

FACTSHEET:

DEMOCRACY COHORT OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Following the first and second Summit for Democracy, Democracy Cohorts have contributed to important outcomes by following-up on and scaling-up existing commitments and establishing concrete recommendations for the future. The Democracy Cohorts have ensured that key topics remain part of the Summit process and have identified new opportunities, reinvigorated existing work and galvanized new efforts.

Since their establishment, many Democracy Cohorts achieved concrete deliverables. Cohort co-leads, present at the third Summit for Democracy in Seoul and around the world, presented some outcomes of their cohort work and invited all stakeholders – governments, civil society, academia and the private sector – to support concrete recommendations for democratic renewal beyond the third Summit for Democracy.

PROMOTING YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The Cohort on Youth Political and Civic Engagement was established to take meaningful action toward implementing Summit for Democracy commitments on youth political and civic engagement through resources, expertise, research, activities, and achievements. The cohort is led by Costa Rica, Ghana, Nepal, the European Commission and the European Partnership for Democracy, Africivistes, International IDEA and the European Democracy Youth Network.

A menu of possible commitments¹ and a Youth Participation Handbook² were finalized for the second Summit. To make further progress on objectives and expected outcomes after the second Summit, the cohort provided small grants to civil society organisations from the Global South to promote the menu of commitments, advocate for their adoption, and assess their implementation at national or regional level. The cohort also developed a programme of ten young and engaged Youth Democracy Cohort ambassadors and established a Young Researchers' Network to bring together a diverse group of international young scholars and democracy support practitioners to foster cross-regional and cross-disciplinary exchanges on the topic of youth participation in democracies across the world.

- **Inviting governments to develop strong national youth policies**, and reinforce existing legal frameworks about youth rights because healthy youth ecosystems need to be supported by solid and institutionalised legal mechanisms. **The Youth Democracy Cohort encourages governments to consider that national youth policies must be holistic, inclusive and evidence-based.** A governance and oversight mechanism for the implementation of the policy is necessary, bringing together state officials and youth actors in a co-management style in which all stakeholders are equal. Any strategy should account for the diversity of youth, accounting for their different experiences and barriers rather than treating them as a

¹ <https://youthdemocracycohort.com/menu-of-possible-commitments/>

² https://youthdemocracycohort.com/the-youth-participation-handbook/?_gl=1*46pebo*_up*MQ..*_ga*NTgyNDQzMTE1LjE3MTAwODc1OTU.*_ga_6ZNN7R1T56*MTcxMDA4NzU5My4xLjEuMTcxMDA4NzYyMi4wLjAuMA

homogenous demographic. Finally, the development and evaluation of policies should be informed by research and youth input.

- **Encouraging governments to harness the potential of young people through well-resourced initiatives.** The independence and funding of youth-led civil society organisations, especially of National Youth Councils, should be ensured and institutionalised. Particular attention should be given to funding for youth-led organisations representing marginalised groups. It is important that funding programmes are sustained with a multi-year approach and young people are integrated in their design and monitoring. Funding programmes should also recognise the different and innovative avenues of engagement for young people, from social media to grassroots movements.
- **Inviting all stakeholders to consider that the lack of engagement of young people in political affairs** could be addressed by increasing youth representation at all levels of governance. **The Youth Democracy encourages public authorities to create more paths and mechanisms for young people**, including young women and people with disabilities, to enter civil service and political positions. Lowering the candidacy age and the creation of junior professional schemes for entering civil service are essential measures to improve youth representation at all government levels. The introduction of civic education into school curriculums has also proved as an effective method to build young people's political capacity and interest. Constitutional provisions need to be put in place to address structural barriers and institutional inequalities in civil service.

PROMOTING GENDER AS A PREREQUISITE FOR DEMOCRACY

The Cohort on Gender equality as a pre-requisite for democracy was established to highlight and promote the connection between gender equality and democracy and to develop policy recommendations to bolster women's participation in and contribution to democracy³. The cohort is led by Sweden, Romania and International IDEA.

To sustain the efforts to sustain gender equality on the global agenda for democracy, the Cohort on Gender equality organized a post-Summit event in May 2023. The event highlighted the importance and good practices for advancing gender equality as a prerequisite for democracy in the post-Summit context.

- **Recognising that gender equality and safeguarding democracy for future generations** requires early and sustainable interventions to shift harmful gender norms and practices/behaviors, the S4D Gender Cohort encourages reforms of gender roles, norms, stereotypes, harmful cultural and social practices, and behaviors that undermine women's ability to participate and be equally represented in public life. Among other key initiatives to create an enabling environment for women in politics, this includes zero tolerance for all forms of violence against women and a systematic process to embed general education curricula that positively informs gender-based perceptions and practices outside of the home.
- **Sustaining the proactive engagement of men and boys** in challenging and questioning the rigid gender norms, discriminatory and harmful social practices, stereotypes, and unequal gender power relations that underpin and perpetuate gender-based inequalities. This entails developing and disseminating public messages/campaigns that convey the importance of gender.

³ <https://summitfordemocracyresources.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/summit-for-democracy-cohort-on-gender-equality-as-prerequisite-for-democracy-statement-of-recommendations-24-march-2023-v03.pdf>

- **Addressing technology facilitated gender-based violence** (GBV) and abuse in collaboration with social media companies and promoting the adoption of legal standards on zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence including online and between/within political parties and political actors.
- **Leveraging the opportunities that peace/political transitions/state building** present by creating robust legislative frameworks that entrench gender equality and gender-inclusive conflict prevention/conflict early warning systems and in disarmament⁴. This includes promoting measures to address structural obstacles to women's full, equal, and meaningful participation.

PROTECTING ELECTIONS INTEGRITY

The Cohort on Elections Integrity was established to provide training and capacity building programmes to Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across the world and technical consultancy as per needs of other EMBs. The cohort is led by Greece, India, Mauritius and IFES.

The Election Integrity Cohort has been working on developing guidelines for social media companies to promote electoral integrity and combat the spread of mis/disinformation. The Election Commission of Nepal and Election Commission of India are both actively involved and held an event adjacent to the Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum in December in Kathmandu, attended by all participating Election Management Bodies from Asia. Moreover, the Election Integrity Cohort, along with Transparency International, International IDEA, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) Coalition Secretariat, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) Center for Anti-Corruption and Democratic Trust have prepared a Joint Statement with over 100 signatures⁵ calling for States Parties to adopt enhanced political finance transparency considerations.

- **Convening election authorities and civil society to share lessons learned globally from efforts to increase transparency, trust, and digital resilience through digital transformation.** Exploring models for piloting new technologies while minimizing collection of data and considering approaches to increase awareness of the digital threat environment while safeguarding free expression, privacy, and other human rights. Exploring lessons learned through technology pilots and similar initiatives serving these goals.
- **Bringing together global technology companies and the election community to explore the shared regional and global digital threat environment that elections share,** consider new and emerging threats, and explore models for coordination between elections authorities, and appropriate models for partnership with technology companies.
- **Developing and launching, at the third Summit for Democracy, the first ever Election Integrity Guidelines for Technology Companies.** These voluntary guidelines, developed in consultation with respected elections experts, civil society, and technology companies, seek to create a high level framework that will enable accelerated coordination and improved communication between elections authorities and technology companies, wherever it is appropriate. The launch of the Guidelines at S4D3 also kicks off a year of action to implement, study, and improve them further, and drive broader and more nuanced support for election integrity in the democracies where it is most needed.

⁴https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_pages_participation_protection_prevention_sgbv_combined.pdf

⁵<https://www.transparency.org/en/press/uncac-cosp10-enhance-transparency-of-political-finance>

RESISTING AUTHORITARIAN PRESSURE

The Cohort on Resisting Authoritarian Pressure was established to build resilience to authoritarian coercion and offer a hand to democrats and human rights defenders from non-democracies. During the second Summit, the cohort launched the Declaration of Principles to Combat Transnational Repression⁶. The cohort is led by Lithuania, Freedom House and the Alliance of Democracies.

Since its launch at the second Summit, the declaration has been endorsed by 9 governments. The cohort has also supported the formation of a Coordination Group to Counter Transnational Repression, assembling 30+ members across three continents from NGOs and experts for joint advocacy. The Coordination Group to Counter Transnational Repression is focused on delivering actionable recommendations to policymakers, evidenced by its influence in legislative processes and its contribution to groundbreaking research on transnational repression's impact, including on exiled journalists and academic freedom. In November 2023, the Lithuanian government, as part of the work of the cohort, held the third Future of Democracy Forum in Vilnius bringing together high-level politicians, diplomats, think-tank members, academics, and democracy activists to discuss the most pressing challenges posed by authoritarianism and complementing other initiatives supporting democracy activists who found refuge in Lithuania. The cohort has continued in the past year to focus on activities related to sheltering human rights defendants in exile; seeking release of political prisoners; countering transnational oppression; and the role of economic coercion efforts.

- ***Emphasizing the importance to ensure unity among democracies to counter economic coercion through the Economic Article 5***, mirroring NATO's collective defense principle, to combat economic pressure from authoritarian regimes. These efforts have seen tangible support and the EU's adoption of the Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) to deter and respond to economic coercion, showcasing a growing global consensus and active stance against authoritarian tactics that threaten democratic integrity and global stability.
- Building on the Declaration of Principles and the formation of a Coordination Group to Counter Transnational Repression, *the cohort invites democratic governments to **acknowledge and commit to addressing the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of transnational repression*** as an issue requiring urgent attention and response, and commit to working to address impunity, build resilience, and protect the vulnerable.

PROMOTING INFORMATION INTEGRITY

The Cohort on Information Integrity was established to discuss, collect and promote best practices on strengthening a healthy information space and information integrity and reinforcing democracy. The cohort is led by Canada, Latvia and the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

In October 2023, the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (ASD at GMF) published a report "The Summit for Democracy Cohort on Information

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/2023/summit-for-democracy-transnational-repression>

*Integrity*⁷ which focuses on the outcomes of the Summit for Democracy Cohort on Information Integrity, which was co-led by Canada, Latvia and ASD at GMF. This report reflects and builds upon the deliverables that the cohort prepared for the purposes of the Second Summit for Democracy. As part of the cohort's work and combining experiences and expertise across sectors and geographies, four Working Groups were set up, each delving into an issue of importance and timeliness in the effort towards strengthening and defending information integrity.

- **Emphasizing the need for citizen awareness and standardized** terminology in this field, recommending the creation of a new infrastructure and funding structure to invest in relevant local civil society organizations, to find space for those groups to exchange ideas, and to link them with global conversations, as per recommendations of the Taxonomy Working Group.
- **Recognizing the Literacy Working Group's findings on the disruptive impact of information warfare and manipulation on democracies**, stressing the significance of long-term media literacy promotion as a central defense against information manipulation, including disinformation.
- **Highlighting the direct link between disinformation and democracy erosion**, placing particular importance to the need for more consistent policy development in this domain, improved information sharing among all stakeholders, and increased coherence of work within and among the different international fora as stressed by the Working Group on International Cooperation on Resilience to Disinformation.
- **Underlining the recommendation of the Political Microtargeting Working Group to develop a unified international understanding of and approach** to this rather underexplored practice, acknowledging the influence of the digital media environment, media literacy, and local political contexts and dynamics in this area.

ADVANCING LABOR RIGHTS

The Labor Rights Cohort worked to help inform the labour-rights related commitments and reforms associated with the Summit process, and fostered diplomatic engagement around labour priorities that emerge from the Multilateral Partnership for Organizing, Worker Empowerment, and Rights (M-POWER) initiative. The cohort is led by the US and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

The labor cohort developed best practices from governments and unions for strengthening approaches to combat forced labor, which was a deliverable from the labor cohort's roundtable on forced labor.

- **Inviting all stakeholders to share best practices of how unions are critical** to setting guardrails that protect working people and democracy in the creation and use of technology.
- **Recognizing the need for participants to enhance their understanding** of how collective bargaining helps to ensure the protection of worker rights in the digital age.

PROMOTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

The Cohort on Deliberative Democracy and Citizens' Assemblies was established to give everyday citizens a more meaningful role in public decisions through citizens' assemblies, by

⁷ <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Summit-for-Democracy-Cohort-on-Information-Integrity-4.pdf>

bringing together a random sample of the community with a wide range of views and giving them access to a diversity of sources as well as ample time to discuss questions and concerns. The cohort aims to inform elected representatives of where informed common ground can be found around difficult trade-offs in a public decision. The cohort is led by Ireland, the European Commission and the new Democracy Foundation.

The Deliberative Democracy Cohort has continued to advocate a list of desirable draft commitments, which was developed prior to the Second Summit. Their work in 2023 and onwards builds on their start-up proposal initially made at the Second Summit. Their first suggested model of Global Citizens Democratic Deliberation builds upon the pre-existing polling methods and infrastructure to facilitate a global deliberation by random and representative samples. The second model uses the methodologies of Citizens Assemblies.

- ***Inviting governments to actively consider convening informational workshops for elected representatives and public administration*** to ensure they are informed on the array of democratic innovations that are proving effective in practice.
- ***Encouraging governments to trial a first Citizens' Assembly*** as a way to counter the legitimate public sentiment where people feel they have neither voice nor power to shape the decisions which affect their lives. Left unchecked, this sentiment softens the ground for misinformation to take root, for expertise to be dismissed, and for fragmentation and polarisation to run rampant. The simple action of taking people broadly representative of our diverse societies and asking them to solve a public problem together – laying out their reasoning and supplying evidence they have relied on – can be highly visibly powerful, effective and complementary to legislators.
- ***Inviting governments to assess the merits of committing supranational and international development funds earmarked for democracy to support Citizens' Assembly trials.*** Democracy has always been an inspiring idea for people living under oppressive rule – an idea that goes beyond elections. Funds committed here bring the democratic idea back to life. We invite everyone interested in democracy to review the scoping work⁸ begun for a Global Citizens Assembly to bring everyday people into the Summit conversation, as well as a global “What Works“ evidence network and a ‘Marshall Plan’ style rollout of deliberative democracy innovations.

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Cohort on Disability Rights was established to support people with disabilities in participating in government institutions, public policy and legislation, providing the basis for promoting equality in all aspects of society by breaking down social stigmas and increasing accountability. The cohort is led by Australia and IFES.

During the second Summit for Democracy, the cohort developed sample commitments⁹ in consultation with disability rights and democracy advocates. As an outcome of the last Summit for Democracy, a Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network¹⁰ Disability-Inclusive Democracy Working Group has been established, led by the U.S. State Department.

⁸ <https://globaldemocracycoalition.org/deliberative-democracy-and-citizens-assemblies-cohort/>

⁹ <https://www.ifes.org/summit-democracy-disability-rights-cohort>

¹⁰ <https://gladnetwork.net/network>

- **Encouraging governments to make concrete commitments to increase access to civic and political life for persons with disabilities.**
- **Inviting governments to involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes across all levels of government**, in the spirit of “nothing without us.” Disability rights should also be mainstreamed across a wide range of policy areas, including climate change, food security, disaster risk reduction, health services, and economic growth.
- **Recognizing the need for governments to align their electoral processes with universal design principles to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate meaningfully in politics as voters, candidates, election officials, and observers.** This includes making all public buildings physically accessible, providing voter and civic education information in accessible formats, and bringing legal frameworks into compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. IFES’ *Developing a Disability Inclusion Policy: A Strategic Planning and Implementation Guide for Election Management Bodies*¹¹, developed at part of the Disability Inclusive Democracy Year of Action¹², provides necessary tools and strategies for election management bodies to codify inclusion of persons with disabilities across their policies and procedures. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), in collaboration with its Disability Advisory Committee, is committed to accessibility¹³ and prides itself on working closely with the disability community to ensure equity of access to electoral processes in Australia. Information for people with disability and mobility restrictions¹⁴ summarizes the alternative voting options and assistance available for electors voting in Australian federal electoral events. For example, at selected polling places electors can access assistive technologies including text to speech pens, hearing loops and a virtual sign language interpreter service.
- **Inviting countries to invest in civic education activities that will support greater engagement by persons with disabilities**, making an effort to reach women, girls, young people, members of ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous Peoples, and those who are out of school and living in remote areas. In *Their Words: A Practical Guide for Engaging Young People in Civic Education*¹⁵, developed by IFES and Kimpact Development Initiative, outlines actionable tips for young leaders and practitioners to develop effective civic education programming for meaningful youth participation.
- **Inviting governments, civil society, and technology companies to ensure that the technology they develop, use, procure, and implement is fully accessible for persons with disabilities.** IFES’ *Learning Series on Disability-Inclusive Election Technology*¹⁶ provides guidelines and recommendations for these stakeholders.
- **Encouraging civil society organizations to take an intersectional approach to their work and proactively recruit people with disabilities who also identify with other identities, and bring diverse perspectives to their leadership**, such as women and girls with disabilities, young people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples with disabilities.

¹¹ <https://www.ifes.org/publications/developing-disability-inclusion-policy-strategic-planning-and-implementation-guide>

¹² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/03/fact-sheet-advancing-disability-inclusive-democracy-in-the-united-states-and-globally/>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spSZS3m5FjY>

¹⁴ <https://www.aec.gov.au/assistance/factsheet-voting.htm>

¹⁵ <https://www.ifes.org/publications/their-words-practical-guide-engaging-young-people-civic-education>

¹⁶ <https://www.ifes.org/publications/learning-series-disability-inclusive-election-technology>

PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE

The Cohort on Civic Space was established to identify common commitments to strengthen support to and protection of civil society actors and civic space for democracy. The cohort is led by Norway, Czech Republic and ICNL.

The cohort developed a call to action¹⁷, which was launched during the second Summit for Democracy.

- ***Welcoming the “calls to action” of the Civic Space Cohort, and, in the context of the third Summit for Democracy, highlights that civil society, journalists, artists, lawyers, academics, and others who promote and protect human rights for all, play important roles in safeguarding democracy, rule of law and sustainable development.*** They have the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms at local, national, regional, and international levels. These rights must be protected online just as they are protected offline. The participation of civil society in policy and decision-making processes is an indicator of a vibrant and inclusive democracy and contributes to the quality and effectiveness of laws and policies at the local, national, regional, and international level. Civil society’s ability to provide expertise, represent marginalized groups and ensure accountability improves the operation and outcomes of the UN system.
- ***Encouraging the promotion of civil society’s access to law and policy making processes,*** including digital policy making, at local, national, regional, and international level, that build on procedures providing for sufficient timeframes, procedural clarity, and sufficient information in order to make civil society participation meaningful and efficient. Further, acknowledging that civic space online is integral to a vibrant civic space offline, and agreeing to strive for improvements in the protection of civil society actors who engage in UN processes and the monitoring and reporting of reprisals of individual cases.
- ***Welcoming the promotion of policies and public statements demonstrating the positive and legitimate role of human rights defenders in promoting human rights, democracy, the rule of law, peace, and sustainable development, online and offline, at the local, regional, national, and international level.*** And to share best practices on allowing civil society activists under threat due to their human rights work to timely and safely enter and continue their work in a country of exile, as well as to work to protect civil society activists from threats imposed on them while in exile by the government of the country of origin, and to build a community of learning to unpack the value, effectiveness, and needs of movement actors as well as to share relevant lessons from various government partners, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations.

ADVANCING FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY

The Cohort on Financial Transparency and Integrity (FTI) was established to address deficiencies in financial systems that may enable or facilitate corruption and money laundering. The cohort is led by the U.S. and Brookings Institute, the Open Government Partnership.

Building on the Pledge and a Call to Action¹⁸ launched at the Second Summit, the cohort has continued their work focusing on three themes:1) implementation of beneficial ownership

¹⁷ <https://www.icnl.org/post/event/civic-space-and-the-summit-for-democracy>

¹⁸ <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/FTI-Cohort-Pledge-and-Call-to-Action.pdf>

requirements; 2) transparent and accountable public procurement and; 3) addressing the professional “enablers” of corruption. More information can be found on the website of the FTO cohort¹⁹.

- **Acknowledging that beneficial ownership registries or alternative mechanisms** can help reveal the actual owners of complex corporate structures used to facilitate corruption and money laundering. These registries tend to be most effective when they consider the specific context of the jurisdiction, are properly resourced, and contain high quality and verified/updated data. When these data repositories are structured and interoperable, it can enhance their utility. Finding a balance between data privacy and the public interest of disclosing ownership is an important consideration. Jurisdictions that choose to provide public access to their beneficial ownership registries provide watchdogs with a powerful tool that enhances their ability to conduct financial investigations.
- **Recognizing that procurement is a critical tool for government service delivery but can be abused by corrupt actors.** An effective procurement system that maximizes service delivery to citizens and reduces opportunities for corruption depends on several key characteristics, including strong legal framework, professional workforce, and clear monitoring and accountability provisions. Data and risk management, along with an effective and transparent procurement complaints mechanism, are important considerations. Stakeholders from government, business, civil society, journalists, and the public can all play a role in monitoring, regulating, and providing oversight of procurement processes to ensure they are free from corruption or manipulation; opening contracting data and combining it with beneficial ownership data can enhance due diligence efforts. Procurement systems that feature a high degree of transparency and integrity can boost economic growth by enhancing competition, while strong procurement safeguards can help governments respond more effectively to emergency situations.
- **Recognizing that certain professional services industries can sometimes be misused to facilitate, encourage, and enable corruption.** Various approaches can be used to address the role of those who act as willful “enablers” of corruption in this industry — posing a threat to democratic resilience and contributing to harming sustainable economic growth and economic opportunity — and those who unwittingly contribute to the problem. Risk profiles are dynamic and vary across sectors and jurisdictions, so while regulation is an important tool to address the role of enablers, it is not the only answer. More empirical data on enablers could help in understanding and addressing their role and impact. There are clear opportunities to address the enabling of corruption and laundering of the proceeds of corruption in various international fora.

PROMOTING MEDIA FREEDOM

The Media Freedom Cohort was initially led by the governments of Canada and the Netherlands, alongside international NGO Internews. It worked to measure achieved progress on the commitments made at the first Summit for Democracy, to bridge gaps on the commitments where progress has been slower to attain, and to spark new, innovative commitments to measurably advance media freedom around the world. Its three priority areas were: (1) Protecting Journalists’ Safety & Security; (2) Advancing Freedom of Expression; and (3) Bolstering Independent and Diverse Media. Three working groups collected and generated commitments on these areas from

¹⁹ <https://www.usaid.gov/anti-corruption/financialtransparencyandintegrity>

government, civil society, media and the private sector, and built on these with recommendations for future work on media freedom. The recommendations featured in the four advisory reports of the High-Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, concerning targeted sanctions, consular support to journalists at risk, safe refuge to journalists at risk, and promoting more effective investigations into abuses against journalists.

- **Supporting journalists in exile (e.g. governments supporting emergency fast tracked visas, news organisations offering resettlement assistance, funders providing flexible funding);**
- **Supporting women journalists and those from vulnerable contexts, both offline and online;**
- **Inviting governments to establish mechanisms for the prevention and protection of attacks against journalists at the national level;**
- **Supporting civil society initiatives to protect journalists;**
- **Supporting journalists facing high risks because of their work;**
- **Supporting journalist safety at the international level;**
- **Establishing and strengthening digital protections and safety mechanisms for journalists;**
- **Supporting the psychological safety of all journalists and media workers.**
- **Inviting governments to make reforms addressing laws that designate “foreign agents” that can be used to target media;**
- **Inviting governments to repeal of laws criminalizing defamation and the introduction of laws to deal with the issue of SLAPPs (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation).**

FIGHTING CORRUPTION BY ESTABLISHING POLICIES AS A GUARANTEE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY, STABILITY, AND SOVEREIGN POLICY

The Cohort for Anticorruption policies as a guarantee for national security, stability and sovereignty was established to build an informal alliance between States with comparable problems by identifying challenges and overviewing the approaches to overcome them across five topics relating to national anticorruption policies. The cohort is led by Bulgaria and the Basel Institute.

In accordance with its Year of Action Summit for Democracy commitments, in the past year, the Bulgarian Government has delivered tangible results by adopting robust anti-corruption and judicial-reform legislative package that includes the Whistleblower Protection Act (January 2023) and the Anti-Corruption Act (September 2023) which established new Anti-Corruption Commission with vested investigative functions. Key amendments were introduced to the Constitution, the Judiciary Act, and the Criminal Procedure Code, which set up an effective regime for accountability and criminal liability of the Prosecutor General and his/her deputies. Amendments to the Public Procurement Act improving transparency in the procurement of media services were also adopted. The Ministry of Justice made significant progress on finalizing a concept note for regulating lobbying activities, prepared in active collaboration with a broad group of public stakeholders and civil society organizations. With the support of the cohort co-lead the Basel Institute on Governance, Bulgaria has enhanced its institutional capacity to identify and investigate corruption by successfully delivering several structured training modules to investigation authorities and adding seven online course curriculums. The Bulgarian Government

continued to expand its cooperation with international partners, regional and local civil society organizations, and the private sector by launching multiple joint initiatives including several with the cohort co-leads the Basel Institute on Governance and/or the Centre for the Study of Democracy : an international policy forum in March 2023 titled “Anti-Corruption and National Security”; an international event in October 2023 on “Strengthening Transparency and Governance through Collective Action,” and in November 2023, the international forum “Anti-Corruption, Democratic Resilience and Economic Security”, featuring Bulgaria’s support for the European efforts to build a new democratic framework for anti-corruption and economic security, including sanctions enforcement. In February 2024, Bulgaria signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Transparency International, adding to the pool of civil society organizations that strive to enhance good governance. Realizing the significant risk corruption poses to global security and democratic resilience, Bulgaria took the lead in highlighting corruption as a major concern at the 2024 Munich Security Conference, with Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov’s address during a dedicated panel focusing on the need to unite global efforts against corruption enablers.

- ***Prioritizing the implementation of adopted legislation, strengthening the capacity of key anti-corruption institutions, and enhancing regional and global cooperation amongst anticorruption agencies.*** The second recommendation is to unite global efforts to recognize corruption as a national security threat, especially in the context of strategic corruption’s impact on both international and domestic security and resilience. Based on this understanding, the fight against corruption should be considered as a whole-of-society effort.
- ***Achieving better international results*** by joint European and global democratic actions, such as extending the competence of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office to violations of EU restrictive measures. This would also require full transparency of beneficial ownership registers to inhibit illicit flow of funds and combat money laundering.