European Democracy Action Plan

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On 3 December 2020, the European Commission presented a European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), which aims at empowering citizens and building more resilient democracies across the European Union. The EDAP is one of the major initiatives of the Commission's Work Programme for 2020, as announced in the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen. The Commission expects that the EDAP, taken together with the new European rule of law mechanism, the new Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan as well as the package of measures taken to promote and protect equality across the EU, will be a key driver for the new push for European democracy to face the challenges of the digital age.

The Action Plan sets out measures around three main pillars:

1. Promote free and fair elections

The Commission will propose legislation on the transparency of sponsored political content ("political advertising"). The Commission will also revise the rules on the financing of European political parties. Through the European Cooperation Network on Elections, the Commission will enhance cooperation among member states and launch a new operational mechanism, which will support efficient and timely exchanges on issues related to the integrity of elections, such as the cyber-security of elections. The Commission will organise a high-level event bringing together various authorities to address the challenges related to electoral processes as well as to empower citizens to participate as voters and candidates in the democratic process. A healthy democracy relies on citizen engagement and an active civil society, and not only at election times. To that end, the Action Plan promotes the use of EU structural funds and the funding available under the new Creative Europe Programme, and it also highlights the importance of active participation among young people, a key element of the EU youth strategy. The European Union will also consolidate the capacity of EU elections observation missions in third countries.

2. Strengthen media freedom and pluralism

In recent years, the safety of journalists has continued to deteriorate – physical and online threats and attacks on journalists are on the rise in several member states. This is why in 2021 the Commission will propose a recommendation on the

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safety of journalists, drawing particular attention to threats against women journalists, and an initiative to curb the abusive use of lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). The Commission will also work closely with member states through a structured dialogue and will provide sustainable funding for projects on legal and practical assistance to journalists in the European Union and elsewhere. Finally, the Commission will also put forward further measures to support media pluralism and to strengthen the transparency of media ownership and state advertising, through, among others, the new Media Ownership Monitor.

The European Democracy Action Plan goes hand in hand with the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan, which aims to help the sector recover and make the most of the digital transformation.

3. Counter disinformation

The Action Plan proposes to improve the existing EU's toolbox for countering foreign interference, including through new instruments that allow costs to be imposed on perpetrators. The Commission will steer efforts to overhaul the Code of Practice on Disinformation into a co-regulatory framework of obligations and accountability for online platforms, in line with the upcoming Digital Services Act. To that end, in the spring of 2021, the Commission will issue guidance to enhance the Code of Practice and will set up a more robust framework for monitoring its implementation. The Commission and the High Representative will also take further measures to strengthen the resilience of our societies and foster international partnerships.

The Commission will gradually implement the European Democracy Action Plan until 2023 - a year ahead of the elections to the European Parliament. The Commission will then also assess progress made and decide whether further steps are needed.

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https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en

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