

The Defence of Democracy Package: Strengthening or Restricting EU Democracy?



The **Defence of Democracy Package** is a 2023 European Commission initiative aimed at **protecting the EU's democratic processes** from foreign interference, disinformation, and internal threats to the rule of law. It introduces **greater transparency requirements**, safeguards elections, and strengthens citizen participation in policymaking. However, while it is seen as a necessary response to growing democratic vulnerabilities, some argue it **risks restricting civic space and limiting freedoms** if not properly implemented.

Key Features of the Package:

■ **Transparency of Political Influence**

■ **Election Integrity & Media Freedom**

■ **Preventing Foreign Interference**

■ **European Citizens' Panels: Strengthening Participatory Democracy**



What Is the Defence of Democracy Package?

>>> Your The package is designed to **counter democratic backsliding** and protect against **foreign interference** in EU decision-making.

>>> It builds on existing measures like the **European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP)** and the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, which address online disinformation and media freedom.



1. Transparency of Political Influence

New reporting obligations for NGOs, think tanks, and civil society organizations receiving foreign funding.

Aims to prevent **hidden foreign influence** in EU policymaking.

Example:

Concerns over Russian and Chinese funding of think tanks and political parties influencing EU policies, especially in areas like **energy security and technology regulation**.

2. Election Integrity & Media Freedom

Monitoring of **social media platforms** to counter foreign propaganda.

Enhanced **media protections** to ensure press independence.

Stronger rules against disinformation in political campaigns.

Example:

The EU has faced disinformation campaigns from Russia, particularly during the 2019 European Parliament elections. The package sought to prevent similar manipulation in 2024 and beyond.



3. Preventing Foreign Interference

New measures to **identify and sanction** foreign actors attempting to **sway public opinion** or influence **EU institutions**.

Strengthening of **cybersecurity protections** to safeguard democratic infrastructure.



Example:

Concerns over Russian and Chinese funding of think tanks and political parties influencing EU policies, especially in areas like **energy security and technology regulation**.

4. European Citizens' Panels: Strengthening Participatory Democracy

The EU is expanding **citizens' panels** to involve ordinary Europeans in **democratic policymaking**.

These panels allow citizens to **debate, deliberate, and make recommendations** on key democratic issues.



Example:

Citizens' panels were used in the **Conference on the Future of Europe** to shape EU reforms. Now, they will help **guide democratic resilience policies** under the Defence of Democracy Package.



The Debate: Pros and Cons of the Package

While the Defence of Democracy Package is widely seen as a step toward **protecting the EU's democratic foundations**, it has sparked **controversy**.

Pros: Strengthening Democratic Resilience

Protects Against Foreign Influence – Ensures transparency in foreign-funded organizations and prevents external manipulation of EU policies.

Defends Free Elections – Strengthens electoral integrity by tackling **disinformation** and **foreign funding of political campaigns**.

Boosts Civic Engagement – **Citizens' panels** and public consultations ensure democratic reforms reflect the **will of the people**.

Reinforces Media Freedom – Ensures journalists and independent media can operate without **political or foreign pressure**.

Cons: Risks to Civil Society & Freedoms

Could Restrict Civic Space – New transparency rules on foreign-funded NGOs might be **used against civil society**, particularly in **authoritarian-leaning EU governments**.

Potential for Misuse – Governments might **weaponize** transparency rules against **opposition groups** under the guise of fighting foreign interference.

Limits on Free Expression? – Stricter disinformation rules might **inadvertently limit legitimate debate** if platforms over-censor political discussions. See in this regard Mark Zuckerberg's communication on social platform moderators.

Example:

The EU's **ban on Russian state-funded media like RT and Sputnik** demonstrated a commitment to tackling **foreign propaganda**—this package **institutionalizes** such protections.

Example:

Hungary and Poland have already introduced laws targeting **NGOs with foreign funding**, labeling them as “foreign agents.” Some fear the package could **legitimize** similar tactics.

CONCLUSION: HOW FAR SHOULD THE EU GO?

The Defence of Democracy Package reflects a **broader dilemma** in European politics: how to **protect democracy without restricting freedoms**. **Can the EU enforce democratic rules while respecting national sovereignty?**

The **role of citizens' panels** in shaping these policies is key to ensuring the package remains **balanced and accountable**. If implemented **transparently and fairly**, the package could **strengthen EU democracy**. But if used to **restrict dissent**, it could **do more harm than good**.



What do you think?

Should the EU be stricter in regulating political influence, or could this package go too far?

