E-democracy: opportunities and risks
[15-03-2017 - 15:58]

Eight out of 10 Europeans used internet at least once a week last year, according to Eurostat. But although the internet has become a part of everyday life, it is still not being fully used to boost democracy. On 16 March MEPs adopted a report stressing that new information technologies offer great opportunities to involve people more in the democratic process.

The report by Spanish S&D member Ramón Jáuregui Atondo's was approved with 459 votes for, 53 against and 47 abstentions.

Different approaches across Europe

European countries have so far had very different approaches to the opportunities offered by e-democracy, depending on how concerned they are about the risk of hacking.

The Dutch government, referring to the possibility of hacking, announced that all casted votes will be counted manually for the general elections taking place last Wednesday. Until 2007, voting machines where used in Netherlands at the polling stations but it was then proved that these machines could be easily manipulated and since then e-voting is banned in the country.

France has allowed e-voting in legislative elections for its citizens abroad since 2012 but dropped the possibility this year, citing cybersecurity fears. France's legislative elections take place in June.

In Estonia legally binding remote e-voting for local, national and EU elections has been carried out eight times since 2005. So far, no hacking has been reported.

Parliament report

MEPs adopted a report on e-democracy, written by Spanish S&D member Ramón Jáuregui Atondo. Referring to Estonia’s example, the report says that for a successful implementation of e-voting in other countries, it will be necessary to assess whether the participation of the whole population can be guaranteed. The report also states that high-speed internet connections and secure electronic identity infrastructure are vital to make e-voting a success.

The report also defines some key terms:

E-democracy refers to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to create channels for public consultation and participation, for example for elections, consultations or referendums.

E-governance refers to the use of ICT to establish communication channels that enable the inclusion of the various stakeholders with something to say about the policy-making process. This could be for example a consultation on whether a specific speed limit should be kept.
E-government refers to the use of ICT in the public sector, particularly to provide people with information and services electronically. This could be for example to enable to pay their speeding ticket online.

**EU examples**

Introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the European Citizen's initiative was launched in 2012. It enabled people for the first time to ask for EU legislation on specific issues provided they gather one million signatures in support. Three have now reached that threshold.

In the EU, people also have the right to submit petitions to the European Parliament. The complaint has to be linked to the EU's functioning and will then be dealt with by the Parliament's petitions committee. Submitting and following petitions is possible via a special web portal.

**Internet usage in the EU (Eurostat, 2016)**

- 96% of people aged 16-24 used internet regularly (on average at least once a week)
- 88% of people aged 25-54 used internet regularly
- 57% of people aged 55-74 used internet regularly

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