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DRAFT REPORT

on Parliamentarism, European citizenship and democracy
(2023/2017(INI))

Committee on Constitutional Affairs

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Parliamentarism, European citizenship and democracy (2023/2017(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 9, 10, 11, 15, 17(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), and Articles 15, 20, 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making¹ (Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making),
- having regard to its position of 14 February 2023 on the proposal for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals²,
- having regard to its position of 14 February 2023 on the proposal for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals³,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2022 on Parliament's right of initiative⁴,
- having regard to its position of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 February 2019 on the implementation of the Treaty provisions related to EU citizenship⁶, and to its resolution of 9 March 2022 with proposals to the Commission on citizenship and residence by investment schemes⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union⁸,

¹ [OJ L 123, 12.5.2016, p. 1.](#)

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0037.

³ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0038.

⁴ [OJ C 493, 27.12.2022, p. 112.](#)

⁵ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0129.

⁶ [OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 6.](#)

⁷ [OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 97.](#)

⁸ [OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 6.](#)

- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 May 2022 on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe¹⁰ (CoFE),
 - having regard to the report of the final outcome of the CoFE,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (A9-0000/2023),
- A. whereas we urgently need to reform parliamentarism, European citizenship and participatory elements of European democracy;
 - B. whereas Article 15 TEU specifies that the European Council must not exercise legislative nor executive functions; whereas Parliament’s lack of a direct right of initiative prevents it from representing the voice of citizens properly;
 - C. whereas the conclusions of the CoFE call for more democracy and for representative democracy to be enhanced through greater citizen participation;

Parliamentarism

1. Strongly believes that Parliament, as the only directly elected EU institution, should be granted the general direct right of legislative initiative and full authority over the budget and that it should be enabled to lay down the strategic priorities of the European legislative agenda;
2. Considers that the European Council’s practice of ‘tasking the Council and the Commission’ goes beyond the role of strategic guidance assigned to it by the Treaties, and is therefore contrary to both the word and spirit of the Treaties; considers it necessary to improve the working relationship between the European Council and Parliament;
3. Proposes that the Council be transformed into a true legislative chamber by reducing the number of Council configurations to one by means of a European Council decision, so as to create a genuinely bicameral legislative system based on the Council and Parliament, with the Commission acting as the executive;
4. Considers that the Council should switch from unanimity to qualified majority voting (QMV) wherever this is possible under the Treaties in the short term, and permanently by means of Treaty changes, in order to make EU decision-making more efficient and democratic;
5. Considers it necessary for Parliament to strengthen its functions of political scrutiny over the Commission, including introducing the possibility of triggering motions of censure against individual commissioners;

⁹ [OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 215.](#)

¹⁰ [OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, p. 109.](#)

6. Calls for Parliament, the Council, and the Commission to improve cooperation modalities with the CoR and the EESC; suggests in particular that the rapporteurs of the CoR and EESC be invited to participate in considering draft reports in the parliamentary committee and committee debriefing meetings on interinstitutional negotiations, where applicable;
7. Emphasises the key role of parliaments at the heart of democracy and calls for closer coordination and political dialogue between national parliaments and the European Parliament to make it more meaningful and substantial, also in frameworks such as Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC); stresses the importance of the subsidiarity principle as laid down in Article 5 TEU;

European citizenship

8. Calls for the creation of an EU Statute of Citizenship, that will clarify and consolidate citizenship-specific rights and freedoms; calls on the Council and Commission to take concrete steps towards the expansion of citizenship-specific rights and freedoms following the procedure under Article 25 TFEU;
9. Highlights that effective citizens' dialogues and active citizens' participation are strongly linked to the European dimension of citizenship education, which should be enhanced;
10. Proposes that the Council and Parliament, in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall be able to lay down common provisions on the acquisition and loss of citizenship of the Union by third country nationals; calls in this regard for Article 20 TFEU to be changed;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to better inform non-national Union citizens (i.e. Union citizens who reside in a Member State of which they are not nationals) about their right to vote in or run for office in municipal and European elections; stresses that such 'mobile' EU citizens' right to vote and stand should be expanded to regional and national elections in Member States;
12. Recalls that a single harmonised age for voting and for standing as a candidate should be introduced across the EU; is of the opinion that the minimum age for voting should be set at 16;
13. Recalls that Parliament has consistently expressed its concern that any national scheme that involves the direct or indirect sale of EU citizenship undermines the very concept of European citizenship; calls on the Member States concerned to put an end to such practices;
14. Is highly concerned by the practice of certain Member States of depriving their citizens of the right to vote in national parliamentary elections when they live abroad; urges these Member States to end this form of disenfranchisement;

Improving representative democracy through citizen participation

15. Stresses the need to create a comprehensive participation infrastructure in the EU, with better connection and integration of existing participatory instruments through a one-stop shop for all European participatory instruments and new avenues for permanent participation;
16. Proposes the institutionalisation of representative deliberative processes of participation based on the model of the CoFE's European Citizens Panels; believes that the use of 'mini-publics' with randomly selected participants representing subsets of the socio-economic structure of the Union will help prevent unequal access to participation in EU decision-making;
17. Proposes, in particular, the creation of a permanent representative and deliberative mechanism called the European Agora, which will start in January each year by deliberating on the Commission's annual work programme and the specific theme of the European Year; further proposes that in the first four months of the year the Agora should focus on the EU's priorities for the year ahead with the results of the deliberations to be presented on 9 May as an input to the consultation process on the work programme; notes that those results should also include a proposal for the specific theme for the European Year in the following annual cycle;
18. Stresses that throughout the year, the citizens in the European Agora should deliberate on proposals on the specific theme of the European Year, and their conclusions should be presented at the end of the year; considers that different minimum requirements for follow-up by Parliament should be laid down depending on the sizes of the majorities supporting these conclusions in the panel, and that this follow-up could include debates in a specific hearing of the relevant parliamentary committees or the drafting of legislative or non-legislative own-initiative reports;
19. Suggests that a Youth component of the Agora should form a European Youth Assembly, which will also monitor the application of the 'youth check' throughout the EU's legislative process; proposes that the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee should establish a structure that convenes representatives of youth civil society and young local elected politicians, which should cooperate closely with the Youth Assembly to implement the youth check;
20. Underlines the potential for the exercise of European citizenship through online tools such as online consultations, online collection of signatures for European Citizens' Initiatives, and electronic voting; stresses that electronic ID can facilitate the use of such tools at European level as well as provide a variety of options for access to public services;
21. Reiterates its long-standing call to amend the EU Treaties to allow for EU-wide referendums on matters relevant to the Union's actions and policies;
22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and national parliaments.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

European democracy is an ever-evolving idea that has the potential to generate further legitimacy through change and adaptation to current developments. There is a strong need to improve the modalities of European democracy, especially in the areas of citizenship, parliamentarism and participation. First of all, European parliamentarism, as a fundament of democracy in Europe, should be strengthened. We should rethink European citizenship and address its challenges including the improvement of citizens' rights and possibilities to participate in the political life of the Union. That is why existing structures should be complemented by a comprehensive and permanent participatory democracy mechanism. This report offers reflections on the ways to address the above-mentioned summons, building on the lessons learnt and the citizens' demands from the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE).

Parliamentarism

The European Parliament (EP) as the only directly elected institution in the EU should be at the core of European democracy. So firstly, we need to reverse a trend in which the European Council is perceived in the public eye and within the EU legislative process as an "instructions-giver". In a parliamentary democracy, the EP should be laying down the long lines of the legislative agenda. For this, the EP needs a full right of initiative as well as full control over its own resources and budget. It is critical that the European Council, which has recently evolved into a quasi-legislative institution by giving increasingly detailed instructions to the Commission, is thus overstepping its clear mandate provided for in Art. 15(1) TEU. There is also a power imbalance between the EP and the Council, which still has considerably more influence over the legislative process. In order to further correct these imbalances and to clarify the role of the EP in the institutional framework, a bicameral system composed of the EP, as the lower chamber representing the citizens, and the Council as the upper chamber representing the Member States, should be established.

The institutional structure of the EU could also be further enhanced through improved coordination between the Commission, Council and the EP, in outlining legislative priorities and in implementing them. Nevertheless, parliamentary scrutiny can also only become proper reality when the EP is empowered with more tools such as a proper right of inquiry.

Lastly, and most importantly, within parliamentarism in Europe, there are many possibilities to further enhance legitimacy. We need to reflect on the role of the EP in a system of multilevel governance. We can achieve to bring the EP to the centre of public debate and engagement by making its procedure attractive and inclusive. For this, we need to enhance transparency in decision-making of the EP, also through ways of inclusive, attractive and open debates. Parliament should be the melting pot, which brings together all institutions and citizens to further debates of European relevancy. Representatives from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and from the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) should be invited to relevant parliamentary exchanges, including committee meetings and relevant inter-institutional negotiations, such as trilogues, on issues they are dealing with. The same applies to representatives of citizens' panels and the proposed youth assembly, the ideas of which are developed in the third part of this report. The inclusion and visibility of these actors in the legislative process should be enhanced. A more inclusive legislative

process should also be achieved through enhanced transparency in general, and increased enabling of public scrutiny over interinstitutional negotiations in particular.

European Citizenship

The rights and values underpinning the Union and enshrined in Articles 2 and 6 TEU put the European citizenship formally at the centre of the European project. In practice the EU is far more centred around the interests of the Member States than those of a common European citizenship.

Furthermore, the rights deriving from European citizenship are not properly known nor understood. For example, voter turnout among mobile citizens in European and municipal elections remains low compared to nationals of the host Member States. Moreover, space for expressing European citizenship is limited, as there is no European public sphere even in case of European elections, which are centred around national issues.

European citizens should be provided with clarity on their citizens' rights, which could be done through an EU Citizenship Statute. At the same time, citizenship education in Europe should be strengthened including through the inclusion of content about EU politics, EU citizenship and participatory democracy in education programs and curricula across the EU.

At the same time, we should improve the access to the rights granted under EU citizenship. The Council and the EP, in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedures, shall be able to lay down common provisions on the acquisition and loss of citizenship of the Union by third country nationals.

European citizenship should be boosted by making use of digital tools such as an e-ID, which provides different possibilities for access to public services and online engagement at EU level, including online consultations, electronic voting and the use of a cross-border European Digital Identity Wallet.

However, it should be clear that granting nationality of a Member State or citizenship of the Union in exchange for material gain shall be prohibited. This means: no golden visas and no golden passports.

Foremost, it, however, needs to be clear and possible for European citizens to make use of their rights, the right to vote and stand in particular. The EU offers the freedom to move and live anywhere in the Union, but often people moving are stopped from exercising their right to participate in elections. We need to make it easier for 11 million mobile EU citizens to vote and stand as a candidate in European and municipal elections. At the same time, discriminatory practices by Member States as regards national elections need to be stopped. This includes an end to the practice of certain Member States to deprive their nationals of the right to vote in national parliamentary elections on the basis of their residence abroad.

Improving representative democracy through citizens' participation

In light of Article 10(3) TEU, which lays down that every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union and that decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen, participatory democracy has been seen as a way to improve political awareness and dialogue with all citizens of the Union. According to recent polls, more than 70% of Europeans expect a more regular and meaningful involvement in the

decision-making process¹. To make sure that more citizens are able to be more regularly and meaningfully involved in European democracy, and ultimately European debates on European issues, there is a clear need for more participatory processes and involvement, going further than asking to partake in elections every five years.

Not long ago, the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) was a unique example to further extend the participatory process with randomly selected citizens, a bottom-up approach, to create a new space to debate Europe's challenges and priorities and develop an overview of what citizens expect of the EU. However, the CoFE has also shown that there is a distinct lack of follow-up on the citizen's proposals. Engagement and proper follow-up with citizens and institutions should become a norm to prevent a lack of political accountability of the participatory process.

Firstly, there is a need for an overview of all the participatory instruments the EU already has. Existing possibilities do not add up to a comprehensive and accessible participation infrastructure. Therefore, a one-stop-shop for all European democracy participatory instruments should be created, which will reduce fragmentation of the participation infrastructure and increase their accessibility. This one-stop-shop should have an institutional framework to administer it and its relations to the citizens.

Secondly, CoFE showed the need to introduce new permanent mechanisms for citizens' participation in the EU and positively tested the concept of a representative deliberative process or mini-publics as a solution to tackle some of the structural problems of the participation toolbox. Furthermore, it established the need to involve young people in the participation process as much as possible, including through a youth check on legislation that affects them directly. As a follow up to the CoFE the Commission has proposed to make citizens panels permanent. However, the scope of the citizens panels proposed is limited to narrow subjects, chosen by the Commission itself, and does not fully integrate a comprehensive vision of participatory democracy, being just another narrow instrument added to the participation patchwork.

There is therefore the need for an annual European citizens agora that is able to influence the guidelines of European policymaking for the coming year. Such an Agora could therefore deliberate on the Commission Annual Work Programme (CAWP) and the specific issue of the European Year. A European Agora of randomly selected citizens, which are representative for the socio-economic structure of the Union, will be convened every year and would deliberate in the first 4 months of the year on the priorities of the EU for the next year. The results of the deliberations could be presented on the 9th of May and will feed the consultation process for the CAWP. Those results should also include a proposal for the specific issue for the European Year of the following annual cycle.

During the entire year, the citizens should deliberate on proposals on the specific issue of the European Year. At the end of the year, the Agora should then present its conclusions. Depending on the majorities of support for these conclusions within the panel, different minimum requirements for follow-ups should be laid down. A proposal supported by a simple majority should be debated in a specific hearing of the relevant committee in the EP. A proposal with two-third support should at least be follow-up with an own-initiative report or a legislative own-initiative report in the EP.

¹ https://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Documents/Future-of-Europe/Next_Level_Citizens_Participation_in_the_EU.pdf

The European Agora will also have a youth component, which shall constitute a Youth Assembly. Additionally to contributing to the EU priorities and European Year, the Youth Assembly will also monitor the application of the youth check throughout EU legislation, in line with the conclusions of the CoFE and in cooperation with a new structure at the level of the EESC that will convene representatives of the youth civil society with the purpose to implement the Youth Check alongside the Youth Agora.

Lastly, citizen's representatives should be able to attend relevant parliamentary debates and inter-institutional negotiations, in order to follow up and voice their positions on latest developments regarding the subjects they are dealing with within the Agora.