

# European Democracy Action Plan: A “democratic vaccine” against disinformation and hate speech



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□□ **Populism, nationalism, disinformation, hate speech and conspiracy theories are widespread in the European public and political sphere, which is leading to polarisation and intolerance. The deterioration of fundamental rights in one Member State has a negative impact across the EU. Therefore, in the 8th meeting of the CIVEX Commission, members welcomed the European Commission’s initiative on the [European Democracy Action Plan \(EDAP\)](#) and adopted an opinion that puts forward a set of proposals for tackling disinformation and hate speech, as well as for promoting media literacy and critical thinking, including the setting up of a European agency linked with the CoR. The members also pointed out that local and regional leaders can play an important role in strengthening citizenship, as they are the closest authorities to citizens and the ones that are most trusted, according to the [EU annual regional and local barometer published in October 2020](#) .**

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[Aleksandra Dulkiewicz](#) (PL/EPP), Mayor of Gdańsk and rapporteur of the draft opinion on the European Democracy Action Plan, stated: “Democracy is one of the most valuable resources of the European Union and that it needs to be constantly updated and defended at all levels – regional, local, national and European. Local and regional representatives serve as an important pillar to fight disinformation and sustain democratic political debate with citizens. They can be instrumental to promote digital media literacy, critical thinking and transparency in political campaigning.”

The EDAP should pave the way for relations with non-EU partners who violate fundamental human rights, and should be a tool to encourage members of the European community to apply the principles of a democratic state and the rule of law. Likewise, the EDAP need to be an instrument support democratic movements among neighbours. The draft opinion also reminds that attacking freedom of expression narrows the public debate and warns against attempts by some governments to limit the independence of research activities. It condemns the use of SLAPPs (Strategic lawsuits against public participation) against the independent media, and calls on the Commission to put forward a proposal to protect journalists.

The opinion on the European Democracy Action Plan is scheduled to be adopted by the CoR’s plenary during its next session from 30 June to 2 July.

□□A thematic debate on the Conference on the Future of Europe also took place during the 8th CIVEX commission meeting, where members stressed that the current dual EU institutional framework (the supranational European Parliament, and national parliaments) does not properly reflect the sub-national representative bodies like regional parliaments. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a fundamental opportunity for the EU to consult and engage with citizens and the role of regional parliaments should be taken into account, considering that local and regional administrations are the closest authorities to citizens and that they implement 70% of all EU legislation.

Prof. Dr. **Gabriele Abels**, Jean Monnet Professor for Comparative Politics & European Integration of the University of Tübingen, opened the debate and stressed: “Regional parliaments are an important layer in the EU multi-level parliamentary systems. This is especially (yet not exclusively) the case for those regional parliaments which are endowed with legislative competences and which have their own democratic legitimacy via regional elections. Yet, they are often not fully recognized. With regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe regional parliaments can be very important. They can actually conduct and facilitate citizens’ deliberations in their region as well as across regions: by themselves, with governments or with civil society organization. Hence, they are instrumental in securing the inclusive and participatory nature of the Conference and, to do so, they could benefit from capacity-building actions, networking and exchange of best practices. The Committee of the Regions can be a partner for them by offering a forum for exchange and capacity-building.”

**Mark Speich** (DE/EPP), Secretary of State for Federal, European and International Affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia, said: “The regions and the CoR have the potential and the resources to anchor Europe closer to the citizens. It is our task as representatives of the regions of Europe to bring about change within the framework of the Conference, on the basis of this conviction.”

**Piero Mauro Zanin** (IT/EPP), President of Regional Council of Friuli-Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region and vice – president of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), said: “The Conference on the Future of Europe must be an opportunity to rethink democracy taking into account the needs of Europeans and must promote a dialogue involving LRAs, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, strongly reaffirmed in the treaties.”

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# Media advisory – Indicative programme – General Affairs Council, 11 May 2021



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## New Trace An Object uploads: fresh leads needed in child sexual abuse cold cases



If you recognise any of the details in these cropped images, Europol wants to hear from you

We are releasing today to the public a series of [new Stop Child Abuse – Trace An Object images](#) in an attempt to solve child sexual abuse cold cases.

All six pictures – a t-shirt, a wristband, a bag – have been cropped out of child sexual abuse footage from cases investigators have yet to solve – some of them months old, some years old – before being digitally enhanced and posted online.

Investigators are hoping that certain details in the images might serve as clues and that members of the public will recognise a detail which could down the line lead to a child being rescued from harm.

## **What do victim identification specialists do?**

Victim identification specialists painstakingly go through images and videos frame-by-frame to identify anything that helps with the origin, location or the identity of the victim.

Some things the specialists find are quite simple, like a street sign or a news programme on a TV in the background, but others are harder as offenders are becoming more aware of what law enforcement is looking for. In some cases, investigators have exhausted all the investigative leads and that's where your help is needed.

Europol's victim identification specialists take your tips sent in via the Trace An Object platform and work to verify and develop them further. Sometimes, your tips lead us in a definite direction. The information is then sent to the relevant country for further investigation.

So far, the Stop Child Abuse – Trace an Object has helped remove 10 children from harm and arrest 3 offenders with over 26 000 tips received.

## **How to report**

We urge the public to have a look at the images by visiting <https://www.europol.europa.eu/stopchildabuse>.

If you recognise an object or any details about its origin, be it from a shop, location or a time period, please report it via the platform. You can do so securely and anonymously. No clue is too small.

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## **[Horn of Africa: EU to deepen strategic relationship with the region](#)**



The Council today approved conclusions affirming the EU's commitment to give

new impetus to its partnership with the Horn of Africa, and **establishing a new strategy for the region.**

A **geo-strategic priority** for the EU in Africa, the Horn of Africa region has undergone unprecedented developments over the last years and is now at a crossroads.

With this new strategy, EU's intention is to further strengthen and deepen its strategic relationship and partnership with the Horn of Africa and its countries, notably with a view to reduce instability, promote democracy and sustainable growth.

The strategy will aim at reinforcing a joint approach to **democracy and regional peace and security**, revitalising **multilateralism** and the rules-based international order, strengthening commitment to **social and human development**, boosting post-COVID socio-economic recovery and **trade and regional integration**. The strategy also aims at strengthening the partnership with the broader region notably the Red Sea, the Western Indian Ocean and the Nile.

The cornerstones of the EU's engagement will be **mutual accountability**, whereby there is a common understanding of each partner's responsibilities, priorities and concrete objectives, and a **Team Europe** approach, which has shown that through collective action the EU is a solid partner of the region.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

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## [Civil protection: Council adopts new rules to strengthen disaster response](#)

The Council today adopted a regulation to strengthen the EU civil protection mechanism. The new rules will allow the EU and the member states to better prepare for natural and man made disasters and to respond faster when they strike, including in cases which affect a majority of member states simultaneously, such as a pandemic. The text also sets out the funding of the civil protection mechanism in the context of the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027.



The EU civil protection mechanism is an emblem of EU solidarity both within our borders and abroad. In 2020 it was activated 102 times and provided support to 77 countries worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has put its functioning to the test and has shown us that we need to go further. With the tripling of the budget and the new

rules we will be better prepared to predict and respond to future crises, whatever their nature.

*Eduardo Cabrita, Minister of Home Affairs of Portugal*

The proposed rules will allow the European Commission to address gaps in the area of transport and logistics, and, in cases of urgency, directly procure certain additional rescEU capacities. These rescEU capacities, as well as those hosted by member states, will be fully financed from the EU budget.

Prevention and preparedness will also be improved under the proposed regulation. The Commission, in cooperation with member states, will define and develop EU disaster resilience goals in the area of civil protection

The text sets out a total of €1 263 million in funds for the 2021-2027 period. It also includes an amount of up to €2 056 480 000 to implement the civil protection related measures to address the impact of the Covid-19 crisis foreseen in the EU recovery instrument. This is an increase of over three times as compared to the 2014-2020 budget. It reflects the strengthening of the EU's collective response to disasters, including the recent establishment of a reserve of capacities (rescEU), the reinforcement of the European civil protection pool and the improvements in disaster prevention and preparedness.

## **Background**

The EU civil protection mechanism was first established in 2001 and it coordinates the response to natural and man-made disasters at the EU level. Its objective is to foster cooperation among national civil protection authorities, increase public awareness and preparedness for disasters and enable quick, effective, coordinated assistance to affected populations.

The EU civil protection mechanism includes a European civil protection pool. This is a voluntary pool of capacities pre-committed by member states for immediate deployment inside or outside the EU. The civil protection mechanism was last amended in 2019, when an additional reserve of resources, called rescEU, was created to provide assistance in situations where overall existing capacities are insufficient.

[Visit the meeting page](#)