

PANEL AND FISHBOWL DISCUSSION

Claudia Klages

Women and Democracy

Results from the Thematic Tables
10th International Partnership Meeting of the Danube Networkers
10 July 2026 · Edwin Scharff House, Neu-Ulm

We are living in the twenty-first century and have spent decades in democratic societies, yet we still need a dedicated table on “Women and Democracy”. That alone tells us a great deal.

We need to discuss two closely connected issues: equality and values. Equality exists on paper in many places but is still not consistently lived in practice. We agreed on this across national borders. We were particularly disturbed by the observation that respect for women appears to be declining rather than increasing in several European countries.

Not everything has become worse. The gender pay gap is narrowing, and women receive more support. Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented in politics and leadership positions. One reason is the persistence of networks that maintain existing power structures and feel more comfortable among themselves.

What can we do? We must discuss our values in everyday life. Theodor Heuss argued that unless democracy is lived as a way of life, it has no chance as a form of society or government. Laws have generally improved over recent decades. The more serious problem is a social mindset that is, in some respects, moving in the wrong direction.

Women struggle every day for rights, recognition and equality. At the same time, we should notice positive examples. In Ukraine, many women work naturally in technical professions and leadership positions, while men also take parental leave. We can look eastward and learn from one another.

Our joint appeal is: “Let’s wake up, let’s step up, and let’s remember that saving democracy is not somebody else’s job. It needs all of us.”

Editorial note: This contribution was corrected and edited on the basis of an automatically generated transcript. Obvious recognition errors, technical interruptions, repetitions and purely organisational remarks were removed. The substance of the contribution has been preserved.