

HOW CAN DEMOCRACY (AS WE
KNOW IT) SURVIVE DIGITAL
PLATFORMS AND AI

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

- **Internet**
 - **Digital platforms**
 - **Digital search engines**
 - **AI**
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- Developed mainly in the United States, spread globally, and imported to Europe.
 - A “**parallel world**” has been created – gradually taking dominance, where online reality increasingly affects offline life in all thinkable ways.

THE WAY WE:

- think, study, communicate
- interpret reality individually
- create “tribes”
- live as individuals and as societies
- do business
- govern states (democracy vs. autocracy)
- vote
- build, develop or destroy human relationships
- love?

SIR TIM BERNERS-LEE – INVENTOR OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB

His warnings

On Internet:

“When inventing it, I had in mind better communication, education, enlightenment creating space for truth and human progress... How different the reality is.”

Lisbon Digital Summit, 2018

On AI:

“If you make AI smarter than yourself, that’s an issue.”

TV Interview, 2025



DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

ACTION CAUSES REACTION

European
Parliament

2019 ELECTIONS

- INFO HUB
- GROUP & BICYCLE VISITS
- PARLIAMENTARIUM
- HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY
- STATION EUROPE - INFORMA
- ZWEIF VISITOR CENTRE
- CITIZENS' GARDEN

EUROPE'S REACTION TO THE IMPORTED 'PARALLEL DOMINANT WORLD':

- Invest public money in digital infrastructure
- Invest in education
- Attract global talent – thinkers and researchers
- Reduce the digital and innovation gap compared to the US and China

MINIMISING HARM TO INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY:

1. Threats to privacy

2. Security risks:

- child sexual
- abuse material
- hate speech
- extremism racism

3. Hybrid warfare risks:

- cyberattacks on critical infrastructure
- sabotage and subversive actions using digital and AI tools
- disinformation campaigns (ad hoc and long-term)

4. Impact on mental health and cognitive capacities



DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE

Democracy as we know it is under extreme pressure for many reasons:

- Multiple unprecedented crises citizens feel unable to solve
- Financial crises, illegal migration, terrorism, inflation
- Energy crisis, poverty, housing shortages
- Epidemics and war
- A strong demand for fast and efficient solutions
- “Do it for us” instead of “Do it with us”
- Negative emotions amplified by social media and AI
- A fertile ground for populists (“we promise everything”) and autocrats (“we act fast, without democratic constraints”)

TO PROTECT
THE
DEMOCRATIC
SYSTEM, WE
MUST TAKE
SEVERAL KEY
FACTORS INTO
ACCOUNT:

1. **Democracy is not a given principle**
– nor automatic, neither guaranteed
2. **People – citizens, voters** – must trust
the system and be willing to play their role
3. **Democracy** – as we know it – **has to
innovate, to adapt** to new conditions and
societal demands



**I. DEMOCRACY IS NOT A GIVEN
PRINCIPLE - NOR AUTOMATIC,
NEITHER GUARANTEED**

VOTE

ANALYSES OF ISSUES:

- **Democratic, free and fair elections** are essential, but they are **not the only parameter of democracy**.
- **Elections were traditionally a competition between real people, their visions and their ability to convince voters.** Is this now an old-fashioned ideal? Increasingly, elections resemble a competition based on manipulative, cheap and unethical methods (e.g. Cambridge Analytica).
- **Manipulation takes many forms:** hidden techniques, algorithms, AI-generated deepfakes and massive volumes of targeted messages driven by AI, which can deprive voters of genuine free decision-making (UK – Brexit? Romania? Germany? Slovakia?).
- **Winners tend to take it all**, putting checks and balances under pressure.
- **Democracy is slow and can be easily dismantled** through small, almost invisible steps.
- **Democracy is also difficult to define** — and what cannot be clearly defined cannot be effectively defended.
- **Political campaigning has become largely a digitalised form of marketing** — inevitable, with both positive and negative consequences — often accompanied by non-transparent financing.
- **The rising impact of influencers.**
- **At the same time, the role of traditional media is weakening:** public service media and established commercial media are under growing pressure from both politics and digital platforms.
- **Cyberattacks targeting electoral infrastructure** further undermine trust by sowing doubt about election results.

REMEDY:

- **Enforcement of the Digital Services Act, the Regulation on Political Advertising and AI Act** (obligatory labelling)
- **Enforcement of European Media Freedom Act**
- **Codes of Conduct of political parties** to refrain from using untransparent methods
- **Data analyses at national level** at the time of elections (6 weeks ahead)
- **Findings on manipulations and manipulative techniques** must be publicly available and explained

An illustration of a diverse group of people, including men and women of various ethnicities, holding up signs and a ballot. The signs prominently display the word 'VOTE' in blue and white, with some featuring a red checkmark. One person is holding a ballot with a red checkmark in a box. The background is a solid grey color.

**2. PEOPLE – CITIZENS, VOTERS –
MUST TRUST THE SYSTEM AND BE
WILLING TO PLAY THEIR ROLE**

ANALYSES OF
ISSUES:

- **Lack of trust in democracy** (40% and more in some countries)
- **Feeling of helplessness**, calling on the **strong hand** to deliver solutions
- **“Our voice is not heard”**
- **Access to evidence based truth more and more difficult, disinformation** seeking to increase **distrust** in democracy and dem. elections, sowing unrest and dissatisfaction

REMEDY:

- **Well informed and demanding citizens who care about the society and the future** – basic element of democracy (and parameter of its stability and success – see Scandinavians)
- **Active engagement** – not just in time of elections (local, regional, state...). Passive crowd easy to manipulate is a dream of autocrats
- **Communication top down** – show more trust and make visible effort to engage people in decision making, shaping the future, planning short term and long term
- **Social media** – an opportunity not just a threat – democrats have to adapt to it, it will not happen vice versa
- **Protect public service media as a trusted source of facts**
- **Young people engagement** – get them out of the rabbit holes
- **Protect NGOs against political attacks**
- **Education** – media literacy, knowledge of modern history etc.

A hand holding a glowing lightbulb with a brain-like structure above it, surrounded by various technology and science icons. The background is dark with a grid pattern and various icons including a Wi-Fi symbol, a robotic arm, a globe, a smartphone, a laptop, a target, a power line tower, and a gear. The text is centered in a white box.

**3. DEMOCRACY HAS TO INNOVATE, TO ADAPT TO
NEW CONDITIONS, SOCIETAL DEMANDS AND NEW
GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT**

ANALYSES OF ISSUES:

- **“The end of history” as a dangerous myth**
- **Transition due to digitalisation affecting all strands of our lives** – why not democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights?
- **Demography, aging voters**
- **Short memory need to find new ways of warnings against totalitarian regimes**
- **War propaganda** – Russian efforts to win the information war (Europe, Africa, America..) – need to find ways of making democracy more resilient and immune against the attacks from outside (with the help of internal proxies)

REMEDY:

- **Need to actively look for innovations of the democratic system** – to make it more sexy, more “digital“ and “ human“ at the same time, more resilient, more practical, more visibly useful – a job for researchers, great enlightened minds from marketing and digital industry (not just for politicians)
- **Need to innovate the voting system as a reaction on the demographic situation** – consider 16 years limit and e-voting (with relevant civic education) – for each individual state to consider
- **Need to find new ways of warnings against totalitarian regimes** – in education, culture, film industry (survivors are leaving us, “do not be indifferent“ is their main message)
- **War propaganda** – this is a matter to be dealt with by many relevant world, European and national actors including security and military structures. We need to react adequately – sanctioning distributors of disinformation campaigns, prebunking of the campaigns, taking care of the facts in concrete sectors. We need proper enforcement of Digital Services Act and more coordinated efforts of FIMI actors, NATO, specialized agencies (FR VIGINUM, SE Psychological Defence Agency)



CONCLUSION:

- Democracy as we know it will not survive, unless we do everything possible to upgrade it and make it more resilient.
- But, who are we?

As Madeleine Albright once told me:

“It is for the people to say – we want it.”

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**