



Fragilities of democracy in Europe

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Report



Research and
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Fragilities of democracy in Europe

European Commission
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
Directorate [Directorate letter] — [Directorate name -see organigramme]
Unit [Directorate letter.Unit number, e.g. A.1] — [Unit name -see organigramme]
Contact [First name Last name]
Email [...]@ec.europa.eu (functional e-mail if existing, and)
[First name.Last name]@ec.europa.eu
RTD-PUBLICATIONS@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Fragilities of democracy in Europe

Emanuela Ceva

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings and recommendations for addressing core democratic fragilities in Europe.

Drawing on a varied portfolio of **EU-funded Horizon 2020** and **Horizon Europe projects**, it discusses various forms of democratic fragilities identified through key challenges undermining democracy's core commitment to **accountability**.

Two main forms of accountability, central to the theory and practice of democracy, are analyzed and discussed: (a) **answerability**: the duty of political representatives and institutional actors to respond to citizens and explain their actions, decisions, and performance; and (b) **address**: the co-creative process through which citizens, political representatives, and institutional actors respond to each other for their contributions to shape policy together.

Five areas of democratic fragilities revealing accountability deficits are examined:

1. Media

Projects (Co-Inform, DE-CONSPIRATOR, EUMEPLAT, COVINFORM, MeDeMAP, PRODEMINFO) show that mis- and disinformation, platform-driven audience fragmentation, and inadequate self-regulation weaken both forms of accountability. Effective strategies—like participatory codes of conduct, stronger crisis communication frameworks, or collaborative fact-checking—are being tested. However, they remain partly voluntary or restricted in scope.

2. Democratic Governance

Research (TRUEDEM, RESPOND, BRIDGEGAP, Governance, FASDEM, EU3D, TiGRE, EnTrust) reveals how institutional dysfunctions—corruption, inadequate oversight structures, eroded checks and balances—undercut civic trust. Citizens often lose contact with political leaders, and existing anticorruption measures rely heavily on either top-down rules or consultative efforts with limited co-decision thus deepening social cleavages. This calls for more robust oversight, co-created rules of office, and a broader “trust, but verify” approach emphasizing inclusiveness and accountability in both forms across sectors.

3. Citizens' Engagement

Several projects (NEW_DEMOCRACY, CUREORCURSE, Voiced, DEMOCRAT, MORES, PLEDGE, EUDEMOS, RECONNECT, REDEMOS, COMLIB) highlight declining citizens' participation, skepticism toward institutions, and emotional disengagement. While initiatives like citizens' assemblies or youth dialogues can enhance accountability practices in both forms, thus enhancing trust and socio-political involvement, efforts often remain ad hoc. Civic education, emotional literacy, and structured deliberative processes can improve both answerability (by making institutions responsible for their decisions) and address (by integrating citizens directly into policy-making).

4. Populism and Other Democracy's Drifts

Findings from projects (Anti-pop, PACT, AoD, PaCE, DEMOS, PAVE, POPREBEL) analyze how populist rhetoric exploits distrust and conspiracy theories, fragmenting citizens and sidelining marginalized groups. Tailored local responses and longer-term resilience-building are key to stem extremist narratives. Measures such as multi-year anti-extremism programs and local partnerships strengthen communities' ability to hold institutions and political leaders to account, while also expanding co-ownership of solutions.

5. EU in the Global Context

Some projects' findings (EU-STRAT, JOINT, EU-LISTCO) indicate that "one-size-fits-all" external strategies, foreign-policy fragmentation, and inadequate crisis preparedness undermine both forms of accountability. More nuanced engagement with neighboring states, integrated security benchmarks, and structured dialogues with civil society can enhance legitimacy. Potential reforms—like partial qualified majority voting in CFSP—remain politically sensitive but could facilitate more timely, transparent EU actions.

Recommendations consolidate these findings and suggest a "public ethics of accountability," combining deeper institutionalization, expanded co-creation, ethical training, reframed transparency, and heightened awareness of emotional and historical dimensions. This approach requires stable funding mechanisms, clear legal frameworks, and consistent political support at local, national, and EU levels. Each policy recommendation is designed to strengthen both answerability (transparency and explanation) and address (inclusive, dialogical processes).

Ultimately, the report underscores that truly resilient democracy demands continuous co-creation and reflection, with citizens, representatives, and institutions jointly upholding accountability standards in everyday governance.

2. INTRODUCTION: Aims, methodology, and conceptual background

This report has **three main goals**: to analyze, assess, and recommend ways to address the major challenges facing democracy today. These challenges have been identified through recent or ongoing Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects.

To achieve these goals, the report adopts a **methodology** starting with laying out the key concepts that characterize the core of democracy (§2.1). This provides the **framework** to analyze and assess projects' findings in a coherent way. The projects object of this report are complex and multidimensional and so are their findings. To give unity of analysis to the report, the choice was made to focus on one key aspect cutting across the heterogeneous and rich project portfolio object of this study. This aspect concerns processes of **accountability** considered definitive of the core of the democratic process (see §2.1.). The analysis and assessment of projects' findings is used to identify the main challenges ensuing from democratic fragilities (§3) through the prism of accountability as a core principle of European democracy.

The second step consists in the **review** of a representative sample of current measures, initiatives, and good practices implemented to address these fragilities and challenges within and beyond the EU (§4). This review is indicative, albeit not exhaustive, of how current measures can address democratic fragilities revealing accountability deficits and the extent to which they could be reconsidered and improved.

The third and final step is the development of **recommendations** to enhance current instruments to ameliorate democratic governance and sustain democratic culture throughout Europe (§5).

2.1. Key Concepts

Democracy is often associated with a range of ideals and norms, such as protecting civil liberties and basic rights, upholding the rule of law, and encouraging meaningful political participation—whether through elections or civil society.¹

A central feature connecting these elements is a commitment to **accountability**, which lies at the core of democratic governance.² Accountability characterizes a relation between two subjects linked by a relation of interdependence.³ In other words, accountability is a relational concept as it links those who owe an account and those to whom it is owed.⁴

Forms of Democratic Accountability

¹ [Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union \(europa.eu\)](#); see Article 3 TEU. For a general overview of conceptualizations of democracy, see T. Christiano, S. Bajaj, “[Democracy](#).” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), E. N. Zalta, U. Nodelman (eds.).

² M. Philp, “[Delimiting Democratic Accountability](#).” *Political Studies* 57(1), 2009: 28-53.

³ M. Bovens, “[Two Concepts of Accountability: Accountability as a Virtue and as a Mechanism](#).” *West European Politics* 33 (5), 2910: 946-967; M. Bovens, T. Schillemans, “[Meaningful Accountability](#).” In M. Bovens, R. E. Goodin, and T. Schillemans, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴ D. Emmett, [Rule, Roles and Relations](#). London: MacMillan, 1966.

Democratic accountability can take two main forms:⁵

a. Accountability by answerability

In this traditional form of accountability, one subject is expected to explain their action (that is to **answer** for what they did and the results they reached) to another subject, who can impose sanctions on the former. In a democracy, the main instance of accountability by answerability is the relationship of **citizens' control over the work of elected representatives**. Members of parliament and other institutional role occupants must answer to citizens for what they did and the results they reached, and citizens can impose sanctions on them by voting them out during elections or, for example, by contesting them via protests.⁶

To ensure the realization of accountability by answerability, **transparency** measures are usually deemed necessary for citizens to exercise their control over their representatives.⁷

b. Accountability by address

A less obvious but no less important form of accountability is realized when subjects **address** one another in processes of dialogue and shared decision-making. In a democracy, this form of accountability is realized in deliberative and interactive processes where citizens and elected representatives address each other as **mutually authoritative partners** in the joint project of giving direction to their polity.⁸ Here, accountability is realized by giving and receiving reasons and criticisms for decisions and policies during a process of constant revision and mutual engagement between citizens and their representatives.

Practices such as **citizen assemblies**⁹ reflect this form of accountability as address which also grounds the logic of democratic voting especially in **direct democracy** processes (e.g., referenda).¹⁰

In a healthy democracy, both forms of accountability by answerability and address work together. Citizens not only hold elected representatives responsible for their actions but also see themselves as co-authors of decisions, sharing responsibility with their representatives in a process of mutual exchange.

⁵ E. Ceva, "Accountability." *Philosophy Compass*, forthcoming.

⁶ C. T. Borowiak, "[Disciplining Democracy: The Principal-Agent Model of Accountability](#)." In Id., *Accountability and Democracy: The Pitfalls and Promise of Popular Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; [S. Gailmard, "Accountability and Principal-Agent Theory."](#) In [M. Bovens, R. Goodin, T. Schillemans \(eds\), The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁷ Y. Papadopoulos, [Understanding Accountability in Democratic Governance](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2023; J. P. Olsen, "[Democratic Accountability and the Terms of Political Order](#)." In Id., *Democratic Accountability, Political Order, and Change: Exploring Accountability Processes in an Era of European Transformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁸ [Z. Kapelner, "Mutual Service as the Relational Value of Democracy." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 25, 2022: 651–665; V. Ottonelli, *I principi procedurali della democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012.](#)

⁹ N. Stojanović, "[Citizens' assemblies and direct democracy](#)." In M. Reuchamps, J. Vrydagh, Y. Welp, *Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023. For a general view of citizens' assembly initiatives worldwide, see <https://participedia.net/method/citizens-assembly>.

¹⁰ E. Ceva, V. Ottonelli, "[Second-personal authority and the practice of democracy](#)." *Constellations* 29(4), 2021: 460-474; [Z. Kapelner, "What does it mean to have an equal say?" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, online first 2023.](#)

Democracy in Decline

Democracies across Europe are facing growing challenges, including political polarization, the spread of disinformation, and declining political engagement among citizens. While each of these challenges present their own specific features, they also share the common trait of featuring a specific accountability deficit, in either one or both forms as answerability and / or address. Significant erosions of accountability happen when:

- Political representatives misuse their power of office to pursue **private** or **unauthorized** agendas.
- Trust between citizens and their elected representatives breaks down, replaced by **antagonism** and **social contempt**.

These issues are visible in events such as corruption scandals (e.g., the [Qatargate affair](#)) and the rise of authoritarian and populist movements. They are also reflected in signs of political disengagement, such as low voter turnout and increasing levels of civil unrest.

2.2. Key Areas of Study

To understand the causes and manifestations of weakening accountability, the report highlights five strategic areas across projects' results:

- MEDIA, including the spread of disinformation.
- DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE, including institutional dysfunctions and corruption.
- CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT, including political participation and democratic culture.
- POPULISM AND OTHER DEMOCRACY'S DRIFTS, including protest movements.
- THE EU IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT, including the problem of how international relations and foreign policy challenges affect democracy internally.

2.3. Structure of the Report

This report is organized into three main sections:

Section 3, based on project findings, identifies the key **fragilities** of the institutions of contemporary democracies, with a focus on accountability deficits. It identifies the main challenges concerning such fragilities and suggests possible directions to address them.

Section 4 reviews an indicative but not exhaustive sample of current **measures, initiatives, and good practices** implemented to address these fragilities and challenges, including EU and global-level efforts, as well as examples of good practices within Member States.

Section 5 makes **recommendations** to **improve** these measures and address democratic weaknesses. A major focus is on strengthening accountability practices and fostering a public ethics of office, essential for creating trustworthy institutions and restoring citizens' trust.

3. PROJECTS REVIEW. Understanding democratic fragilities through accountability deficits

Democracies across Europe are facing growing challenges, including political polarization, the spread of disinformation, and declining political engagement among citizens. This section examines the **institutional failures** behind these challenges, focusing on how they reveal **accountability deficits** in either form of answerability or address as characterized in section 2.

Drawing on insights from EU-funded projects under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, the section highlights key democratic fragilities and possible instruments to address them. The projects cover a range of topics, such as the role of civil society and media, citizen participation, the rise of populist movements, and the EU's role in global affairs.

3.1. Media

Media, both traditional and digital, play a crucial role in **supporting or undermining democratic accountability**. On the one hand, media have been traditionally recognized in their function as a watchdog, considering their capacity to foster informed public discourse. However, when they fail to provide accurate, reliable, and pluralistic information, they contribute to democratic fragilities, such as the spread of misinformation, audience fragmentation, and the erosion of public trust.

Pathologies of Information

- ⇒ **Misinformation**, particularly on social media, poses one of the most serious threats to democracy by distorting public perception and weakening accountability mechanisms. The [Co-Inform](#) (*Co-Creating Misinformation-Resilient Societies*) project highlighted how misleading content on digital platforms disrupts trust between citizens, journalists, and policymakers. To address this, Co-Inform developed digital tools, including a browser extension and a fact-checking dashboard, to detect and combat fake news. These tools leverage a combination of machine learning and human fact-checking, involving users in the co-creation of an anti-misinformation model.¹¹

A significant **challenge** concerns the promotion of digital literacy among the public, policymakers, and journalists.

- ⇒ **External information manipulation** by foreign actors also undermines media accountability and democratic stability. States like Russia and China use disinformation and information suppression tactics to influence public opinion and disrupt democratic institutions in the EU and partner countries. The [DE-CONSPIRATOR](#) (*Detecting and Countering Information Suppression from A Transnational Perspective*) project highlights gaps in the EU's legal and regulatory responses to this threat, showing that frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Digital Services Act need to be strengthened.¹²

¹¹ *Co-Inform: Co-Creating Misinformation-Resilient Societies* (completed) Main sources: Reporting for period 2; D1.1; D5.4; D2.4; D5.2; D2.2; D5.1; D3.3; D1.3; D1.2; D2.1; D3.2; D4.6; D1.4; D2.3; D5.6.

¹² *DE-CONSPIRATOR: Detecting and Countering Information Suppression from A Transnational Perspective* (ongoing). Source available: Fact sheet only.

- ⇒ **Media fragmentation and the exclusion of diverse voices** further weaken the public's ability to engage in informed democratic processes. The concentration of media ownership and the algorithm-driven nature of online platforms often create "information bubbles" where citizens are exposed to narrow viewpoints, limiting critical debate. This situation sensibly limits accountability by address.

The [EUMEPLAT](#) (*European Media Platforms: Assessing Positive And Negative Externalities For European Culture*) project examined how the internationalization and platformization of media have not fostered Europeanization but instead contributed to audience segmentation and the marginalization of independent voices.¹³

Commercial interests and algorithmic biases that favor sensational or divisive content present challenges to developing inclusive media policies and guidelines for promoting pluralism implementing such practices.

Media's Role in Times of Crisis

- ⇒ **Institutional reactions to crises**, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, expose and exacerbate weaknesses in media accountability and public trust. In emergencies, clear and reliable information is essential for citizens to understand policy decisions and hold institutions accountable. When such communication is lacking, it creates confusion and erodes trust in public authorities.

The [COVINFORM](#) (*COronavirus Vulnerabilities and INFormation dynamics Research and Modelling*) project demonstrated how misinformation during the pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable groups and highlighted failures in crisis communication. The lack of transparency in this domain reveals the failure of the conditions for accountability by answerability. For example, as a result, healthcare workers in countries like Spain felt abandoned and lacked clear guidance, revealing gaps in accountability structures.¹⁴

The **challenge** here concerns how to effectively communicate complex information in an accessible manner.

- ⇒ Crises also provide opportunities for **external actors to exploit disinformation**, further undermining democratic processes. The [DE-CONSPIRATOR](#) project stresses the importance of filling current gaps in regulatory frameworks.

The **challenge** is to improve current frameworks to enhance resilience against foreign interference, especially during periods of uncertainty and instability.

Media Accountability and Internal Pluralism

- ⇒ Media face challenges in **self-regulation and maintaining internal pluralism**. These challenges undermine media's support for accountability, which requires adherence to high standards of journalistic integrity and their commitment to providing a platform for diverse voices. Weak accountability mechanisms, such as insufficient adherence to codes of ethics or ineffective press councils, allow disinformation and biased reporting to flourish.

¹³EUMEPLAT: *European Media Platforms: Assessing Positive And Negative Externalities For European Culture* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

¹⁴COVINFORM *COronavirus Vulnerabilities and INFormation dynamics Research and Modelling* (completed) Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D6.7; D8.1; D3.2; D8.4; D7.7; D5.7; D8.5; D5.4; D7.8; D7.1; D8.2.

The [MeDeMAP](#) (*Mapping Media for Future Democracies*) project emphasizes the need for cross-national media regulation and accountability frameworks to promote journalistic quality and internal plurality. Such frameworks include legal and self-regulatory measures (accountability by answerability) and participation in the media (accountability by address).¹⁵

However, implementing these frameworks is challenging due to differences in national legal systems and media landscapes. A significant **challenge** regards the commitment to a coordinated efforts among policymakers, media organizations, and civil society to overcome these jurisdictional and cultural differences.

- ⇒ Media face a widespread difficulty in **reaching individuals who are resistant to fact-based information** or traditional media narratives. The [PRODEMINFO](#) (*Protecting the Democratic Information Space in Europe*) project addresses this issue through the development of counter-messages based on inoculation theory, which aims to build cognitive resistance to misinformation by exposing people to weakened versions of false narratives.¹⁶ This approach expands the constituency of accountability by reaching audiences who might otherwise be excluded from fact-based discourse.

The **challenge** concerns developing communication strategies that can penetrate echo chambers without alienating audiences.

Fostering Participatory Media Ecosystems

- ⇒ A common factor cutting across media-related fragilities is the current limited **involvement of citizens in creating and sharing responsible media content**. This fragility must be addressed because only when citizens, journalists, and policymakers work together to co-create solutions, they can strengthen both forms of accountability: answerability (by promoting transparency and fact-checking) and address (by fostering inclusive dialogue).

This insight is visible in the [Co-Inform](#) project's findings, that demonstrate how participatory approaches can be effective in combating misinformation. However, achieving meaningful participation requires addressing digital divides, varying levels of expertise, and potential apathy.

The **challenge** concerns developing infrastructures enabling collaboration among diverse actors while promoting media literacy and civic engagement, necessary to foster accountability.

¹⁵ *MeDeMAP: Mapping Media for Future Democracies* (ongoing). Main sources: Reporting for period 1 and D4.1; D2.1 (V2.0); D2.2. For further details see [A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation. Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation](#)

¹⁶ *PRODEMINFO: Protecting the Democratic Information Space in Europe* (ongoing) Main sources: Reporting for period 1.

Media: Summary of challenges

Harmonizing Media Regulation across national contexts (MeDeMAP).

Combatting Misinformation and enhance citizens' capacity to detect and counter fake news and promoting media literacy (Co-Inform).

Strengthening EU Legal Defenses against external information suppression tactics (DE-CONSPIRATOR).

Promoting Media Plurality to reduce audience fragmentation (EUMEPLAT).

Improving Crisis Communication during emergencies (COVINFORM).

Reaching Diverse Audiences especially individuals who may be skeptical of factual accuracy (PRODEMINFO).

Facilitating Co-Creation to involve various stakeholders in developing solutions to media-related challenges (Co-Inform).

3.2. Democratic governance

Institutional dysfunction is a major driver of democratic fragilities, including democratic backsliding, corruption, public disaffection, and the erosion of the rule of law. These dysfunctions stem from **deficits in accountability**, both in terms of institutions being answerable for their actions and fostering collaborative relationships with citizens. Without strong accountability mechanisms, public trust in democratic governance deteriorates, further destabilizing democratic institutions.

Accountability Deficits in Government Structures

- ⇒ A key fragility is the failure of institutions to **meet citizens' expectations** and deliver effective governance, which undermines both their legitimacy and their accountability by answerability.

For example, the [TRUEDEM](#) (*Trust in European Democracies*) project highlights that this failure leads to widespread public disaffection and political instability.¹⁷ When institutions fail to respond to citizens' needs, there is a deficit of accountability by answerability, and citizens lose trust in their leaders' ability to govern. This predicament often leads to legitimacy crises and polarization.

The **challenge** concerns how to develop mechanisms that can make institutions more transparent and responsive, ensuring that they are held accountable for their performance.

- ⇒ **Corruption** and **undue influence** exacerbate institutional dysfunction by distorting decision-making and weakening democratic governance. Corruption directly undermines accountability by answerability, as citizens cannot hold officials accountable without transparency or effective anti-corruption measures.

From this perspective, the [RESPOND](#) (*Rescuing Democracy from Political Corruption in Digital Societies*)¹⁸ and [BRIDGEGAP](#) (*Bridging the Gaps in Evidence, Regulation and*

¹⁷TRUEDEM: *Trust in European Democracies* (ongoing). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

¹⁸RESPOND: *Rescuing Democracy from Political Corruption in Digital Societies* (ongoing). Source available: Fact sheet only.

Impact of Anticorruption Policies)¹⁹ projects emphasize how corruption reveals underlying institutional weaknesses, particularly when preventive mechanisms and enforcement measures are ineffective. Corruption also disrupts accountability by address by breaking the bond between citizens and institutions. When private interests dominate public action, citizens become alienated from democratic processes, reducing their motivation to participate in governance.

The analysis of the main findings of these projects leads to identifying a **challenge** concerning common frameworks and practices of co-creation with stakeholders to design, test, and revise anticorruption strategies, including new risk indicators for corruption.

- ⇒ **Structural changes in governance**, including the rise of populist movements and shifting societal identities, contribute to institutional fragilities. Traditional party systems have been disrupted, and existing governance structures often struggle to adapt to new political dynamics.

The [Governance](#) (*Democratic governance in a turbulent age*) project highlighted how these shifts create a disconnect between citizens and institutions, particularly when representation fails to reflect citizens' evolving needs and identities.²⁰ This disconnect weakens accountability by address by reducing opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

The **challenge** rests with how to make governance structures more flexible and responsive to societal change, allowing citizens to feel represented and engaged in the democratic process.

- ⇒ **Autocratization** is another significant threat, as it often occurs gradually under a legal façade, eroding the institutional checks and balances necessary for both forms of accountability.

The [FASDEM](#) (*Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization*) project warned that this process undermines accountability by answerability by weakening oversight mechanisms, such as independent courts and parliaments. As executive power expands unchecked, the collaborative aspect of governance (accountability by address) is also diminished, as citizens have fewer avenues to participate in decision-making.²¹

One important **challenge** concerns how to strengthen judicial constraints and reinvigorate parliamentary oversight.

Accountability Deficits in Multi-Level Governance

- ⇒ Deficits in accountability are particularly visible in multi-level governance structures, where **coordination between national and EU institutions** is critical.

The [EU3D](#) (*EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy*) project examined how the regression of democracy and the rule of law in EU candidate countries, such as those in the Western Balkans, is partly due to ineffective accountability mechanisms at both levels.

¹⁹*BRIDGE GAP: Bridging the Gaps in Evidence, Regulation and Impact of Anticorruption Policies* (ongoing)

Source available: Fact sheet only.

²⁰ *Governance: Democratic governance in a turbulent age* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

²¹ *FASDEM: Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 4.

Conditionality measures and the uncertain prospect of EU membership have created perceptions of dominance rather than partnership, undermining accountability by address. This has reduced opportunities for collaborative decision-making and weakened the legitimacy of both national governments and the EU.²²

There is a need to address the **challenge** of enhancing accountability structures between the two levels of authority.

Balancing Trust and Distrust in Governance

⇒ Democratic governance requires at once that **citizens trust their representatives** and that their trust is **not blind** but stems from critical thinking. While trust is essential for fostering constructive engagement, blind trust can lead to regulatory capture and a generalized disengagement from accountability mechanisms.

In this spirit, the [TiGRE](#) (*Trust in Governance and Regulation in Europe*) project underscored the importance of maintaining a “trust, but verify” approach, which encourages regulatory actors to perform effectively while avoiding excessive skepticism.²³ Excessive distrust can weaken accountability by address by reducing constructive dialogue between citizens and institutions.

The [EnTrust](#) (*Enlightened trust: An examination of trust and distrust in governance – conditions, effects and remedies*) project also highlighted the link between trust and accountability, emphasizing that declines in trust across EU societies undermine democratic governance. Restoring trust requires addressing corruption, enhancing transparency, and ensuring that institutions are answerable for their actions.²⁴

Taken together, the **challenge** concerning accountability mechanisms visible in the findings of these projects is how to address the “trust problem” upfront. This is important both to enhance the grounds of institutional answerability and to restore the collaborative relationship needed for accountability by address.

Democratic governance: Summary of challenges

Strengthening Citizens Trust and Institutional Trustworthiness to maximize citizens' inclusiveness in democratic governance (TRUEDEM, TiGRE, EnTrust).

Enhancing Anti-Corruption Measures, including institutional revision processes and the development of corruption risk indicators (RESPOND, BRIDGEGAP).

Adapting Governance Structures to Societal Changes in order to make institutions more responsive to citizens' needs and contextual priorities (Governance).

Reinforcing Checks and Balances to reinvigorate parliamentary activities (FASDEM).

Improving Legitimacy of EU decision-making processes (EU3D).

²² EU3D: *EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 3; D2.4; D3.5; D4.6; D6.2; D6.4.

²³ TiGRE *Trust in Governance and Regulation in Europe* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 3; D4.3; D8.7.

²⁴ EnTrust *Enlightened trust: An examination of trust and distrust in governance – conditions, effects and remedies* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 3; PBI; PBIII; PBII.

3.3. Citizens' engagement

Well-functioning democracies rely on active citizen engagement, robust political participation, and a strong democratic culture. When citizens **disengage** or disconnect from institutions, key **accountability practices**—both answerability and address—are **undermined**. This disengagement weakens the mutual relationship between citizens and institutions, fostering political instability, public disaffection, and societal polarization.

Crisis of Citizens' Participation in Representative Institutions

- ⇒ Across Europe, **declining electoral turnout** and the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties signal an erosion of citizens' belief in the effectiveness of traditional representative institutions.

As an illustration, consider how the findings of the [NEW DEMOCRACY](#) (*Meeting Great Expectations Through Democratic Innovations*)²⁵ and [CUREORCURSE](#) (*Non-elected politics. Cure or Curse for the Crisis of Representative Democracy?*)²⁶ projects highlighted this tendency, emphasizing that citizens increasingly feel disconnected from traditional decision-making processes. When citizens perceive that their concerns are ignored, they disengage from accountability practices, weakening both answerability (as they are less inclined to hold representatives accountable) and address (as they lose interest in co-authoring collective decisions).

A current **challenge** concerns the design of participatory processes that can effectively engage citizens and enhance their legitimacy perceptions by fostering meaningful accountability practices.

- ⇒ Efforts to revitalize democracy through **participatory innovations**, such as deliberative minipublics and participatory budgeting, face skepticism and mixed results.

The [NEW DEMOCRACY](#) project explored these innovations but found limited public enthusiasm for their problem-solving potential. Similarly, the [CUREORCURSE](#) project highlighted concerns about delegating decision-making powers to non-elected participants, which can create tensions with representative democracy. This poses challenges for accountability by answerability, as citizens may feel that decision-making is moving away from elected officials who are directly answerable to them.

The **challenge** to address concerns the development and implementation of participatory mechanisms that can complement, rather than compete with, traditional structures to enhance democratic engagement.

- ⇒ **A lack of competence** in navigating complex political environments further limits citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in governance processes.

This is evidenced in the [VoiCED](#) (*VOTing Citizens and the Ethics of Democracy*) project's findings from which we can see how citizens' competence is an essential enabling condition for both forms of accountability.²⁷ Without sufficient knowledge and critical

²⁵ *NEW DEMOCRACY: Meeting Great Expectations Through Democratic Innovations* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 4.

²⁶ *CUREORCURSE: Non-elected politics. Cure or Curse for the Crisis of Representative Democracy?* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 4.

²⁷ *VoiCED: VOTing Citizens and the Ethics of Democracy* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

thinking skills, citizens struggle to hold elected officials accountable (answerability) and to participate effectively in collaborative decision-making (address).

Strengthening civic education and media literacy is therefore crucial to empowering citizens as active democratic agents. To this end, it is necessary to address the current **challenge** concerning how citizens can select and interpret information without succumbing to biases (see also §3.1).

- ⇒ **Polarization** and **conspiracy beliefs** further citizens' skepticism towards traditional representative institutions.

As highlighted by the [DEMOCRAT](#) (*Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship*) project, events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of right-wing extremism have deepened political disengagement from both political and scientific institutions. When citizens feel disconnected from these institutions, they disengage from accountability practices, reducing their capacity to demand answerability and participate in collaborative decision-making processes.²⁸

To address these manifestations of citizens' disengagement, the current **challenge** for responsible democratic citizenship must be addressed.

- ⇒ As a consequence of the phenomena and tendencies analyzed in this section, citizens across Europe are experiencing a form of **emotional disengagement from politics** too. This is a key factor sustaining political indifference and polarization.

For example, the findings of both the [MORES](#) (*Moral emotions in politics – how they unite, how they divide*)²⁹ and [PLEDGE](#) (*Politics of Grievance and Democratic Governance*)³⁰ projects emphasize that policymakers often fail to address citizens' moral and emotional needs, which can result in frustration and alienation. When citizens' emotional needs are ignored, the partnership between citizens and institutions weakens, affecting accountability by address. Polarization can also hinder answerability by creating an environment where citizens are less willing to engage constructively with opposing viewpoints or hold leaders accountable in a fair manner.

We can thus notice a **challenge** to reform institutions in ways to make them capable of engaging with citizens on an emotional level, strengthening the partnership in governance. Recognizing and addressing citizens' frustrations can prevent disengagement and promote a more collaborative political culture.

European Integration and Citizenship Challenges

- ⇒ **Institutional constraints on national politics**, especially those stemming from European integration, also contribute to declining citizen engagement.

This tendency emerges from the findings of the [EUDEMOS](#) (*Constrained Democracy: Citizens' Responses to Limited Political Choice in the European Union*) project, which emphasize that when political choices are constrained by EU-level decisions, citizens may

²⁸ *DEMOCRAT: Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship* (ongoing). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

²⁹ *MORES: Moral emotions in politics – how they unite, how they divide* (ongoing). Source available: Fact sheet only

³⁰ *PLEDGE: Politics of Grievance and Democratic Governance* (ongoing). Source available: Fact sheet only.

feel they have limited influence over collective outcomes.³¹ This diminishes accountability by address, as citizens no longer see themselves as co-authors of decisions that affect their lives.

The disconnect between citizens and EU institutions is revealed also by the [RECONNECT](#) (*Reconciling Europe with its Citizens through Democracy and Rule of Law*) project. Many citizens perceive EU institutions as distant and unresponsive, demanding greater transparency and procedural legitimacy.³² The findings show that citizens increasingly value accountability by address, emphasizing the importance of input and throughput legitimacy, where inclusive procedures matter just as much as positive policy outcomes.³³

A critical **challenge** concerns effective policies ensuring that citizens have meaningful opportunities to participate in governance, even within multi-level structures.

Regional Challenges to A Democratic Political Culture

⇒ In regions with ongoing **democratization challenges**, citizen engagement faces unique obstacles.

For example, The [REDEMOS](#) (*REconfiguring EU DEMOcracy Support? Towards a sustained demos in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood*) project highlights difficulties in promoting democratic reforms in the EU's eastern neighborhood, where democracy support often focuses on institutional and procedural measures while neglecting the role of citizens. This minimalist approach limits the development of a sustained democratic culture, undermining accountability by address by failing to engage citizens as active partners in governance.³⁴

Fostering accountability requires addressing current **challenges** about policies sustaining citizens' participation, necessary for the development of a democratic political culture. Without engaging citizens as partners, efforts to strengthen democracy may lack legitimacy and effectiveness.

⇒ **Historical legacies** can also shape current democratic fragilities, as shown by the [COMLIB](#) (*Communists into Liberals: The Transformation and Demise of the Left as Precursor to the Illiberal Turn in Poland*) project's examination of democratic backsliding in Poland. The project underscores how past transformations, including the neoliberalization of social democracy, have contributed to contemporary challenges in citizens' engagement.³⁵

Understanding these historical influences is crucial for addressing deep-seated institutional dysfunctions and fostering stronger accountability mechanisms. The current

³¹ *EUDEMOS: Constrained Democracy: Citizens' Responses to Limited Political Choice in the European Union* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 4.

³² *RECONNECT: Reconciling Europe with its Citizens through Democracy and Rule of Law* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 3; WP15 D1; PB; WP6 D4; WP15 D2.

³³ *RECONNECT*, WP15 D1.

³⁴ *REDEMOS: REconfiguring EU DEMOcracy Support? Towards a sustained demos in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood* (ongoing). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

³⁵ *COMLIB: Communists into Liberals: The Transformation and Demise of the Left as Precursor to the Illiberal Turn in Poland* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

challenge concerns how to support research on how past shifts influence current institutional dysfunctions.

Citizens' Engagement: Summary of challenges

Enhancing public support for democratic innovations by to enhance citizens' participation in accountability practices (NEW_DEMOCRACY, CUREORCURSE).

Balancing representative and participatory mechanisms to improve citizens' involvement while ensuring that elected officials remain answerable to the electorate (NEW_DEMOCRACY, CUREORCURSE).

Strengthening education for responsible democratic citizenship not just knowledge of democratic systems (Voiced, DEMOCRAT).

Incorporating emotional dimensions in policymaking to support citizens' trust in and active engagement with institutions (MORES, PLEDGE).

Enhancing national responsibility for political choices amid EU constraints (EUDEMOS, RECONNECT).

Acknowledging historical influences on political culture to understand how past shifts influence current institutional dysfunctions (REDEMOS, COMLIB).

3.4. Populism and other democracy's drifts

The rise of **populist and protest movements** across Europe has exposed significant democratic fragilities, including political polarization, diminished civic engagement, and the erosion of democratic norms and the rule of law. These movements thrive on public distrust in institutions (see §3.2), disinformation (see §3.1), and exclusionary rhetoric, weakening the two key forms of accountability—answerability and address—necessary for democratic governance. These tendencies reinforce and are in turn further reinforced by diminished levels of civic engagement (see §3.3).

Populist challenges

- ⇒ One major factor driving polarization is the use of **divisive narratives** in both populist and anti-populist rhetoric.

The [Anti-pop](#) (*Anti-populist discourse in European politics and media*) project highlighted how anti-populist narratives in political and media discourse can inadvertently deepen polarization by creating a binary divide between populism and anti-populism.³⁶ This fragmentation disrupts the collaborative discourse required by accountability by address, as it reduces mutual understanding among citizens.

Such narratives are often sustained by conspiracy theories. The [PACT](#) (*Populism and Conspiracy Theory*) project's findings, for example, highlight how populist leaders often exploit conspiracy theories to fuel distrust and undermine democratic processes. As seen with the spread of fake news in the earlier discussion of media fragilities (§3.1), without

³⁶ *Anti-pop: Anti-populist discourse in European politics and media* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

sufficient institutional engagement to counter these narratives, citizens' ability to demand answerability based on accurate information declines.³⁷

This tendency also emerges from the [AoD](#) (*Articulations of Desire: Populism and the Future of Democracy*) project's findings offer the ground for seeing how failure of institutions to resonate with citizens hampers accountability by answerability, as citizens lose faith in institutions' responsiveness.³⁸ We can also see how the failure also undermines accountability by address by reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement between citizens and their representatives.

To bridge these divides, there is a need to address the **challenge** of promoting inclusive narratives that foster reflective discourse. These are important to bring diverse groups together and countering the antagonism that populist rhetoric perpetuates.

- ⇒ Populist parties often gain traction by **dominating political narratives** and presenting themselves as the sole representatives of "the people."

The [PaCE](#) (*Populism And Civic Engagement – a fine-grained, dynamic, context-sensitive and forward-looking response to negative populist tendencies*) project highlighted that liberal-democratic parties frequently fail to offer compelling alternatives, allowing populist narratives to thrive.³⁹ This weakens accountability by address, as citizens may disengage when they feel that mainstream parties do not empower them or address their concerns (see also the analyses in §3.3.).

Liberal-democratic parties have an important role to address this accountability **challenge**. The challenge for them is to reclaim positive political narratives that emphasize meaningful participation in governance (see also §3.2).

- ⇒ Populism also flourishes when institutions fail to engage **underrepresented groups**, such as youth, women, and migrants.

In this respect, looking at the findings of [DEMOS](#) (*Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe*) project is important to see how populist movements often capitalize on the political disengagement of these groups, leading to a generalized distrust in politics.⁴⁰

The main **challenges** in this respect regard how to promote horizontal accountability to improve political representation for marginalized groups.

Social Resilience for Countering Extremism

- ⇒ Extremist movements threaten **democratic stability**, particularly in regions experiencing social inequality, unresolved legacies of violence, and dysfunctional governance.

The [PAVE](#) (*Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA*) project's findings highlight that addressing violent extremism

³⁷ PACT: *Populism and Conspiracy Theory* (ongoing). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 3.

³⁸ AoD: *Articulations of Desire: Populism and the Future of Democracy* (completed). Main source: Periodic Reporting for period 1.

³⁹ PaCE: *Populism And Civic Engagement – a fine-grained, dynamic, context-sensitive and forward-looking response to negative populist tendencies* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D5.10; D4.4; D6.6.

⁴⁰ DEMOS: *Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D7.1; D9.1.

requires strengthening local actors, such as religious leaders, educators, and civil society organizations, to promote inclusive partnerships and foster community resilience.⁴¹

The main **challenges** in these areas concern how to strengthen local communities.

- ⇒ **Civic education** is a crucial tool to strengthen democratic resilience against democratic drifts.

This element emerges from the findings of the [POPREBEL](#) (*Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism*) project, which identify a gap in citizens' understanding of their rights and responsibilities within liberal democracies, which populist leaders often exploit.⁴² By investing in civic education, democratic institutions can help citizens better understand the importance of the rule of law and their role in democratic accountability.

The **challenge** consists in developing education programs that not only enhance answerability—by fostering citizens' ability to demand institutional performance—but also support address by fostering collaborative engagement in democratic processes.

Democracy's Drifts: Summary of challenges

Fostering reflective discourse and positive political narratives to bridge divides in politics and society rather than deepen them (Anti-pop, PACT, AoD).

Contextualizing reactions to populism and conspiracy theories (no one size-fits-all approach) (PaCE, DEMOS).

Enhancing Community Resilience Against Extremism to increase the accountability relations between citizens and institutions (PAVE).

3.5. The EU in the Global Context

The EU faces significant challenges in its international relations and policy-making processes in foreign affairs. Recent research projects have highlighted how fragilities in this respect concern shortcomings of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP); security risks; and a fragmented foreign policy.

Fragilities in EU Foreign Policy and International Relations

- ⇒ A major issue in the EU's engagement with neighboring countries is its reliance on a **one-size-fits-all approach**, which fails to account for the diverse political, social, and economic contexts of individual Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.

The [EU-STRAT](#) (*The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment*) project critically engaged with this approach. Its findings show how it has contributed to the stagnation of democratic reforms in several EaP countries, where stable hybrid regimes have taken root instead of democratic systems. By applying a

⁴¹ PAVE *Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D8.6; D7.3; D8.8.

⁴² POPREBEL: *Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 3; D4.5.

generalized strategy, the EU undermined its ability to collaborate with these countries, weakening accountability by address. The project's findings highlight the EU's missed opportunities to co-author policies with local stakeholders, preventing mutual participation in collective decision-making (as accountability by address requires).⁴³

The main current **challenge** concerns how to enhance engagement strategies to foster genuine partnerships with EaP countries and strengthen joint ownership of reforms.

- ⇒ **Fragmentation** in foreign policy formulation and implementation within the EU also undermines its external actions.

The [JOINT](#) (*Understanding and Strengthening EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World*) project pointed to the lack of systematic integration of internal policy areas and insufficient coordination among member states, which hampers the EU's ability to define and pursue unified foreign and security objectives.⁴⁴ This fragmentation matters not only because it leads to inefficiencies but also because citizens struggle to hold decision-makers accountable when responsibilities are dispersed across various actors. Moreover, accountability by address is compromised, as the lack of a unified approach limits citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in shaping foreign policy decisions.

The main **challenge** concerns how the EU can build synergies across policy domains and improve coordination mechanisms to enable clearer accountability structures.

Security Risks

- ⇒ The EU faces unprecedented geopolitical rivalries, **unconventional security threats**, and crises such as uncontrolled migration and environmental risks.

The [EU-LISTCO](#) (*Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders*) project highlighted the EU's limited preparedness to anticipate and respond to governance breakdowns and external threats. This deficiency poses a serious challenge for accountability by answerability, as citizens expect the EU to safeguard their security interests effectively. When institutions lack the capacity to respond to external risks, citizens are left without clear mechanisms to hold them accountable for failures.⁴⁵

The main **challenge** for the EU is how to enhance its strategic autonomy and preparedness, ensuring that its mechanisms can adequately respond to emerging threats while remaining answerable to citizens.

⁴³ *EU-STRAT: The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D8.9; D3.6; D8.10; D4.5

⁴⁴ *JOINT: Understanding and Strengthening EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D3.3.

⁴⁵ *EU-LISTCO: Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders* (completed). Main sources: Periodic Reporting for period 2; D5.5; D5.6; D7.8.

The EU in the Global Context: Summary of challenges

Enhancing preparedness for complex security risks, including the development of strategic autonomy and capacity to respond to citizens' perceptions of risk (EU-LISTCO).

Balancing strategic interests with upholding democratic values to counter anti-democratic tendencies in neighboring countries and members states while preserving strategic partnerships (EUSTRAT).

Assessing political acceptability of greater cooperation as required by balancing national sovereignty concerns with the benefits of deeper EU integration (JOINT).

4. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT LANDSCAPE. ADDRESSING DEMOCRATIC FRAGILITIES

In section 3, based on project findings, the key **fragilities** of democratic institutions across Europe were identified, with a focus on accountability deficits, understood as shortcomings either or both in answerability mechanisms or/and practices of mutual address between citizens and their representatives (see section 2). Such a focus was useful to confer unity of analysis to a rich and heterogeneous project portfolio by identifying a common thread across results which targets a core aspect of democratic politics and culture. The fragilities were connected to concrete **challenges** across the five main lines of inquiries related to media, institutional dysfunctions, citizens' participation, populism and other democratic drifts, and the EU in the global context.

To make a head start in addressing such challenges, this section presents a review of a selection of current **measures** to redress democratic fragilities across the five lines of inquiry.

While not all these measures were devised explicitly to tackle accountability deficits, the critical review is helpful to see how future policy interventions (see recommendations in section 5) can be developed by capitalizing on existing efforts.

The review includes a sample of EU and global-level efforts, as well as examples of good practices within Member States. Each measure is briefly presented in view of how it might tackle accountability challenges concerning democratic fragilities. Their possible lines of improvement are also pointed out, thus identifying the gaps that still need to be addressed.

4.1. Media

Challenge: Harmonizing Media Regulation

- ⇒ Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)

[Directive \(EU\) 2018/1808](#)

Brief description and analysis: The AVMSD establishes EU-wide minimum standards for media regulation, addressing such issues as hate speech and advertising. The effort to harmonize rules across Member States can foster accountability by answerability in so far as media providers must comply with transparency requirements and respond to both regulators and citizens. It can also support accountability by address, by allowing Member States to tailor specific provisions to local contexts through stakeholder engagement.

Possible lines of improvement: The directive's impact depends on each Member State's enforcement capacity. Rapidly evolving digital platforms, such as social media, are regulated only in part within AVMSD's scope, leaving some emerging technologies less covered.

- ⇒ [European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services](#) (ERGA)

Brief description and analysis: ERGA brings together national audiovisual regulatory authorities to coordinate and share best practices in implementing the AVMSD. This cooperation can enhance accountability by answerability by improving cross-border oversight.

Possible lines of improvement: ERGA's recommendations are not legally binding. Implementation hinges on each regulator's resources and political support.

Challenge: Combatting Misinformation

- ⇒ [The Code of Conduct on Disinformation](#)
Brief description and analysis: Signatories include Major online platforms, tech firms, civil society actors, and advertisers.. Although participation remains voluntary, the Code lays out commitments to tackle disinformation, such as demonetizing false news purveyors, removing inauthentic accounts, and empowering fact-checking. Signatories must publish regular transparency reports, and VLOPs/VLOSEs are subject to independent audits under the DSA. This encourages answerability by requiring explanations of anti-disinformation measures and fosters address through the Code's Permanent Task-force, which convenes industry and non-industry players in a shared dialogue on monitoring, rapid response, and methodology.
Possible lines of improvement: Some major platforms have lowered their level of subscription in critical areas like political ads and fact-checking.
- ⇒ [European Digital Media Observatory \(EDMO\)](#)
Brief description and analysis: EDMO supports collaboration among fact-checkers, researchers, and media literacy experts to detect, analyze, and counter disinformation. It thus aligns with the demands of accountability by address by bringing diverse stakeholders into a cooperative process, while also supporting answerability by equipping policymakers with data-driven insights to identify disinformation actors.
Possible lines of improvement: Ongoing and open instrument. Need to monitor how it might evolve.

Challenge: Strengthening Legal Defenses

- ⇒ Digital Services Act (DSA)
[EUR-Lex: Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2065](#)
Brief description and analysis: The DSA creates a comprehensive set of obligations for online intermediaries (including social media). Key provisions require platforms to remove illegal content swiftly, disclose algorithmic decision-making information, and provide transparent reporting. Because platforms must justify content moderation, the DSA can enhance answerability. To the extent that it promotes the involvement of civil society and experts in defining systemic risks, it can also support accountability by address.
Possible lines of improvement: Future developments might need to consider how smaller Member States or lesser-known platforms may face resource constraints, possibly leading to uneven application.
- ⇒ Anti-SLAPP Directive
[Directive \(EU\) 2024/1069](#)
Brief description and analysis: In response to the rise of *Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation* (SLAPPs), the Directive EU aims to protect journalists and activists from abusive legal action. This action is important to advance answerability by deterring frivolous or intimidating lawsuits, thus preserving a robust “watchdog” function for journalists, activists, and other public participants.
Possible lines of improvement: The Directive is mainly focused on cross-border matters, potentially leaving a gap for purely domestic intimidation tactics. Overall, it reduces the chilling effect caused by strategic litigation but could be

enhanced as concerns its capacity to cultivate the deliberative dimensions of accountability by address.

Challenge: Promoting Media Plurality

⇒ [Media Pluralism Monitor](#) (MPM)

Brief description and analysis: The MPM evaluates the risk factors affecting media pluralism across legal, economic, and socio-political dimensions in EU Member States. By publishing annual comparative data, it contributes to answerability insofar as governments can be called out for concentrated ownership or editorial interference. It can also enhance accountability by address by sparking policy discussions on how to ensure a diversity of voices.

Possible lines of improvement: The MPM's comprehensive risk assessment serves as a catalyst for public awareness and potential stakeholder discussion. Its capacity to open up formal arena for co-creation or collaborative action could be improved

Challenge: Improving Crisis Communication

⇒ EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)

[Regulation \(EU\) 2021/836, amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU](#)

Brief description and analysis: The UCPM coordinates rapid response to large-scale disasters and includes communication guidelines for effective outreach during crises. This mechanism can enhance answerability in so far as public officials must provide clear updates and justifications for emergency measures. It can also sustain accountability by address by engaging multiple stakeholders (local authorities, NGOs, EU agencies) in coordinated messaging.

Possible lines of improvement: While robust for large-scale events, day-to-day crisis communication remains a Member State responsibility, possibly leading to high levels of heterogeneity.

⇒ [Finland's "Whole-of-Society" Crisis Communication](#)

Brief description and analysis: Finland's model integrates government agencies, local communities, and civil society to ensure transparent and inclusive crisis messaging. This strengthens address by welcoming public input and answerability by requiring officials to clearly communicate decisions and emergency measures.

Possible lines of improvement: Local cultural factors (e.g., high trust in institutions) may not translate easily to other contexts across EU Member states.

Challenge: Reaching Diverse Audiences

⇒ ["Media Literacy for All" Programme](#)

Brief description and analysis: Including calls and funded pilot projects under Digital Europe / Creative Europe, this is a series of EU-funded actions aimed at improving critical thinking and media literacy skills among diverse demographic groups. We can thus notice a commitment to enhancing accountability by address, by empowering citizens (especially younger or marginalized groups) to engage critically with media.

Possible lines of improvement: Projects depend on local educational contexts for implementation. Disparities in digital infrastructure can hamper effectiveness in underserved regions.

- ⇒ Germany's "Integration Through Media" Approach
[Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration](#)
Brief description and analysis: German public broadcasters, government agencies, and civil society groups produce multilingual content to reach migrant and minority audiences. This initiative can foster answerability practices by providing clear information on rights and responsibilities, and address by involving community representatives in content decisions.
Possible lines of improvement: Success requires continuous funding and political backing. Varying public attitudes toward migrant integration may impact the program's reach and reception in other Member States.

Challenge: Facilitating Co-Creation

- ⇒ [MediaFutures](#)
Brief description and analysis: MediaFutures is a data-driven hub funded within Horizon 2020, bringing together startups, artists, and media organizations to co-create new forms of media content. Through open calls, MediaFutures has funded collaborative projects that experiment with data journalism, interactive storytelling, and audience engagement practices. By supporting projects that rely on open or transparent data, MediaFutures has encouraged media creators to justify sources, methods, and editorial choices. This is important to empower audiences and peer collaborators to question or validate contents, thus contributing to holding creators answerable. Moreover, via collaborative Project Design, artists, startups, and media organizations could work together from the concept stage, promoting joint ownership of content ideas. This can foster accountability as address by sustaining a dialogical approach wherein traditional media actors and citizens (via open hackathons, feedback sessions) co-produce editorial visions.
Possible lines of improvement: Funded projects have been small-scale and time-limited pilots or prototypes. Institutional structures that can sustain these collaborations in the long run could be necessary to foster ongoing and lasting dialogue.
- ⇒ Engaged Journalism Accelerator ([European Journalism Centre](#))
Brief description and analysis: The Engaged Journalism Accelerator (launched in 2018 with support from the News Integrity Initiative) provided funding, mentoring, and knowledge-sharing to European news organizations that explicitly involve their communities in shaping editorial content. Although now archived, it remains a reference for co-created journalism. By requiring participating outlets to show how audiences influence story angles and produce content, the Accelerator forced newsrooms to justify editorial decisions publicly, thus enhancing transparency in line with accountability as answerability.
Possible lines of improvement: Many engaged-journalism initiatives rely on grant funding or philanthropic support. The investment of public resources could sustain deep co-creation processes over time.

⇒ [Media Councils' Joint Guidelines on Audience Engagement](#), European Federation of Journalists (e.g., [Press Council of Ireland](#)).

Brief description and analysis: Some European press and media councils have encouraged interactive editorial processes and more robust complaints and feedback mechanisms, so that audiences become active participants in media oversight and content refinement. These practices can enhance answerability by openly publishing guidelines for receiving public feedback—on factual errors or editorial bias. In rulings or statements on complaints, the emphasis is often on conversation and consensus-building (e.g., encouraging voluntary changes to editorial practice) rather than punitive measures, which fosters a more interactive, deliberative approach as required by accountability by address.

Possible lines of improvement: Outlets not participating are not subject to these co-creation-friendly norms, limiting widespread adoption.

⇒ [People's Voice Media](#) (Community Reporting)

Brief description and analysis: People's Voice Media is a charity that trains and supports “community reporters”—local residents who learn basic journalism and storytelling skills to co-create local media content. Though primarily UK-focused, it has partnered with EU organizations on pilot projects to replicate community reporting models elsewhere in Europe. Such kind of practices can sustain accountability by offering a direct platform for marginalized voices. By equipping community members to produce stories themselves, local institutions (e.g., councils, service providers) face direct questions and must offer explanations for policies or community issues, thus directly engaging in answerability practices. Moreover, reports often appear on shared digital platforms, inviting real-time feedback and requiring local stakeholders to justify or respond to the issues highlighted. The co-creative approach sustains accountability by address because it treats community reporters as co-authors with professional journalists or trainers, nurturing shared decision-making about story selection, angle, and language thus nurturing a more collaborative editorial culture.

Possible lines of improvement: Community reporting is by its nature hyperlocal, limiting how these narratives influence broader regional or national media agendas.

How could existing accountability measures to counteract media system fragilities be improved?

These measures aim to address multiple facets of democratic fragility in the European media ecosystem by enhancing both **answerability**—through transparent regulation, reporting obligations, and legal frameworks—and various forms of **address**—via participatory, co-creative processes that engage citizens and stakeholders in shared decision-making.

However, **implementation gaps**, **resource constraints**, and **varying political will** across Member States remain persistent challenges. **Participatory** or **co-creative** models demand significant **institutional buy-in** and robust **public engagement** to move from pilot phases to long-term, structural improvements

4.2. Democratic Governance

Challenge: Strengthening Citizens' Trust and Institutional Trustworthiness

⇒ [European Democracy Action Plan](#) (2020)

Brief description and analysis: Adopted in December 2020, the European Democracy Action Plan aims to strengthen citizens' trust in democratic processes by enhancing media freedom, pluralism, and fair electoral conditions. It also supports civic education initiatives and proposes actions to counter disinformation. It can sustain institutional trustworthiness by enhancing accountability by answerability because it encourages public officials and institutions to justify and communicate their decisions clearly, for instance, through improved transparency of political advertising and campaign financing. Citizens' trust can be upheld via accountability by address because the Plan promotes inclusive dialogue with citizens and civil society when shaping policy responses to misinformation and election integrity, reinforcing a shared responsibility for safeguarding democracy.

Possible lines of improvement: By its very design, the Plan primarily sets policy goals. It remains to be seen how far it can support direct citizen co-authorship of official decisions (possibly in concert with other instruments).

⇒ [Swiss Direct Democracy Tools](#) (Referendums and Popular Initiatives)

Brief description and analysis: Switzerland's system of direct democracy grants citizens the right to propose new legislation ("popular initiative") and challenge parliamentary acts ("facultative referendum"). These tools aimed to maximize citizen inclusiveness in governance thus backing trust by ensuring the public has a direct say in shaping or blocking laws. In fact, in the most recent (2019-2022) OECD "[Trust in Government scores](#)," Switzerland occupies the first position, with 84% of its citizens reporting to trust their national government. The Swiss democratic system can be seen to sustain accountability by answerability because local, cantonal, and federal authorities must publicly explain and justify their positions on proposed citizen initiatives or referendums before they go to a popular vote. Moreover, by empowering citizens to co-author legislation through popular initiatives, Switzerland embodies a dialogical form of accountability by address—policymakers must respond directly to citizen-authored proposals, fostering shared responsibility.

Possible lines of improvement: The Swiss system promotes inclusiveness as citizens can propose or vote on measures. However, it should also be noted that the process often remains an up-or-down ballot choice rather than a sustained, co-created dialogue on policy details.

Challenge: Enhancing Anti-Corruption Measures

⇒ [EU legislation on anticorruption](#)

Brief description and analysis: Overall, the EU anti-corruption agenda—culminating in the 2023 [Proposed Directive to Tackle Corruption](#)—seeks to unify and modernize existing rules, covering broader definitions of corruption, setting consistent sanctions, and emphasizing prevention. From an accountability lens, answerability is sought by strengthening mandatory [transparency](#), unified definitions, and reporting obligations. Institutions/officials face heightened

pressure to explain or justify anti-corruption strategies and to publish data on prosecutions/outcomes. Accountability by address can be sustained via recommended dialogues with civil society, specialized bodies, and new frameworks for stakeholder participation (e.g., risk assessments, anticorruption strategies).

Possible lines of improvement: Most measures remain consultative; they encourage but do not enforce permanent co-creation or co-decision with citizens..

⇒ [Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP)

Brief description and analysis: The OGP is a global initiative, with multiple European countries participating. It supports the creation of National Action Plans wherein governments co-create commitments with civil society to improve transparency, prevent corruption, and foster accountability. Many European governments (e.g., France, Germany, Italy) have included specific targets on anti-corruption frameworks. Because governments must publicly report on progress made in each Action Plan, each milestone and outcome can be scrutinized by civil society, compelling official explanation for successes or delays (answerability). The requirement to co-develop action plans with stakeholder groups gives citizens and NGOs an active voice in shaping anti-corruption norms, reflecting shared ownership (address).

Possible lines of improvement: Deeper institutional redesign might be limited to advisory roles.

Challenge: Adapting Governance Structures to Societal Changes

⇒ [Fit for Future Platform](#) (2021-2024)

Brief description and analysis: The Fit for Future Platform was an expert group advising the European Commission on ways to simplify EU laws and adapt them to changing social and technological contexts. It gathered input from stakeholders, including public authorities, civil society, and businesses, to propose regulatory updates that respond to citizens' evolving needs. It was inspired by answerability because it published feedback and reasoned assessments, thereby making visible how institutional frameworks were being revised to address new challenges and why certain proposals were accepted or rejected. It was also sustained by a commitment to enhancing address by inviting a range of experts and citizens' representative to collaborate on potential regulatory improvements.

Possible lines of improvement: It would be interesting to see how this action can inspire future initiatives concerning institutionalized actions that can enhance the shared ownership dimension.

⇒ Canada's Digital Government Strategy: [Digital Operations Strategic Plan](#) (2021-2024)

Brief description and analysis: As an international example of good practice, the Canada's Digital Operations Strategic Plan outlined how federal agencies could modernize governance through open data, digital services, and citizen-centric design, aiming to ensure institutions adapt swiftly to evolving social and technological needs. The Plan had a commitment to enhancing government's answerability by asking departments to publicly report on digital service

progress—explaining new service designs and showing how they meet citizen needs. The framework also encouraged co-design with users (citizens and businesses) through consultation and pilot programs, embedding a dialogical ethos in policy formulation and digital tool creation (accountability via address). *Possible lines of improvement:* Taking inspiration from this Plan would require thinking of institutionally sustained and integrated measures to allow citizens and civil society groups not only to offer feedback, but have a direct voice in decision-making.

Challenge: Reinforcing Checks and Balances

- ⇒ [Rule of Law Report](#) (European Commission)
Brief description and analysis: The annual Rule of Law Report outlines the state of judicial independence, checks and balances, and institutional safeguards in EU Member States. It includes recommendations for reforms to strengthen independent courts and responsive parliaments. Answerability is sought by asking national institutions to explain how they address the Commission's concerns about judicial independence or parliamentary oversight. Also it embeds a concern for accountability by address because it engages with civil society groups for input. This can foster a dialogical dimension, encouraging these groups to shape the conversation on national checks and balances.
Possible lines of improvement: By its nature, the report primarily identifies deficits and suggests improvements. A gap that it can help to fill is the active promotion of a general culture that can sustain co-decision with citizens or national parliaments in implementing recommended reforms.
- ⇒ [World Justice Project – Rule of Law Index](#)
Brief description and analysis: The World Justice Project (WJP) annually publishes a global index assessing countries' adherence to rule-of-law principles, such as judicial independence, checks on government powers, and open government. This comparative index can illuminate areas where independent courts and balanced governance need strengthening. The Index can be used to enhance accountability (in either form) as civil society organizations, think tanks, and policymakers can use the findings to initiate dialogue on reform strategies.
Possible lines of improvement: By its nature, the Index identifies what is lacking in terms of checks and balances. Further efforts might be necessary to lead to institutional reforms.

Challenge: Improving EU Legitimacy

- ⇒ European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) – [Revised Regulation \(EU\) 2019/788](#)
Brief description and analysis: The ECI allows EU citizens to propose legislation directly to the European Commission, thus collaboratively shaping the EU agenda. The regulation, in force since 2020, simplifies signature collection and broadens digital tools, aiming to enhance the EU's democratic legitimacy. It can sustain answerability because, when an initiative meets the required threshold, the Commission is obliged to publicly respond, explaining the reasons for advancing or not advancing the proposal. Also, it can uphold accountability by

address as citizens across Member States can have a say on potential EU legislation, forging a shared sense of ownership over policy ideas.

Possible lines of improvement: Further simplifications to facilitate the use of this mechanism could be desirable.

⇒ [Public Consultations and Feedback](#)

Brief description and analysis: The European Commission's single online portal for public consultations and feedback on new initiatives. Through this platform, citizens, businesses, and civil society organizations can provide comments and feedback on EU legislative proposals and policy initiatives at various stages of the law-making process. The portal also hosts public consultations on upcoming or ongoing legislative acts, enabling the Commission to gather broader input from multiple stakeholders. Answerability is sought by having the Commission and relevant Directorate-Generals publicly respond to or at least acknowledge feedback. Also, the platform's transparency (e.g., publication of non-confidential feedback, summary of consultation outcomes) helps people see how the Commission has considered or incorporated comments.

Possible lines of improvement: Because the Commission must summarize large volumes of feedback, detailed explanations of why certain ideas are adopted or rejected can be challenging. Also, some could find the process too technical.

⇒ [Together for Democracy](#)

Brief description and analysis: This is an interactive space for citizens to voice their views on EU policies, discuss proposals in online forums, and participate in virtual workshops or events. The Commission uses these inputs to gauge public sentiment on proposals—ranging from social policy to environmental legislation—and potentially incorporate them before formal drafting. Accountability, in either form of answerability and address, is sustained by a process in which Commission representatives or MEPs are expected to clarify aspects of proposed legislation in real time, responding to user questions or criticisms. Publicly available Q&A threads can also enhance transparency (answerability). An important aspect for accountability by address is that the platform fosters a continuous conversation, allowing participants to co-shape or refine initial policy ideas.

Gaps and limits: The digital space where discussions occur might only include populations with higher digital literacy or secure internet access. Complementary offline or hybrid channels could counteract the impact of social inequalities on political participation.

How could existing measures to counteract fragilities in democratic governance be improved?

While not all measures discussed in this section were designed with the explicit aim of enhancing accountability, they can be helpful insofar as they can sustain the duty to respond for decision-making (answerability) or a collaborative, co-creative engagement with citizens (address).

Besides these measures, there is gap concerning structural guarantees for systematic citizen co-decision or direct, continuous oversight. This would require broader **institutional reforms** that go beyond specific voluntary measures.

4.3. Citizens Engagement

Challenge: Enhancing Public Support for Democratic Innovations

⇒ [Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies](#)

Brief description and analysis: Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies bring randomly selected citizens together to deliberate on complex issues (e.g., abortion, climate action, gender equality). They submit recommendations to Parliament, which then debates and may implement them. Accountability is sought via answerability mechanisms: for example, parliament and government must publicly explain (in formal debate and documentation) why they accept or reject each recommendation. Recommendations reflect shared decision-making engagement among citizens and officials rather than top-down instructions (accountability by address).

Possible lines of improvement: Transition from recommendations to legislation can dilute the direct authorship role of citizens.

⇒ [Danish Board of Technology](#) – “Consensus Conferences”

Brief description and analysis: The Danish Board of Technology pioneered “consensus conferences” on emerging technological or societal issues (e.g., GMOs, AI). These randomly selected citizen panels consult experts, deliberate, and publish collective statements. Answerability is visible in mechanisms for policymakers and experts to respond publicly to the panel's final statements, clarifying how these insights shape (or do not shape) official policy. Opportunities for address characterizes the entire process in which citizens, experts, and policymakers engage in co-framing the issue, learning together, and co-creating final policy suggestions.

Possible lines of improvement: Conferences typically address specific policy or technology concerns, so the collaborative dynamic may not spread to other legislative areas.

⇒ [Healthy Democracy](#)

Brief description and analysis: Among the many projects and participatory initiatives, the [Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review](#) set the blueprint. A demographically balanced citizen panel reviews state ballot measures, deliberates with experts, and composes a factual summary (“Citizens' Statement”) for all voters, enhancing citizenship engagement in direct-democracy processes. Answerability is promoted by the provision that the official Voters' Pamphlet includes the citizen panel's statement, compelling ballot-measure sponsors and government officials to address or respond to the panel's key findings. Accountability by address is evidently reflected in the design of the initiative that makes citizen reviewers co-producers of official electoral information, shaping the broader public discourse around referendum issues through a transparent, deliberative process. This model has also informed the Swiss experience within the [Demoscan](#) project.

Possible lines of improvement: There is still a limited spread of such mechanisms especially at the EU level, while local projects are flourishing throughout members states (especially through local [deliberative mini publics](#)).

Challenge: Balancing Representative and Participatory Mechanisms

- ⇒ Belgian Permanent Citizens' Dialogue on Institutional Reforms (see [CitizenLab Analysis](#))
Brief description and analysis: The Belgian Federal Parliament sustains a permanent mixed commission, composed of MPs and randomly selected citizens, to debate and shape future reforms of state structures. Accountability-enhancing explanatory dynamics are implemented in a process throughout which elected officials in the commission must articulate their stances within a public forum, justifying any divergences from citizens' inputs.
Possible lines of improvement: A current gap concerns the development of shared good practices to improve role clarity.
- ⇒ Germany's "[Bürgerrat Demokratie](#)" (Citizens' Council on Democracy)
Brief description and analysis: A large-scale citizens' council convened to explore how Germany's democracy could be strengthened, culminating in recommendations delivered to the *Bundestag*. The Council's participants were randomly selected, ensuring representativeness. Accountability links between representative government and citizens participatory initiatives is sustained by parliamentary committees and party representatives responding to the Council's proposals in documented hearings or statements, clarifying rationales for acceptance or rejection.
Possible lines of improvement: Clear answerability mechanisms and a widespread accountability culture among members of parliament could corroborate citizen-institution interplay beyond initial consultation.
- ⇒ Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Electoral Reform ([Victoria Law Reform Commission](#), Australia)
Brief description and analysis: An independently facilitated citizen jury was convened to propose ways to balance direct citizen input and representative institutions in local electoral processes. The Electoral Commission publicly addressed the jury's findings, explaining the legal and logistical feasibility of each recommended change, thus upholding transparency of the process (answerability). Jury members and commission officials co-examined potential reforms, encouraging a synergy between administrative expertise and grassroots perspective (address).
Possible lines of improvement: Taking the cue from this international experience, the implementation of such a mechanism at the EU level would require more political integration among Member States.

Challenge: Strengthening Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship

- ⇒ [EU Youth Dialogue](#) (2022–2027)
Brief description and analysis: The EU Youth Dialogue is a structured process bringing young people and policymakers together across Europe to discuss and shape policies affecting youth. It is part of the broader EU Youth Strategy, aiming to build awareness of democratic values, civic engagement, and responsible participation. Dialogues encourage transparent feedback where EU officials clarify the rationale behind adopting or not adopting specific youth proposals (answerability). Interactive accountability practices of address can be

seen in the efforts to shape a process in which youth views are not just “heard,” but actively shape new initiatives.

Possible lines of improvement: While strong on youth input, the Dialogue outcomes rely on subsequent political endorsement. When the endorsement is partial, continuous co-ownership of policy might be weakened.

⇒ Finland's National “[Democracy Project](#)”

Brief description and analysis: Finland's government invests in democracy education by training teachers, funding civic tech tools, and supporting youth councils in municipalities. The program aims to embed active citizenship early on in citizens' training. By equipping students with the knowledge and channels to question public officials, the initiative sustains citizens' power and capacity to hold officeholders to answer for their decisions.

Possible lines of improvement: The extension of such an initiative on a larger scale requires ensuring the continuity of student-to-institution dialogues.

⇒ UNESCO's “[Global Citizenship Education](#)” (GCED)

Brief description and analysis: The program advocates civic education that fosters critical thinking, respect for diversity, and a commitment to human rights globally. It encourages cross-cultural projects, teacher training, and policy guidance to integrate democratic participation skills into school curricula. Students' capacity to engage in answerability practices is sustained by equipping them with a stronger grasp of governance and civic right. Classroom debates, global school partnerships, and community projects form the GCED accountability ethos in the interactive terms of a co-creative process of address.

Possible lines of improvement: Where direct links to actual governance or youth-led policy input are missing, the potential for continuous co-creative accountability can remain underdeveloped (see also the broader [Youth 2030 UN Strategy](#)).

Challenge: Incorporating Emotional Dimensions in Policymaking

⇒ [French Citizens' Convention on Climate](#) (2020–2021)

Brief description and analysis: This convention explored the emotional and behavioral barriers to climate action, with 150 randomly selected citizens co-writing climate policy proposals, factoring in public anxieties about economic disruptions. The distinguishing feature of this initiative is the engagement with citizens' emotional testimonies and personal experiences about lifestyle changes, which shaped the final policy recommendations.

Possible lines of improvement: The role of emotions in politics is still surrounded with some concerns, as they are often contrasted with the rationality supposedly characterizing collective decision-making processes. Therefore, even in this case, while the emotional dimension was recognized in the final proposals, actual legislative adoption sometimes omitted or softened those affective elements.

Challenge: Enhancing National Responsibility for Political Choices Amid EU Constraints

⇒ COSAC ([Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs](#))

Brief description and analysis: COSAC is a framework bringing together representatives of national parliaments' EU Affairs Committees and Members of the European Parliament to discuss EU legislation, policies, and the political direction of the Union. It provides a structured platform where national-level parliamentary voices meet EU-level representatives to deliberate on shared challenges. Answerability is sought because COSAC sessions prompt Member States' representatives in Council or Commission officials to explain ongoing legislative proposals. National MPs can question how these EU decisions constrain or influence national policies, and then hold their own governments to account domestically. By demanding clarity on both EU and national responsibilities, it aims to clarify for citizens (through parliamentary communication) why certain compromises are needed or how constraints shape policy choices.

Possible lines of improvement: COSAC improves dialogue and mutual understanding; its co-creative power requires robust follow-up to COSAC insights.

Challenge: Acknowledging Historical Influences on Political Culture

⇒ [The House of European History](#) (HEH)

Brief description and analysis: Managed under the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Communication, the HEH is an EU-backed museum and educational center in Brussels, dedicated to exploring Europe's past—from wars and ideological conflicts to the founding of the EU. By highlighting historical turning points, the HEH aims to foster a shared European memory that informs citizens about how historical legacies continue to shape present-day political culture. In policy terms, EU officials can reference the HEH's materials to explain the rationale for certain integrative or democratic safeguards. Also, the HEH hosts interactive events, lectures, and debates that bring together citizens, historians, and policymakers, thus encouraging a dialogical exploration of how historical narratives inform contemporary policy decisions.

Possible lines of improvement: Although the HEH engages the public on historical roots of modern governance, it primarily functions as a cultural and educational institution, whose impact on day-to-day policy is still limited.

⇒ Poland's "[European Network Remembrance and Solidarity](#)" (ENRS)

Brief description and analysis: The ENRS fosters cooperation between European countries on research and remembrance of 20th-century dictatorships, conflicts, and transitions, with Poland as an active participant. Public events link historical understanding to present democratic resilience. Activities prompt participants to explain how their national institutions incorporate historical lessons into current policy frameworks—for instance, referencing past authoritarianism to justify new civic safeguards. Address is encouraged across a variety of actors including historians, policymakers, and citizens to co-create narratives about shared pasts and forge a sense of collective responsibility for a democratic political culture. *Possible lines of improvement:* Given the nature of this cultural initiative, research outputs and memorial activities might not systematically feed into legislative or administrative reforms. There is a risk that historical insights remain symbolic rather than consistently embedded in policy-making processes.

How can accountability measures to counteract fragilities in citizens' engagement be improved?

Current initiatives illustrate diverse efforts to strengthen citizens' engagement across Europe and internationally, each addressing a distinct **accountability deficit**—whether about public support for innovations, balancing representation and citizens' direct participation, civic education, policy-responsiveness to emotional dimensions, national ownership vis-à-vis supranational constraints, or historical legacies.

They can favor **answerability** by expanding and enhancing the channels through which authorities publicly respond to citizen-driven deliberations or project outcomes, revealing how and why decisions align (or not) with public input. They can also sustain accountability by **address** when citizens share in framing solutions, forging an enduring dialogical space.

However, the current landscape could be improved enhancing the **translation** of such discrete engagements into **systemic institutional reforms**. These are important to ensure that interactive processes of co-creation become embedded in the daily operations and feed into a generalized democratic political culture.

4.4. Populism and Other Democracy's Drifts

Challenge: Fostering Reflective Discourse and Positive Political Narratives

⇒ [“Europe Talks”](#) – Pan-European Citizen Dialogues

Brief description and analysis: Collaborating with various European media outlets, Europe Talks is a digital platform that pairs citizens from different European countries with opposing viewpoints to have one-on-one video discussions on polarizing topics (migration, climate, EU integration). It aligns with an accountability-driven approach to counteract democratic drifts because it aims to foster reflective discourse and personal encounters that can reduce antagonism.

Possible lines of improvement: While the dialogues stimulate personal transformation, positive narratives can remain confined to individual experiences especially if policy channels do not actively adopt them as part of official consultations.

Challenge: Contextualizing Reactions to Populism and Conspiracy Theories

⇒ [EU vs Disinfo](#) – European External Action Service (EEAS)

Brief description and analysis: EU vs Disinfo is the flagship initiative of the East StratCom Task Force, aiming to identify and debunk disinformation targeting the EU. It acknowledges different national contexts, focusing on region-specific false narratives, including conspiracy theories about EU institutions. By inviting explanations of the factual basis behind policy decisions, the initiative aims to foster a culture where institutions provide clear rationales for contentious issues, enhancing answerability and reducing the vacuum exploited by populist and conspiracy rhetoric. The initiative also collaborates with local media and civil society to adapt communication strategies to specific country contexts. This co-

designed approach contributes to make the fight against conspiracy theories resonates locally, reflecting a shared accountability dynamic between EU bodies and local stakeholders.

Possible lines of improvement: Much of the measure's effort counters disinformation after it emerges. This reactive, rather than proactive, approach is sufficient to foster a factual baseline. However, it might not fully embed a permanent channel of collaborative narrative-building to preempt conspiracies.

⇒ [Canada's Digital Citizen Initiative](#) (DCI)

Brief description and analysis: The DCI provides an international example of how to support citizen awareness programs and policy dialogues to counter disinformation, conspiracy theories, and harmful online narratives. It emphasizes local cultural contexts, recognizing that conspiracy discourses vary region to region. A good accountability practice concerns funding collaborative projects between community organizations, educators, and experts, so they jointly design strategies. This local tailoring can foster a shared sense of how to confront conspiracy theories in each region's specific social context.

Possible lines of improvement: Many DCI-funded activities run for finite periods, making it challenging to sustain a continual co-creation framework that permanently integrates community feedback into national policies.

Challenge: Enhancing Community Resilience Against Extremism

⇒ Denmark's "[Aarhus Model](#)" for Preventing Radicalization

Brief description and analysis: The Aarhus Model relies on community policing, mentorship programs, and close collaboration with local religious leaders, social workers, and families to deter youth from extremist paths. It was among Europe's earliest success stories in bridging community engagement with official oversight. Because municipal authorities and police are invited to publicly explain how they tailor interventions to contexts, the initiative can contribute to promote a culture of case-by-case justification rather than blanket enforcement. Accountability by address is visible in the model's commitment to partnership: local faith leaders, educators, and law enforcement actors co-develop interventions. This aims to foster a shared sense of responsibility for community well-being, making the fight against extremism an inclusive, rather than purely top-down, strategy.

Possible lines of improvement: The scalability of the initiative beyond the local context is open to test. While the approach is laudable, replicating it in diverse regions can prove challenging if local trust at the societal level, stakeholders' commitments, or resource availability differ.

⇒ [The Strong Cities Network](#) (SCN)

Brief description and analysis: SCN is a global network of local governments united to build community resilience against extremism. It supports municipalities in developing local partnerships with faith-based groups, educators, and civil society. SCN initiatives urge municipalities to remain transparent and evidence-based, thus showing a commitment to enhance institutional answerability. A commitment to accountability by address is also visible when participating cities convene multi-stakeholder policy labs, to facilitate local religious figures, youth organizations, and educators to help shape prevention initiatives.

Possible lines of improvement: Municipalities join SCN voluntarily, which can limit the formal integration of SCN's collaborative frameworks into official urban governance.

How can existing accountability measures to counteract fragilities related to populism and other democracy's drifts be improved?

Democracy's drifts raise challenges for the development of a **political culture of accountability** requiring fostering positive rather than antagonistic narratives, tailor responses to populism/conspiracy, and building community resilience against extremism.

The initiatives mapped in this section contribute to developing this culture in two main ways. First, they promote accountability by **answerability** through encouraging transparent communication, policy justification, and open channels for critical feedback. Second, they sustain accountability by **address** via co-creative processes that unite institutions, civil society, and local communities in forming inclusive responses.

There is a gap to fill in developing proactive measures that can be institutionally sustained over time and space

4.5. The EU in the Global Context

Challenge: Enhancing Preparedness for Complex Security Risks

⇒ [The EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#)

Brief description and analysis: The Strategic Compass is a policy framework aiming to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond to evolving security threats (cyber, hybrid warfare, terrorism). It seeks to enhance strategic autonomy while coordinating with Member States' defense strategies. The [2023 Annual Progress Report](#) shows how the EU is moving to address evolving security challenges—particularly triggered by the aggression against Ukraine—using the Strategic Compass as a guiding framework. The Compass can sustain the answerability of EU action in this domain by publishing specific achievements (trainings, equipment delivered, structural changes). The address aspect of accountability emerges via expanded stakeholder dialogues, joint procurement initiatives, and collaboration with global partners.

Possible lines of improvement: Fully embedding sustained co-creation into the fast-paced defense sphere remains challenging.

⇒ [Coordinated Annual Review on Defence \(CARD\)](#)

Brief description and analysis: CARD is a systematic assessment of EU Member States' defense capabilities, identifying collaboration opportunities and gaps. It aims to synchronize national planning to respond effectively to complex security challenges. The EDA contributes to answerability practices by publishing findings on overlaps or shortfalls in Member States' defense investments.

Possible lines of improvement: CARD recommendations rely on national political willingness. This might result in partial or selective adoption, limiting the continuous dialogical creation of an integrated and mutually accountable security framework at EU level.

Challenge: Balancing Strategic Interests with Upholding Democratic Values

⇒ [EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime](#)

Brief description and analysis: This regime enables the EU to impose restrictive measures (e.g., travel bans, asset freezes) on individuals/entities responsible for serious human rights violations worldwide. The provision is sustained by an effort to balance strategic alliances with a firm stance on democratic values. The entire process shows a design sensitive to answerability standards: the EU must publicly justify why specific actors are sanctioned, ensuring a transparent listing process subject to legal scrutiny (including appeals to the EU Court). Moreover, dialogues with NGOs, human rights defenders, and Member States feed into identifying potential targets for sanctions, adding a collaborative dimension to this effort.

Possible lines of improvement: The listing process cannot be insulated from geopolitical trade-offs introducing tensions between shared value commitments and pragmatic alliances.

Challenge: Assessing Political Acceptability of Greater Cooperation

⇒ [Proposed Shift from Unanimity to Qualified Majority Voting \(QMV\) in EU Foreign Policy](#)

Brief description and analysis: A recent [report](#) addresses decision-making in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) from a “cost of non-Europe” perspective. It explores how unanimity rules can hamper EU effectiveness as a global actor and examines alternative policy options to reduce those costs, including the possibility of QMV in selected CFSP areas (e.g., sanctions, human rights statements, civilian missions). It outlines policy options—from incremental measures within existing Treaty scope to deeper Treaty changes and a more supranational CFSP model. A move toward QMV or flexible decision-making could foster answerability and open a path to more inclusive, dialogical processes (address).

Possible lines of improvement: Legitimacy concerns for outvoted Member States remain significant hurdles.

⇒ [Finland's Parliamentary Scrutiny of EU Affairs](#)

Brief description and analysis: Finland is noted for expansive parliamentary scrutiny over government's EU positions, including foreign and security matters. A feature of the parliamentary discussion process about how proposed deeper EU cooperation serves Finland's strategic interests concerns the involvement of civil society experts. This involvement aims to strengthen the mutual accountability of political action and collective ownership of any deeper EU-level commitments.

Possible lines of improvement: The robust scrutiny model can be constrained when urgent foreign policy decisions require quick consensus, limiting the extent to which the dialogical dimension can consistently operate in real-time.

How can existing accountability measures to counteract fragilities related to EU in the global context be improved?

The diverse EU-based initiatives and best practices go heavily in the direction of enhancing institutional **answerability** by compelling policymakers to justify strategic choices by parliamentary **scrutiny** or **transparent** programmatic details. A commitment to accountability by **address** also emerges when co-creation processes bring together **multiple stakeholders** (EU institutions, Member States, civil society, third-country partners) to shape or refine policy solutions in a shared, iterative manner.

Limits in the implementation of current measures stem from two main sources. One concerns **fragmented** or situational **stakeholder** involvement. The other regards the persistent **tensions** between **strategic** imperatives (economic, security) and **value-based** objectives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS. Improving responses to democratic fragilities: A public ethics of accountability

Drawing together the insights from the previous sections, this final section offers **recommendations** aimed at strengthening democracy through a robust **public ethics of accountability**. The focus is on both forms of accountability that provide the conceptual background to the entire report:

- Accountability by **answerability**, i.e. clarifying how political representatives and institutional actors respond to citizens for the outcomes of their decisions and actions.
- Accountability by **address**, i.e. ensuring that citizens, their political representatives and institutional actors respond to each other as co-authors in an inclusive process of shared decisions through reason-giving and mutual dialogue.

These recommendations span the five key fragility areas targeted on the basis of the review of projects' findings:

- 1 Media
- 2 Democratic Governance
- 3 Citizens' Engagement
- 4 Populism and Other Democracy's Drifts
- 5 The EU in the Global Context.

The twofold accountability lens has offered a unified framework for the analysis and assessment of a complex and multifaceted scenario. This is important to allow for a cohesive discussion which targets a core feature of democracy. Common cross-cutting challenges across areas include:

- insufficient institutionalization of accountability mechanisms,
- overreliance on voluntary or non-binding consultative processes, and
- the tendency to treat codes of conduct or transparency rules as mere legal formalities.

Throughout, the analysis highlights how a **political culture of accountability** must be actively fostered-through ethical training, participatory approaches, and institutional buy-in-to sustain trustful and collaborative relations among citizens and between citizens and institutions across Europe's democracies.

5.1. Common Challenges Across Fragilities and Current Gaps

Sections 3 and 4 have shown that many existing measures (legal frameworks, regulations, voluntary guidelines, or project-based initiatives) suffer from:

Fragmented or Voluntary Implementation

Several EU-level measures (like codes of practice or self-regulatory frameworks) rely on the goodwill of private actors (e.g. media platforms) or national authorities. This fragmented approach might lead to uneven coverage and ephemeral projects that end once short-term funding ends.

Limited Co-Creation

Even promising initiatives (e.g. citizen assemblies, crisis communication platforms, or institutional dialogues) often stop short of fully integrating citizens or civil society into ongoing decision-making. While measures exist to invite feedback and respond to it, they rarely institutionalize real co-decision. Also, current measures are primarily aimed at enhancing co-creative processes between citizens and institutions. A gap remains concerning actions specifically targeted to enhance collaborative processes among members of the same institution and across institutions.

Limited Use of Transparency Tools

Lobby registers, media ownership disclosures, or data portals can devolve into box-ticking if participants view them as forced formalities rather than helpful instruments. This use risks fueling cynicism rather than building institutional trustworthiness and citizen trust, especially if no internal reflection or supportive resources accompany them.

Reactive, Not Proactive

Many accountability practices focus on monitoring or sanctioning after wrongdoing occurs (e.g., disinformation, corruption, misuse of office) with limited ex-ante measures to prevent it. This fosters a perception of crisis management rather than fostering a real project for realizing an ethics of accountability within institutions.

Overlooked Emotional and Historical Dimensions

Citizens' disengagement from politics often has emotional roots (e.g., frustration, alienation), while historical legacies (e.g., authoritarian pasts) can persist and exacerbate present institutional dysfunctions. Projects mention these factors but they are seldom incorporated systematically into institutional reforms.

To address these challenges, there is a need for measures that can sustain a public ethics of accountability: a proactive, integrative approach that

- a. invests in continuous officeholders' and citizens' training;
- b. normalizes co-creation processes fostering collaboration between citizens and institutions and within as well as across institutions at various levels of decision making;
- c. broadens the use of transparency rules as supportive rather than coercive tools for political action;
- d. fosters emotional and historical awareness as part of building a shared institutional culture.

Such an approach requires:

1. **Greater institutionalization**, i.e. embedding accountability practices in statutes or official procedures (e.g., national laws, local charters, or EU regulations).
2. **Detailed guidance** on who (parliaments, ministries, local councils, media regulators, etc.) takes responsibility and how (codes of conduct, new legislation, or stable financing).
3. **Integration of best practices** from national experiences (see section 4, e.g., Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies for engagement, Finland's crisis-communication approach for media transparency, Open Government Partnership for co-designed anti-corruption programs) into mainstream policy.

5.2. Media

Institutionalize Participatory Codes of Conduct

Responsible bodies: National media regulators or press councils; major media outlets; journalist associations.

Instruments: Incorporate the approach used in, for example, *Press Councils' Joint Guidelines* (§4) – holding workshops with editors, journalists, and citizen representatives to design codes that reflect shared values, not just top-down rules.

Rationale: This fosters consensus on ethical standards and helps ensure buy-in from media professionals. The newly co-created code can become the standard reference for editorial decisions and conflict resolution.

Transform Media Literacy Programs into Ongoing Ethical Dialogues

Responsible bodies: National education ministries, local authorities, and NGOs; EU Commission under the “Media Literacy for All” initiative.

Instruments: Embedding long-term modules in school curricula and adult learning centers, plus local “media clubs” or “citizens’ dialogues” that highlight how to consume, critique, and even co-produce media content.

Reference: Finland’s “Whole-of-Society” Crisis Communication” approach (§4.1) shows how structured engagement can enhance trust and user literacy in real contexts.

Empower Press Councils to Provide Positive Support

Responsible bodies: Press councils themselves, supported by national parliaments or media regulators (via legislation or official sponsorship).

Instruments: Expand beyond sanction-based approaches to include mentoring, training, and technical resources so that news outlets can adopt better fact-checking methods.

Reference: Some elements in the Media Councils’ Joint Guidelines could be scaled up with more formal institutional support to unify best practices for press autonomy and accountability.

5.3. Democratic Governance

Expand Co-Created Codes of Office

Responsible bodies: National parliaments, city councils, or executive agencies.

Instruments: Formal adoption of “Codes of Office” through local or national legislative acts, co-created with civil society and professional associations.

Rationale: Move away from purely top-down compliance. By referencing Open Government Partnership experiences (§4.2), these codes can detail ethical principles and conflict-of-interest management, with a sense of “co-ownership” by officeholders.

Integrate Ethical Training into Civil Service and Political Onboarding

Responsible bodies: National civil service training institutes, political parties, and specialized NGO trainers.

Instruments: Official on-the-job training modules integrated into annual civil service performance reviews or mandatory political party induction programs.

Reference: The European Democracy Action Plan (§4.2) underscores the importance of reinforcing trust in institutions; these programs can use that framework to ensure long-term capacity-building.

Co-Created Anti-Corruption Strategies

Responsible bodies: National anti-corruption agencies (where they exist) and relevant ministries, in tandem with civil society (see, e.g., RespOND and BRIDGEGAP projects' findings).

Instruments: Draft and update corruption-risk indicators (§4.2) in legally binding national strategies, using multi-stakeholder working groups.

Rationale: This complements existing top-down rules by ensuring a shared project, e.g., a publicly accessible "Anti-Corruption Dashboard" for real-time risk monitoring.

5.4. Citizens' Engagement

Institutionalize Deliberative Processes

Responsible bodies: National or regional parliaments, local councils.

Instruments: Legislation or internal regulations (like "Parliamentary Standing Orders for Citizen Deliberation"), modeled after Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies or the Danish Consensus Conferences (§4.3).

Rationale: Guarantee these minipublics occur regularly for high-impact legislation, with official channels for governments to publicly respond to their recommendations.

Strengthen Civic Education as a Two-Way Process

Responsible bodies: Education ministries, local school boards, youth organizations.

Instruments: Officially embed civic and democratic training in secondary curricula, plus co-run "mock assemblies" or "youth councils" in collaboration with local government.

Reference: Finland's Democracy Project or UN Youth Agenda 2030 approach to fostering youth-led dialogues can serve as a blueprint.

Encourage Co-Creation Tools for Digital Participation

Responsible bodies: Local and national governments with the EU Commission's "eParticipation" programs, financed via e.g. CERV or Digital Europe.

Instruments: Provide stable funding to scale up platforms akin to the Co-Inform or MediaFutures pilot programs (§ 4.1, 4.3), ensuring that digitally crowdsourced proposals gain actual policy traction (e.g., partial binding rules on budgeting or local ordinance drafting).

Address Emotional Dimensions in Public Engagement

Responsible bodies: Civil society organizations, local governments, social psychologists or conflict-mediation experts.

Instruments: Incorporate "emotional literacy" or "community empathy" modules into training for local civil servants, referencing experiences like those implemented in projects MORES or PLEDGE which highlight moral-emotional aspects of politics.

Rationale: This approach can help local councils or parliaments address citizens’ frustration or mistrust more empathetically, thus fostering deeper collaboration.

5.5. Populism and Other Democracy’s Drifts

Tailor Responses to Populism via Local Partnerships

Responsible bodies: National or regional authorities, local NGOs, educators.

Instruments: Officially recognized partnership agreements to design local strategies that specifically address misinformation and alienation.

Reference: PaCE or DEMOS projects’ findings show that local involvement is key in deflating populist narratives from the ground up.

Build Community Resilience with Sustained Anti-Extremism Frameworks

Responsible bodies: Municipal or regional councils, law enforcement agencies, specialized social workers.

Instruments: Multi-year frameworks or “City Security & Resilience Charters” that include ongoing funding for religious leaders’ dialogues, community policing, or counseling for at-risk youth.

Reference: PAVE project findings’ underscore that short-run programs are less effective if not structurally embedded. Over time, communities become co-responsible for prevention, bridging potential mistrust.

5.6. The EU in the Global Context

Strengthen Preparedness for Complex Security Risks through Transparent Benchmarks

Responsible bodies: EU Commission (DG DEFIS, DG HOME, DG ECHO), European External Action Service (EEAS), Member States’ defense ministries.

Instruments: Publish official readiness/procurement/training targets derived from the Strategic Compass, referencing good practices from CARD or EU Rapid Deployment Capacity frameworks (§4.5).

Rationale: With clear numerical goals or timelines, national parliaments and EU-level bodies can hold security actors answerable if they underperform.

Balancing Strategic Interests and Democratic Values

Responsible bodies: EEAS, the Council, European Parliament (especially AFET Committee).

Instruments: Strengthen or expand existing dialogues—like the Rule of Law Report approach but for external relations.

Rationale: By requiring consistent rationales for exempting or sanctioning third states, the EU ensures that realpolitik does not overshadow the EU’s democratic commitments.

Assessing Political Acceptability of Greater Cooperation

Responsible bodies: Council of the EU, national parliaments (for CFSP matters), Commission’s legal services.

Instruments: Provide robust “emergency brake” clauses so that states can request deeper scrutiny if vital interests are at stake.

Rationale: Minimizing indefinite vetoes fosters timely joint EU actions, but preserving some national prerogatives ensures broader buy-in.

5.7. General summary recommendations for a political culture of accountability

Co-Created Codes of Conduct as “Institutional Identity Cards”

Instead of top-down rulebooks, each institution (media outlets, parliaments, executive agencies, etc.) should be encouraged to develop living “Codes of Office” that articulate mission, values, and practical commitments via internal but publicly answerable deliberative process.

Ethical Training for Both Officeholders and Citizens

Create or expand “Ethics Induction” for elected representatives, civil servants, and media professionals, including ethical leadership modules centered on accountability ethics. In parallel, incorporate a stronger “public ethics” component into secondary or adult life-learning civic education, teaching citizens how to read transparency data or use complaint channels effectively.

Transparency as Support, Not Surveillance

Reframe registers, disclosures, and reporting obligations so that actors see them as helpful in identifying conflict-of-interest, assessing risks for corruption, or addressing pressures from lobbying. Dedicated support staff or units within institutions should be created to help individuals who sense a risk of corruption, undue pressure, or drifting from the code. Safe internal whistleblowing channels can also sustain accountability efforts.

Institutionalizing Reflection and Revision

To keep codes or training from becoming inert, require regular reflection sessions where staff and external stakeholders can revise guidelines and practices if they prove ineffective or outdated. Such outlets are important to encourage open debate on the “point” of each institution’s joint mission, fostering a collectively-held sense of contributing to a shared and living project.

6. CONCLUSION

This report's analyses and recommendations are informed by a wide range of EU-funded Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects that illuminate the complexities of Europe's democratic landscape and the main fragilities it is currently facing.

In the area of **media**, research from Co-Inform, DE-CONSPIRATOR, EUMEPLAT, COVINFORM, MeDeMAP, and PRODEMINFO shed light on misinformation threats and ways to strengthen pluralism.

Studies on **democratic governance** by TRUEDEM, RESPOND, BRIDGEGAP, Governance, FASDEM, EU3D, TiGRE, and EnTrust examine institutional dysfunctions and accountability deficits.

Efforts to boost **citizens' engagement**, drawing on NEW_DEMOCRACY, CUREORCURSE, VoiCED, DEMOCRAT, MORES, PLEDGE, EUDEMOS, RECONNECT, REDEMOS, and COMLIB, highlight how education, emotional dimensions, and historical legacies affect political and social participation.

With respect to **populism and other democracy's drifts**, Anti-pop, PACT, AoD, PaCE, DEMOS, PAVE, and POPREBEL investigate the rise of populist and protest movements, extremist threats, and civic resilience.

Finally, **EU in the global context** research from EU-STRAT, JOINT, and EU-LISTCO address the challenges of foreign policy fragmentation and preparedness for emerging security risks.

Collectively, these projects' insights offer fundamental insights for the core analyses and recommendations of this report, which underscores the urgency of embedding a public ethics of accountability across all levels of European democracy.

In fact, as the theoretical set up of the report has presented, a robust democracy requires at its core that citizens and institutions alike understand and practice **accountability** in both of the following senses:

- (1) as the duty to provide explanations and remain transparent about performance (accountability by **answerability**),
- (2) as a joint project where citizens and public servants feel co-responsible for shaping the rules and norms that govern their polity (accountability by **address**).

Accountability-enhancing measures, initiatives, and good practices already exist in the EU and internationally across the five key fragility areas concerned by this report—media, democratic governance, citizens' engagement, democracy's drifts, and the EU in the global context. However, many remain short-lived pilots, highly dependent on voluntary adherence or limited to top-down compliance approaches.

Strengthening democracy by counteracting current fragilities thus requires revised actions that can ground and spread a commitment to a public ethics of accountability.

The report has identified the following strategic areas of revision and reform:

- A. **Deeper Institutionalization**: Provide the legal frameworks, stable funding, accessibility programs, and recurring procedures to ensure accountability is not situational or erratic, but permanent and inclusive.

- B. **Expanded Co-Creation:** Encourage genuine partnerships within and between national and EU institutions with civil society, local communities, and citizens, from developing professional codes of conduct to legislative drafting.
- C. **Active Ethical Training:** Build an institutional environment where ethical codes are discussed, revised, and internalized by officeholders, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for institutional functioning.
- D. **Reframing Transparency:** Treat data or mandatory disclosures as constructive tools to detect vulnerabilities and help those at risk—rather than solely punishing wrongdoing.
- E. **Holistic Perspective:** Acknowledge emotional drivers, historical legacies, and the interplay between local and EU-level politics to address root causes of citizens' alienation, distrust, and polarization.

While developed in response to specific democratic fragility challenges, the actions in each of these areas should not be pigeon-holed and sought after individually. They are, rather, the interlocked and mutually reinforcing components of a complex strategy aimed at rooting a **public ethics of accountability** in the political culture of European democracies.

This strategy requires each actor—citizen or officeholder—to see themselves as part of a **dynamic, evolving project of democratic institution building and upholding**. By systematically co-creating, revisiting, and reflecting on the norms guiding democratic institutions, European societies can reinforce their institutional frameworks, close gaps in accountability, and respond more effectively to the shifting landscape of democratic fragilities.

7. APPENDIX 1: Projects

Across the key areas identified in the report, sources of analysis are the main results (reports and policy briefs) of the following completed and ongoing projects:

- MEDIA: State and role of (traditional and new) media, including disinformation campaigns
 - o Ongoing projects
 - [MeDeMAP](#): Mapping Media for Future Democracies
 - [PRODEMINFO](#): Protecting the Democratic Information Space in Europe
 - [DE-CONSPIRATOR](#): Detecting and Countering Information Suppression from A Transnational Perspective
 - o Completed projects
 - [Co-Inform](#): Co-Creating Misinformation-Resilient Societies
 - [COVIFORM](#) COronavirus Vulnerabilities and INFOrmation dynamics Research and Modelling
 - [EUMEPLAT](#): European Media Platforms: Assessing Positive And Negative Externalities For European Culture
- DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: Institutional dysfunctions and corruption
 - o Ongoing projects
 - [TRUEDEM](#): Trust in European Democracies
 - [RESPOND](#): Rescuing Democracy from Political Corruption in Digital Societies
 - [BRIDGEGAP](#): Bridging the Gaps in Evidence, Regulation and Impact of Anticorruption Policies
 - o Completed projects
 - [Governance](#): Democratic governance in a turbulent age
 - [FASDEM](#): Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization
 - [EU3D](#): EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy
 - [TiGRE](#) Trust in Governance and Regulation in Europe
 - [EnTrust](#) Enlightened trust: An examination of trust and distrust in governance – conditions, effects and remedies
- CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT: Political participation and democratic political culture
 - o Ongoing projects
 - [NEW DEMOCRACY](#): Meeting Great Expectations Through Democratic Innovations
 - [CUREORCURSE](#): Non-elected politics. Cure or Curse for the Crisis of Representative Democracy?

- [DEMOCRAT](#): Education for Responsible Democratic Citizenship
- [REDEMOS](#): REconfiguring EU DEMOcracy Support? Towards a sustained demos in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood
- [MORES](#): Moral emotions in politics – how they unite, how they divide
- [PLEDGE](#): Politics of Grievance and Democratic Governance
- Completed projects
 - [EUEMOS](#): Constrained Democracy: Citizens' Responses to Limited Political Choice in the European Union
 - [COMLIB](#): Communists into Liberals: The Transformation and Demise of the Left as Precursor to the Illiberal Turn in Poland
 - [VoiCED](#): VOtIng Citizens and the Ethics of Democracy
 - [RECONNECT](#): Reconciling Europe with its Citizens through Democracy and Rule of Law
- DEMOCRACY'S DRIFTS: Role of populist and other protest movements
 - Ongoing projects
 - [Anti-pop](#): Anti-populist discourse in European politics and media
 - [AoD](#): Articulations of Desire: Populism and the Future of Democracy
 - [PACT](#): Populism and Conspiracy Theory
 - Completed projects
 - [PaCE](#): Populism And Civic Engagement – a fine-grained, dynamic, context-sensitive and forward-looking response to negative populist tendencies
 - [DEMOS](#): Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe
 - [POPREBEL](#): Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism
 - [PAVE](#) Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA
- EU IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: Foreign relations and interference on EU policy
 - Completed projects
 - [EU-STRAT](#): The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment
 - [EU-LISTCO](#): Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders
 - [JOINT](#) Understanding and Strengthening EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World

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This report presents findings and recommendations for addressing core democratic fragilities in Europe. Drawing on a varied portfolio of EU-funded projects, it discusses various forms of democratic fragilities as it identifies the key challenges undermining democracy's core commitment to accountability. Five areas of democratic fragilities are examined: media; democratic governance; citizens' engagement; populism; and EU in the global context. To counter these issues, the report calls for a "public ethics of accountability," combining deeper institutionalization, expanded co-creation, ethical training, reframed transparency, and heightened awareness of emotional and historical dimensions. This approach requires stable funding mechanisms, clear legal frameworks, and consistent political support at local, national, and EU levels.

