

EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 29, 2025 – 12 NOON

PRESS RELEASE

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

Germany needs to be put back on track for growth and must drive innovation together with its European partners. After all, prosperity is an important guarantor of a stable democracy.

Digital sovereignty is the anchor of a strong Europe. Germany can once again become a leading country of innovation and a driving force for the continent. For this to happen, the public sector must be thoroughly modernized. At its annual press conference, the foundation presented its proposals: increased innovation through more research and development; greater sovereignty in technologies; more consistent digitalization that serves the common good; and better citizen participation, especially by the younger generation, in democratic processes.

Gütersloh – April 29, 2025. The Bertelsmann Stiftung is focusing on economic, democratic and European issues to ensure Germany's future becomes more innovative. In times of national challenges and international uncertainties, the foundation's experts are seeking solutions to pressing problems. Its Executive Board – Hannes Ametsreiter, Brigitte Mohn and Daniela Schwarzer – presented the nonprofit organization's analyses and ideas. **To make Germany more competitive and fit for the future, the foundation recommends:**

- Increasing public and private expenditures on research and innovation to at least 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (2024 benchmarks: USA 3.5 percent, South Korea 5 percent)
- Doing more to tap Germany's startup potential in order to increase the number of startups by 30 percent
- Making Germany a leader again in future technologies in cooperation with its European partners, and thus
- Striving to become a leading player in AI and quantum technologies
- Promoting innovative technologies in the energy sector and competitive electricity prices for industry
- Ensuring consistent digitalization through the digital ID and high-performance networks

To spur economic dynamism, bureaucracy must be reduced, public administration systems digitalized, infrastructure modernized and framework conditions for entrepreneurial activity improved. Better structures and incentives are also needed to increase labor productivity, attract skilled workers from abroad and provide as many people as possible with gainful employment.

"A strong and sustainable social market economy is the foundation for democracy," says Hannes Ametsreiter, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. "If we strengthen the

economy and promote prosperity, we will also strengthen social cohesion. We don't want to let the future just happen, we want to shape it."

The public's trust in politics and democracy must be strengthened once again. This requires greater social participation in Germany and Europe, along with bold reforms. **To make democracy crisis-proof and innovative, the foundation's experts therefore recommend the following:**

- Greater and more consistent citizen participation beyond elections
- Better involvement of the younger generation in democratic processes and thus a reform of voting rights
- Better safeguarding of democratic institutions
- A bolder trans-European discussion of coming challenges, together with measures to combat disinformation

Daniela Schwarzer: "At a time when our democracy is under pressure from outside and being challenged internally by polarization and diminishing trust, our response must be clear: We are strengthening democracy's resilience. This includes safeguarding spaces for democratic discourse through European tech sovereignty, combatting strategically disseminated disinformation, and creating new opportunities for the public to get involved and shape the political process. At the same time, Germany and Europe must become more capable of taking political action, and our democratic institutions and procedures must be protected against those who are trying to influence and undermine them."

A competitive, resilient democracy requires a sovereign digital infrastructure that is oriented towards the common good. This can only succeed within a European framework. The Eurostack project, which was co-initiated by the foundation, includes the following proposals for shaping digitalization so that it serves society as a whole:

- Data should be treated as a shared resource for unleashing innovation and should serve as a tool for promoting the common good
- Critical digital infrastructures in Europe should be protected by European laws
- European efforts to innovate in sectors such as quantum research and to develop commercial applications should be expanded as a way of increasing Europe's competitiveness

Brigitte Mohn: "For Europe's future development, we need a digitally sovereign Europe with fewer technological dependencies, along with digitalization based on the principles of rule of law, sustainability, tolerance, diversity and the common good."

Through its work, the Bertelsmann Stiftung aims to generate momentum for social progress. Since its inception in 1977, the foundation has made approximately €2 billion available for nonprofit activities. Its expenditures on its project work totaled €77 million in 2024. The

foundation employs 334 people at its offices in Gütersloh and Berlin. It also has affiliated organizations in Washington and Barcelona.

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

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to enabling social participation for everyone – politically, economically and culturally. Our programs include Education and the Next Generation, Democracy and Social Cohesion, Digitalization and the Common Good, Europe's Future, Health, and Sustainable Social Market Economies. In our work, we focus on people, since only they can change the world and make it better. We share knowledge, promote expertise and develop solutions. A nonprofit foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung was established in 1977 by Reinhard Mohn.

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