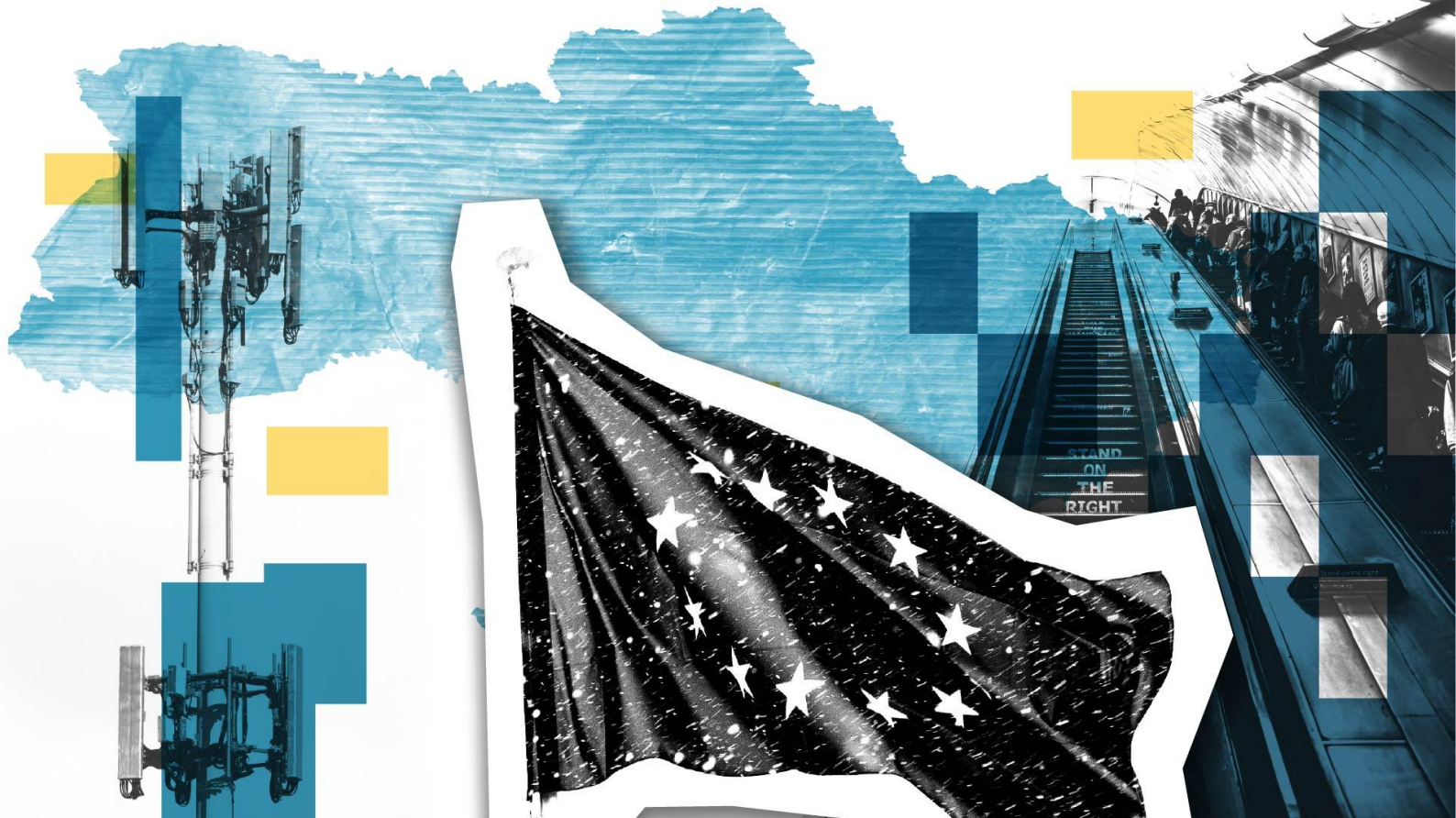




## A DIASPORA LINK

### Engaging Ukrainians in Europe for resilience and security

by

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Once a sustained ceasefire is in place, Ukraine's first post-war elections will be a defining test of the country's democratic resilience. The circumstances will be exceptional. Yet seen from this perspective, the approximately [five million Ukrainian citizens](#) now residing across numerous EU Member States are more than displaced people: they are also a strategic democratic constituency whose resilience and political engagement will help shape both their country's recovery and the future of European security. To ensure that Europe's military, financial and political investment in Ukraine delivers lasting results, Ukraine must emerge from Russia's war of aggression not only as a stable state, but also as a reliable democratic partner. The EU should therefore help safeguard the integrity of out-of-country voting while harnessing the wartime experience and civic engagement of Ukrainians living in Europe to strengthen resilience against Russian interference.

### Idea

Creating favourable conditions for Ukrainians living in the EU and for those who choose to [return](#) home requires early preparation and sustained engagement to build trust, develop skills and capacities, and strengthen civic networks across Europe, thereby supporting Ukraine's postwar reconstruction and recovery. In parallel, leveraging Ukrainians' wartime experience can help EU Member States to enhance whole-of-society resilience and civil-military preparedness through joint resilience-building activities.

Existing initiatives led by organisations such as International IDEA or the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) focus on the technical and regulatory challenges of out-of-country voting to strengthen democratic legitimacy, social cohesion and long-term stability in Ukraine. Complementing these efforts, non-governmental and non-partisan organisations like OPORA also engage Ukrainians across borders in activities that reinforce democratic resilience. These include election monitoring, integrating security mechanisms into democratic governance, countering disinformation, documenting war crimes and international advocacy.

Beyond continued funding, the EU could build on these efforts by institutionalising and expanding

support for initiatives that foster the resilience of Ukrainians as a whole, both at home and abroad, while engaging them to address a wider set of democratic and societal challenges shared with EU citizens. Stronger EU-Ukraine civic resilience networks would help ensure that this engagement endures beyond a ceasefire. Integrated measures will also reduce the risk of widespread disenfranchisement and reinforce the legitimacy and integrity of future elections, which will almost certainly be a target for Russian interference.

For the EU, supporting such efforts is not only an act of solidarity. It is also an investment in safeguarding Ukraine's – and by, extension, Europe's – democratic, secure and prosperous future.

## Impetus

One way to strengthen democratic resilience is to support the integrity of out-of-country voting by Ukrainian diaspora communities, treating it as a strategic investment rather than a short-term project or a purely technical electoral exercise. At the same time, investing in broader, long-term transnational resilience programmes would help sustain democratic connections long after temporary protection arrangements expire. Such programmes would also strengthen European security by increasing capacities against foreign interference.

Before Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, out-of-country voting relied largely on embassies and consulates. The model is no longer fit for purpose. Millions of Ukrainians are now dispersed across dozens of Member States, often with outdated voter registration records, and subject to different legal and administrative frameworks in their host countries. A limited number of consular officials are responsible for serving communities often numbering in the hundreds of thousands. In many cases, diaspora organisations have stepped in to fill this gap, acting as trusted intermediaries between the Ukrainian authorities and citizens.

Out-of-country voting in future elections will not merely be a technical electoral exercise. It will likely be one of the largest cross-border democratic governance operations ever conducted, requiring coordination across multiple EU Member States and close cooperation

with the Ukrainian authorities to enable large-scale electoral participation. Success will depend not only on voter engagement but also on structured dialogue, agreements (such as Memoranda of Understanding) and operational cooperation between host-country authorities, the Ukrainian authorities, domestic civil society, Ukrainian diaspora organisations and citizens in Ukraine. Fruitful cooperation must begin well ahead of the electoral process. It requires early and effective communication and sustained financial and operational investment. This should include expanding polling facilities beyond embassies and consulates to facilitate in-person voting, coordinating voter registration, putting in place the necessary security and legal arrangements and developing systematic channels of communication with Ukrainian citizens living abroad.

Secondly, building societal and electoral resilience takes time and requires early institutional preparedness. It should include joint training and simulation exercises involving election officials, civilian and military personnel, and Ukrainian citizens both with and without wartime experience as part of a broader effort to strengthen integrated, transnational resilience. Such an approach would also improve the capacity to anticipate and manage potential disruptions. Strengthening the resilience of Ukrainians living abroad against Russia's interference activities will be critical before, during and in the aftermath of Ukraine's first post-war elections. Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to exploit elections and societal divisions. Future Ukrainian elections will likely become a prime target of hybrid Russian attacks, in particular through information operations. Experience across Europe suggests that citizens' resilience to information manipulation is strengthened not only through fact-checking, monitoring and media literacy initiatives, but also through deeper social cohesion. Displaced populations are often exposed to fragmented information environments, making them particularly vulnerable to disinformation. This is especially the case when diaspora communities are not well-integrated into their host societies or organised among themselves.

## Instruments

Ukrainian institutions, including the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, have been engaging with the host countries of Ukrainian diaspora communities to develop detailed technical recommendations on future out-of-country voting arrangements. To strengthen the integrity of upcoming electoral processes, the EU could complement these efforts by providing sustained, forward-looking support to democratic actors working with Ukrainians abroad. It should start by identifying established organisations that represent and mobilise Ukrainian diaspora communities across the EU as key institutional partners. Their organisational structure and levels of engagement vary considerably across Member States, in part due to different waves of immigration before and after Russia's full-scale invasion, as well as differences in local integration or social conditions. Consequently, the EU must engage with a diverse network of actors, ranging from established and well-coordinated Ukrainian associations, for example in Poland, Spain and Sweden, to more fragmented diaspora groups, e.g. in neighbouring Moldova.

The EU can also build on [recent proposals](#) developed by democracy-focused organisations, some of which featured also in a non-paper circulated by Sweden in the Council of the EU in March 2026, and which have been endorsed by seven other EU Member States. In particular, it should leverage the 2028–2034 Global Europe instrument under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to scale up support for democratic resilience efforts as part of the EU's external action. This could in particular benefit Ukrainian civil society organisations working with counterparts across the EU to mobilise and engage Ukrainian democratic constituencies abroad. Although the next MFF may take effect only after Ukraine's first post-war elections, strengthened investment in democracy with targeted funding and support to organisations cooperating across Ukraine and the EU will generate significant returns for security and economic development by fostering sustainable civic partnerships across borders.

Particular attention should be paid to social media platforms (especially Telegram, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook) and messaging

applications. Ukrainian communities across Europe rely on them as their [main sources](#) of information about events in Ukraine, but threat actors also exploit them to manipulate information. Other online media and informal social networks also play an important role in shaping information consumption within Ukrainian communities.

To help counter such interference during elections, the EU should further encourage Ukraine to swiftly align with its regulatory framework, including the Digital Services Act, the Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, and the Digital Markets Act. Over the longer term, the EU should sustain its engagement with the targeted communities through both election-related and resilience-building exercises. These should draw on Ukrainians' wartime experience (for example, activities organised by the European Security and Defence College) and complement voter education, media and digital literacy initiatives, as well as structured community dialogue with trusted diaspora organisations in host countries and neighbouring states. Such measures would strengthen electoral and broader societal resilience while helping to reduce disparities in integration and democratic participation.

The European Centre for Democratic Resilience already provides a platform for targeted partnership initiatives led by Member States. It could also foster stronger links with the Ukrainian diaspora to engage communities across Europe in resilience and security efforts, particularly around elections, when democratic legitimacy and electoral integrity are most at risk.