

1. Ways of consulting and informing the people of Europe and enabling them to take decisions

1.1 Introduction: European citizens are not generally well informed about Europe. Therefore, if they are to take an active part in shaping the future of the Union, this needs to be rectified by means of a civic education programme, to be included in national education programmes, taking into account specific national circumstances.

1.2 Information: There is a demand for more information about Europe that is not being met by the media. Efforts must be made to convince them of the existence of this need, and therefore of the benefits of informing their respective audiences in a way that is adapted to each of them. In addition, we must not forget about the publications of civil society organisations, which spread such information among their members.

1.3 Workings: while bearing in mind that no organisation can claim to represent civil society as a whole, the Agora should be established as a permanent structure representing and consulting civil society within the European Parliament (how it would be integrated into the European Parliament, how it would be convened, how it would operate and its code of conduct remain to be defined). Its membership would vary depending on the subjects it deals with (thematic agoras bringing together people with specific areas of expertise). It would be complemented by national and regional agoras. It would have to be consulted before decisions were taken on any matter of concern to citizens and would have to be granted sufficient financial resources to ensure its long-term existence. The way it is organised should be subject to monitoring, evaluation and a feedback mechanism. Moreover, in order for civil society to be organised at European level, it would be necessary to ensure that the European association statute was finally adopted. All these measures will allow for a structured dialogue between all concerned.

1.4 Giving practical expression to participatory democracy: investing this Citizens’ Agora with powers of proposal, as part of the discussion and decision-making process of the European institutions. This would give practical expression to a type of participatory democracy at Union level and demonstrate the political maturity of civil society.

2. Structure of European civil society and ways in which it can act

2.1 Citizens’ Agora: civil society would become part of the institutional framework through being represented within the Citizens’ Agora. It should create liaison bodies in order to provide it with proposals and points of view on a regular basis, through debates and a deliberative process.

2.2 Achieving sustainable competition: In order to promote public goods (health, social and territorial cohesion, solidarity, the right to a dignified existence), any form of competition likely to destroy them should be avoided. The European Parliament could prepare a declaration on the interdependence of European citizens to this effect.

2.3 A societal pact: current policies on the market, social protection and sustainable development are grossly imbalanced and suffer from a total lack of coherence. Parliament should take initiatives in the future to allow for a convention to be set up. The objective of this convention would be to draw up, in a participatory manner, a

societal pact between those concerned, with the aim of integrating policies in a single framework, thereby ensuring their coherence. It has been proposed that it would be subject to a consultation held at the same time throughout the Union.

2.4 A real constitution: some are calling for Parliament to declare its support for the drafting of a real constitution that is concise and can be understood by all European citizens. Parliament could call for an ad hoc assembly to be set up with precise terms of reference to this effect. For various reasons, others do not support the idea of a constitution.

2.5 Right of European citizens to be consulted: Parliament could call for European citizens to be given the right to be consulted before any significant amendment to the Treaties or before the adoption of a true constitution. In addition to ratification by each of the Member States in line with their constitutional arrangements, such acts should also be subject to the approval of all European citizens by means of a European consultation held at the same time throughout the Union.

2.6 Charter of Fundamental Rights: Parliament should commit itself to ensuring that the Charter applies to all citizens of the Union without exception, and could prepare a solemn declaration to this effect. In this context, the most-favoured-nation clause should apply in the legislative field, particularly as regards gender.

2.7 Extension of the right of initiative: Parliament should call for a review of the Commission's virtually exclusive right of initiative and for its own to be strengthened and extended to civil society. The practical arrangements for implementing the right to petition of 'one million citizens from a significant number of Member States' should be clarified. The Citizens' Agora will serve as an observatory for monitoring the action taken by the Union's institutions as a follow-up to this right of initiative.

3. Simplifying the machinery of Europe's institutions and making its workings more transparent

A Citizens' Agora is a means of allowing the institutions to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with, and to consult, civil society. In this context, a clear distinction should be made between pressure groups and civil society, particularly when the Commission is organising expert consultations.