

From Dialogue to Change:

A YOUTH VISION FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS



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EUROPEAN **YOUTH** PARLIAMENT



Foreword

In September 2025, 10 young people from countries across Europe came together to discuss, exchange, and reimagine how fundamental rights should inform policy in the EU.

At the heart of the YouthRights Vision Lab lies a powerful idea: fundamental rights must not only be understood—they must be lived, shared, and acted upon. Shaping a generation that sees the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union not as distant or abstract, but as a living, breathing tool for justice, equality, and dignity in everyday life. Yet the fragility of our fundamental rights has become omnipresent in recent times. Many of the very frameworks and basic principles put in place for our protection and freedom are being ceaselessly questioned and progressively infringed upon. In parts of Europe, political narratives are emerging that portray coexistence among different cultures, beliefs, and identities as unrealistic or undesirable. Yet that is precisely what makes unions like the EU so rich—*United in Diversity*, as its motto reminds us.

Projects like FOCUS give young people space to explore how their voices can make an impact, as well as the many routes available for political engagement. There are many roads to Rome, and not everyone needs to travel the same path to create change. What we need is a clearer understanding of these different routes—what it means to drive change from different positions, with different tools, in different communities.

During the Lab, we explored the Charter not just as a legal text, but as something personal, critical, and relevant to young people's lives. We identified five key areas—the most urgent and overlooked aspects of fundamental rights today, as our focal lens. Through the lens of Climate, Cultural Heritage, Technology and Innovation, Non-Discrimination and the Protection of Democracy and Media, we considered how the Charter can serve as a framework to navigate these complexities.

In this publication, you'll find the research and proposals of each working group in their respective chapters. Each chapter was explored by a different working group, which is why the texts reflect diverse voices, styles, and perspectives. We hope this Vision Paper serves as both a resource and an invitation to reflect, to inform decision-making, and to encourage readers to understand where young people are, what matters to them, and how you as well might begin (and continue!) to advocate for fundamental rights.

This publication was created as part of the [FOCUS project](#) in the context of the [YouthRights Vision Lab](#), initiated by the [European Youth Parliament](#) (EYP) and consortium partners under the EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme.

— Sofie de Jong (NL),
Facilitator of the YouthRights Vision Lab

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Team Profiles

MURDO POPE (UK-SCT)

- ♦ Interested in Latin American studies, theology, criminology, gender studies, and human rights
- ” I love gaming, learning languages, and partying

ALLEGRA DE MATTIO (IT)

- ♦ Studying at Liceo Scientifico focusing on physics and chemistry
- ♦ Interested in politics, modern history, art history, and cultural exploration. Working as a volunteer at the Red Cross
- ” My name means “happy” in Italian, and I try to live up to it every day

MICHAŁ OGIELA (PL)

- ♦ Studying science, technology, Engineering, and mathematics (STEM) for an International Baccalaureate Diploma in Tarnów
- ♦ Interested in aviation, youth voice, civic education, and international projects
- ” I love travelling, meeting new people, and creating unforgettable memories

MARTHE VANKEIRSBILCK (BE)

- ♦ Studying for a Master’s degree of International Politics at KU Leuven
- ♦ Passionate about societal issues and how to approach them
- ” I have lived in three countries in the last three years, I am obsessed with art, and I collects cows in all forms and sizes

EMIL NEACSA (RO)

- ♦ Currently pursuing a Master’s degree in international and European law
- ♦ Stays active in the community through volunteering, youth climate work and training others in soft skills
- ” I’m always curious to learn more about the world and explore new places

KNUT WASSMO (NO)

- ♦ Works in press for Save the Children
- ♦ Interested in art, music, psychology, philosophy, politics, problem-solving, and activism. Enjoys singing, martial arts and hunting
- ” The reason that I like politics is that we can create a future where the joy of our activities is more prominent in all people’s lives, than the problems that prevent them from experiencing it

Team Profiles

NICOLETTA TRAISTA (MD)

- ◆ Currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Techniques and Methods in Psychological Science at the University of Padova
- ♥ Interested in cultural and intercultural psychology, media psychology, narrative psychology, and ethics
- ” In the past, I have conducted research in media psychology as well as in narrative psychology. Beyond academics, I have a strong love for language, stories, expression, ethics and morality, which I nurture through learning new languages, reading and music

AMELA KASA (AL/DE)

- ◆ International Business at Fachoberschule (technical college) Regensburg
- ♥ Interested in business, politics, law, arts and philosophy
- ” I am a memento collector, that means that I like to collect keepsakes that symbolise significant memories or past experiences

TAISIYA SOLODKA (UA)

- ◆ Currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Biotechnology at the Technical University of Berlin
- ♥ Interested in youth activism, STEM equality, humanitarian support, freedom of academic research, and education access
- ” I love salsa and bachata dancing, reading, and travelling to discover new places

MAKSYM LOHARZHEVSKYI (UA)

- ◆ Currently doing a Bachelor's degree in politics, philosophy and economics at Charles University
- ♥ Interested in the application of technological development as a political means, urban and regional development, EU politics, security and international relations, and economics
- ” When I was 5 years old, I knew the brands of almost every car



The Charter and Climate



INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis is rapidly intensifying across Europe, with 2024 recorded as the continent's warmest year.¹ Extreme weather events such as storms, floods, heatwaves, and droughts are causing loss of life, disrupting communities, and imposing significant social and economic costs. Our aim is to highlight the perspectives of young Europeans on environmental protection, identify key gaps in political commitment, legal accountability, and public participation, and propose concrete measures to strengthen the right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

CORE ISSUES

- Surveys indicate that the majority of young people experience stress and uncertainty linked to the climate crisis, also known as **eco-anxiety**.²
- The climate crisis demands urgent environmental protection, yet political responses across Europe remain inadequate.³ In some cases, this is compounded by political withdrawal from climate commitments or outright denial of the crisis itself, further weakening enforcement, eroding public trust, and leaving citizens without **effective safeguards**.⁴
- While the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFREU) includes environmental protection in Article 37, it is classified as a principle rather than a directly enforceable right. This reduces the legal leverage needed to protect the environment effectively and limits citizens' ability to hold their governments accountable.
- In 2023, harmful energy subsidies in the EU totalled around €136 billion, with €93 billion linked to fossil fuels.⁵ Less than half are scheduled to end by 2025, and nearly half have no clear end date or extend beyond 2030, slowing the transition to renewable energy and delaying decarbonisation efforts.

PROPOSALS

To strengthen environmental governance, mechanisms must enable citizens, especially young people, to **hold institutions accountable**. Existing EU complaint and enforcement systems often fall short, as shown by a 2022 report from the European Environmental Bureau and BirdLife Europe,⁶ which found that many stakeholder complaints to the European Commission were ignored or inadequately addressed. Reforming these structures is therefore essential: public complaint systems should be more accessible and transparent, online platforms should allow citizens to monitor enforcement actions, and consistent penalties must apply for violations. The EU should promote education and awareness initiatives, while Member States implement them nationally. This ensures that young people know their rights and can actively contribute to environmental decision-making.

Transforming Article 37 from a guiding principle into a binding right would make environmental protection legally enforceable, allowing citizens to claim their right to a healthy environment in court directly. While amending the EU Charter is complex and long-term, secondary legislation like directives and regulations aligned with Article 37 can immediately strengthen national laws, making enforcement more consistent across Member States. This approach pushes EU bodies to ensure that environmental commitments become enforceable obligations in national legislation, moving beyond mere principles to real rights.



The Charter and Climate

The FIRESPOL project⁷ exemplifies this approach by introducing financial instruments and grants to overcome barriers in renewable energy investment, promoting decentralised energy solutions and empowering communities through local ownership, reduced energy costs, and greater control over their environmental future. We recommend **scaling up** and replicating such **initiatives** across Member States **to strengthen community-based energy transitions**.

Persisting fossil fuel subsidies must be phased out while **boosting renewable energy investment with concrete projects**. For example, Germany's ThEGA solar pilot project⁸ showed that informing homeowners about their roofs' solar potential led many to install photovoltaic systems,⁹ generating clean energy and cutting carbon emissions. Other initiatives, such as Ireland's domestic photovoltaic programme,¹⁰ demonstrate that targeted support can help communities adopt decentralised, sustainable energy solutions. Subsidising clean energy technologies promotes the shift to low-carbon living, raises awareness about sustainable energy, and enhances energy security.

To reduce youth eco-anxiety, programmes like citizens' assemblies¹¹ involve young people in real decision-making about environmental policies. This can be done by organising regular forums where youth represent diverse backgrounds to discuss climate issues, propose solutions, and directly advise policymakers.

These **participatory processes** create a safe space **for young people** to express their concerns, feel heard, and actively contribute to shaping policies.

These assemblies lead to well-informed, widely supported policy recommendations, while simultaneously providing youth with agency and a tangible way to influence the policies that shape their future.¹² For example, the Youth Climate Assembly in Estonia, brought together 40 young people aged 16–29 to assess the region's Just Transition Plan¹³ and provide recommendations on transitioning from the oil shale industry to greener energy solutions. By directly contributing to policy decisions, participants strengthened their sense of agency and alleviated climate-related anxiety.¹⁴

FURTHER REFERENCES

The Youth Climate Assembly in Ida-Viru County, Estonia, serves as a concrete example of how young Europeans can meaningfully shape environmental policy through participatory democracy. Building on its success, further research should explore how similar assemblies could be institutionalised across Europe and integrated into broader environmental governance frameworks. To inspire reflection on these issues, we invite you to explore the following resources:

- A comprehensive overview of the assembly and its outcomes by the Climate Investment Funds: *A Youth Climate Assembly in Ida-Viru, Estonia*
<https://www.cif.org/just-transition-toolbox/example/youth-climate-assembly-ida-viru-estonia>
- Resources and materials on the assembly from People Powered for climate action: *Youth Climate Assembly in the Ida-Viru region, Estonia*
<https://www.peoplepowered.org/resources-content/youth-climate-assembly-in-the-ida-viru-region-estonia>
- Resources and materials on the just transition process in Estonia from CEE Bankwatch Network: *Estonia's Young Heroes Leading the Just Transition Charge*
<https://bankwatch.org/blog/estonia-s-young-heroes-leading-the-just-transition-charge>

The Charter and Cultural Heritage



INTRODUCTION

The European Union's motto, *United in Diversity*, reflects the belief that its strength lies in the rich and vibrant interaction of cultures, languages and traditions. Culture is a multifaceted right that should be prioritised, as overlooking it directly undermines fundamental rights such as human dignity, freedom of expression, artistic creation, the right to education, non-discrimination, and the respect for cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity as protected in the Charter. European institutions must prioritise cultural protection within their policy frameworks. As Jonathan Scheele, former Head of the European Commission Delegation in Romania, observed: *'Europe continues to be a project of its citizens'*.¹⁵

It is therefore the responsibility of every citizen—regardless of their social background or profession, whether they are a student or a policymaker—to ensure that cultural preservation remains a shared commitment.

CORE ISSUES

- Globalisation¹⁶ has contributed significantly to the erosion of cultural identity and local heritage across the EU, undermining traditional practices and artistic diversity.
- The rise of far-right political movements promoting exclusionary ideas of cultural supremacy¹⁷ further marginalises minority groups. This limits the freedoms of already disproportionately affected communities, further censoring voices and reducing their visibility.
- Several Central and Eastern European Member States continue to underperform in cultural protection due to chronic underfunding, weaker institutional capacities, and the long-term effects of post-socialist transitions.¹⁸
- Natural heritage sites and tangible cultural assets face continuous threats from armed conflicts, the escalating climate crisis, and neglect by the national and local authorities, threatening their preservation.¹⁹
- Despite significant investments, many cultural heritage preservation initiatives are unable to obtain adequate or continuous support due to the absence of integrated, well-structured funding frameworks and limited resources for long-term projects.²⁰
- Although most Europeans value heritage education, cultural education in schools is often superficial and underprioritised, only focusing on facts, and lacking emotional or community connection, reducing its effectiveness.²¹
- The need for housing and expansion of cities as a result of rapid urbanisation, combined with modern architectural development, frequently clashes with historical sites in European cities, putting culturally significant sites at risk of demolition, as seen in areas like Lövholmen in Stockholm.²²
- Socio-economic and demographic disparities²³ such as low income, unemployment, disability, rural isolation or limited access to education, continue to create significant barriers to cultural accessibility and participation.

PROPOSALS

To make cultural heritage more tangible, cultural education should be strengthened through **workshops and local heritage projects** that teach about regional traditions and practices. Member States should make cultural employment more attractive by providing education grants, facilitating international exchanges, and **raising public appreciation for cultural professions**. European joint initiatives, particularly collaborative projects in the cultural and creative sectors, can challenge negative perceptions of cultural education and foster broader appreciation for Europe's diverse heritage.

The EU should expand capacity building²⁴ by **increasing support for EU-wide cultural exchange programmes** such as Erasmus+ and EmS,²⁵ ensuring these initiatives remain well-funded and accessible for both youth and cultural professionals. Current budget proposals for Erasmus+ in the 2027 framework risk excluding marginalised groups, which could undermine opportunities for democratic participation and cultural engagement for many young people. These organisations are not only strategic investments in European identity and innovation, but they also directly support fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter, including the rights to education, non-discrimination, and cultural participation.

The Charter and Cultural Heritage

To make cultural heritage more accessible and visible, further **investment in digital platforms**, such as content-sharing networks, archives, and educational portals, is needed to promote cultural expression and participation. The **digitisation of cultural collections and archives** through organisations such as Europeana is crucial for open online access. Particular attention should be given to the representation of disadvantaged groups in digital heritage projects. This effort should be complemented with digital skills training and inclusive tools to guarantee equal opportunities for participation.

Taking further steps to **address the disparities in funding between Member States** is crucial. The European Commission should encourage underperforming states to increase cultural funding and avoid cuts. In addition, a dedicated EU cultural fund could support countries in Central and Eastern Europe that face financial constraints due to economic challenges, post-socialist legacies, or nearby conflicts.

This would ensure that heritage initiatives are adequately supported, safeguarding the collective right to cultural diversity, especially in historically underfunded regions. Raising awareness of tangible and intangible cultural heritage requires **supporting local communities and artists**. Bringing collections, concerts, and exhibitions to rural or suburban areas, and ensuring barrier-free access, fosters stronger connections to traditions and encourages inclusive participation. These measures should be pursued through a pan-European approach, ensuring that cultural preservation and participation remain consistent and accessible across all regions. Finally, continuous research is vital in order to identify gaps in the EU's cultural preservation framework.

The Charter and Technology



INTRODUCTION

Every day, billions of digital interactions take place across Europe—our messages, searches, purchases, and personal data travel online. Yet most Europeans worry about how their information is collected, used, and shared, and feel they lack control over their digital lives. The rapid growth of technology offers incredible opportunities but also real risks to privacy, personal integrity, freedom of expression, and equal access to online services. This chapter focuses on safeguarding these rights, ensuring people can control their data, communicate freely, and participate online without discrimination. At the same time, digital innovation must respect fairness, equality, and environmental sustainability. By grounding our proposals in these principles, we aim for a human-centred digital Europe that serves its citizens, not the other way around.

CORE ISSUES

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) violations by foreign multinational companies constitute a problem.²⁶ Despite the Regulation's role in giving practical effect to Article 8 of the Charter by turning fundamental data protection rights into concrete and enforceable obligations, weak enforcement within the EU and the lack of harmonised standards with non-EU states often leave such infringements unaddressed or insufficiently penalised.
- Many EU candidate countries struggle to align their national laws with GDPR, the AI (Artificial Intelligence) Act, and the Digital Services Act (DSA) due to limited resources, institutional weaknesses, shifting priorities, and the rapid pace of EU regulation.²⁷
- The DSA does not place sufficient obligations on Very Large Online Platforms²⁸ (VLOPs), e.g., Facebook, TikTok, X, etc., to manage illegal content and ensure their transparency.
- Current safeguards for personal data under national laws are inadequate,²⁹ particularly against cyberattacks, leading to frequent breaches that compromise citizens' personal information held by various entities, including large corporations.
- Advances in generative AI, such as LLMs³⁰ and deepfakes, create risks including privacy violations, misinformation, identity misuse, and opaque decision-making.³¹
- Efforts to regulate illegal content, such as threats and harassment, sometimes lead to restrictions that conflict with fundamental rights and freedoms, i.e. platforms or authorities removing content that, while contentious, falls within the bounds of protected freedom of expression rather than genuinely illegal speech.
- The AI industry's growing environmental impact,³² especially from facilities outside EU oversight, stems from the escalating and largely unregulated consumption of energy, generation of greenhouse gas emissions, and depletion of resources, which directly obstruct global climate sustainability efforts.

PROPOSALS

The EU should **implement tiered financial penalties, linked to global turnover, for foreign companies violating GDPR, alongside mandatory EU-based representatives with direct liability.**

A **joint data protection framework**, built on enhanced adequacy decisions and mutual legal assistance, should reduce loopholes. Foreign companies require clear compliance rules, including mandatory EU-standardised data protection audits. Public authorities need increased funding for DPAs, proactive AI-assisted monitoring, and an **‘EU GDPR Enforcement Coordination Unit’** for cross-border cooperation.

National governments should build specialised educational systems, funded by EU pre-accession funds, for legal and IT professionals. The EU must promote and fund advisory bodies, ‘twinning projects’, and technical assistance. The EU should work toward harmonised regulations by setting **clear legislative benchmarks and timelines**, linking pre-accession funding to legal alignment, and conducting impact assessments.

DSA enforcement for VLOPs needs clear accountability, including senior executive liability, and **stronger penalties** like increased minimum fines and service restrictions. Mandatory, independent, publicly available **transparency audits** are crucial. Detection of illegal content will improve through proactive AI technologies, a centralised EU reporting mechanism, and data sharing with law enforcement. Citizens should report violations, and civil society should monitor platforms. Tech companies must adopt best moderation and transparency practices. EU institutions will enable independent audits and promote global accountability standards.

It is necessary to enhance data protection against cyberattacks with an **‘EU Cybersecurity Research and Innovation Fund’** for threat research and advanced defence. We suggest implementing mandatory **sector-specific cybersecurity standards**, regular penetration testing, and vulnerability assessments. Key stakeholders must engage in coordinated collaboration through ‘Cybersecurity Resilience Hubs’ for threat intelligence and joint exercises, encompassing IT teams, employee training, and regulators ensuring compliance via enhanced auditing and harmonised incident response protocols.

It is important to implement **precise regulations for generative AI**, including mandatory digital watermarking and metadata for AI-generated content and clear legal definitions with associated liabilities. Also, we suggest **prohibiting specific malicious** uses like non-consensual deepfakes. We require robust operational rules, mandatory AI impact assessments for high-risk systems, and strong digital rights protections including a **‘right to explanation’**. The dedicated **‘European Generative AI Regulator’** should be established to monitor misuse, violations and apply graduated enforcement.

Surveillance of private communications must be excluded. Moderation should target public content with transparent, accountable oversight. Tech companies must adopt rights-respecting moderation, privacy-by-default settings, and clear user controls, and public bodies should enforce rules consistently using risk-based criteria without breaching the Charter.

Protecting children online requires parental guidance, age standards, platform safeguards, and **EU-wide coordination** with practical guidelines and measurable compliance to uphold their rights and safety.

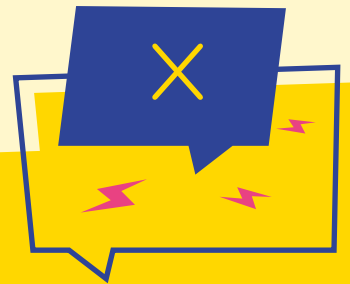
The EU should set **binding climate and energy-efficiency standards for AI infrastructure**, including consumption limits and Emissions Trading System integration for data centres. Also, it should regulate AI systems by prohibiting training/ deployment on non-compliant facilities outside the EU. We suggest mandated **standardised disclosure of energy sources, water usage, and carbon footprints** across the AI lifecycle, publicly accessible. Also, we urge for the **introduction of incentives for renewable energy**, like green procurement and grants, alongside progressive sanctions. Lastly, we encourage EU location for AI facilities through tax benefits and affordable loans for sustainable infrastructure.

FURTHER REFERENCES

As mentioned, AI's growth raises concerns beyond energy use, including hardware production and waste, highlighting the need for full life-cycle sustainability metrics. At the same time, gaps in enforcing GDPR against foreign companies show limits to Europe's digital sovereignty. We believe that further research should link environmental standards with stronger cross-border rights enforcement. To foster thoughts on this matter, we invite you to explore the following sources, which are linked to each of these two issues respectively:

- Desroches, A., Morley, J., Floridi, L., & Birhane, A. (2025). *Exploring the sustainable scaling of AI dilemma: A projective study of corporations' AI environmental impacts*. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2501.14334>
- European Data Protection Board. (2024). *Report on the extraterritorial enforcement of the GDPR*. https://www.edpb.europa.eu/our-work-tools/our-documents/other/report-extraterritorial-enforcement-gdpr_cs

The Charter and Non-Discrimination



INTRODUCTION

Colonialism, anthropocentrism, patriarchal structures and capitalistic values have left deep roots in European society. This has resulted in marginalised groups being systematically discriminated³³ against in almost all aspects of life. This, in combination with the recent rise of the far right, has intensified discrimination numbers further, increasing by 6% from 2019 to 2023.³⁴ Against this backdrop, this chapter examines the Charter's protection against discrimination and outlines ways to strengthen it for millions of Europeans.

CORE ISSUES

- EU anti-discrimination efforts are grounded in the Charter, which reaffirms non-discrimination on multiple grounds. There are currently many different directives to combat discrimination, such as the racial equality directive³⁵ and the directive on equal pay transparency.³⁶ These efforts, however, fall under shared competence between the EU and Member States, meaning the EU does not have exclusive authority to decide. As a result, directives are often applied as standalone issues, and the absence of an intersectional approach³⁷ leaves more complex forms of discrimination unaddressed.
- European citizens with a disability still face barriers to casting their votes, such as a lack of accessible voting options and laws which exclude citizens with intellectual disabilities from voting.³⁸
- Marginalised communities, such as racialised ethnic groups often have poor relationships with law enforcement³⁹ and court systems. This dynamic is rooted in a history of police brutality⁴⁰ and centuries of institutionalised racism,⁴¹ leaving affected groups hesitant to report crimes⁴² and police profiling.
- Increased social media use has fueled an alarming rise in online hate speech,⁴³ including racist and misogynistic abuse and targeted disinformation campaigns. Existing legislation, such as the DSA, has proven to be insufficient to counter the scale and complexity of the problem.⁴⁴
- The lack of consolidated and accessible data on hate crimes,⁴⁵ driven by underreporting and limited follow-up, prevents national bodies and the press from effectively assessing the scale and evolution of online hate.
- The scope of the Charter is limited, only applying to areas of EU legal competencies, leaving significant gaps to be addressed at the national level. This leads to uneven protection across Member States, where victims of discrimination in areas such as housing, employment outside of EU directives, or private services must rely on varying national legislations.
- Whilst there are measures and routes in place for people to counter discrimination within private settings,⁴⁶ they are complex and can be intimidating for the public to access. Often, courts only make changes in high-level cases with prevalent discrimination, meaning smaller and daily instances of prejudice are overlooked.

PROPOSALS

We encourage an **increase in communication and cooperation between different EU directives** and action plans. This could be achieved through regular inter-directive meetings, joint reporting mechanisms, shared databases and the collaborative drafting of standardised procedures for handling cases of stacked or intersectional discrimination.

Article 26 should be reinforced to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are fully integrated into European democracies. We recommend establishing different national advisory councils representing marginalised groups, following examples like the Saami councils⁴⁷ to promote increased political participation and visibility of these communities.

We recommend the establishment of outreach projects for marginalised communities, such as **community liaison officers**, which would build trust between authorities and minorities and be carried out through public services and institutions such as schools and libraries. Additionally, the national advisory councils should be encouraged to assess the current state of judicial systems, with the results allowing room for justice reform.

We propose the **tri-annual revision of guidelines** to advise Member States on how best to **combat the rapidly changing online hate**. These should include clear criteria to determine online hate speech and misinformation—to ensure the protection of freedom of speech whilst prohibiting violent and hateful rhetoric. We additionally urge social media platforms to make clearer, more accessible avenues to report hate speech and misinformation.

The Charter and Non-Discrimination

We support the **continued creation of media campaigns and educational programmes to raise citizens' awareness of their rights** and their options to challenge discrimination in their daily lives. We encourage the development of EU-level reporting platforms that integrate national equality bodies and provide accessible legal guidance, reducing common barriers such as complex procedures and lengthy court processes.

The Charter and Democracy and Media



INTRODUCTION

Media plays a key role in ensuring citizens' right to fair information and freedom of speech.

With the rapid development of new technologies and the rise of extremist ideologies, the ethical and fair use of democracy's existing political instruments for media protection and rule of law⁴⁸ has become more important than ever.

In evaluating how these safeguards function today, we aimed to highlight the core problems affecting the fundamental rights of democracy: rights that allow people to stay informed, speak freely, gather and organise, and take part in elections on an equal footing, as per Articles 12, 39 and 41 of the Charter.

These rights are vital as they allow citizens to hold those in power accountable and ensure that democratic processes remain open, pluralistic, and responsive to the public interest.

CORE ISSUES

- The rise of far-right parties in certain EU Member States has threatened journalistic independence through Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP's), harassment, threats and surveillance.⁴⁹ Examples include Italy (Fratelli d'Italia), Germany (Alternative for Germany), France (National Rally), Austria (Freedom Party of Austria), all of which currently hold more than 20% of the vote.
- The growing concentration of media assets in the hands of a few powerful actors poses a significant threat to democratic institutions. The economic interests of the KEMSA foundation (Central European Press and Media Foundation) in Hungary⁵⁰ and Vincent Bollore's expanding influence in Italian media⁵¹ show how media influence can be weaponised against the public interest.
- Reducing budgets, censoring, minimising and interfering in unbiased journalistic reports, especially those reflecting EU values, endangers the freedom of the press.
- European mechanisms used for addressing breaches of EU law, including media freedom violations, rely on instruments such as the infringement procedure⁵² and the conditionality mechanism.⁵³ Their application remains slow and inconsistent, as the use often depends on political considerations.
- The rise of far-right parties⁵⁴ and the suspension of media reflecting European values⁵⁵ threatens citizens' right to fair information and fair voting, as seen during the 2022 elections in Hungary.⁵⁶ Disinformation threatens democracy⁵⁷ and these practices create an uneven playing field, directly compromising electoral fairness and citizens' fundamental right to make informed choices.

PROPOSALS

We suggest facilitating more accessible, **long-term funding opportunities** for media outlets and NGOs that promote democratic values and fundamental rights, **rather than relying on short-term, project-based support**. Currently, most EU media funds are directed towards initiatives with a big emphasis on collaboration and innovation (26.9%), while topics like disinformation, public trust, media freedom, and pluralism receive only 6.1% to 11.2% of funding.⁵⁸ Additionally, we suggest that the Creative Europe Programme⁵⁹ prioritise funding for EU-oriented projects in EU candidate countries.

We call on the European Commission to **apply the Audiovisual Media Services Directive⁶⁰ to assess the work of media covering the far-right within the framework of the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalism.**⁶¹

Particular attention should be given to the first three points, which call for objectivity, freedom and accountability, which promote diversity and protect all forms of expression—including those that hold differing views, with the clear boundary of excluding content that incites violence. Applying the Directive this way will also evaluate whether Member States are prepared to implement the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA),⁶² highlighting a need for urgent action.

Focus should be on **ensuring public service media independence, proper funding, good governance, and transparency in media ownership and state advertising.**

We also encourage the European Commission through the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST),⁶³ to **increase visibility of international independent journalistic organisations** like Journalists without Borders and Forbidden Stories⁶⁴ to ensure the ongoing documentation of the socio-political situation in affected states.

The EU must use its political tools, such as the Annual Rule of Law Reports⁶⁵ **to systematically document and publicly scrutinise all breaches of media freedom and pluralism.** Beyond reporting, the EU should be ready to **apply legal and financial mechanisms**, such as the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation,⁶⁶ in Member States with widespread or persistent violations of media independence, threats to journalists' safety, or clear patterns of state-sponsored disinformation.

Support and guidance should draw on the expertise of bodies like the Venice Commission⁶⁷ or the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ),⁶⁸ providing legitimacy and independent reviews. Existing political mechanisms, such as the EU Rule of Law Framework,⁶⁹ should be used to facilitate continuous and confidential dialogue between the Commission and the Member State concerned, helping identify solutions and safeguard shared EU values. Financial and complementary monitoring tools, such as the annual Rule of Law Report, can reinforce this process by providing regular, evidence-based evaluations. Finally, media initiatives like the European Media Hubs⁷⁰ should offer diverse perspectives on political situations, supporting fair and objective coverage, especially during elections.

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Sofie de Jong
Nadja Brandt
Anya Suprunenko

CHARTER EXPERT:

Nino Tsereteli

LAYOUT AND DESIGN:

Johanna Wittig

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