narratives:** the WG2 webinar [“Civil Society at a Narrative Crossroads”](#) (September 2025) brought together [European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes \(EADI\)](#), [German Institute of Development and Sustainability \(IDOS\)](#), [Oxfam](#) (Intermón) and [ECDPM](#) to explore and respond to questions on how narratives shape civic space and democracy support. Case studies from Latin America, Africa and Europe illustrated how narrative delegitimisation often precedes legal repression, while polarisation and disinformation further weaken trust. Donors face a dilemma: stepping back risks abandoning local actors, but engagement can be framed as interference. Flexible, risk-informed, trust-based support is therefore crucial. Innovative approaches such as supporting exiled activists, localising legitimacy, embedding youth voices and piloting alternative financing pathways (e.g. through the private sector as exemplified by the [European Delegation \(EUD\) in Zimbabwe](#)) demonstrate both the challenges and possibilities of sustaining civic resilience. Looking ahead, sustaining democracy support will depend on the EU’s and MS’s ability to balance its strategic interests (e.g. Global Gateway, security/defence mobilisation) and budget cuts (e.g. MFF) with democratic values, ensuring civil society is treated not as an accessory but as a genuine partner.
- 5. Mapping EU and MS Initiatives on Civic Space and Local Democratic Governance:** drawing on over 30 interviews with EU institutions (including EU Delegations), TED MS+ and stakeholders, the WG2 mapping exercise (expected delivery: November 2025), conducted by [Elbarlament](#) - [Democracy Reporting International](#) (DRI), looks to EU and MS initiatives on civic space and local democratic governance, recognising the interdependence, potential for scaling/replication and the challenges in programming including positioning through the Global Gateway and feasibility of Team Europe/coordination. In restrictive or politically sensitive



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contexts, navigating “red lines” requires specialised coordination, rapid response, funding and careful political risk management, while decentralised cooperation, through city-to-city partnerships, twinning and municipal alliances, has proven an effective alternative when central-level engagement is constrained.

### III. Members Space

WG2 members shared the following selected resources of interest for the group:

- [The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance \(International-IDEA\)](#)'s paper on *“Safeguarding Democracy: EU Development at the Nexus of Elections, Information Integrity and Artificial Intelligence”* draws on 7 country case studies (Bangladesh; Ghana; Indonesia; Mexico; Mongolia; Pakistan; South Africa) to show how information pollution and AI-generated media, threaten elections and democratic trust, while also revealing opportunities for proactive engagement and counter measures.
- [The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#)'s *“Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space - Toolkit for Implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance”* guides development and humanitarian actors in civic space protection efforts through context-specific, locally grounded funding and inclusive multi-actor approaches.
- [European Association for Local Democracy \(ALDA\)](#)'s upcoming publication on *“Local Democratic Resilience: Locally and Value-based Approach for the Global Gateway Strategy”* explains that Global Gateway can succeed, also in fragile contexts, through locally anchored, participatory and flexible investments that include and empower local actors.
- [The EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society \(EU SEE\)](#) (consortium TED/WG2 members: [European Partnership for Democracy \(EPD\)](#), [Democracy Reporting International \(DRI\)](#) and [Transparency International \(TI\)](#)) tracks emerging risks and opportunities affecting civic space across 86 countries through its early warning and monitoring mechanism, flagging trends and responses through [Enabling Environment Snapshots](#) and [alerts](#).

### IV. Speed Dating: Exchange

The WG2 session centred on a “Speed Dating” exercise aimed at translating lessons on civic and political participation into practical ideas for the next TED workplan (2025–2026).

#### Exchange Framework - Speed Dating Tables

Topic/Table	Leads	Guiding Questions and Messages
1. Civic Space and Narratives	<p><b>Co-Leads:</b>  <a href="#">German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)</a> and <a href="#">European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)</a></p> <p><b>Support:</b>  <a href="#">Oxfam</a> (Intermón) and <a href="#">European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI)</a></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the impact of narratives (e.g. in the context of shrinking civic space, security/defence priorities, funding pressures)?</li> <li>2. How can the discussions held so far be scaled up and what is most useful for MS and the EU?</li> <li>3. What to do - strategies and coping mechanisms - can democracy practitioners apply and what practical solutions are available?</li> </ol>



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<p><b>2. Mapping Exercise – EU and MS Initiatives on Civic Space and Local Democratic Governance</b></p>	<p><b>Co-leads:</b>  <a href="#">Elbarlament</a> - <a href="#">Democracy Reporting International</a>          Mapping Experts and <a href="#">The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)</a></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can joining forces ensure that the Global Gateway enhances civic space and local democratic governance?</li> <li>2. How to ensure that providers of development cooperation properly address staff education and institutional knowledge management on civic space/local democratic governance?</li> <li>3. What are original examples of rapid reaction, resilience and sustainability mechanisms/actions by providers/other civic space actors to contribute to protecting civic space?</li> </ol>
<p><b>3. Local Democratic Governance</b></p>	<p><b>Co-leads:</b>  <a href="#">European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)</a> and <a href="#">UNDP</a></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which actors and actions at the local level should be empowered to strengthen democratic governance and resilience?</li> <li>2. What good practices, examples or case studies can be shared that TED members and participants can build on to support local democratic governance?</li> <li>3. What modalities and approaches are most effective for supporting local governance and how can TED add value by operationalising these practices to inform programming, respond to emerging shifts and complement initiatives such as the Global Gateway?</li> </ol>
<p><b>4. Civic-Political Participation in-between Elections</b></p>	<p><b>Co-leads:</b>  <a href="#">European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES)</a> and <a href="#">UNESCO</a></p> <p><b>Support:</b>  <a href="#">The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International-IDEA)</a></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why is supporting democracy “between the ballots” critical, especially in today’s geopolitical context (e.g. Global Gateway, security/defence, budget cuts)?</li> <li>2. What good practices, lessons can be drawn/scaled up from the webinar on civic engagement and political participation (esp. involving youth and women) in-between election periods and recent country experiences (e.g. Mozambique, Guinea)?</li> <li>3. How can democracy support adapt to new challenges like AI, disinformation and digital mobilisation?</li> <li>4. How can Team Europe/EU-MS translate these good practices and lessons into concrete actions, programming or initiatives such as the Global Gateway?</li> </ol>



## Exchange Takeaways

1. **Civic Space and Narratives:** experiences shared by members - Finland (*where cuts to bilateral programmes were offset by increases for Finnish CSOs, creating unrealistic expectations that CSOs could compensate for the reductions*), Switzerland (*facing conservative political trends and ODA reductions despite new positive democracy guidelines*), France (*shift towards infrastructure over governance, focus on strengthening state consultation mechanisms*) and Uganda (*persistent smear campaigns and suspicion cast EU, MS and CSOs as promoting political opponents or “non-traditional” values*) - illustrated how political climates, budget cuts and hostile narratives constrain civil society. These examples also highlighted the urgency of proactive responses, resilient funding and stronger (different, new) alliances.

**Outputs:** Narratives in public debate can undermine civil society’s space and legitimacy. To prevent marginalisation - especially as donor agendas increasingly reflect national interests - (local) counter-narratives, development education and greater flexibility in funding and reporting/monitoring are essential. It remains vital to include civil society, local actors and marginalised groups within shifting priorities (e.g. energy, infrastructure, security, Global Gateway). Effective and joint responses include investing in proactive, coordinated communication (storytelling), amplifying local and youth voices, diversifying funding (via private sector) and supporting independent media. CSOs should reinforce collective action (“strength in numbers”), lead joint campaigns and engage (new) allies such as journalists, private sector, churches, schools and creative sectors in shaping narratives. Coping strategies are needed to protect civil society and local actors, possibly alongside a common (re)definition of civic space and its actors. A recurring dilemma is CSOs’ dual role as watchdogs and service providers/intermediaries, which can be compromised by funding dependencies (both domestically and internationally). Donors should therefore continue to innovate funding models, link political dialogue/diplomacy with development cooperation and apply a “do no harm” approach that protects CSO and media independence while ensuring sustained engagement and programming support.

2. **Mapping Exercise - EU and MS Initiatives on Civic Space and Local Democratic Governance:** exchanges focused on how WG2 members’ inputs could both strengthen the mapping exercise’s preliminary findings and draw from synergies and lessons from the OECD toolkit (see [III. Members Space](#)). Experiences shared by members - Belgium (*flexible funding, rapid response projects, joint context analysis with CSOs*); Kyrgyzstan (*importance of diplomatic policy dialogue alongside programming*); Yemen (*EU-Elbarlament project on relocation options, regional networking and sub-grants for at-risk (women) human rights defenders*) and the EU SEE (*on-the-ground monitoring and alerts combined with flexible (rolling) funding, rapid/pooled support, learning and collective protection mechanisms to inform EU, MS and donors on shrinking civic space and threats to CSO partners*) - tested and added to the mapping’s findings. This included on the positioning of the Global Gateway and Team Europe coordination approach in relation to civic space and local governance.

**Outputs:** Three interlinked needs were identified, each requiring Team Europe action: (1) effective early warning systems that trigger timely response, (2) rapid reaction and information sharing capacity and (3) long-term resilience for civic space and local democratic governance. An early warning - (rapid) response nexus was promoted. Priorities included strengthening coordination and collective action (e.g. joint safety nets), establishing harmonised rapid response and context analysis mechanisms (focus on local priorities, engage CSOs and other donors in co-analysis). Members stressed the importance of leveraging political-diplomatic channels and pooling resources (e.g. rolling funding lines). Efforts to strengthen civic space and local democratic governance should be framed within the Global Gateway and Team Europe approach



- not as a “box-ticking” or (re)branding exercise, but as a part of the 360° strategy to create an enabling environment. Stronger inter-institutional (EU, MS, CSOs, financial and private sector etc) learning on the Global Gateway and its offer is needed. Civic and political participation should be integrated across all six Global Gateway principles (democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean, security focused and catalysing private sector investment). Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards were identified as promising entry points for democracy and participatory approaches. Democracy support should be systematically linked with infrastructure, energy, security and investment agendas as well as with the actors (e.g. companies) driving them. For example, [People in Need](#) shared from a recent field assignment to the Lobito Corridor (Zambia, DRC, Angola) how civic education and CSO accompaniment in large-scale mining and transport projects during scoping and implementation can strengthen contextual awareness, public trust and help de-risk investments.

- 3. Local Democratic Governance:** strengthening requires the involvement of citizens and communities across the full project/public investment cycle, including under the Global Gateway - from the identification of priorities to the co-design and planning (budgeting (e.g. quadratic financing) and territorial), the implementation, as well as monitoring, closure and evaluation (see [WG2 LABs](#)). Impact stories from Mozambique (*decentralised climate financing leading to participatory climate adaptive infrastructure projects*),<sup>4</sup> Costa Rica (*public visibility of local offices and decisions on inclusive mobility*) and Nepal (*bridging role of CSOs when local institutions fail*) illustrated this. Local authorities (elected or not), CSOs and community actors are often the first responders or service providers in times of crisis (e.g. Ukraine), bridging the gap not only between citizens and governments but also with donors. Hence the importance of amplifying governance mechanisms that actively connect CSOs and local authorities/actors to ensure their voices are heard and initiatives remain inclusive and coordinated (e.g. [Global Gateway CSO/LA Advisory Platform](#)). Depoliticisation and pluralism (e.g. inclusion of opposition parties, social groups, organisational) at the local level is often more successful than at central level and can help sustain projects across regime/ruling party changes. Good local governance is also increasingly recognised as a catalyst for “bottom-up” reforms at the central level (e.g. see [WG2 LAB #2](#) Bosnia and Herzegovina case study) and as an entry point for donors to “stay engaged” (e.g. decentralised funding, small-grants focussed on “less intrusive” sectors like education, health, climate).

**Outputs:** Mapping local stakeholders and initiatives is needed to understand the ecosystem and “*know who to work or partner with, as well as support*” (e.g. elected/not officials, opposition, political parties, civil society, private sector, administrative/technical level) to ensure continuity of support and democratic processes. Yet, local actors face structural, social and political barriers, including limited access to direct funding and threats of recentralisation (e.g. Georgia). For example, local women politicians face additional hurdles from patriarchal norms, stereotypical role assignments (e.g. soft policy portfolios, social sectors, administration support), gender-based violence (GBV) and home or community responsibilities, which constrain their political participation. Local citizen engagement is often uneven, largely male-dominated or concentrated among specific groups; while women, youth, minorities, elders, persons with disabilities and remote/offline communities are frequently excluded, hindered by limited resources, access or awareness of their rights. CSOs filling public service and funding gaps or acting as local democracy intermediaries risk operating in silos or entering a “grey zone,” where they may lose safeguards and subsidy/Grants access while lacking genuine influence in governance and decision-making. While e-governance and online civic platforms can widen access, sustained outreach to offline populations (e.g. remote communities or elderly citizens) remains equally

<sup>4</sup> Examples: UNDP: [Mozambique | Climate Promise](#); UNCDF: [Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility - UN Capital Development Fund \(UNCDF\)](#); UNHABITAT: [In Mozambique, climate resilient infrastructures save lives and reduce the impact from natural disasters | UN-Habitat](#)



critical. Participatory approaches should be grounded in local context and leverage accessible, familiar but also diverse environments (e.g. ombudsperson offices (Switzerland/SDC), schools, markets and creative or recreational centres) to create safe spaces for consultation and engagement. Complementing these local strategies are city-to-city cooperation ([International Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, VNG International](#)), cross-party engagement ([European Network of Political Foundations, ENoP](#)) and regional peer-to-peer or South-to-South learning. Attention to local languages and media is crucial to ensure inclusive participation and access to information. Local media fragility is a critical challenge: local journalists and fact-checkers are often underfunded or absent, exposed to disinformation, face talent loss and can be influenced by external funding sources. This underscores the urgent need for sustainable, diverse financing and capacity-building, including training journalists in AI tools, ethics and disinformation resilience. Leveraging initiatives such as the [International Fund for Public Interest Media](#) (IFPIM) was recommended to support sustainable (local) media and information ecosystems.

- 4. Civic-Political Participation In-Between Elections:** is critical in shifting from event-driven to continuous engagement, strengthening institutions/rule of law, public trust and safeguarding information integrity. Despite substantial technical and financial election support, recent experiences in Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola and Malawi show that post-election recommendations - including those from Election Observation Mission (EOM) – often face implementation and follow-up challenges. Sustained engagement and capacity building of Election Management Bodies (EMBs), courts, parliaments, media and civil society are therefore crucial to consolidate reforms and ensure accountability. Digitalisation and the rise of AI bring both risks (disinformation, cyber threats/manipulation) and opportunities for inclusive participation and civic awareness, provided actors have the ethical frameworks, skills and resources to respond effectively. The overarching message is clear: the periods between elections not “downtimes” but decisive phases where democratic trust is either eroded or renewed.

**Outputs:** Members underlined the importance of continuity in EU support, ensuring that election observation and technical assistance are followed by systematic inter-election (pre-, mid and post periods) engagement through monitoring, political dialogue, mediation and institutional capacity building. Electoral support should be linked to broader governance, social inclusion and human rights objectives. CSOs and media remain watchdogs, but require independence and flexible support to monitor processes, hold elites accountable, advocacy for reforms and raise citizen awareness. While AI and online platforms can amplify disinformation and inequalities, they also provide opportunities for transparency, civic education and broader participation, provided ethical standards, codes of conduct and accreditation mechanisms (e.g. UNESCO and International-IDEA, regional experiences from Latin America and South Africa) are embedded in practice and supported through training. Influencers, journalists and content creators are strategically important in shaping narratives and public trust, calling for targeted engagement, ethics training and safeguards. Collaboration with multinational digital actors is equally necessary to improve regulation, counter disinformation and address cyber-related electoral risks. At the same time, reducing social inequalities in information access through digital literacy, open spaces/knowledge and empowerment programmes remains essential. Sustainable and strategic funding - by combining EU support with domestic resource mobilisation - is key to strengthen EMBs, digital oversight and governance structures between electoral cycles. EMBs are progressively gaining budgetary and procurement autonomy (as seen in Angola and Malawi), supporting digitalisation and e-governance reforms. Finally, multi-stakeholder cooperation should be reinforced - bridging EMBs, CSOs, citizen observers, international partners, political elites and digital actors. Funding strategies should align Team Europe/external contributions with immediate electoral needs, project outcomes and long-term resilience, ensuring resources also cover equipment, capacity building, media and digital literacy, and institutional strengthening.



## V. Feeding Exchanges into the TED Workplan 2025 – 2026

The 2025–2026 TED Workplan outlines cross-WG activities around three strategic areas that leverage the expertise of the TED Network:

1. **Democratic Principles of Global Gateway: Applying the 360° Approach**
2. **Building Democratic Resilience**
3. **Democracy Support in a Challenging International ODA Landscape**

WG2 will lead the following cross-WG activities under these themes:

1. Safeguard democracy: **elections, citizen engagement and information integrity in the age of AI** (WG2 & 3 webinar planned for 1st of October 2025);
2. **Youth and women as political drivers** in situations of fragility (in-between elections levels, political parties and parliaments; in collaboration with EU WYDE *tbc*);
3. Explore **intersection “human rights and business/private sector”** (responsible business practices, human rights-based approach in global value chains, Global Gateway);
4. Explore **intersection “human rights and human security”** (reference: [OSCE Helsinki+50 Conference](#) August 2025);
5. **Electoral Assistance 2.0**: European and partner approaches upholding democratic values

WG2 members identified the following takeaways to guide implementation and inform the 2025–2026 workplan (clustered responses):

1. **Democratic Principles, Global Gateway Sectors and the 360° Approach.**
  - Systematically integrate local democratic governance and civic participation into Global Gateway projects, across all sectors and cycle stages.
  - Explore entry points (e.g. ESG, CSDDD) to move beyond token consultations.
  - Adopt a cross-WG approach, leveraging TED Network expertise and the PCE pillar where relevant, for Global Gateway to integrate all three TED priorities, building an enabling environment and effective communication.
2. **Human Rights, Equal Economic Development and Responsible Business/Private Sector Practices.**
  - Position democracy, participation and local governance as drivers of responsible investment and economic stability through an advisory brief. As “public goods” for stability and economic development.
  - Leverage frameworks e.g. CSDDD, Corporate Social Responsibility and ESG to embed civic engagement and accountability in business practices.
  - Engage private sector/related actors (e.g. financial institutions, banks, contractors, legal firms etc.) with TED through multi-stakeholder dialogues exploring approaches and alliances supporting Team Europe and democracy programming.
3. **Intersection of Human Rights and Human Security, including the Evolving Focus on Security/Defence Mobilisation.**
  - Use TED as a platform to exchange approaches that link human rights and democratic accountability in evolving security/defence contexts, priorities and policy discussions (e.g. exchanges between civic and governments’ security/defence units, Helsinki Final Act’s “...recognition that security is not merely a matter between states - it is inseparable from the rights of individuals. The Final Act redefined security, expanding it beyond military

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*considerations to encompass human rights, economic co-operation, and environmental protection.”<sup>5</sup>)*

- Produce advisory briefs clarifying TED’s role in aligning security imperatives with democratic integrity across its three priorities supporting EU-MS coordination and democracy programming.

#### 4. Recalibrating Democracy Support Strategies amid Funding/Budget Cuts and the New MFF.

- Use TED as a platform to share member experiences and innovations (e.g. small grants, pooled funding, ring-fencing) to inform EU and MS positions as to budget cuts and MFF negotiations.
- See as examples:
  - ECDPM, [Inside the EU’s long-term budget: The multiannual financial framework \(MFF\) explained - ECDPM](#) and [A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal - ECDPM](#)
  - I-IDEA, [Democracy assistance in the next MFF: a first impression | International IDEA](#)
- Bring country-level evidence into global processes to ensure democracy support and civic space remain recognised and funded.

WG2 can thereby help strengthen political messaging and evidence-based narratives on democracy’s value reinforcing its relevance amid shifting, competing, priorities (security/defence, migration, private sector) and in fragile or authoritarian contexts.

## VI. Recommendations

Based on discussions at the TED Network Annual Meeting, TED and WG2 can outline the following roadmap for the 2025–2026 workplan, drawing on key lessons and recommendations:

### 1. TED should consolidate its role as a hub that pools Network expertise and evidence - centred on WG2’s work - to deliver coordinated, strategic messaging on democracy’s relevance for peace, security, development and human rights, including in fragile or contested contexts.

#### How:

- Develop a “Democracy as a Strategy” brief or narrative toolkit with evidence, case studies and sectoral examples.
- Look at civic and political participation through synergised development cooperation and political lens (DG INTPA & EEAS; MS Ministry departments, HQ & in-country).
- Develop strategic advisory briefs to support WG2 approaching: (1) Human Rights and Human Security (drawing on the OSCE Helsinki+50 Conference political messaging); and (2) Human Rights and Business/Private Sector (exploring alliances, CSDDD, ESG, look to EU trade policy/instruments like European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+).

### 2. Link WG2’s work more closely to the Partner Country Engagement (PCE) pillar.

#### How:

- Identify pilot countries to focus on civic and political participation through WG2’s civic space and local governance mapping or EU/MS/co-chair country nominations. Use the context as a testbed to apply WG2 knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Elina Valtonen in [OSCE Helsinki+50 Conference](#) (August 2025).



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- Tap into WG2 members' expertise for PCE desk research, stakeholder consultations and local partner engagement. Supports context-understanding.
- Continue to include local voices and perspectives in WG2 activities.
- When possible, hold joint debriefings WG2-PCE on assignment findings and bring them into WG2 activities as illustrative case studies.

### 3. Strengthen practical application of WG2 outputs.

#### How:

- Organise a capitalisation activity to operationalise WG2 results, move from theory to practice.
- Develop a chapter-based playbook "how to" as to WG2's thematic priorities applied in different country contexts/scenarios, with EU-MS coordination as a cross-cutting theme.
- Take a focus on *political* participation, bringing in political parties, parliaments and link with youth and women.

### 4. Identify entry points for civic and political participation in Global Gateway and investment initiatives.

#### How:

- Explore a mapping or PEA of civic and political participation practices within Global Gateway projects and cycles (e.g. those effective, qualitative or challenging,) drawing on the WG2's mapping.
- Tap into members' and their local partners' experience with Global Gateway such as the Lobito Corridor and explore cross-exchanges with the Global Gateway CSO/LA Advisory Platform.
- Organise TED–private sector dialogues to explore (new) alliances (with "unusual suspects") to support Team Europe and democracy programming.

### 5. Explore and implement cross-WG collaboration in activities and knowledge products with central them strengthening EU-MS coordination.

#### How:

- Develop joint initiatives that bring the three TED priorities together to address democracy support in the context of: AI/digitalisation; information integrity; women and youth political participation; the role of the private sector; the balance with security/defence mobilisation; the political and economic costs of inaction; implications of the changing ODA landscape.
- Explore a cross-WG toolkit mapping interlinkages between rule of law, accountability, civic-political participation and information integrity.
- Plan cross-WG working sessions for the next TED Network Annual Meeting.

### 6. Measure TED and WG work's impact on members, PCE and programming.

#### How:

- Track uptake of WG activities' outputs, knowledge products and exchanges in programming.
- Explore using surveys or follow-ups (4-6 months post-activity) to assess use, replication or scaling-up of WG outputs.
- Explore MS-only and CSO-only exchanges to facilitate candid exchanges, explore issues in more depth and align positions with peers/common interests.

