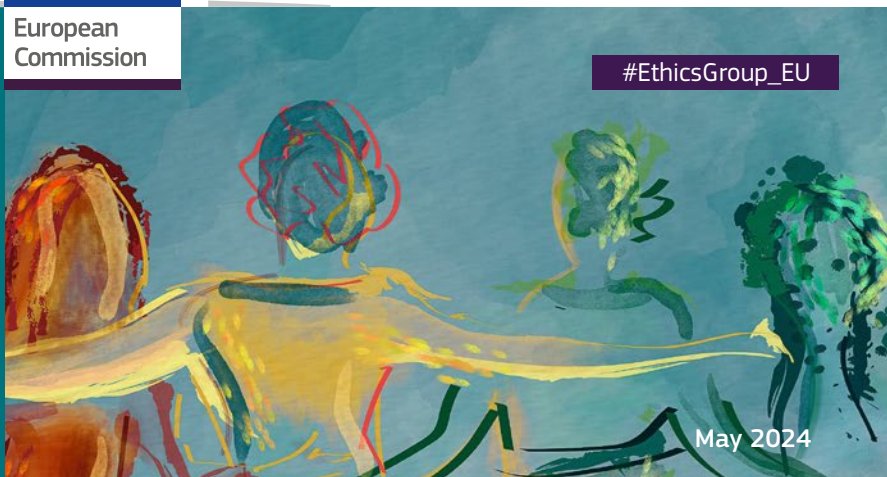


Defending DEMOCRACY in Europe

*Addressing the threat of
authoritarian populism and
reinforcing democratic practice*

European Group
on Ethics in Science and
New Technologies



May 2024



This EGE Statement analyses factors that put democracy at risk and develops recommendations for the **strengthening of a pluralistic European civic space**.

Democracy is **not merely a formal regime** consisting of periodic free elections. It is committed to **protecting and promoting fundamental rights and values**, as well as **practices of lived democracy**. Our democratic ethos, situated in relations of reciprocity and solidarity among citizens, needs to be **nurtured**, through **dialogue** between politicians and citizens, and by **strong and meaningful participation of citizens** in civic and political life.



Authoritarian populism is incompatible with this conception of democracy. It is characterised by antagonism against civil society organisations, media, and other entities that stand up for the rule of law and the interests of the people and minorities.

— SO WHAT IS NEEDED NOW? —

- ▶ We need an **understanding of identity which is not defined by exclusionary categories** such as territory, nation, ethnicity or religion – but which transcends these, appreciates plurality, and creates a sense of (transnational, European) belonging by building on values and their translation into civic practices.
This could help to **strengthen people's participation in society** and their **appreciation of the European endeavour**.
- ▶ We need a reorientation of Europe to its **social roots** – understood as a commitment to providing a dignified life for everyone, avoiding grave levels of social and economic inequality.
This would also help to provide **protection against the rise of far-right authoritarianism**.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Renewing our understanding of democracy and making **substantive participatory democracy** real, which involves ongoing public consultation and deliberation.



Strong and sufficiently funded **public infrastructures** (for housing, health, education etc.) as a precondition for civic and political engagement.



Support for **European public spaces**, such as (non-commercial) deliberative platforms, including digital social spaces, that encourage citizen involvement in European decision-making.



Active encouragement of **intermediary structures**, including associative democracy – the self-organisation of citizens in grass-roots associations that identify and solve problems at local and regional levels.



Encouragement of a **strong administrative and civic ethos** in public administration that works with civic associations; indeed a transformed interplay between citizens and the existing institutions of decision-making – on the basis of a pluralistic Europe as a community of values.



Analysing how **law**, including legal processes, are at risk of being hollowed out and repurposed by authoritarian populist leaders – and resisting this.



Reinforcing mechanisms that secure and support fact and value-based **collective memory** of our European history; recognising the contribution of the **research community** to strengthen democracy; measuring the **wellbeing of societies** in a more comprehensive sense.

This is a summary of a Statement by the [European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies \(EGE\)](#). The EGE is the independent multidisciplinary body appointed by the President of the European Commission that advises on all aspects of Commission policies and legislation where ethical, societal and fundamental rights dimensions intersect with the development of science and new technologies.