

The European Democracy Summit 2026, held in partnership with the Council of Europe, brought together policymakers, industry representatives, democracy reformers and activists to discuss the future of Europe's democratic model and the concrete role business can play in strengthening it.

DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING – WHY BUSINESS CANNOT REMAIN NEUTRAL

Agreeing that Europe is facing a democratic crisis, speakers concurred that judicial independence, transparent governance and the rule of law provide the certainty on which markets and companies rely for sustained growth. As these foundations come under pressure, regulations become more unpredictable and reputational exposure increases, the cost of neutrality is rising for companies.

Participants discussed where companies should draw the line between commercial interests and civic responsibility. The debate also addressed how the private sector can contribute to democratic resilience, maintaining public trust and political legitimacy. The discussion highlighted that companies have a concrete impact over the state of democracy, as well as a strong interests in supporting democratic systems.

As Ana Gallego Torres Director General DG JUST, European Commission underlined: “In Europe, democracy and economic prosperity have evolved together”

THE WEAPONISATION OF PUBLIC DEBATE

A strong consensus emerged on how reliable information is essential for both a functioning democracy and a functioning market. As such, participants stressed that public debate and technology being increasingly interconnected is one of the main battlegrounds of Europe's democratic challenge.

Artificial intelligence, online platforms and algorithmic amplification were highlighted as core drivers of this shift, with the potential either to strengthen democratic debate or to accelerate its erosion through disinformation and deepfakes, weaponising contested policy debates to instigate division. Speakers insisted that independent, free and pluralistic press remains essential to keeping the information space open, and that social media and tech companies must similarly commit to combatting the spread of disinformation.

DEMOCRACY AS EUROPE'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The Summit reflected on how economic success rests on more than innovation and investments: it depends on stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, regulatory certainty and public trust.

This issue becomes all the more salient in long-term investments, such as industrial plants, energy supply and data centres. Participants also discussed the role of trusted global partnerships, stressing that integrated value chains make collaboration essential for innovation, especially for new technologies like AI, provided that security, accountability and public trust are upheld.

AFFORDABILITY, ECONOMIC SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC TRUST

The cost-of-living crisis is one of the most powerful drivers of democratic discontent. Participants addressed how unaffordable housing, high energy bills and lack of mitigating measures leave many citizens feeling that the economy and governing institutions no longer work to improve the standard of living, feeding distrust and support for anti-system politics.

For business, this constitutes a risk rather than a distant social question: political volatility complicates long-term investment. Speakers also highlighted how companies, especially Big Tech, have the power to bridge the gap between civil society, institutions and business by ensuring democratic safeguards such as free and fair elections and improving accessibility of information.

The European Democracy Summit 2026 demonstrated that, rather than an abstract value, democratic stability is a critical infrastructure for Europe's economic stability, and precondition for long-term investment. Preserving it is thus a direct interest and responsibility for businesses as much as it is for institutions and civil society.

The challenge now lies in moving from a shared concern to a shared commitment, through increased practical engagement from companies, closer cooperation across institutions, media and civil society. As participants highlighted throughout the Summit, defending democracy is a questions reserved to political institutions, but a responsibility shared with businesses.