



**Keynote speech of Yannick Shetty, parliamentary group leader of NEOS in the Austrian Parliament, at the European Liberal Forum Spring 2026 General Assembly in Vienna on 17 April 2026**

Good morning, everyone,

It is a real pleasure to be here today and an honour to open this General Assembly. I have been told by colleagues who were already here yesterday that the discussions have been both intense and inspiring — exactly the kind of exchange that Europe needs right now. And I think that is precisely what makes this forum so valuable: it creates space not just to analyse problems, but to challenge each other on how we respond to them.

When we speak about resilient democracies, we often focus on institutions — on independent courts, free media, and checks and balances. And all of that is, of course, essential.

But resilience is not only tested in constitutional theory. It is tested in political reality — in the moments where pressure builds and systems are forced to prove that they can actually deliver.

Against this backdrop, I would like to offer a specific perspective — one shaped by my role as my party's spokesperson on integration, but also by my own background. I was born right here in this city to an Austrian mother and an Indian father.

And maybe that is why I believe that if we want to have an honest conversation about democratic resilience today, there is one issue we cannot ignore: Migration.

Not because it is the biggest challenge we face — but because it brings many of them together.

Migration is not just about asylum or forced displacement. It is, in a much broader sense, about movement — about people making decisions to build their lives elsewhere, across borders, within an increasingly interconnected world.

It is a constant feature of globalization. A driver of economic dynamism. A force of social transformation.



And at the same time — and we need to be equally clear about this — it is also a challenge.

A challenge that must be addressed at every level: institutional, political, economic, and societal.

And that is exactly why I chose to speak about migration in the context of resilient democracies.

Because few issues test the capacity of our European democratic systems as directly as this one.

Migration is not a temporary phenomenon, nor is it a crisis that will simply pass. It is a structural reality of our past, present, and especially our future.

People move — because of conflict, economic opportunity, climate change, and globalization itself. And Europe will remain one, if not **the** main destination globally.

So the real question is not whether migration happens.

The real question is whether democratic systems are capable of managing it.

Migration touches something fundamental: identity, fairness, and control.

And when people feel that these are no longer being managed well, trust in the ability of democratic systems erodes.

Once that trust weakens, the political consequences are immediate. We see it across the world: migration becomes the central battleground of political competition. It fuels polarization and creates fertile ground for those who are not interested in improving democracy, but in undermining it.

And this dynamic is not accidental.

It follows a pattern — an authoritarian playbook.

The logic is simple.

You take a complex issue like migration and turn it into a cultural conflict. You create a sense of threat, tell people that the system has failed them, and promise simple solutions through strong leadership. Institutions are discredited, opponents delegitimized — and once fear takes hold, democratic checks begin to erode. It works.

And the uncomfortable truth is: it works partly because it builds on real problems. So what is the alternative?

It begins with honesty.



Migration is a real policy challenge. When integration fails, when parallel societies form, when people feel that the system is unfair, that is real. And people are right to expect their governments to address it.

Acknowledging this is not a concession to populism.  
It is the foundation of credibility.  
But honesty must be followed by action.  
A resilient democracy is one that delivers.

And in migration, that means three things: order, integration, and cooperation.

Order means functioning systems. Fast and fair asylum procedures, clear decisions, and consequences that are actually enforced. Without this, legitimacy erodes.

Integration means participation from day one. Language, education, access to the labour market. Because exclusion creates parallel realities, and parallel realities undermine democratic cohesion.

And cooperation means recognizing a basic fact: migration is a European challenge. No single country can manage it alone. Without European solutions and international partners, national systems will remain under permanent pressure.

But there is another dimension we need to address.  
Because today, the resilience of our democracies is tested not only in the physical world — but in the digital one.

We are witnessing the emergence of a digital radicalization ecosystem. Algorithms amplify outrage. They reward extreme content. And migration is one of the issues where this dynamic is most visible. Young people searching for belonging are drawn into narratives that simplify, divide, and radicalize.  
We can see that on the radical right, but also on the side of the radical Islamists.

Often their radicalizations are different sides of the same coin.  
Step by step, the boundaries of what is acceptable shift.

This is not a marginal issue.  
It is a direct threat to democratic stability.  
Europe has started to respond. But regulation still lags behind reality. If we are serious about resilience, we must treat digital spaces as part of our democratic infrastructure.  
So where does this leave us?



If there is an authoritarian playbook, then **\*\*there must also be a liberal playbook\*\*** too.

Not as theory — but as practice.

First: own the hard questions.

Do not cede migration, security, or cohesion to the populists.

Second: deliver results.

Democracy survives when it works — when people experience fairness, order, and opportunity in their daily lives.

Third: protect democratic institutions.

Independent courts, free media, strong parliaments — these are the foundation of freedom.

Fourth: build Europe.

On migration, digital regulation, and security, the nation state alone is too small.

And fifth: tell a better story about the future.

Authoritarians offer a narrative of fear and lost greatness. We need to offer something more powerful: a vision of what we are building together.

This conference asks us to look ahead — and to imagine Europe in 2050.

I want to believe that in 2050, a young person with his own migration history — or any combination of the world's stories — can stand in front of an audience like this and be heard not as a symbol of a problem, but simply as a citizen. As a leader. As a liberal.

That future is not inevitable.

But it is possible.

The democracies that will survive the next decades are those that have the courage to be honest about what is difficult — and the determination to fix it.

Let's build that future together.

Thank you.