

EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY: BETWEEN CHALLENGES AND COUNTERMEASURES

Andra DIPRATU

Elena NEDELICU

Professor, PhD, Faculty of International Relations and Administration, „Nicolae Titulescu”
University of Bucharest
doina.nedelcu@yahoo.com

Abstract

We set out to analyse the future of democracy worldwide, and particularly in Europe, given that over the past decade it has experienced a clear decline on a global scale. Reports from the most renowned intergovernmental institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutes that measure the quality of political life, elections, civil liberties, and the rule of law point to an increase in the number of dictatorial regimes, a decrease in the number of countries undergoing democratization, and even a decline in democracy in some countries with a long history of democracy. This situation is causing serious concerns among the majority of European citizens. This paper seeks to determine whether and to what extent the way democracy is perceived and evaluated by European citizens has influenced and continues to influence its evolution. We were interested in finding answers to the following questions: Do citizens, particularly Europeans, still believe in democracy? Do they still feel committed to democracy? What is their level of satisfaction with the EU, both generally and regionally? Is there a significant difference between the values promoted by the EU and those shared by European citizens in its various regions? If so, what are the implications? The paper includes several conclusions regarding the EU's ability to protect its democracy, to successfully manage potential internal conflicts of values, and to address current challenges, namely the rise of illiberal (autocratic) regimes and illegitimate external interference in European politics.

Keywords: democracy, perceptions, assessments, European values, national values, evolution

Introduction: The Global Decline of Democracy Over the Past Decade (2017–2026)

The Freedom House report, *Nations in Transition*, shows that from Central Europe to Central Asia, democracy has been in decline for the 19th consecutive year. In 11 of the 29

countries, democracy scores have fallen significantly. Russia recorded the sharpest decline in a single year, due to the violent crackdown on protesters opposing the invasion of Ukraine. 'Nevertheless, seven countries saw improvements thanks to civic activists and democratic leaders who continued to fight for better governance throughout the region. Romania is stable, unlike most of its neighbouring countries, but it faces issues with the ethics of its leaders, which, at some point, could even undermine public confidence in democracy and the mechanisms for holding elected officials accountable.'¹

Another noteworthy report, the 2023 V-Dem Institute Report², shows that in 2022, 72% of the world's population (5.7 billion people) lived in countries with autocratic regimes, many of which reached the level of dictatorships. Thus, for the first time in more than two decades, there are more dictatorial regimes in the world (28% of the population) than liberal democracies (13% of the population). The number of countries in the process of democratization has fallen sharply over the past two decades: in 2002 there were 43; in 2022, only 14.

The Annual Report of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)³, published on November 2, 2023, echoes this sentiment, noting the weakening of the foundations of democracy worldwide and the decline of democracy in Europe and the rest of the world. It argues that the world is experiencing its most severe period of 'democratic recession' since 1975, a conclusion based on several indicators, such as civil liberties, judicial independence, and political participation. Of the 173 countries analysed, 85 scored poorly on at least 'one key indicator of democratic performance over the past five years.' Although Europe remains 'the best-performing region in the world, thanks to a number of well-established democracies,'⁴ the report nevertheless notes a decline in democracy in certain historically stable democratic countries. These include Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal. In Central Europe, despite the European Commission having blocked billions of euros in funds due to violations of the rule of law, Hungary and Poland are not making progress, with the

¹ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/raport-freedom-house-democratia-in-declin-europa-centrala-asia-centrala/32424712.html>

² The V-Dem Institute (Varieties of Democracy), which operates within the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, produces the world's largest dataset on democracy. The 2023 report, which analyzes data from 2022, is aptly titled "Resistance to Autocratization", <https://www.libertatea.ro/opinii/declin-la-nivel-global-al-democratiei-72-din-populatia-lumii-traieste-in-tari-cu-regimuri-autocratice-cum-sta-romania-4754246>

³ <https://www.idea.int/annual-reports>; <https://agerpres.ro/politic-extern/2025/09/11/un-raport-al-international-idea-avertizeaza-asupra-declinului-democratic-global-si-a-degradarii-libe--1483264>

⁴ Ibidem

exception of a few minor changes (according to analyses published by International IDEA). The quality of democratic governance is facing a protracted crisis, marked by the following elements: institutional erosion (more than half of the countries analysed globally have seen declines in at least one key indicator of democracy), a shift toward authoritarianism (the exercise of power has become more arbitrary and repressive) and a crisis of trust (fuelled in part by the elites' lack of loyalty to citizens).

The erosion of democratic standards even in consolidated democracies, as the aforementioned reports conclude, is primarily caused by: rising inequality and poverty, the use of technology for surveillance and manipulation, and the weakening of the rule of law.

Nicole Gnesotto, Vice President of the *Jacques Delors* Institute, notes with concern that, in Europe, populism is gradually eroding the electoral base against a backdrop of identity crises, rejection of globalization, and deep pessimism among a significant segment of the middle class, etc. She argues that 'American leaders, and our own European citizens, fed up with the welfare state, are the ones rejecting democracy and yearning for a different system: one that is more authoritarian, less liberal, and more rigid. (...). In the United States, President Donald Trump, himself, is attempting to replace the traditional liberal triad (free markets, democracy, and the rule of law) with a new, destructive trio: protectionism, authoritarianism, and brute force.'⁵

European Citizens' Perception and Assessment of Democracy Today

The far from encouraging trend of democracy's decline in recent years raises the question of whether, and to what extent, Europeans, as citizens of the world, still believe in democracy and to what extent they still feel committed to it. If the answer is yes, what is their concrete vision of what democracy should bring about (or represent)? If they are dissatisfied with the way democracy functions, what aspects dissatisfy them the most? Are there insurmountable conflicts of values between the cultures of different countries within Europe, and if so, what are the effects, and what is the future of European democracy? We have attempted to find answers to these questions, taking into account

⁵ Gnesotto, N., 'La démocratie est l'enjeu de ce siècle', Blogpost, Institut Jacques Delors, Novembre 2025

the results of the most recent ESS (European Social Survey), Eurobarometer, and Democracy Perception Index surveys, among others.

It is certainly a positive sign that, according to research findings, a large proportion of European citizens consider democracy to be a universal value and regard it as the best possible system for meeting people's needs. It is also encouraging that, according to the indices, commitment to the idea of democracy is strong in most European countries. The average level of support for the idea that it is important to live in a democratically governed country is over 8 (measured on a scale from 0 to 10) in 24 of the 29 countries that participated in the 6th edition of the ESS⁶.

Equally encouraging is the fact that European citizens perceive the EU as a source of stability in an increasingly unstable world. According to the most recent Eurobarometer survey (July 2026), 75% of Europeans (eight percentage points more than in October-November 2025) have confidence in the EU, viewing it as a beacon of stability during a period of global uncertainty. Seventy-four percent of Romanians share this view.

At the same time, studies show that there are significant concerns about how democracy actually functions in some European countries. Despite the positive perceptions listed above, strong democratic commitment and appreciation for the liberal and electoral dimensions of democracy, European citizens also express some dissatisfaction with the social and direct dimensions of democracy, which seem not to meet their expectations (according to the ESS, 6th edition).

The two components of the social dimension, quality and inclusion on the one hand, and social rights on the other, receive scores of only 6 out of 10 or even lower across all regions, while the referendum component, which represents the dimension of direct democracy, shows even lower average scores (below six). Southern and Eastern Europeans rate direct and social democracy even lower. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Northern Europe is the exception; citizens in this region are, on the one hand, the most satisfied with the functioning of their democracies, followed by Western Europeans.

⁶ Ferrin, Mónica; Kriesi, Hanspeter, Compréhensions et évaluations de la démocratie par les Européens: Principaux Résultats de la 6ème édition de l'Enquête Sociale Européenne, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/TL4_ESS-democratie-FR-final.pdf

Overall, European citizens, on the one hand, believe in and demonstrate commitment to and support for democracy and consider that it functions relatively well from a procedural and electoral standpoint. On the other hand, given that the social and direct dimensions of democracy do not even receive an average score of 5 in most countries, it seems clear that democratic governments are failing to meet public expectations⁷.

Thus, while in the Nordic countries and Switzerland residents trust democratic institutions and the courts' ability to make fair decisions, according to the results of the *Democracy Perception Index* survey, democratic performance is rated very negatively by citizens in Ukraine, Romania, Russia, France and Serbia. In this regard, Romania ranks roughly at the same level of perception as Russia and Lebanon⁸.

The aforementioned report shows that the decline in democratic perception in Romania is linked, in particular, to the collapse of trust in the judiciary, in the separation of powers, and in the transparency of public institutions. Romania ranks 97th out of 98 countries analysed in the *rule of law* category, with a score of 36 regarding the perception that courts make fair and impartial decisions. Only Lebanon ranks lower. With regard to the separation of powers, our country is among the lowest-rated nations in the world, with the population believing that the courts would be unable to stop the government if it were to violate the law.

The vast majority of European citizens consider that some of the major, serious problems facing democracy today, and which need to be addressed, are the rapid spread of disinformation (86% of Europeans) and foreign interference in our democratic systems (81% of Europeans).

We note that, despite the fact that democratic performance within certain societies is perceived as unsatisfactory by a significant portion of European citizens, according to opinion polls, they view the EU and the European Parliament positively. We thus observe that the overall indicators measuring satisfaction with the European Union and the European Parliament remained positive and stable in the EP Eurobarometer from spring 2026 compared to 2025. Moreover, approval of how democracy functions in the EU has increased by five percentage points compared to November 2025: 59% of European respondents say they are satisfied. Romanian citizens share this view, showing a high

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Democracy Perception Index, a survey of 95,000 respondents from 98 countries, conducted between March and April 2026.

level of satisfaction with the EU: 73% of respondents in Romania believe that Romania's membership in the European Union is beneficial (six percentage points higher than in 2025).

Regarding the future of the world, the general sentiment among European citizens oscillates between uncertainty (44%) and hope (43%); 58% of Europeans say they are pessimistic about global developments, while 38% are optimistic. Overall, we note a six-percent increase in the number of pessimists compared to the fall 2025 survey. Romania does not follow this trend; here, the data is exactly the opposite: 57% of respondents are *completely optimistic* about the future of the world, while 38% of Romanians are *completely pessimistic*.

EU: Promoted Values and Shared Values. Regional Differences in the Values Shared by European Citizens.

Values are beliefs, ideals, and preferences that have a lasting influence on individuals' perceptions, opinions, and behaviours, predisposing them to act in certain ways. Compared to opinions, values are more stable; they change slowly over the course of a lifetime and serve as a guide for action, a sort of compass that helps us make choices and decisions. Man is a being with a vocation for values, and the value system shared by an individual represents his 'backbone,' argued the Romanian sociologist Eugeniu Speranția.

Values play a fundamental role not only in the lives of individuals, but also in those of societies. Societies are defined by their culture, and value systems are an intrinsic component of that culture. However, until the 1980s, attempts to analyse societies through the lens of their values were generally viewed with scepticism in the social sciences. 'Social scientists focused primarily on economic variables, facts, and objectively measurable data, viewing values as elements that were extremely difficult to define a superstructure of little significance (...). Today, references to values are ubiquitous in social interactions; individuals define their identity by affirming the values they wish to believe in, while large organizations often articulate them in so-called codes of values.'⁹

⁹ Bréchon, Pierre, Europe: des valeurs en évolution mais toujours aussi clivées, no 443, juillet-août 2021, @futuribles, <https://www.futuribles.com/wp-content/uploads/related-documents/numero443complet.pdf?postId=361>

The European Values Studies (EVS) were initiated around 1980 by sociologists and political scientists concerned about the decline of traditional values and eager to better understand the changes underway. They set out to measure the values and attitudes of populations across all major areas of life: perceptions of oneself, others, and society; moral norms; family life; the meaning of work; attitudes toward politics; as well as religious beliefs and practices.

The results of the EVS surveys (1990, 1999, 2008, 2017) span a 40-year period and constitute an important database for understanding current and future significant shifts in values. It reveals a Europe of values that is extremely diverse¹⁰ in terms of the level of trust in others (from neighbours to people of other nationalities), altruism (understood as a sense of concern for the living conditions of different groups of people), politicization and dissatisfaction with the political system, individualism and individualization, nationalism, religiosity, etc.

Below, we will provide a summary analysis of the differences in levels among key values that define European societies (trust, individualism/individualization, nationalism, altruism, religiosity, gender equality, etc.) based on the most recent surveys and research in the field.

Surveys (EVS, Eurobarometer, etc.) show that the level of trust in others is higher in wealthy countries, particularly in the Nordic states. A culture of trust based on open social interactions has long prevailed there. This high level of trust goes hand in hand with significant rates of civic engagement: 83% of Scandinavians belong to at least one association, compared to 60% of Western Europeans and 20-30% of residents in other regions. The high level of trust in others may be linked not only to economic prosperity but also to the Protestant roots of their culture.

Trust in institutions is also much higher in the Nordic countries, while it remains low elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Europe, where 'the democratic transition that began after 1990 has not yet led to stable political and party systems, and corruption among the elites remains high.'¹¹ Political engagement tends to be lower, dissatisfaction with how the political system functions as well as nationalism are much more pronounced in the East and South than in the West and in the Nordic countries.

¹⁰ Ibidem

¹¹ Ibidem

Regarding individualism, in the work cited earlier in this article, Pierre Bréchon shows that it is on the rise throughout Europe. He also points out that this concept is not fully clarified and that it must be distinguished from what is meant by individualization. While individualization corresponds to individuals' need for autonomy and their desire to freely make their own life choices, as the author argues, individualism corresponds to the desire to always act in one's own interest. Individualization stands in opposition to traditional values based on duty, conformity, and respect for authority, while individualism stands in opposition to altruism and the values of solidarity. In other words, the two indices are inversely proportional: the more individualized a person is, the less individualistic they are. EVS indices show that individualization is highly developed in the Nordic countries and in Western Europe, representing a major achievement of developed nations, while in Eastern Europe it is at considerably lower levels. In contrast, individualism is particularly high in Eastern Europe. One explanation could be that when faced with poverty and precarious circumstances, human beings naturally tend to focus more on themselves than on others.

With regard to individualization, a country's level of development (i.e., material well-being and quality of life) is a crucial explanatory factor according to the comparative analysis conducted by the EVS. 'The relationship between the Human Development Index (HDI) and individualization is very close and follows an asymptotic trajectory: as long as countries have a relatively low HDI level, values related to personal autonomy do not seem to evolve. However, once a certain level of development is reached, the process of individualization accelerates sharply.'¹²

From another perspective, the degree of individualization also varies depending on the dominant type of national culture, namely, autonomous (centred on the individual, freedom of choice, and personal responsibility) or affiliative (focused on cohesion, conformity, and collective identity). In Shalom Schwartz's terms, 'closed' relationships with others correspond to cultures of belonging: I accept the other based on their connection to the group to which I belong. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 'open' relationships flourish in cultures of autonomy, where the other matters as a human being.

¹² Ibidem

According to the surveys mentioned above, the culture of belonging shows low levels of individualization, while the culture of autonomy shows high levels.

In the same context, Bernard Denni, in his work *Value Conflicts and the Future of Democracy in Europe*, finds a positive correlation between personal autonomy and political and civic engagement. As an individual's cultural orientation shifts along the scale from the pole of belonging toward the pole of autonomy, interest in politics, the inclination to participate in lawful collective protests, and trust in the electoral process all increase significantly and steadily. Conversely, the temptation toward authoritarianism declines at a similar rate and to the same extent as the culture of individual autonomy strengthens.¹³

Cultures of belonging dominate in the eastern EU states, though with certain nuances, according to Bernard Denni. 'In the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Estonia, belonging and autonomy are fairly well balanced at around 25% to 30% (...). In Hungary and Slovakia, cultures of belonging (35%) clearly outpace those of autonomy (21% and 16%). Romania has the weakest culture of autonomy in the EU (4%), with the culture of belonging being dominant (70% of the population), a fact that once again highlights the fragility of democracy.'¹⁴

Survey results (EVS, etc.) show that individual autonomy correlates positively with life satisfaction and feelings of happiness. While the political sphere tends to generate a sense of unease and dissatisfaction, as people feel they have no influence over the collective future, an increase in individual autonomy tends to enhance feelings of happiness and a sense of control over one's own life.

This correlation does not hold true, at least in the case of Romanian citizens. Romania is ranked as having the weakest culture of autonomy in the EU (4%); therefore, based on the correlation analysed above, life satisfaction should be low. However, the reality is quite the opposite. In recent national surveys, approximately 72% of Romanians say they are *satisfied* or *fairly satisfied* with their lives. The World Happiness Report shows that Romania ranks 34th globally, ahead of countries such as France and Brazil, positioning itself among the nations in Central and Eastern Europe experiencing sustained growth in

¹³ Bernard Denni, 'Conflits de valeurs et devenir de la démocratie en Europe', April 7, 2025, Telos, <https://www.telos-eu.com/fr/societe/conflits-de-valeurs-et-devenir-de-la-democratie-en.html>

¹⁴ Ibidem

quality of life. Despite economic difficulties and distrust of institutions, Romanians report a high level of satisfaction. According to a Europe-wide survey conducted by Eurostat, the countries with the highest life satisfaction, on a scale of 0 to 10, are Finland and Switzerland (7.8), followed by Romania, Austria, Belgium, and Slovenia (7.7).

Altruistic values follow the same trend as those of individualism, argues Pierre Bréchon. They are more widespread in places where the standard of living is high compared to areas where meeting daily needs is the primary concern. Building on this idea, we could say that where there is greater wealth, altruism increases. In other words, if you are wealthier, you tend to be more altruistic. We could say that there is a positive correlation between wealth and altruism. Is this really the case?

On the other hand, Paul Piff's research over the past 20 years in the field of the psychology of wealth shows that, as status and wealth (whether earned or inherited) increase, the individual tends to feel increasingly entitled to this privilege and increasingly convinced that they truly deserve it, that it is their due because they are superior to others. They tend to ignore the role of luck and external circumstances that placed them in that favourable position without any effort on their part.

In fact, the research mentioned above shows that in interpersonal interactions, the wealthier a person is, the more likely they are to prioritize their own needs, goals, desires, and interests at the expense of others' interests, as wealthier people are, in fact, slightly less generous and less compassionate.¹⁵

Although it may seem paradoxical at first glance, those who have built their own wealth have proven to be less understanding and less empathetic toward those in need compared to those born into wealth. In many cases, their reasoning or justification is that they climbed the social ladder on their own, that they succeeded through their own efforts and merit. Therefore, if you are not as wealthy, if you are in need, it means it is your own fault that you have not managed to do so. It is a perspective, argues Piff, that sets the stage for blaming others for one's own misfortunes, rather than inspiring a desire to help them. Moreover, Paul Piff's studies¹⁶ show that wealthier individuals tend to be more inclined not only to accept unethical behaviour but also to resort to minor acts of

¹⁵ Piff, Paul, Speaking of Psychology: The psychology of wealth, empathy, and entitlement, June, 2025, <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/wealth-empathy>

¹⁶ Ibidem

fraud or rule-breaking in order to prioritize their own interests at the expense of others' well-being. Consequently, no positive correlation can be established between a person's level of wealth and their level of altruism.

Even Pierre Bréchon noted at one point that the higher level of altruism in certain regions, such as Southern Europe, cannot be explained solely by the level of wealth, and that other variables, such as religiosity and the strength of a nation's solidarity networks, must also be taken into account.

Religiosity, in turn, is a relevant indicator in the analysis of a society's culture; it is a strong predictor of an individual's value system. Strong religiosity, Pierre Bréchon argues in the cited work, leads to lower levels of individualization, a right-wing political orientation, greater trust in institutions, and stronger nationalism. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the author argues, non-religious individuals are highly individualized, more often left-leaning, and have less trust in institutions because they are more critical, less conformist, and support democratic values to a slightly greater extent.

The surveys mentioned earlier in this article also show that religiosity is much more pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Southern Europe. Religious practice is in decline almost everywhere, with the exception of Eastern Europe, where it has experienced a revival in the post-communist era.

Romanians are the most religious Europeans¹⁷. They surpass Armenians, Greeks, and Moldovans, according to the most recent study by the Pew Research Centre, which found that 55% of Romanians describe themselves as very religious. Specifically, 50% of Romanians say that religion is very important in their lives, 50% say they attend religious services at least once a month, and 44% say they pray daily.

The aforementioned research highlights that secularization has developed primarily in wealthy Western and Nordic countries, where there is a high level of material security. According to the analysts of these surveys, this fact tends to reduce the need for certainty or belief in salvation through transcendence, and to diminish the level of religiosity.

In turn, sociologist Ronald Inglehart has explained the differences in levels of religiosity across Europe through the lens of *existential security*. He argues that in prosperous Western European countries (such as Sweden, Denmark, or France), high

¹⁷ <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/studiu-romanii-se-pretind-cei-mai-religiosi-dintre-1909712.html>

levels of education, along with healthcare and social welfare systems, reduce the uncertainty and vulnerability of life, thereby decreasing the population's dependence on religious faith. In other words, the need for religion appears to be an expression of our vulnerabilities, of the need to reduce the scope of uncertainty in our lives. In a reductionist and superficial way, we might argue that wherever we have more control over our lives (but where, exactly???) and greater material security, this need diminishes drastically or even disappears.

At the opposite extreme, Mircea Eliade¹⁸ points out that 'the disappearance of religions does not imply the disappearance of religiosity,' and that 'sacredness is more than a human need; it is a fundamental ontological trait of the human being, a vital necessity through which man finds meaning, order, and stability in a chaotic universe.'

Another important issue we intend to discuss is gender equality. Research indicates its widespread acceptance in Scandinavian countries and Western Europe compared to Eastern Europe, where it is less prevalent (although there are differences here depending on whether a country is a member of the European Union or not).

Romania ranks last in the European Union's Gender Equality Index, calculated by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) for the year 2024¹⁹. According to the latest infographic published by *Monitorul Social*, a project of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Romania, Romania has an overall gender equality score of just 57.5 out of 100, coming in last place alongside countries in Central and Southern Europe: Hungary (57.8), Greece (59.3), Croatia (59.7), the Czech Republic and Slovakia (both with a total score of 59.9). At the opposite end of the spectrum, Sweden (82), the Netherlands (78.8), and Denmark (78.8) occupy the top spots in the gender equality ranking, alongside France, Spain, and Belgium, each with a total score of 76.1.

Regarding nationalism, surveys show that it is much more pronounced in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe or the Nordic countries (see EVS, 6th edition). By prioritizing the national 'in-group,' nationalism is very often accompanied by xenophobia and a negative perception of immigrants. Regardless of the country, the family is considered an essential aspect of life, though the preferred type of family structure varies.

¹⁸ Eliade, Mircea, *Sacru și profanul*, 3rd edition, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 9, translation from French by Rodica Chira.

¹⁹ <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/indexul-egalitatii-de-gen-cum-se-pozitioneaza-romania-comparativ-cu-tarile-uniunii-europene.html>

Today we are witnessing the rise of nationalist-populist movements in Europe that seek to shift the focus from European integration toward sovereignty, anti-immigration policies, Euroscepticism, and economic protectionism. This is a new challenge that European democracy must face!

Conclusions

Analysing the data provided by the surveys listed above, we conclude that significant differences in values persist in Europe, despite the fact that exchanges and interactions among populations are much more frequent than in the past, and legislation and public policies within the European Union have undergone a process of convergence and alignment.

Values are not always in consensus even within a single society (country): sometimes they conflict, clash, or are contradictory. Current research shows that value conflicts exist in every society; what differs is the degree to which they are accepted and 'resolved.' While totalitarian regimes ignore or reject them, democratic societies tend to acknowledge them, attempt to 'resolve' them, and manage them. If rejected or swept under the rug, value conflicts risk intensifying and degenerating into states of anomie. The democratic society 'in fact represents the rational means of resolving and neutralizing these value conflicts; it is the sound management of the tension between freedom and order, between equality and freedom.'²⁰

In addition to managing differences and value conflicts, the EU must face more serious challenges, such as external interference, the rise of nationalist-populist movements, and the emergence of illiberal regimes, which, in Fareed Zakaria's view, are in fact nothing more than 'a transitional stage toward authoritarianism or dictatorship'.

Sooner or later, these so-called 'illiberal democracies' will undermine the system of individual rights, erode the rule of law, independent judiciary, and the system of checks and balances within the state, and amend constitutions to ensure autocrats' unlimited access to power. Under these circumstances, does the EU have the necessary defences to maintain and strengthen the process of democratization and internal integration? Is the

²⁰ Morar, Vasile, Valorile morale în democrație, II, Revista Dilema, An VI, nr.307, decembrie, 1999, p.16

EU prepared to counter external interference, whether it comes from Moscow or Washington, and attempts to illegitimately influence European politics?

It seems so! To this end, the EU is committed to: protecting and defending democracy and enhancing the resilience and preparedness of society; strengthening the rule of law for a fair and functional society; and promoting civic engagement and participation to place citizens' ideas at the centre of the policymaking process.²¹ To protect democracy within the EU, the European Commission²² has set out clear objectives and corresponding measures to achieve them. In a nutshell, these are as follows:

- creating a European Shield for Democracy to counter foreign information manipulation and online interference (by proactively detecting, analysing, and combating disinformation and information manipulation), as well as hybrid threats;
- strengthening the rule of law (which contributes to the proper functioning of our societies and economies and guarantees the protection of fundamental rights, the fight against corruption, and the enforcement of contracts);
- emphasizing the central role of citizens in our democracy (to integrate citizen participation into the European policy-making process).
- The EU and the European Commission consider that promoting, respecting, and upholding democratic values and citizens' rights is a continuous, day-to-day process in which citizens must play a central role and participate in the functioning of the institutions they trust.

References

- Bodea, Dorin, *Romania între lumi .Valorile angajaților români*, Ed. Result, 2026
- Bréchon, Pierre, *Europe : des valeurs en évolution mais toujours aussi clivées*, no 443 . juillet-août 2021@futuribles, <https://www.futuribles.com/wp-content/uploads/related-documents/numero443complet.pdf?postId=361>
- Denni, Bernard, *Conflits de valeurs et devenir de la démocratie en Europe*, 7 April 2025, <https://www.telos-eu.com/fr/societe/conflits-de-valeurs-et-devenir-de-la-democratie-en.html>
- Eliade, Mircea, *Sacru și profanul*, ediția a III-a3rd edition, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992
- Ferrin, Mónica; Kriesi, Hanspeter, *Compréhensions et évaluations de la démocratie par les Européens: Principaux Résultats de la 6ème édition de*

²¹ https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/democracy-and-our-values_ro

²² ibidem

l'Enquête

Sociale

Européenne;

https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/TL4_ESS-democratie-FR-final.pdf

- Gnesotto, Nicole, La démocratie est l'enjeu de ce siècle , Blogpost, Institut Jacques Delors, Novembre 2025
- Laurent, Alain, L'individualisme bien compris, Liberte, 5 decembre, 2020,
- Morar, Vasile, Valorile morale în democrație, II, Revista Dilema, An VI, nr.307, decembrie, 1999
- Piff, Paul, Speaking of Psychology: The psychology of wealth, empathy, and entitlement, June, 2025, <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/wealth-empathy>
- Schwartz, Shalom H. Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). Academic Press, 1992
- Zakaria, Fareed, Viitorul libertății. Democrația iliberală în Statele Unite ale Americii și în lume, Polirom 2009
- ***The Eurobarometer survey (2025)
- ***The Eurobarometer survey (2024)
- ***The EU survey on the rule of law (2024)
- ***2023 Report, V-Dem Institute (Varieties of Democracy)
- <https://www.news.ro/economic/sondaj-eurobarometru-75-dintre-europeni-considera-ue-spatiu-stabilitatii-intr-lume-tot-instabila-romanii-mult-optimisti-media-europenilor-privire-viitorul-lumii-mult-putin-multumiti-calitatea-vietii-1922402301252026070922500920>
- <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/raport-freedom-house-democratie-in-declin-europa-centrala-asia-centrala/32424712.html>
- <https://www.libertatea.ro/opinii/declin-la-nivel-global-al-democratiei-72-din-populatia-lumii-traieste-in-tari-cu-regimuri-autocratice-cum-sta-romania-4754246>
- <https://www.idea.int/annual-reports>;
- <https://agerpres.ro/politic-extern/2025/09/11/un-raport-al-international-idea-avertizeaza-asupra-declinului-democratic-global-si-a-degradarii-libe--1483264>
- <https://www.liber-the.com/lindividualisme-bien-compris-interview-dalain-laurent/f8ce-4ade-8102-46111f69be501783265166>
- <https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/ue-isi-reitereaza-angajamentul-de-a-proteja-democratiea-in-fata-provocarilor-fara-precedent-precum-dezinformarea-si-manipularea-este-o-chestiune-de-securitate-si-valori/>
- <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/indexul-egalitatii-de-gen-cum-se-pozitioneaza-romania-comparativ-cu-tarile-uniunii-europene.html>
- <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/studiu-romanii-se-pretind-cei-mai-religiosi-dintre-1909712.html>

