



## Main Statements

### EUROPEAN DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE METAVERSE

The exploratory study, which emerged from a collaboration between Stiftung Zukunft Berlin and Foundation Metaverse Europe, examines the challenges and opportunities for democracy in the metaverse and identifies areas for further engagement.

The "metaverse" is currently causing a lot of excitement. In the metaverse, virtual worlds, augmented realities, cyberspace and the real physical world merge into one. If the metaverse actually becomes a living environment that takes on the character of a public infrastructure, as envisioned by tech companies like Meta, questions of governance will become increasingly important.

#### Possible risks for democracy in the metaverse

A centralised, privatised metaverse based on the business model of data mining may become a risk to democratic values as understood in Europe:

- Realisation of fundamental human rights: the extraction of people's attention is contrary to a democratic understanding placing people as citizens at the centre of developments.
- Political public sphere: the possible control of public discourses can (further) undermine the role of the public sphere, whose function is the formation of the collective will and the legitimisation of political decisions.
- Democratic procedures and processes: by the potential influence on political debates, the agenda-setting and voting behaviour can be manipulated on a large scale (micro- or voter targeting); moreover, in a privatised metaverse, all political representatives and democratic institutions are at the same time users and thus subject to the terms of the company.

#### What can we do?

However, the metaverse also opens up the possibility for all actors to try out and create their own spaces for the realisation of democratic values. Essential for this is the improvement of the education and competence level of citizens to be able to deal with this new technology in an informed and critical way. Furthermore, different means and measures are to be distinguished in three time horizons:

Political-strategic measures with long-term impact (10-15 years):

- Build and promote European structures and businesses
- Develop positive and desirable visions for the future

Political-strategic measures with medium-term impact (5-10 years):

- Drive technical standards and interoperability
- Advance new and improved digital regulation

Measures with immediate effect for platform developers and operators:

- Take into account current European digital legislation (Digital Markets Act, Digital Services Act, AI Act etc.): e.g. mandatory labelling of bots and deep fakes; equal opportunities and non-discrimination; facilitation of user complaints and transparent handling of online advertising, content moderation
- Define proper democratic processes: Set transparent goals; ensure accountability; provide opportunities for participation
- Reflect on design decisions and community rules: e.g. protection against undesirable behaviour: orientation towards criminal law?; design and abilities of avatars depending on context; opportunities for participation of people with physical and mental disabilities etc.

The exploratory study is intended as a prelude to further collaboration on the crucial questions of democracy and European values raised in the metaverse.

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