

New Democratic Pact: A Chance for Europe?

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Democracy has been in decline [for the past 25 years](#), with civic space shrinking across the globe. Europe has not been spared the effects of this worldwide trend. Democratic backsliding often takes place through the deliberate capture of democratic institutions and processes by autocratic forces, which is accelerated by media capture, disinformation and attacks on civil society actors. This brings us to the question of how to bolster democratic resilience within Europe, combating autocratisation and rebuilding trust in democratic governance. Recent research [shows](#) that people overwhelmingly want politics to change, but consider the possibility of change to be futile. The Council of Europe's [Reykjavík Declaration](#) is a welcomed initiative, and we think the New Democratic Pact for Europe can represent a further step for strengthening our democracies and making them more resilient.

One of the key objectives of the New Democratic Pact for Europe is to conduct a broad consultation on democratic challenges. This is an important initiative, as designing new democratic thinking and investigating the reasons behind declining public trust in democracy and its institutions needs active participation of citizens and communities, whose lived experiences inform their attitudes towards democracy. Civil society plays a central role in defending democracy and upholding democratic values and must therefore help shape actionable policies that can reinvigorate democracy at European, national, regional and local levels. The New Pact for Democracy provides us with a strong push towards deliberative democracy, which ultimately requires rethinking democratic practice and culture, and how democratic institutions and politicians share decision-making power.

The central pillar of the new Democratic Pact for Europe is also an important initiative for safeguarding the rule of law. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) are the legal backbone of Europe's democratic order, providing the binding legal standards on which the implementation of the New Democratic Pact for Europe depends. However, declining compliance and political attacks by [now 27 member states](#) challenge this order. The non-implementation of the ECtHR rulings poses threats to democratic governance and erodes public trust. According to the flagship report "[Justice Delayed and Justice Denied: Non-Implementation of European Courts' Judgments and the Rule of Law](#)" for 2024, the trend of non-implementation also in EU countries is concerning.

The key question is whether the Pact can generate the political revitalisation needed to protect what the ECHR secures legally. For this, it must reaffirm the binding force of ECtHR judgements, strengthen domestic implementation, counter disinformation and engage civil society meaningfully. Complementing each other's work, the New Democratic Pact for Europe could also benefit from closer collaboration with the EU through the Democracy Shield initiative and the annual Rule of Law monitoring process.

No strategies can be successful without governments' uptake and proper consultations with key democratic stakeholders. A meaningful New Democratic Pact requires inclusive and structured consultations with civil society and citizens of Europe, in line with the Council of Europe's mission of encouraging democratic participation in decision-making.