

## Towards a permanent citizens' participatory mechanism in the EU <sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO Committee, examines the EU participatory system and its existing participatory channels against mounting citizens' expectations for greater participation in EU decision-making in the aftermath of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It proposes the creation of a permanent deliberative mechanism entailing the participation of randomly selected citizens tasked to provide advice upon some of the proposals originating from either existing participation channels or the EU institutions, in an attempt at making the EU more democratically responsive.

This study assesses the EU participatory system and its existing participatory channels against mounting citizens' expectations for greater citizen participation in EU decision-making in the aftermath of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

First, the study systematises and examines each existing participatory mechanism, from the right of petition, the request for access to documents and the complaint to the European Commission and European Ombudsman to the European Citizens' Initiative, in terms of their accessibility, responsiveness and effectiveness.

Second, it demonstrates how these mechanisms' individual and collective ability in helping citizens to contribute to the Union's democratic life remains limited due to a variety of structural factors, ranging from low EU (participatory) literacy and the fragmentation of the EU participatory channels to unequal access to the very same tools.

Third, the study argues that part of these limitations that have historically limited the democratic potential of EU citizen participation might potentially be overcome by the introduction of an innovative representative participatory process, generally embodied by citizens' assemblies. The key feature of this approach is the direct involvement of citizens, who are randomly selected to represent the cultural identities and the diversity of society – beyond partisan divisions, particular interests, and nationalities – in the decision-making process. As such, the representative deliberative model seems particularly fitting for the EU, generally scarcely, unequally populated, and little deliberative, policy process.

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<sup>1</sup> Full study in English: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/735927/IPOL\\_STU\(2022\)735927\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/735927/IPOL_STU(2022)735927_EN.pdf)



Fourth, the study examines what it would take to embed a randomly selected citizens' assembly within the EU legal order. After contextualising this effort within the ongoing, broader debate around the institutionalisation of representative deliberative models, it puts forward a model of an EU representative deliberative process that could be set up without Treaty changes and operate in sync – not in competition – with existing EU participatory channels. Under such a model, a permanent Citizens' Chamber, populated by randomly selected citizens with previous deliberative experience, would regularly discuss novel initiatives generated either from the bottom-up, by citizens through existing EU participatory channels, or from the top-down, by the EU institutions within their prerogatives, with the aim to propose on a yearly basis the convening of one or more ad hoc EU Citizens' Panels to advise on those very same themes. The proposed model not only intends to provide citizens with a permanent voice in the decision-making process, but also with a systematic monitoring system to ensure they are heard. The aim is to increase accountability and reinvigorate the agenda-setting power of common citizens through the creation of an integrated deliberative and participatory ecosystem of democratic engagement and innovation to be embedded, without Treaty change, into the existing EU decision-making and institutional architecture.

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