



**2020/2201(INI)**

26.4.2021

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

on citizens' dialogues and citizens' participation in EU decision-making  
(2020/2201(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Irena Joveva

PA\_NonLeg

## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Underlines that citizens' understanding of and trust in the EU institutions are fundamental for democracy, good governance and effective policy-making and are a key factor in building citizens' confidence in the EU and its future, and that for this reason all EU institutions must strive for the highest possible standards of transparency, accountability and integrity by taking specific, dedicated measures in all aspects of their work, with a particular focus on the EU decision-making process;
2. Recalls the 'Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education' adopted by the EU education ministers on 17 March 2015, in which they called for strengthened actions in the field of education at European, national, regional and local level in order to safeguard our pluralistic society;
3. Stresses the importance of reviewing and identifying current gaps in democratic means of participation for citizens, stakeholders and organised civil society so that they entail an open and transparent process that takes an inclusive, participatory and well-balanced approach; notes that openness requires relevant adjustments to facilitate access for citizens in EU decision-making horizontally; believes that dialogue between decision-makers and civil society should be organised in such a way that the diversity of our societies is fully reflected in all Member States; highlights that all citizens should have equal access to and opportunities to exercise their rights and asks for specific inclusion measures in citizens' dialogues for persons with fewer opportunities, as well as for vulnerable and marginalised groups;
4. Welcomes the Conference on the Future of Europe and hopes that it will play a crucial role in the further development of citizens' participation in the EU policy-making process and pave the way for establishing a new permanent mechanism for citizens' participation, reforming the current top-down approach and transforming it into a bottom-up approach; calls on the Commission, therefore, to develop meaningful participation methodologies and tailored tools enabling deep engagement and understanding of the topics debated; calls on the Commission to explore the potential of culture, arts and creativity as tools for innovative solutions for the expression of opinions on the future of Europe and to make use of this potential in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, as well as in the form of a continuous method of citizens' participation in the internal and external governance of the EU; believes that the Conference on the Future of Europe should discuss how to reinforce European action in the fields of education, culture, youth and sports; recalls its position on the Conference on the Future of Europe and reiterates the need to create structures of engagement for young people and youth organisations; recalls that the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe envisages that civil society be represented in the conference plenary; insists that the voices of young people, citizens and civil society are essential throughout discussions among all Conference bodies at all levels;
5. Welcomes the establishment of an ethics body as an independent authority to foster

transparency in the EU institutions;

6. Reiterates the definition of equality established in Chapter 3 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as equality before the law, non-discrimination, diversity, gender equality and the rights of children, elderly people and people with disabilities;
7. Notes that established channels for citizens to give their input on the EU decision-making process, such as the European citizens' initiative (ECI), the right of petition to the European Parliament, recourse to the European Ombudsman, public consultations and dialogues, lack visibility, accessibility and follow-up and therefore hinder citizens' adequate participation; strongly supports awareness-raising and information activities, and evaluation and streamlining of these mechanisms to maximise their impact and effectiveness and improve their accessibility to citizens; believes that the lack of action by the Commission after successful ECIs undermines the goal of enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the Union through enhanced participation of citizens in its democratic and political life;
8. Believes that citizens' participation implies the development of an array of tools ranging from consultation to deliberation, as well as the development of structured permanent dialogue on EU issues with citizens and civil society organisations representing citizens, at both EU and national level;
9. Underlines the importance of fostering civic engagement and active participation in a coordinated and coherent way at local, regional, national and EU level; believes, in this context, that the role, activities and independence of European Commission Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLOs) in the Member States should be strengthened, in order to facilitate civic engagement and direct dialogue with citizens, provide access to and the dissemination of information and raise awareness about the European Union and its policies through broad and well-coordinated use of communication tools for the digital and physical participation of citizens;
10. Stresses that civic education and learning about the EU are key to improving European democracy and the future of the Union, thereby enabling EU citizens to make informed choices and be an integral part of a democratic society based on the shared European values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights; notes that European citizenship is a value that should be fostered in young people and therefore welcomes mobility initiatives and programmes, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, allowing young people, students, trainers, teachers and researchers to study, work and live together while experiencing and increasing their understanding of Europe's culture and values; welcomes the 'Back to school' and 'Europe at school' initiatives as best practice examples to promote the European project among young people; calls on the Commission to provide support in order to complement educational programmes and training in all Member States, notably by supporting the development of a common curriculum on European citizenship education, enhance learning about the EU, foster, inter alia, a better understanding of its functioning, of the existing EU participatory mechanisms and of the history and cultures of Member States, and encourage objective and critical thinking of the benefits of the European Union, with the aim of increasing citizens' participation in the EU decision-making process;

11. Believes that ensuring youth participation will be an essential part of the long-lasting impact of citizens' dialogue initiatives; stresses the importance, therefore, of focusing on young people in any EU learning activities and suggests that youth engagement tools be promoted, with a special focus on social media, mobile apps, mobile games, quizzes and other youth-friendly formats; welcomes peer-to-peer educational programmes such as the European Youth Parliament and the EU Youth Dialogue as examples of good practices;
12. Stresses that the current COVID-19 crisis and the digital transition have introduced new ways of working at the EU institutions; calls, therefore, for the systematic use of various online platforms and tools for dialogue between EU institutions and citizens, as well as those providing opportunities for civil society input and comments on specific legislation proposals;
13. Underlines that for citizens to be actively engaged the availability and accessibility of information in their mother tongue is of the utmost importance; warns that language barriers limit citizens' engagement and participation in the political process; considers that technology, especially language technology, can help to overcome these language barriers, and asks that the EU institutions make use of them so that no citizen is left behind;
14. Underlines the right of citizens to have access to reliable, independent and factual information on the European Union, its policies and its decision-making processes; recognises the need to establish diversified access to a neutral, independent and informative common European news centre, accessible in all the EU's official languages, and to develop proactive communication with EU citizens; recalls, too, the value of existing media outlets; considers it necessary to concretely tackle the spread of misinformation and disinformation, especially in times of crises when valid, reliable and timely information is needed most; stresses that the independence of the media is crucial to these processes; calls for the introduction into the functioning of online platforms of downstream feedback, fact-checking and moderation in relation to misinformation and disinformation that are respectful of civil rights and freedom of expression; considers it essential, therefore, to reinforce the training of journalists in order to foster independent and critical thinking;
15. Welcomes the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) objective of improving citizens' participation in democratic systems through informed decision-making; emphasises the need to ensure youth participation and the civic engagement of people from disadvantaged backgrounds under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps; welcomes the measures announced under the EDAP to strengthen media freedom, freedom of expression and quality journalism; looks forward to the Commission's proposals for practical and efficient tools to better secure the safety of journalists, who are all too often subjected to threats and undue intimidation, thereby limiting citizens' right to information; notes with concern the lack of specific proposals to ensure artistic freedom and grant protection to censored and prosecuted artists and invites the Commission to further develop this area under the EDAP;
16. Recognises the right of all EU citizens to request and receive information from the EU institutions in one of the official EU languages; points out that genuine dialogue and the active and informed participation of EU citizens in EU decision-making is only possible

if there is no language barrier, and therefore calls on the Commission to make much greater efforts to communicate with citizens in all the EU official languages; notes that in order to strengthen inclusiveness, awareness and visibility, there is a need to improve the accessibility of online content; suggests that all EU websites should be user-friendly and available in all official EU languages;

17. Underlines the importance of culture and education as the backbone of our society and stresses their crucial role in shaping the historical, political and societal consciousness of our citizens; affirms that the right to quality education, and particularly civic and citizenship education, is one of the prerequisites of democracy; recalls that the right to education, training and lifelong learning is the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and is key to enabling citizens' participation in political processes and the life of society; invites the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to develop a comprehensive European strategy on civic and citizenship education, as well as supporting platforms to promote its implementation, focusing notably on shared EU democratic values and principles; believes that this strategy should enhance citizens' understanding of the complex EU decision-making process and of EU policies and should raise awareness of the benefits, rights and obligations of EU citizenship; calls for the EU and national governments to increase their investment in formal, non-formal and informal civic education, active citizenship and democratic competences, as well as in training and capacity-building programmes for educators;
18. Calls on the Commission to present a proposal for an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue on the basis of Article 11.2 of the Treaty on European Union, stating that institutions must maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society;
19. Draws attention to the new Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, which is expected to give more visibility and impact to activities that contribute to citizens' dialogues and engagement in participative democracies; stresses the importance of ensuring continuity and increased resources for the 'citizens' strand of this programme, including town twinning and remembrance activities; welcomes the introduction of activities aimed at fostering further European values under this programme, such as raising awareness of a common European history; calls for the swift establishment of the 'Civil Dialogue Group' under the new programme.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	19.4.2021
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 26 -: 1 0: 1
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Asim Ademov, Ilana Cicurel, Gilbert Collard, Gianantonio Da Re, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Alexis Georgoulis, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Predrag Fred Matić, Dace Melbārde, Victor Negrescu, Niklas Nienaaß, Peter Pollák, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Monica Semedo, Andrey Slabakov, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh, Milan Zver
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Diana Riba i Giner, Iuliu Winkler

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

26	+
ECR	Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Dace Melbārde, Andrey Slabakov
PPE	Asim Ademov, Tomasz Frankowski, Peter Pollák, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh, Iuliu Winkler, Milan Zver
Renew	Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Irena Joveva, Monica Semedo
S&D	Hannes Heide, Petra Kammerevert, Predrag Fred Matić, Victor Negrescu, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Massimiliano Smeriglio
The Left	Alexis Georgoulis, Niyazi Kizilyürek
Verts/ALE	Niklas Nienaaß, Diana Riba i Giner

1	-
ID	Gilbert Collard

1	0
ID	Gianantonio Da Re

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention