

Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network

Fourth Annual Meeting Summary Booklet

16 - 17 June 2026, Brussels

Executive Summary

The Fourth Annual Meeting of the Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network took place on 16–17 June 2026 in Brussels and gathered more than 190 participants. The event provided a platform for collective reflection on the changing context for democracy support and for shaping TED's priorities and work plan for 2026–2027.

Discussions over the two days reaffirmed that democracy is not a standalone governance objective but a strategic necessity that contributes to security, peace, economic development, investment and resilience. Against a backdrop of democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, growing pressure on independent media and more limited resources, participants emphasised the importance of maintaining credibility through consistent and long-term engagement, stronger partnerships and coordination, and approaches that are adapted to local contexts.

Key sessions addressed the integration of democratic principles “by design” in EU international partnerships, the Team Europe approach in practice, stronger alliances with the private sector, and locally grounded approaches to democratic resilience. Participants also looked ahead to how TED can respond to democratic openings, strengthen partnerships and make better use of evidence and emerging opportunities.

The Annual Meeting confirmed TED's growing role as a platform that connects different actors, experiences and areas of expertise across the democracy support community. It also showed the Network's strong potential to build on the knowledge, partnerships and tools developed over recent years and to translate them into more practical and coordinated action. Looking ahead to 2026–2027, TED will continue to strengthen country-level cooperation, foster connections across its different areas of work and support Team Europe partners in turning shared priorities into concrete action.

Day 1

Opening & Keynote



Lindsey Higgs

Global Head of Facilitation & Community Engagement, Sage+Spark

Moderator



Chiara Adamo

Acting Director Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, DG INTPA



Marie-Alexandra Kurth

Team Leader TED Secretariat



Martin Bille Hermann

Deputy Political Director and Managing Director, European External Action Service



Summary

The opening session set the tone for the TED Network Annual Meeting by framing democracy support as a strategic component of the EU's external action rather than a standalone governance agenda. Against a backdrop of overlapping geopolitical crises, Chiara Adamo called for democracy to be integrated "by design" across security, trade, investment and the Global Gateway, positioning democratic governance not only as a values-based commitment but also as a driver of resilience, economic development and social cohesion. She illustrated this approach through practical examples of TED's operational support, including embedding civil society accountability into Global Gateway investments in Malawi, mainstreaming governance through thematic webinars on sectoral governance, and strengthening coordination around fragile contexts, civic space, and follow-up to election observation missions (EOMs) across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Guatemala. Looking ahead, she identified civic space, election integrity, AI, and the Democracy Shield as increasingly important priorities for EU democracy support.

Reflecting on the network's progress, Alexandra Kurth highlighted that shrinking development budgets, democratic backsliding, and growing pressure on civil society require stronger partnerships, better use of collective expertise, and a greater focus on identifying and learning from "pockets of resilience" that demonstrate that democratic progress remains possible even in challenging contexts. She stressed that democracy support must increasingly connect governance with security, social cohesion, and economic opportunity. Representing the European External Action Service, Martin Bille Hermann reinforced this strategic framing by reaffirming that democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are both a legal obligation under Article 21 of the Treaty on EU and a strategic interest. He identified the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, EOMs, and working in partnerships through TED as three pillars of EU democracy support, concluding with a call for continued collaboration to strengthen democratic resilience worldwide.

Key Takeaways

- Democracy as a strategic enabler, not a standalone objective, with a role in advancing security, peace, economic development, investment and resilience in response to growing geopolitical challenges.
- The focus is shifting from defending democracy to strengthening democratic resilience.
- Partnerships and practical cooperation are the EU's comparative strength, with TED firmly positioned as the platform that continues to connect EU institutions, Member States, democracy practitioners and EU Delegations to translate knowledge and peer-learning into practical action and make better use of limited resources.
- Stronger policy coherence is a key priority, with closer alignment needed between country-level action, Action Plans and broader EU frameworks, including between internal and external democracy priorities.
- Embed democratic governance "by design" across sectors and policies, build on existing tools and evidence, and jointly shape more coherent, politically relevant approaches that deliver tangible benefits for citizens.

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Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network, Annual Meeting, 16-17 June 2026

Integrating Democratic Principles by Design in EU International Partnerships



Lindsey Higgs

Global Head of Facilitation & Community Engagement, Sage+Spark

Moderator



Bart Pennewaert

Deputy Director General for Directorate-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, Belgium



Chiara Adamo

Acting Director Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, DG INTPA



Mark Zellenrath

Director for Multilateral Organisations and Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands



Constanze Neher

Deputy Director General for Development Policy Issues, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)



Marie-Louise Koch Wegter

Director for Humanitarian Affairs and Civil Society, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark

Summary

Following the opening, a panel gave a concise overview of the state of democracy support from a European perspective. Chiara Adamo pointed out Europe's growing relevance and gave the example of independent EU EOMs in bolstering citizens' trust in democratic institutions. She noted that the commitment to democracy and governance is made clear by embedding key principles into the Global Gateway 360° approach which translates into projects, ensuring efficiency and distinguishing the EU from other global actors. "Democracy must be at the core", Chiara Adamo stated.

Representing Germany, Constanze Neher called for co-ownership in international partnerships to reinforce democracy. Regarding Germany's restructuring of the BMZ, she stated that democracy is a strategic value that underpins stability, urging collaborative efforts to enhance Europe's credibility in this regard.

Bart Pennewaert from the Belgian Federal Public Service emphasised the importance of maintaining engagement in fragile states, despite the worsening conditions in these complex environments – two billion people live in these countries, and it is our duty to not give up on them. He argued for embedding democratic support within significant political dialogues like Global Gateway, linking values to actions. He reflected that the unique selling point of EU support is that it guarantees long-term benefits on all sides, including the ecological and social perspective.

In terms of democracy, Mark Zellenrath stated that for too long, especially in the multilateral space, we have been on the defensive. Instead of resignation, he argued that allies believing in democracy need to change gears and go on the offensive, by reverse-engineering the methods that autocracies have perfected. Many countries still want to work with the EU, and its standing is still strong in multilateral space. "Do not underestimate the EU," he stated, pointing to its global appeal and values.

Marie-Louise Koch Wegter underscored the digital dimension, and how technology can be used in the Global South to increase civic participation. But with that, she also cited that 75% of activists who faced physical harm had previously experienced online harassment. She called for investment in well-connected ecosystems to uphold human rights in the digital space, as greater capacity is urgently needed.



Key Takeaways

- Democracy must be treated as a strategic priority within EU policies.
- International partnerships should be inclusive and co-owned to enhance democracy's credibility.
- Engagement in fragile contexts is essential for supporting civic space and education.
- Democracy needs to go on the offensive against the shift towards authoritarianism.
- Digital rights are human rights; addressing online harassment is crucial for protecting activists.

Perspective from the Implementing Partners



Lindsey Higgs
Global Head of Facilitation & Community Engagement,
Sage+Spark

Moderator



Jean Van Wetter
CEO, Enabel



Kristian Lempa
Director of Division For Global Policy,
Governance and Cities, GIZ

Summary

In light of the previous panel, Jean Van Wetter and Kristian Lempa explored how European development actors can remain credible and effective in a changing geopolitical environment. A key message was that Europe's credibility depends on aligning its actions with its stated values, including human rights, democracy and good governance. When political or economic interests appear to take precedence over these principles, trust and legitimacy can be weakened.

The speakers stressed that credibility is built through long-term partnerships and close engagement with local realities. European development agencies benefit from their strong presence on the ground, which allows them to work with governments, communities, civil society and local authorities. Rather than withdrawing from challenging contexts, they advocated sustained and pragmatic engagement while staying committed to core values.

The growing role of investment in development cooperation was another important theme. While investment is essential, Jean Van Wetter warned against viewing it as the only development tool. Partner countries continue to value Europe's support for governance, vocational training, civil society and institutional strengthening. This highlights the need for a holistic approach that combines economic, social and democratic objectives.



"It does not make sense for us to compete with each other when we lack resources. We need to work together."

Kristian Lempa emphasised the importance of the Team Europe approach, noting that closer cooperation among European actors can increase visibility, impact and influence in a context of limited resources and growing competition. The discussion concluded that Europe's strength lies in combining values-based action, local engagement, long-term partnerships and collective efforts while adapting to evolving global challenges.

Key Takeaways

- Credibility depends on consistency between European values and actions.
- Long-term local engagement is essential for trust, legitimacy, and impact.
- Team Europe increases scale, visibility, coordination, and political influence.
- Democracy support is political, requiring strong political backing and contextual adaptation.
- Local authorities and cities are important development actors but need support to attract investment.
- Civil society is foundational, not an add-on, to democratic resilience and stability.
- Europe's strength lies in its standards, partnerships, inclusiveness, and collaborative approach.
- Future success requires balancing principles, pragmatism, proximity, and collective action.

Leveraging Alliances for Team Europe, Democratic Governance Support and Private Sector



Lindsey Higgs
Global Head of Facilitation & Community Engagement, Sage+Spark

Moderator



Christina Dahlmann
Senior Policy Specialist, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)



Yohann Chaigneau
Senior Advisor Strategy and Policy, European Investment Bank (EIB) Global



Angela Rodriguez
Director of Netherlands Institute on Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) Colombia, TED Grantee



Géraldine Smeets
Executive Director Euro Cámara Argentina, Vice Chair of Board of Directors European Business Organisation



Clare Cook
Head of Journalism and Media Viability, International Media Support

Summary

The second panel explored how investment and democratic governance reinforce each other, with governance forming part of investment infrastructure. Realising this potential requires context analysis, country-level cooperation and dialogue with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), civil society and the media to ensure that investments are informed by, and responsive to, local realities.

In this context, the private sector should be seen not merely as a financing source but as an ally in democracy support, with incentives aligned with stronger governance outcomes. The speakers illustrated this with several examples. Christina Dahlmann called for a shift from dialogue to practical cooperation at country level, highlighting the Sweden-H&M partnership in Bangladesh as an example of locally anchored collaboration and the importance of political economy analysis for sensitive investments such as critical raw materials in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Drawing on Colombia's TED grant experience, Angela Rodriguez showed that effective governance alliances depend on deliberate trust-building, participation and shared incentives, with clear objectives, roles and ownership beyond symbolic consultation. Yohann Chaigneau highlighted Europe's comparative advantage in combining financing with governance standards, technical assistance and long-term engagement, arguing that adapted approaches can maintain sustainable impact in fragile contexts. Clare Cook underlined the role of independent media and civil society in enabling responsible investment, with investigative journalism exposing corruption, strengthening transparency and identifying governance risks.



"Trust is fundamental to collaboration between public institutions and the private sector. It does not emerge automatically from bringing actors together; it must be designed through participation, clear roles and shared incentives."

Géraldine Smeets highlighted European businesses as partners, providing insights into governance bottlenecks affecting investment decisions – from regulatory uncertainty to institutional predictability – while stressing the need to better integrate SMEs into Global Gateway opportunities. The speakers agreed that successful investment–democracy alliances are built on trust, inclusion and early engagement rooted in local realities.



Key Takeaways

- Democratic governance reduces risk, strengthens legitimacy, and supports sustainable investment.
- The private sector can support democracy through expertise, local knowledge and responsible business practices.
- Effective alliances require early engagement, clear roles, shared incentives and strong contextual analysis.
- Long-term, locally anchored partnerships can sustain responsible investment and democratic resilience in complex contexts.

Impressions Day 1



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Impressions Day 1



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Day 2

3rd Plenary – Panel Discussion:

Democratic Resilience: Myth or Reality?



Moderator

Richard Youngs

Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe
and co-founder of
the European Democracy Hub



Mandeep Tiwana

Secretary General of
CIVICUS



Joan Hoey

Europe Consultant at The
Economist Intelligence Unit



Tin Gazivoda

Development Director of
D-Hub



Summary

The panel explored whether democratic resilience is strong enough to counter the wider trend of democratic decline, and where signs of resistance are already visible. Joan Hoey, drawing on two decades of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, presented a sobering global picture: democratic performance has declined across all regions, particularly in civil liberties and electoral pluralism. One noteworthy exception is political participation, which has increased and points to continued public demand for representation and political engagement.

Mandeep Tiwana argued that this is precisely why the debate should move beyond resilience towards resistance. While civic space is under severe pressure globally, civil society continues to push back through protest, community organising, litigation, campaigning and engagement with international institutions. His central message was that resilience allows societies to withstand pressure, while resistance seeks to change its direction.

Tin Gazivoda brought a practical perspective through D-Hub's anti-authoritarian playbook, which gathers concrete strategies used by pro-democracy actors around the world. Examples ranged from bringing democratic messages into non-political digital spaces to using symbols, movement-building and public mobilisation to defend institutions and the rule of law.

Across the discussion, speakers stressed the importance of early action, consistent diplomacy, support for independent media and civic space, and stronger links between formal democratic institutions and citizens. They also highlighted the need to engage people beyond established political and civil society circles, and to respond earlier when signs of democratic erosion emerge. For democracy-support actors, this means combining long-term institutional support with greater attention to emerging movements, civic mobilisation and the actors actively defending democratic space. The panel ultimately pointed to a mixed picture: democratic decline is real, but so too are new forms of participation, mobilisation and resistance.

Key Takeaways

- Political participation is a potential entry point for democracy support: rising engagement shows that public demand for representation remains strong even where institutions are weakening.
- Democracy support needs to become more anticipatory, identifying authoritarian drift and restrictions on civic space early enough to support actors before democratic space closes further.
- Stronger connections are needed between civil society, independent media, political institutions and diplomacy so that democratic resistance is supported through complementary channels rather than isolated interventions.

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TED Grants on action-oriented research - Proof over Promise: Advancing on the democratic agenda in our partner countries



Jakob Rieken

Deputy-Head of Division
Democracy, governance and
media, BMZ

Moderator



Expédit Ologou

Senior Researcher and
Founder, Civic Academy for
Africa's Future



Latyr Tine

Senior Researcher in Peace and
Security,
Gorée Institute



Rodrigo Barahona

Learning Lead on Civic
Space at Oxfam Intermon



**Batsugar
Tsedendamba**

Team Leader, Independent
Research Institute of Mongolia



Rachel Taylor

Justice Sector Advisor, HiIL



Summary

The fourth panel moved the focus to the ground where TED grantees are working locally on supporting democratisation in Uganda, Mongolia, the Philippines, Central America and West Africa. Drawing on their field experience, the panellists explored strategies to bolster democratic resilience in contexts of shrinking civic space, emphasising that effective governance relies on bottom-up, community-driven approaches. Realising this potential requires an understanding of local realities, as citizens often prioritise security and everyday well-being over democratic freedoms.

Rodrigo Barahona called for a rethink of approaches to human rights advocacy in Central America, noting that citizens may tolerate authoritarianism if basic needs are met, which makes participatory research essential. Drawing on the Gorée Institute's experience in West Africa, Latyr Tine demonstrated that evidence-based early warning systems and local multi-actor dialogues are crucial for bridging the deep trust deficit between communities and the state. Rachel Taylor highlighted HiIL's findings in Uganda, arguing that when formal legal systems fail, traditional community justice mechanisms act as vital forms of civic participation, demonstrating the importance of co-designing solutions with local stakeholders.

Expédit Ologou underlined the profound resilience of citizens in Benin. Despite security threat, local communities or 'lower state' continues to function and expect the upper state to respond to their basic needs. Batsugar Tsedendamba highlighted the need to go on the offensive against sophisticated disinformation operations in Mongolia by empowering citizens through structured, responsible and inclusive civic agency. The speakers agreed that countering democratic decline requires empowering people directly, restoring trust and anchoring solutions in local community resilience.

Key Takeaways

- When formal institutions are weak or inaccessible, citizens rely on local mechanisms for justice, conflict resolution and survival. Recognising these practices is essential, as communities often retain strong agency despite state failure.
- People's tolerance for authoritarian or extremist actors may reflect demands for peace, safety and livelihoods rather than a rejection of democracy. Democratic interventions must therefore address basic security alongside political freedoms.
- Distrust between citizens and governments is reinforced by top-down, poorly evidenced policies. Rebuilding trust requires participatory approaches that involve local stakeholders in co-designing solutions as partners rather than subjects.

Mainstreaming Integrity in the Global Gateway



Summary

Following the plenary discussions, participants moved into a series of thematic workshops to explore practical approaches. The first brought together representatives from the European Commission, development finance institutions, civil society, investigative journalism and governance organisations to discuss how integrity is embedded across the Global Gateway investment cycle and how effective accountability frameworks can improve the effectiveness of infrastructure investments. Moderated by the Transparency International Secretariat, the discussion featured representatives from Sida, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Open Government Partnership, EDFI Management Company, and DG INTPA.

The discussion opened by framing anti-corruption not as an additional safeguard, but as a core prerequisite for effective development investments. Speakers highlighted how corruption undermines development outcomes, institutional trust and the long-term sustainability of infrastructure projects. Drawing on practical examples – from investigative journalism in Uzbekistan and governance reforms in Nigeria and Ukraine – the panellists illustrated how corruption risks manifest throughout the investment cycle and how they can be mitigated through stronger governance systems.

The panel also highlighted the business consequences of weak integrity. Beyond governance concerns, corruption creates legal, financial, operational and reputational risks that can undermine investments and long-term business performance. Conversely, strong integrity standards and due diligence were presented as essential for protecting investments, attracting private capital and fostering sustainable partnerships.

Rather than relying only on compliance measures, speakers emphasised systemic reforms, including beneficial ownership transparency, open procurement, stakeholder participation, robust due diligence and grievance mechanisms. The discussion concluded that Global Gateway presents a unique opportunity to combine large-scale investments with governance reforms, provided that integrity safeguards are embedded throughout project design and implementation and supported with coordinated action among governments, development partners, civil society and local stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

- Integrity must be embedded and institutionalised throughout the entire investment cycle.
- Global Gateway can serve as a catalyst for institutional reform.
- Collaboration across governments, financiers, civil society, journalists, and local communities is essential to improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and help identify and address corruption risks before they undermine development objectives.

Summary

Led by Partnership for Integrity and U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, this workshop examined how justice institutions can respond to increasingly complex threats to electoral integrity. These include the intersection of corruption, illicit political finance, foreign interference, cyberattacks, disinformation and AI-enabled manipulation. Participants agreed that these hybrid threats no longer fit within traditional legal or institutional frameworks and require coordinated action across electoral, judicial, anti-corruption and cybersecurity bodies.

Discussions highlighted the growing judicialisation of elections, with courts increasingly called upon to adjudicate cases involving digital interference, foreign influence and political finance violations despite limited legal precedent, technical expertise and access to digital evidence. Participants identified evidence collection – including access to platform data, attribution of coordinated influence campaigns, hidden financial flows and the use of intelligence – as one of the greatest obstacles to effective enforcement.

“*Electoral threats no longer occur in isolation. Corruption, foreign interference, disinformation, cyberattacks, and illicit political finance increasingly reinforce one another, requiring coordinated responses across institutions.*”

An interactive case study explored whether elections should be annulled when multiple violations cumulatively undermine electoral integrity, even if no single breach altered the outcome. This sparked a discussion about balancing the rule of law with proportionality and highlighted the importance of assessing cumulative harm rather than isolated incidents. Participants also stressed that electoral integrity, anti-corruption, digital governance and cybersecurity should no longer be addressed in separate policy silos.

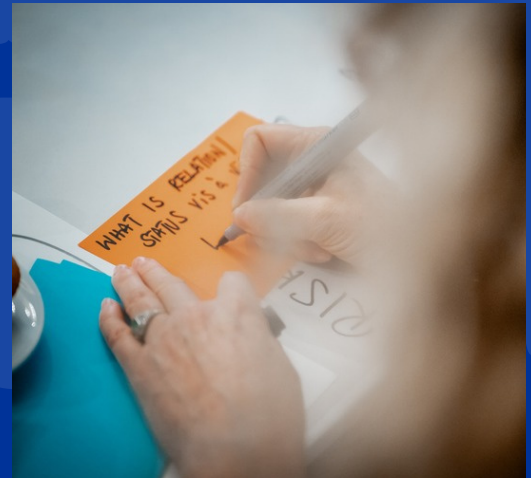
The session concluded that strengthening democratic resilience requires specialised investigative capacity, stronger cooperation among institutions, improved access to cross-border digital evidence and greater engagement with civil society and independent media. Emerging European and international legal instruments offer important opportunities, but effective implementation will depend on enhanced coordination, technical expertise and sustained institutional cooperation.



Key Takeaways

- Electoral integrity, anti-corruption, the rule of law, and information integrity should be addressed as a single, interconnected ecosystem, requiring coordinated action across justice, electoral, anti-corruption, and cybersecurity institutions. TED provides a valuable platform to break down these silos and strengthen collaboration in tackling emerging electoral threats.
- Access to reliable digital and financial evidence remains a major challenge for courts and investigators.
- Electoral manipulation should increasingly be assessed based on its cumulative impact rather than on isolated violations.
- Stronger institutional cooperation, specialised expertise, and effective implementation of new legal frameworks are essential to protect electoral integrity.

Turning Scenarios into Action: Practical Pathways to Safeguard Civic Space



Summary

The context in which democracy support operates strongly shapes the way organisations can work. To address this, the workshop brought together the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Open Government Partnership, GIZ, Brot für die Welt, People in Need and the European Centre for Development Policy Management to explore how TED could respond to three evolving civic space scenarios. Three different types of scenarios were clustered: abrupt restrictions, gradual constriction, and cautious opening.

The discussion highlighted how TED's role would need to adapt to these different trajectories. In contexts of abrupt restrictions ("The Crackdown"), the priority would be rapid coordination at country and regional level, combined with flexible funding arrangements that allow effective responses and good practices to be deployed quickly and safely. Where restrictions emerge more gradually ("The Tightening Net"), participants saw a greater need for systematic dialogue between Member State implementing agencies and diplomatic counterparts to align analysis, messaging and responses before the situation deteriorates further. In contexts of cautious opening under reform-oriented governments, TED could instead help consolidate emerging opportunities by supporting the long-term sustainability of civil society, strengthening citizen participation and engaging actors beyond the EU, while ensuring that available instruments remain aligned and adaptable through technical exchanges and early-warning mechanisms.

While each context presents distinct challenges, participants agreed that TED should strengthen its role as a coordinating platform by enabling early warning, facilitating information-sharing among local civil society organisations, including through South-South exchanges and among TED members, and providing flexible, context-sensitive support while facilitating political dialogue. Across all scenarios, key priorities emerged: proactive coordination, adaptable funding mechanisms, stronger partnerships and coalitions, sustained political engagement, and more support for locally led civil society to respond effectively to both crises and emerging opportunities.

Key Takeaways

- As civic space shifts between rapid repression, gradual democratic erosion and cautious openings, understanding the context is essential to effectively support civic space, a cornerstone of democracy.
- TED should therefore position itself as a flexible and coordinated platform that enables early warning, strengthens partnerships among TED members and beyond to ensure adaptable political, technical and sustainable financial support to civil society across these different contexts.



Strengthening People-Centred International Solidarity Initiatives

Summary

The workshop explored how development cooperation can better support people-centred initiatives by recognising communities as holders of resources, knowledge and agency rather than primarily as recipients of external assistance. Organised by the Wilde Ganzen Foundation and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the discussion focused on how trust-based and equitable partnerships can strengthen local philanthropy, community-led resource mobilisation and civic action.

A central message was that communities already sustain collective action through local resources, informal networks and systems of solidarity. Participants stressed that development cooperation should build on these existing capacities rather than requiring communities to adapt to donor-driven frameworks. This requires a shift from donor-led decision-making towards co-investment models, greater flexibility and stronger recognition of locally defined priorities. Community fundraising – including peer-to-peer fundraising, diaspora engagement, partnerships with local businesses and other forms of collective action – was presented not only as a financing mechanism but as an expression of civic agency that strengthens participation, accountability and legitimacy.



“Local resource mobilisation is more than a financing mechanism; it is a democratic practice that enables communities to organise, build accountability and shape their own futures.”

Examples from Cabo Verde, Indonesia, Liberia, and Ukraine illustrated how diaspora-supported exchanges, community solidarity mechanisms, social enterprises and private-sector collaboration can mobilise resources and generate sustainable responses. Participants emphasised that diaspora communities should be recognised as development actors whose contributions extend beyond remittances, bringing expertise, networks and investment potential; diaspora bonds – including India’s experience – were highlighted as one model for channelling collective investment towards community priorities, infrastructure and social protection. Across different scenarios, participants explored how community-managed funding models and multi-stakeholder platforms can advance locally led solutions, while highlighting persistent tensions between localisation commitments and donor priorities, reporting requirements and funding structures.

Key Takeaways

- Local resource mobilisation is a democratic practice and a source of civic power, not only financing. Community philanthropy, fundraising and solidarity mechanisms strengthen participation, accountability and local ownership.
- Trust-based partnerships require shifting decision-making power towards local actors and beyond donor-driven approaches, giving communities greater influence over priorities, resources and decision-making.
- Civic space must be understood through communities’ own realities, including informal networks and marginalised groups.
- Diaspora communities are strategic development actors beyond remittances. Their expertise, networks and collective investment potential can support locally defined priorities, infrastructure and social protection.
- People-centred solidarity initiatives strengthen democratic resilience by enabling communities to organise, mobilise resources and shape solutions; they reinforce agency, legitimacy and accountability from the ground up.

Why Journalism Matters: Evidence of its impact on security, economy and society



Summary

An interactive one-hour session entitled “Why journalism matters - Evidence of its impact on security, economy and society” was organised and facilitated jointly by TED members DW Akademie, the International Fund for Public Interest Media, International Media Support, UNESCO, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development together with Germany. The session focused on discussing the recently compiled evidence on the value of journalism in relation to the TED initiative's three thematic priorities and sought to engage members as subject matter experts to test the arguments and develop them further.

Key insights from the Evidence Brief [The Value of Journalism: Why media matters to economics, national security and crises](#) were presented by one of its co-authors Professor Mel Bunce of City St George's, University of London, highlighting academic research into the value of journalism to explain its critical importance to economies, national security, and crisis response. One notable finding is that \$1 invested in journalism can generate more than \$100 in public savings through reclaimed funds, improved public services, and reduced corruption.

An interactive World Café round of discussions followed, with three tables along TED's three thematic priorities. Studies find that countries with high levels of media freedom tend to have lower levels of corruption. More specifically, critical reporting (or the fear thereof) incentivises elites to behave better across sectors and has led to the return of stolen public funds. In terms of participation, research has demonstrated that journalism motivates audiences to engage with political processes and is associated with higher levels of trust in political institutions. When it comes to journalism's role in building resilience to security threats such as disinformation, evidence suggests that the more news media audiences consume, the less likely they are to believe in disinformation.

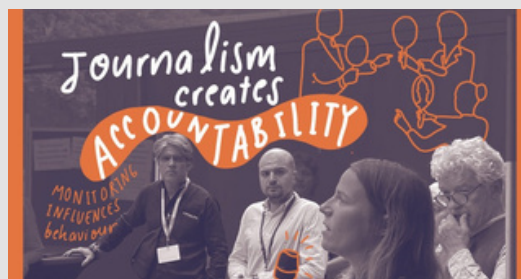
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We need to attend more purely business-focused trade shows and promote journalism there as a business and investment opportunity – an enabler for good business and investment.

”

Key Takeaways

- Highlight journalism as a service for businesses – a business-to-business offering. This would involve not only explaining why it is lucrative and sensible for companies to invest in journalism (the business case), but also how to do so.
- The benefit of investing in journalism outweighs the costs of security risks.
- Put together a set of arguments for political actors on how journalism can help get people excited about politics.
- Engage with non-media actors in their own environments and using their language/perspectives
- TED could create a one-pager outlining these arguments and the cost-benefit analysis, along with a plan mapping out which “rooms” these arguments should be presented in.



Working Group 1 “Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption”

Summary

The Working Group 1 session focused on shaping TED's strategic direction for 2026–2027 and identifying how TED as a platform can generate greater impact by connecting accountability, the rule of law, and inclusive economic development. Participants agreed that TED should evolve from a knowledge-sharing platform into a more action-oriented network that translates policy discussions into practical country-level support, strengthens partnerships, and amplifies existing initiatives.

A recurring theme was the need to make the Global Gateway agenda more practical by providing methodologies, tools, and guidance that support implementation in partner countries. Participants highlighted opportunities to better integrate people-centred justice, anti-corruption, judicial independence, and enabling business environments, particularly through stronger engagement with implementing partners and more coordinated country-level programming. Discussions on access to justice for SMEs underlined that effective commercial justice systems are essential for inclusive economic development and should be designed around the needs of small businesses rather than large investors alone.

The session also explored emerging priorities, including judicial independence, the upcoming EU anti-corruption strategy, Open Government Partnership initiatives, and the role of political leadership in promoting democratic resilience. Participants stressed that TED's comparative advantage lies in bringing together institutions, practitioners, civil society, and international organisations that would not otherwise collaborate. Rather than duplicating existing initiatives, TED should act as a connector, fostering cross-sector cooperation, facilitating exchanges among thematic and country-level actors, and promoting integrated programming around shared priorities. There was broad consensus that future activities should provide more strategic guidance, strengthen political engagement, improve information sharing, and demonstrate concrete impact on the ground.



Key Takeaways

- Move from knowledge exchange towards more action-oriented support, with clearer follow-up and evidence of results.
- Connect Global Gateway investments with country-level reforms that strengthen rule of law, accountability, anti-corruption and people-centred justice, while fostering predictable, transparent and enabling environments for investment and economic development
- Use TED's convening role to connect EU Delegations, Member States, civil society and implementing partners around co-created, country-level reform priorities.
- Building closer links across TED Working Groups on cross-cutting issues, including connections between information integrity and accountability.

Working Group 2 “Political and Civic Participation”



Summary

The Working Group 2 session opened with an interactive “search for common ground” exercise, inviting members to identify shared experiences across democracy support communities and working environments before breaking into three thematic clusters. Looking ahead to TED 2.0, discussions reflected on how WG2 can further strengthen the network as a community of practice by translating collective expertise into practical support for Team Europe cooperation.

The clusters suggested priorities for TED activities under the 2026-2027 work plan. The Civic Space Cluster examined how civic space increasingly sits at the intersection of democracy support, EU SEE and the Global Gateway 360° approach. Members explored civic space not only as a rights-based objective, but also as an enabling condition for accountability, legitimacy, resilient investment and democratic resilience, while recognising tensions when restrictions, geopolitical priorities, investment objectives and civic space commitments collide. The Local Governance Cluster focused on decentralised development cooperation as an entry point for strengthening democratic resilience in fragile contexts. Through peer exchange, members shared experiences of working with local authorities and civil society to sustain dialogue, trust and locally led governance where institutions are under pressure, highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches and practical tools for practitioners.

Reflecting on nearly twenty years of the EU Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance, the Electoral Support Cluster explored how support should evolve beyond electoral events to strengthen democratic resilience between cycles, linking support more closely to democratic governance, violence prevention, information integrity, AI-training, regional ownership and institutional trust in increasingly contested environments. Together, the clusters shifted WG2’s focus for 2026-2027 from diagnosis towards operational learning and evidence-based practice.

Key Takeaways

- Sustaining democracy support in restrictive environments requires Team Europe to move beyond reactive responses towards flexible, locally grounded partnerships that strengthen resilience, preserve spaces for participation, and connect electoral, civic space and local governance efforts.
- The evolving investment landscape requires stronger alignment between Global Gateway and democracy support priorities, with civic space, civil society engagement and human rights-based approaches embedded throughout programming and implementation.
- Fragile contexts require a more locally rooted and coordinated approach, supported by practical tools that help Team Europe actors understand local governance dynamics, engage local authorities and civil society, and strengthen locally led resilience.
- Electoral support must move beyond election moments towards a continuous approach linking observation, technical assistance and broader governance efforts across the electoral cycle.
- TED’s added value lies in connecting expertise across democracy support communities, creating a space for peer learning, exchanging of operational lessons and translation of collective knowledge into practical approaches for Team Europe and its partners.

Summary

The Working Group 3 discussion took place at a critical moment marked by increasing pressure on independent media and digital rights, compounded by shrinking funding and global setbacks such as the cancellation of RightsCon. Opening remarks highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration to support public-interest media, digital rights, and coordinated engagement beyond the immediate community, while also aligning with broader investment agendas.

Discussions were grounded in recent evidence, notably the presentation of a mapping report on the impact of funding cuts on independent media across regions. The findings underscored the scale of the current funding crisis and its implications for the sustainability of journalism. Members also reviewed ongoing efforts, including the TED Toolkit, a repository on information integrity, and a brief on mobilising private capital for media support, concluding that there is a need to leverage existing knowledge and advance ongoing efforts rather than generate new reports.

The second part of the session consisted of three thematic subgroup discussions. The first, on the Working Group’s outlook under TED 2.0, focused on priorities towards 2027. Members emphasised continuing effective formats such as in-person exchange and country-level coordination, while moving away from siloed discussions and duplicative reporting. Key directions included engaging beyond the WG3 community through clearer messaging aligned with EU priorities and strengthening joint action in partner countries. The second group explored how to enhance narratives on media’s role in accountability and enabling environments for investment. Participants stressed the need for clear, evidence-based communication, stronger donor dialogue, and better links to ongoing initiatives. The third group addressed digital sovereignty through dialogue with second- and third-tier tech companies. Suggested next steps included mapping relevant actors and clarifying expectations to support collaboration on information integrity and human rights.



Key Takeaways

- The current funding crisis for independent media is severely affecting the sustainability of journalism, making it urgent to build on existing evidence and strengthen coordinated responses rather than produce more reports.
- TED’s added value lies in translating its growing knowledge base into practical tools, shared messaging, and targeted engagement that can reach beyond the immediate media community.
- Working Group 3 should keep what works, especially in-person exchange, country-level coordination, and cross-sector dialogue, while moving away from siloed discussions.
- Media support should be positioned not only as a sectoral concern, but as part of broader agendas on accountability, rule of law, civic participation, and enabling environments for investment.
- Engagement with private capital and with second- and third-tier tech companies can open new pathways for impact, but this requires a clear mapping of potential private sector collaborators, a sharp definition of expectations, and a strategic conversation on human rights and information integrity.

Closing Remarks



Moderator

Lindsey Higgs

Global Head of Facilitation & Community Engagement, Sage+Spark



Markus Handke

TED Coordinator, DG INTPA



Kristina Hrbková

Permanent Representative to the EU from the Czech Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic



Joëlle Coureau

Head of Unit – Fragility and Rule of Law, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France



Summary

The closing session of the Annual Meeting looked ahead to the future of TED a year from now. The session invited participants to react to two statements: whether long-term structural approaches remain more important than rapid responses to democratic openings, and whether building new pro-democracy alliances beyond Europe is now more important than deepening existing partnerships.

Joëlle Coureau stressed that TED should continue strengthening partner country engagement and reinforce its knowledge networks, sharing knowledge products and tools to support democratic interventions, create better synergies between workstreams and ensure aligned and coordinated actions. Kristina Hrbková underlined the importance of bridging flexible and sustainable long-term funding, preparing for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework and the next EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy. She also encouraged members to move beyond discussions of potential risks and harms associated with artificial intelligence towards exploring how its opportunities and benefits can be harnessed for protecting and promoting democracy. She also advocated for greater use of data to demonstrate the economic and societal benefits of investing in democracy and human rights.



“Get out of the defense and get into the offense”

Finally, Markus Handke stressed the importance of having a common understanding to seize opportunities. Stronger coordination, shared analysis and joint action across Team Europe are essential to respond effectively to an increasingly volatile global context. He also noted that despite the clear trend towards democratic backsliding as highlighted in previous panels, youth engagement in political participation continues to increase. The cases of Gen-Z protests across multiple countries are a sign of optimism and provide an opportunity to showcase the demand for democratic values and principles.

Key Takeaways

- AI can be a promoter of democracy.
- A mindset of strategic realism and partnership is essential.
- Evidence strengthens the case for democracy.
- Despite global democratic backsliding, there are reasons for optimism.

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For further information on TED please visit capacity4dev: https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/projects/team-europe-democracy-ted_en

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