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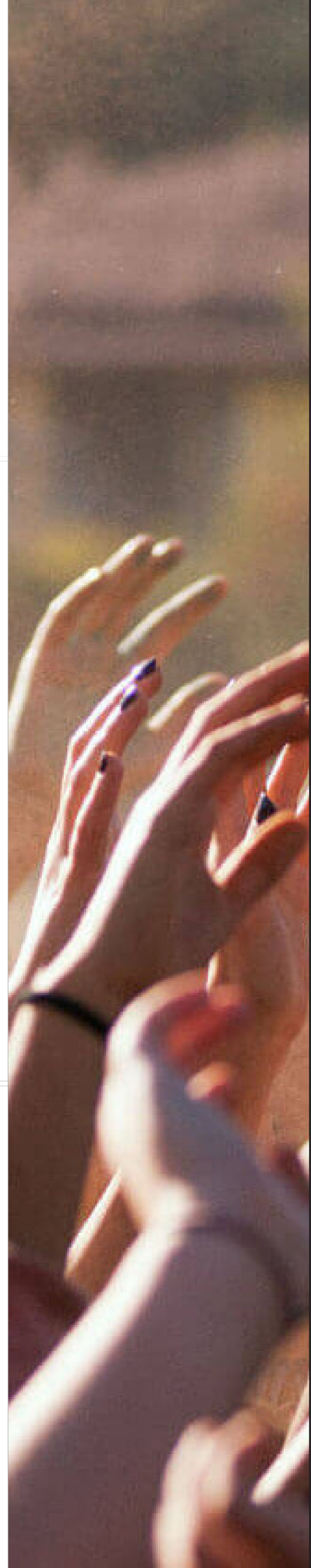
Outcome document 4: Roundtable on Democracy and the New Security Agenda

Strengthening Democratic Resilience in a Changing European and Transatlantic Security Landscape

Understanding the links
between multilateralism &
democracy to tackle global
challenges more effectively

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On 20 June 2025, the Kofi Annan Foundation and the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy at the Geneva Graduate Institute, in partnership with the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), the European Endowment for Democracy and International IDEA, convened the third in a series of thematic roundtables exploring the intersections of democracy and global governance in Brussels. This session focused on the place for democracy in the new security agenda. Experts from international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector examined how democratic resilience is challenged by both external threats, such as those posed by authoritarian powers like Russia and China, and internal dynamics, including polarization, judicial capture, and declining public trust. The discussion highlighted four key themes, along with actionable recommendations, outlined below. Many of the speakers' remarks echoed and reinforced the messages of the accompanying policy paper.

THEME 1: Democracy as a foundation for lasting security

Framing democracy and security as separate priorities is both conceptually flawed and strategically counterproductive. The two are mutually reinforcing. Strengthening democratic institutions enhances national resilience and supports long-term security. Drawing on Clausewitz's notion of the 'center of gravity,' public trust, administrative effectiveness, and professional armed forces form a strategic triangle that consolidates both defense capacity and democratic legitimacy.

Corruption and fragile institutional safeguards create vulnerabilities that foreign powers exploit. In contrast, states with accountable institutions and low corruption levels are better equipped to resist external manipulation. Competitive elections serve as a line of defense against interference and information warfare, reinforcing both sovereignty and civic confidence. At the same time, authoritarian regimes are operating with increasing coordination to weaken democratic norms, requiring collective and pre-emptive responses. Ukraine's forthcoming elections, for example, represent both a critical moment for democratic resilience and a likely target for disinformation and legitimacy attacks.

Security strategies that focus solely on military preparedness aren't sufficient, and may even be counterproductive. Democratic resilience, civil preparedness, and inclusive institutions must be treated as core components of national defense. A broadened understanding of security that includes these elements is essential to counter both internal erosion and external threats to democratic systems.

Recommendations:

- 1. Anchor democratic resilience in EU and NATO security strategies: Recognize democratic institutions, public trust, and inclusive governance as strategic assets in collective defense. EU and NATO planning documents should explicitly integrate democratic resilience alongside military preparedness in threat assessments and capability development.*
- 2. Establish an EU-led Democracy Defense Fund to counter authoritarian interference: The EU should create a dedicated funding instrument to support democratic processes in member states and partner countries under pressure. This fund would prioritize electoral integrity, independent media, and anti-corruption initiatives, particularly in contexts vulnerable to external manipulation or internal erosion.*

THEME 2: Democratic resilience as a strategic priority for the Euro-Atlantic alliance

NATO must affirm its commitment to democracy not only as a principle but as a strategic necessity. The values articulated in the 1949 Washington Treaty – democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law – form the core of the Alliance's legitimacy. NATO's identity as a community of democracies carries operational implications: weakening democratic governance undermines the cohesion and credibility of the Alliance itself. Authoritarian regimes are not only advancing rival agendas, they are actively exploiting the fractures within democratic societies, sowing disinformation and eroding public trust.

In recent years, NATO has rightly broadened its concept of defense to confront hybrid threats that extend beyond conventional military confrontation. The Alliance has created dedicated structures to address specific dimensions of this challenge—including cyber defense, strategic

communications, and energy security—through specialized centers, joint exercises, and knowledge exchange. Yet there is no equivalent institutional home for democratic resilience.

This is a critical gap. Disinformation campaigns, institutional subversion, and corruption are not just national vulnerabilities; they are shared threats that compromise collective security. Unlike cyberattacks or critical infrastructure breaches, there is no single node within NATO responsible for coordinating efforts to defend and advance democracy across the Alliance. Democratic resilience cannot be fostered through ad hoc measures or left to political declarations alone. It requires continuity, dedicated resources, and institutional memory.

NATO's Building Integrity programme and its support for civilian oversight and anti-corruption reforms are valuable but insufficient. To uphold its identity as a community of democracies, NATO needs a dedicated structure to coordinate democracy-related efforts, track trends and threats, and ensure that support for democratic governance is embedded across the Alliance's strategic and operational agenda.

Recommendations:

- 1. Establish a Center for Democratic Resilience: Create a permanent institutional hub to coordinate NATO's efforts on democratic resilience, much like existing centers for cyber defense and strategic communications. This center would support member states in strengthening institutional safeguards, and ensure continuity, coordination, and institutional memory across NATO's democracy-related initiatives.*
- 2. Ensure that upcoming NATO initiatives—such as the European Defence Investment Programme and resilience planning under Article 3—explicitly include financial and operational commitments to bolster democratic institutions, election integrity, and civilian oversight as core elements of collective defense.*

THEME 3: Reasserting EU leadership in democracy promotion and protection

The European Union has stepped up its efforts to defend and advance democracy in the face of intensifying hybrid threats. It has launched a rapid response capability to support member states in identifying and countering foreign interference, including a dedicated mission to Moldova, currently on the frontlines of democratic defense. These efforts reflect a shift toward more agile and proactive engagement, both within and beyond EU borders.

Institutionally, the EU is building the legal and operational infrastructure needed to safeguard democratic integrity in a digital age. Flagship measures such as the Cybersecurity Act, Cyber Solidarity Act, and the EU-wide Cybersecurity Certification Framework aim to secure critical systems and promote trust in digital infrastructure.

The EU has affirmed that democracy must not be treated as a secondary concern or separate agenda: it is integral to security, stability, and international partnerships. As illustrated by Ukraine, democratic commitment gains its strength not only from institutions, but from popular belief in freedom, dignity, and the power of civic choice. This civic dimension is essential to any durable democratic system.

Recommendations:

- 1. Allocate at least 1% of NDICI–Global Europe to democratic governance and civic resilience: Ring-fence a minimum share of the EU’s external action budget to support democratic institutions, election integrity, civil society, and independent media, especially in partner countries facing hybrid threats or democratic backsliding.*
- 2. Protect and expand ODA earmarked for long-term democratic development: Reverse the trend of shrinking governance budgets within EU development policy by prioritizing rule of law, accountability, and political participation as foundational pillars of sustainable peace and partnership.*
- 3. Ensure long-term democratic consolidation is built into security and stabilization programming.*

THEME 4: Broadening global support for democracy

The future of democracy is being shaped well beyond the Euro-Atlantic space. From Taiwan's leadership in digital governance and civic tech to India's regulatory experiments with data protection and platform accountability, democracies under pressure are pioneering solutions to shared challenges. These innovations offer valuable lessons for Europe and its partners, particularly in navigating disinformation, safeguarding elections, and defending civic space in contested environments.

The EU should not only protect democracy at home but also invest in the global ecosystem. Democracies facing external interference or internal volatility often lack access to sustained support, despite mounting risks. Where governments and civic actors request assistance, as seen in Ukraine and The Gambia, EU support has proven both effective and welcomed. These cases underscore the importance of responding to locally expressed demand with flexible, principled, and well-resourced tools.

To be credible and strategic in its democracy agenda, the EU must move beyond a reactive, neighborhood-focused model. Supporting emerging and established democracies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is a long-term investment in global stability.

Recommendations:

- 1. Prioritize partnerships with governments and civic actors in regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, especially where democratic institutions are actively requesting support. Funding should focus on independent media, electoral integrity, digital safeguards, and early-stage democratic leadership.*
- 2. In countries where NATO is already present, the Alliance should respond to host government requests for support in strengthening democratic governance. This may include assistance with civilian oversight of security institutions, anti-corruption measures, protection of civic actors, or logistical support for democratic processes.*

Conclusion

The roundtable highlighted the urgent need to reinforce democratic systems at every level – within NATO, the European Union, and globally. Addressing democratic backsliding, hybrid threats, and political polarization emerged as not only normative imperatives but as pressing strategic priorities. While the communiqué issued in connection with the discussions did not directly shape the outcomes of the NATO summit, it offers a valuable opportunity to influence upcoming deliberations, particularly as EU member states begin negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

The recommendations advanced in this document speak directly to the mandates of many participating institutions and reflect both NATO and the EU’s own stated values. They call for embedding democracy more systematically into security planning, policy instruments, and institutional structures. Moving forward, the Kofi Annan Foundation and the Graduate Institute will continue to work with partners across International Geneva and beyond to promote and support the implementation of these recommendations, amplifying democratic priorities as vital elements of collective defense, global cooperation, and sustainable peace.

Speakers:
Jerzy Pomianowski – Executive Director, European Endowment of Democracy
Marcos Perestrello – President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly
Eliza Urwin – Head of Research, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding
Benedetta Berti – Director of Policy Planning, NATO
Dominika Hajdu – Policy Director, Globsec
Danielle Piatkiewicz – Brussels Representative, Alliance of Democracies
Joe Brinker – Policy Fellow, Democratic Resilience, NATO PA
Sam van der Staak – Director for Europe, International IDEA
Ecaterina Casinge – Human Rights and Democracy Advisor, Directorate-General for External Relations (RELEX) at the Council of the European Union
Corinne Momal-Vanian – Executive Director, Kofi Annan Foundation