



Ms. Vera Jourová

Vice-President of the European Commission
for Values and Transparency

Ms. Dubravka Šuica

Vice-President of the European Commission
for Democracy and Demography

Mr. Didier Reynders

European Commissioner for Justice

Brussels, 23 February 2023

Dear Vice-President Jourová,
Dear Vice-President Šuica,
Dear Commissioner Reynders,


The signatories of this letter commend the European Commission for the announced initiative on the **EU Defence of Democracy Package**. Defence of Democracy is crucial in the context of escalating geopolitical turmoil, authoritarian tendencies, and recent attacks on the foundations of democracy. To ensure that the EU responds to these challenges in the most effective way, we would like to raise some considerations on the **objectives and scope of the package**.

Defending democracy in Europe, especially in view of the European elections in 2024, starts at home. It will be key to restore European citizens' trust in democracy by ensuring the integrity of the European democratic space and strengthening transparency and democratic values. Furthermore, **the rule of law, fundamental rights, free media and civic space** need to be fully respected as intertwined and mutually reinforcing principles at the basis of our democracy.

The announced Defence of Democracy Package can help achieve these objectives, provided that legislative and non-legislative initiatives complement each other to form a coherent package and that **ambitions go beyond the relaunch of existing policy initiatives**. The package must contain policy innovations that represent a constructive continuation of the European Democracy Action Plan, the EU Rule of Law reporting mechanism and the proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe in the following areas: **electoral processes and civic participation; news media; disinformation and media literacy; civic space; and the rule of law**.

We recognize the urgent need to counter undue foreign interference in European and national elections, with a clear link to countering disinformation, maximizing the transparency of political finance and effectively regulating the digital sphere. However, an **excessive focus on foreign interference would be counterproductive**, as it could easily be misused by autocrats to promote their own anti-democratic narratives. Malign interference and influence from abroad can only achieve their goals if they fall on fertile ground in the EU.

It is therefore equally important to **strengthen democratic resilience within the EU's borders**, by fostering participation of citizens and ensuring accountability of democratic institutions and the



integrity of democratic processes. Civic education and trust-building in European democratic processes and institutions will be equally essential to defend democracy.

We call on the European Commission to consider including legislative and/or non-legislative initiatives in the Defence of Democracy Package, aiming at: ensuring a strong and vibrant space for civil society; engaging citizens and investing in civic education; increased cybersecurity in elections; ensuring sustainability of news media organisations and their editorial independence; fostering voluntary commitments for ethical behaviour by political parties; supporting the exchange of practices between authorities of Member States, civil society and academia on new digital threats; and improving the transparency and oversight of political finance. The signatories would like to offer support in view of developing such initiatives.

Finally, the threats to democracy inside and outside Europe are strikingly similar. It is therefore crucial to involve countries outside Europe and to **strengthen the link between the internal and external dimension of democracy support**. A strategic approach to supporting democracy within the EU must also be coherent with the EU's democracy support policies abroad. As such, the signatories call for the package to refer to the external dimension, which includes developments in the protection of democracies inside and outside the EU.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories:

International institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)
European Partnership for Democracy
Democracy Reporting International
Open Governance Network for Europe
Association for International Affairs (AMO) in Prague
Transparency International EU
Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies
KU Leuven Fund involvEU
Green European Foundation
Kofi Annan Foundation
European Network of Political Foundations
Civil Society Europe