

Growth and innovation as cornerstones of a strong democracy and a digitally sovereign Europe

Tuesday 29 April, 2025

Germany should be restored to a growth path and should give new impulse to innovation, along with its European partners. Because prosperity is a significant guarantor of a stable democracy. Digital sovereignty is the anchor of a strong Europe. Germany can once again be a country of pioneering innovation and a pacesetter for the continent. For this, comprehensive modernization of the state is indispensable. The Bertelsmann Stiftung presented its proposals at the annual press conference.

Gütersloh, 29.04.2025. In order to make Germany more competitive and fit for the future, the Bertelsmann Stiftung recommends the following:

- increasing total private and public sector expenditure in research and innovation to at least 3.5 per cent of gross domestic product
- better exploiting society's entrepreneurial potential with a view to raising the number of startup launches by 30 per cent
- once again turning Germany, in collaboration with its European partners, into a frontrunner in the technologies of the future
- driving forward innovative technologies in the energy sector and competitive electricity prices for industry
- rigorous digitization through digital ID and efficient networks

Bertelsmann Stiftung executive board chairman Hannes Ametsreiter: "A strong and sustainable market economy forms the foundation stone of democracy. When we enhance the economy and prosperity, we ensure social cohesion. We do not intend to allow the future simply to happen; we will shape it."

The population's confidence in politics and democracy must be strengthened once more. For this, greater participation in society and bold reforms are needed. Our experts thus propose the following to make democracy crisis-resistant and innovative:

- stronger and more consistent participation by the population outside election time as well
- greater involvement of the younger generation and associated suffrage reform
- enhanced protection of democratic institutions
- a more courageous pan-European debate on future challenges, along with measures against disinformation

Daniela Schwarzer, member of the board: "During times when our democracy is put under pressure from outside and is challenged from within by polarization and diminishing trust, our response has to be clear: we will boost the resilience of our democracy. This includes securing space for democratic discourse that promotes European tech sovereignty, protection against deliberately targeted disinformation, and fresh opportunities for our citizens to contribute politically and assist in shaping policies."

A resilient democracy needs sovereign infrastructure directed towards the common good. This can only occur within a European context. The following proposals can be found in the EuroStack project co-initiated by the Foundation:

- data are treated as a resource for opening up innovation and as a tool for the common good
- there is assurance that critical digital infrastructure in Europe is secured by European legislation
- European efforts in innovative sectors are boosted, so that Europe's competitiveness is enhanced

Brigitte Mohn, member of the board: "We need a digitally sovereign Europe for Europe's future development, with reduced technological dependencies and digitization that incorporates as its foundation the principles of the rule of law, sustainability, tolerance and diversity, as well as the common good."

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About the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Inspiring people. Shaping the future.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to ensuring that everyone can participate in society – whether politically, economically or culturally. Our programme: education and the next generation, democracy and cohesion, digitization and the common good, Europe's future, health and a sustainable social market economy. The Bertelsmann Stiftung was founded by Reinhard Mohn in 1977.

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