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REPORT

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

Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Rapporteur: Helmut Scholz

Committee on Petitions (*)

Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat

(*) Associated committee – Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 10(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to Article 11 of the TEU,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 18 June 2020 on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe²,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the position in the form of amendments of the Committee on Petitions,
 - having regard to the opinions of the Committee on Culture and Education and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs,
- A. whereas the results of the 2019 European elections sent a positive signal that European citizens are taking an increasing interest in developments at EU level and that they believe that EU legislation has an impact on their daily lives; whereas overall turnout in 2019 was 50.6 %, the highest since 1994 and a notable increase from 2014, when turnout was 42.6 %; whereas, although turnout in 2019 was higher among all groups of the population, the increase was led by the younger generation, with large increases among people aged under 25 and those aged between 25 and 39; whereas despite the overall increase in turnout, large differences remain between individual Member States;
- B. whereas according to the Civic Engagement Eurobarometer of June 2020³, voting in European elections was regarded by 55 % of respondents as the most effective way of ensuring that voices are heard by decision-makers at EU level; whereas, although it is the aim to continuously improve the way in which democracy works in the EU, several Eurobarometer surveys show that citizens are not satisfied with the way democracy works; whereas this perception is not only measured at EU level, but also at national level; whereas a considerable proportion of EU citizens do not feel heard and consider the EU to be a distant entity;
- C. whereas Articles 10 and 11 of the TEU and Articles 20, 21, 24, 227 and 228 of the

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0010.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0153.

³ [Flash Eurobarometer FL4023](#)

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) form the basis for citizens to participate in the making of EU policies and legislation;

- D. whereas Article 10(3) of the TEU 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;
- E. whereas Article 11(1) and (2) of the TEU requires the institutions to give, by appropriate means, citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action, and to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society;
- F. whereas the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making, in its paragraph 19, underlines that public and stakeholder consultation is integral to well-informed decision-making and to improving the quality of law-making;
- G. whereas Article 165(2) of the TEU mandates the EU to encourage the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and to encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe;
- H. whereas EU citizens may only under certain conditions institute proceedings directly before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), in order to enforce their rights under the Treaties, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights; whereas democratic elections to the European Parliament constitute the main bottom-up instrument for citizens in the EU, while other means, namely the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), complaints to the European Ombudsman and petitions to Parliament, which are important supplements to Parliamentarism, must be strengthened;
- I. whereas there have been six successful ECIs to date, most recently the 'Minority Safepack' initiative and the 'End the Cage Age' initiative; whereas Regulation (EU) 2019/788⁴ on the ECI, which came into effect in January 2020, intends to make it easier for citizens to call on the Commission to propose legislative acts in its areas of competence in which the Union has the power to act; whereas the 'Minority Safepack' initiative was the first ECI to be debated in Parliament on the basis of the revised ECI regulation, and was overwhelmingly supported by Parliament in December 2020 with 76 % of the votes cast; whereas, nevertheless, the impact of ECIs is low, owing in part to the Commission's lack of follow-up;
- J. whereas the European Ombudsman's recommendations are not legally binding but the rate of compliance with findings is consistently high;
- K. whereas citizens of the EU and any natural or legal person residing in or with a registered office in a Member State have the right to submit petitions to the European Parliament under Articles 24 and 227 of the TFEU whenever the matter affects them directly and falls within the EU's fields of activity;

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative. OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 55.

- L. whereas online public consultations carried out by the Commission are mostly aimed at a particular target group, are not widely disseminated and are sometimes too brief, meaning that they do not reach a significant proportion of the population; whereas the European Court of Auditors, in a comprehensive review of the Commission's consultation policy in 2019, recommended that the Commission should improve the way it reaches out to citizens in order to promote greater participation;
- M. whereas Citizens' Dialogues conducted by the Commission are a way to provide information to citizens rather than to engage with them in a debate about their vision and what they would like to see change in the EU and do not provide a feedback mechanism to inform citizens about the outcomes of their participation;
- N. whereas the current functioning of existing participatory instruments, such as the ECI, public consultations and Citizens' Dialogues, does not provide sufficient means for citizens to influence EU decision-making; whereas this is largely due to the lack of effective follow-up in the decision-making process at institutional level;
- O. whereas most forms of participation are rarely used by individual citizens; whereas individual citizens are largely unaware of the existing participatory instruments and therefore underrepresented in views and data collected through the existing instruments; whereas citizens' participation does not replace organised civil society;
- P. whereas the current participatory instruments do not maximise the potential of citizens' participation and therefore insufficiently contribute to strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the EU and increasing citizens' sense of ownership towards an EU that reflects their needs and visions;
- Q. whereas reforming the existing participatory instruments, while paying particular attention to the most underrepresented groups of society, notably young people, and further developing a European public sphere can contribute to reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of the EU;
- R. whereas improving citizens' participation and transparency at EU level is key to bringing the Union closer to citizens and increasing citizens' trust and confidence in EU institutions, as well as achieving a real multi-level democracy; whereas a lack of transparency prevents public debate on any piece of legislation; whereas not all stakeholders have equal access to the EU institutions or information about their work; whereas the Commission should carry out open, transparent and regular dialogues with citizens and civil society organisations; whereas the EU should ensure that civil society can participate actively in the public debate and has the capacity to influence policy and decision-making processes;
- S. whereas there is a need to enhance the European dimension of citizenship education, by improving citizens' understanding of the EU, in order to enable their participation;
- T. whereas there is a growing need for European citizenship education classes across Member States; whereas in this context, the work of civil society organisations in civic education and learning should be recognised, and a holistic approach to citizenship education, including both formal and non-formal education and learning, should be encouraged;

- U. whereas existing successful projects on citizens' participation, such as European HomeParliaments and EU Youth Dialogue, have demonstrated that citizens would like to be included in EU decision-making processes on a regular basis;
 - V. whereas the Council remains a closed-door institution as confirmed by the European Ombudsman's inquiry OI/2/2017/TE into the Council's lack of transparency regarding public access to its legislative documents and its decision-making process;
 - W. whereas the OECD defines open government as 'a culture of governance based on innovative and sustainable public policies and practices inspired by the principles of transparency, accountability, and participation that fosters democracy and inclusive growth';
 - X. whereas the European Citizens' Consultations of 2018 conducted by Member States about the Future of Europe have proven to be an effective tool to engage with citizens on EU matters; whereas the lack of concrete follow-up and continuity in the process led to mixed results from this participatory effort;
 - Y. whereas the Conference on the Future of Europe should involve as much public participation as possible and could potentially be a valuable experience of engaging with citizens in order to understand what they truly expect from the EU and the work of the institutions;
1. Stresses the need to reflect on how the Union can become more effective in engaging with citizens under the Union's core principles of representative democracy; believes that citizens should have a greater voice in EU decision-making to make the Union more reflective of citizens' views and more resilient, democratic and effective; believes in this regard that Treaty change should not be precluded, although it should not be a goal in itself, and that the Conference on the Future of Europe should provide an opportunity to forge a constructive dialogue with citizens on these key topics;
 2. Believes that any reform of the Union, in order to make it more social, equitable, cohesive, united, focused, capable, sovereign and accountable, is strengthened by directly engaging with citizens through participatory mechanisms;
 3. Underlines that there is an underlying tension between the vision of an EU centred around Member States and an EU centred around EU institutions which can be surpassed by developing an approach and instruments for a European Union of citizens;
 4. Points out that the existing participatory instruments have various shortcomings and should therefore be improved and new ones developed to make citizens' participation more accessible, inclusive, meaningful and effective; opines that, to facilitate public participation in wider political debates and equip citizens with the opportunity to influence political outcomes, with synergies in existing mechanisms, it is imperative that citizen engagement is structured in a way that responds to citizens' expectations; believes that this bottom-up participatory agenda should complement representative democracy in the EU;
 5. Highlights the importance of the ECI as the only participatory tool at EU level which has the capacity to potentially trigger legislation; calls for the response that is given to it

to be strengthened through the adoption of a parliamentary resolution for each successful ECI; notes that the Commission must fully comply with its legal obligation to state sufficient reasons for why it did or did not take action on an ECI, and believes that this needs to be more comprehensive to ensure that citizens are provided with an accurate picture of what should be expected from engagement with or the launching of an ECI; regrets the lack of follow-up of successful ECIs by the Commission through legislative measures; believes that, in accordance with Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 on the ECI, in case the Commission, within the given deadlines, has failed to publish its intentions, or has set out in a communication that it intends not to take action on an ECI which has met the procedural requirements and is in line with the Treaties, in particular the core values of the Union, enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU, Parliament could, in line with Rule 222 of its Rules of Procedures, decide to follow up on the ECI with a legislative own-initiative report (INL); urges the Commission to commit itself to submitting a legislative proposal following Parliament's adoption of such an INL; proposes in that regard to modify the current framework agreement between Parliament and the Commission; asks that the ECI regulation be amended to incentivise the Commission to table a legislative proposal where the ECI submitted meets the relevant requirements;

6. Points out that, following the report of the European Court of Auditors⁵, which recognised the effectiveness of the Commission's public consultations, and given the satisfactory perception of citizens, the Commission should improve its public consultation process in order to promote greater citizens' participation and to better monitor and assess their contributions;
7. Points out that the current concept and practice of Citizens' Dialogues should be reinforced and updated;
8. Underlines the benefits of engaging with citizens and civil society in the development of a European public sphere and in complementing the democratic legitimacy of the EU provided by its representative institutions and democratic procedures;
9. Underlines that not all stakeholders, notably citizens and civil society groups, are equally active politically, vocal or influential; therefore, believes that EU participatory democracy requires supporting unorganised citizens and promoting their access to electoral and participatory opportunities within and outside EU channels;
10. Considers that citizens' trust in the EU institutions is fundamental for democracy, good governance and effective policymaking; believes that the EU institutions must strive for the highest possible standards of transparency, accountability and integrity; stresses that citizens' access to documents of the European institutions is fundamental for participatory democracy; calls in particular on the Council to increase transparency as regards its decision-making process and access to documents;
11. Underlines the potential of new technologies which can provide new avenues to engage with citizens, to ensure an effective bottom-up approach and improve the capacity of citizens to hold institutions accountable;

⁵ Special report 14/2019 'Have your say!', European Court of Auditors, September 2019.

12. Stresses that open government, which combines increased transparency and accountability measures and participatory tools, is a good response to the democratic deficit that results from a perceived lack of agency in EU decision-making by EU citizens;
13. Welcomes the establishment of an ethics body as an independent authority to foster transparency in the EU institutions;
14. 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;
15. Believes that it is important to promote exchanges between citizens of different countries at European, national, regional and local level, in particular through networks of towns and regions, and by facilitating an inter-regional dialogue; calls on the Commission to ensure sufficient funding for that purpose through the 'Citizens' engagement and participation' strand of the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values programme;
16. Emphasises that improved information regarding citizens' concerns will assist the EU institutions in their efforts to be attentive and responsive to these concerns by ensuring adequate channels to reach citizens and gather input and by providing appropriate follow-up in the ensuing decision-making process; calls for participatory mechanisms to be improved to enable citizens' participation to have a meaningful impact on EU decision-making;
17. Underlines the need to engage with young people in particular in a political debate on the future of Europe and involve them consistently in participatory mechanisms and regularly held citizens' dialogues, as today's decisions will determine their future; emphasises the need to identify new means of communication and interaction adapted to the interests of young people;
18. Commends child-specific consultations conducted by the Commission and supports the setting up of an EU children's participation platform in the future; welcomes the inclusion of young people in the Digital Platform and Citizens' Panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe; urges the EU institutions to create ways to ensure similar engagement with children and young people in the future on a structural basis and with adequate feedback mechanisms;
19. Calls for genuine involvement of young people and youth organisations in the planning, implementation and evaluation of events and programmes; commends the efforts made by the EU Youth Dialogue to include young people and youth organisations in creating policy and decision-making; calls on the EU institutions to commit to taking tangible action based on the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue;

20. Highlights the necessity of engaging with educational institutions and civic education organisations to ensure that active European citizenship becomes part of the curriculum across the EU; calls on the Commission to provide support in order to complement educational programmes in all Member States, notably by supporting the development of a common curriculum on European and global civic education, fostering a better understanding of the existing EU institutions and of the history and cultures of Member States, and encouraging objective and critical thinking of the benefits of the European Union; suggests the inclusion of modules on EU functioning and history in educational curricula and calls on the Commission to propose guidelines for such modules;
21. 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;
22. Calls on the Commission to launch an annual European Union Olympiad competition on EU functioning and history for young people in high schools, vocational training and other educational structures, in order to boost interest, participation and debate on EU affairs; emphasises that the Erasmus+ programme should also be utilised to enhance European citizenship education, especially among students and young people; reiterates the need for the Commission to better support EU affairs and study programmes that exist across Europe and beyond, building on the successful Erasmus+ programme;
23. 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;
24. Underlines the importance of academia, researchers and universities in the improvement of the level of know-how of citizens about participatory mechanisms in the EU in order to increase their participation in the EU decision-making process;
25. Highlights that effective citizens' dialogues and active citizens' participation are strongly linked to the European dimension of citizenship education; stresses therefore the need to enhance the European dimension of citizenship education in order to enable citizens' participation and ability to act as informed citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life at both, the European and Member State level, based on understanding of political, legal, social and economic concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability; calls on the Commission to develop a comprehensive European strategy to enhance citizenship competences in the EU and develop supportive measures aimed at providing equal access to citizenship education to all people residing in the EU in order to enable them to exercise their political rights;
26. Proposes to establish a European network for citizenship education to provide a platform for the exchange of best practices and knowledge regarding methods of

enhancing the European dimension of citizenship education; stresses the need for new models and instruments of citizenship education such as the establishment of a European agency for citizenship education;

27. Highlights the role played by the media in shaping citizens' opinions on EU policy and the EU itself; stresses the need to uphold an independent and diverse media landscape across Europe, but believes greater effort should be made to tackle disinformation and misreporting in the media on EU issues, notably through increased support for fact-based, pan-European media projects;
28. 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 official EU 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;
29. 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;
30. 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 official EU 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;
31. Recalls that European policies and legislation are most times implemented by local and regional administrations and that they have the capacity to reach out more easily and play a central role in educating citizens about the EU, as they are the level of government closest to the citizens; stresses that a first step could be to increase the

resources allocated to the liaison offices of the European institutions and to develop their territorial network throughout Europe;

32. Welcomes the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 14 October 2020 entitled ‘Local and regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens’; requests, in addition to EU-wide tools for citizens’ participation, the establishment of a network of multi-level governments that should serve as a transmission chain between European institutions and citizens;
33. Reiterates the need to fully engage citizens in EU decision-making in order to enhance the legitimacy of the EU and increase public trust in the work of the institutions; stresses, therefore, the importance of permanent participatory mechanisms to further facilitate and encourage citizens’ participation in EU decision-making beyond the act of voting and other existing channels and instruments; supports awareness-raising activities of these mechanisms to maximise their impact and effectiveness; underlines the need for such mechanisms at European, national, regional and local level and for adequate horizontal and vertical coordination among institutions at different levels;
34. Highlights the fact that regular participatory processes with citizens could serve different purposes, such as influencing annual political or legislative priorities, developing specific proposals in relation to specific questions, discussing institutional matters or deciding on the spending of certain public resources; underlines, however, that while citizens’ participation will prove to be beneficial in some areas, it is important that citizens have a clear understanding of engagement outcomes, including inherent limitations, with appropriate and transparent follow-up procedures;
35. Notes that citizens’ participation mechanisms include a wide range of tools that are complementary, such as citizens’ assemblies, citizens’ initiatives, public consultations, citizens’ dialogues, participative budgeting, referendums, etc.;
36. Recalls that participatory mechanisms for citizens should provide a means for individuals to express their ideas and concerns; underlines the fact that they have to be participatory, inclusive, open, deliberate, transnational, transparent, non-partisan, accountable, effective, visible and engaging;
37. Emphasises that, in order to reach out to as many people as possible, an inclusive approach must be taken; underlines the fact that the selection of participants should ensure a well-balanced representation of the population by the use of adequate communication mechanisms to reach a diverse public, so that the societal and territorial diversity is fully reflected; stresses that all citizens should have equal access to participatory mechanisms, including those living in disadvantaged areas or those who have a lower exposure to EU information; calls for participatory mechanisms to be extended to all, including non-EU citizens residing in the EU as well as EU citizens residing in another Member State or in a non-EU country, who should be offered alternative mechanisms adapted to their needs;
38. Stresses the need for citizens to have access to participation mechanisms in their mother tongue; recalls that language barriers make the European institutions distant from citizens and prevent the development of a truly inclusive European democracy;

39. Underlines the importance of giving full access to persons with disabilities to all the different instruments that the EU provides to citizens, particularly through systematic interpretation and translation into sign language and easy-to-read language;
40. Highlights that civil society organisations, social partners and other stakeholders should play a major role in all participatory instruments; considers that proper methodologies supporting their participation are crucial; underlines the fact that, in order for such instruments to be successful, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) must be involved;
41. Stresses that the purpose, rules and timeframes of any participatory process must be communicated from the very beginning in order for them to be effective; underlines that communication on citizen engagement needs to highlight the practical role of any mechanism, otherwise failing to meet expectations will reduce participation, and in turn legitimacy;
42. Emphasises the need to have a good balance between a common format and diverse national practices for the regularly held citizens' dialogues in order to provide citizens with a European framework that accommodates various traditions of deliberation at national level;
43. Stresses that digital technologies should be a complement to face-to-face participation instruments and should especially be used to encourage participation among populations that have difficulties participating in traditional participatory instruments;
44. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop accessible, innovative and inclusive tools for citizens' participation and dialogues, making better use of digital technologies to allow all citizens (such as younger and older people, people with disabilities, mobile EU citizens, people living in rural or less populated areas) to play an effective part in EU decision-making, building on the lessons from the way the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as an accelerator for the use of digital tools; points out the added value of a non-bureaucratic and comprehensive website providing citizens with information about all European participatory initiatives; underlines the crucial role of social media, especially for children; stresses that the purpose of such innovative tools should be to support representative democracy and that transparency at all levels should be ensured;
45. Calls for fact checking and moderation with regard to disinformation in the functioning of online platforms that are used to engage with citizens;
46. Recalls that, prior to the launching of any participatory process, the EU institutions must commit themselves to following up on their outcome in the light of their competences and legislative procedures, since citizens' disappointment often stems from a lack of follow-up; stresses that citizens should have a clear understanding of citizen engagement and dialogue structures so that expectation meets reality, otherwise there is a risk of disenfranchising citizens; highlights that any new participatory instrument should be accompanied by a significant communication campaign, with high-level political engagement at EU and national level, similar to the successful electoral campaign for the 2019 European Parliament elections;

47. Stresses that the EU institutions must actively provide guidance to participants throughout the participatory process; underlines that at the end of this process, its outcome must be clearly defined, so that it can be subject to an obligatory response; proposes that participants should be provided with written feedback on each proposal or recommendation in clear language at the end of such exercises, in which the EU institutions clarify their intention to implement that proposal or recommendation or justify their decision not to do so; recognises that there are difficulties and challenges to overcome if participative mechanisms are to contribute more significantly to democratic quality, and in turn to a sense of ownership and European identity;
48. Highlights the need to establish a framework for the follow-up to citizens' dialogues in order to take citizens' input effectively into account; proposes that part of the follow-up could be to translate the outcome into initiative reports and public hearings and to involve citizens, including the most underrepresented groups of society, notably young people, throughout these steps;
49. Believes that citizens' participatory processes must adhere to the highest possible level of transparency; notes that transparency and open data reinforces trust in public institutions and therefore their legitimacy; highlights that promoting the democratic legitimacy of the EU institutions through public engagement requires a greater understanding of EU decision-making; calls for the creation of a standard for open government at EU level that could serve as a basis for other levels of government;
50. Proposes that the Commission's 'Have your say' website becomes a one-stop resource granting access to all participatory instruments at EU level; notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged the use of digital media and online conference systems, and therefore sees further opportunities that digitalisation offers for citizens' participation; points out that this has helped citizens to participate more quickly, widely and inclusively in decision-making; believes that the EU should promote new and innovative ways for citizens' participation, enabling the use of digital technology tools that facilitate multilingual dialogue with citizens; calls on the Commission to embrace further digital possibilities for citizens' participation, in all official EU languages, including tutorials, past examples and information on relevant legislation; believes that provisions should be made for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled;
51. Encourages the setting up of an independent civil society, academic and social partners forum in order to monitor the process and its follow-up by the EU institutions;
52. Encourages the facilitation of the establishment of an independent civil society organisations network, based on voluntary participation, to bring together different democracy initiatives, including across different regions, in order to facilitate information sharing and knowledge transfer as well as to ensure that best practice methods are used; believes that this will increase citizens' awareness of EU decision-making procedures, as well as ensure more opportunities for citizens to influence policy-making;

53. Welcomes the proposal from the Presidents of the EESC and the CoR to set up an interinstitutional working group on citizens' participation in EU decision-making processes;
54. Commits to engaging with the other EU institutions and stakeholders to strengthen additional channels of citizen input, including the expansion of citizens' dialogues and the establishment of a permanent mechanism for citizens' participation with a formally binding follow-up process;
55. Calls on the Commission to present a proposal for an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue on the basis of Article 11(2) of the TEU, stating that institutions must maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society;
56. 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;
57. Points out the New European Bauhaus initiative as a recent innovation to encourage and facilitate citizens' participation; highlights that the initiative brings citizens, experts, businesses, and institutions together and facilitates conversations about making tomorrow's living spaces more affordable and accessible;
58. Proposes the introduction of citizens' participation mechanisms for pilot projects, including 'participatory budgeting' to allow the shaping of the expenditure side of the Union's budget and crowdsourcing to enable citizens to be involved in the co-creation of policies with EU decision-makers;
59. Stresses the need to facilitate citizens' participation, with sufficient engagement from EU institutions, in the structural reforms of the EU by reforming the Convention method as provided for in Article 48 of the TEU; proposes that this be discussed in the Conference on the Future of Europe;
60. Welcomes the Conference on the Future of Europe and believes that it is a great opportunity to engage directly with citizens in a meaningful dialogue on the future of Europe and to provide responses to their demands;
61. Underlines the importance of balanced participation of civil society organisations alongside institutional representatives in the Conference on the Future of Europe; stresses the need for a solid follow-up on the outcome of the Conference, keeping citizens informed of the different steps in the resulting decision-making process, ensuring that the dialogue with citizens is meaningful and that it continues after the formal end of the Conference on the Future of Europe;

62. Stresses that citizens' agoras organised in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe should serve as a pilot for their future institutionalisation as a permanent mechanism of citizen participation in key debates;
63. Expects that the Conference on the Future of Europe will bring an important contribution in the further development of citizens' participation in the EU policy-making process and pave the way for the establishment of new permanent mechanisms for citizens' participation;
64. Considers that the Conference on the Future of Europe provides an opportunity to discuss possible mechanisms for the active participation of citizens in the consultation process in order to influence the annual Work Programme of the Commission and the State of the Union address; notes that such a mechanism could work on an annual basis, starting in the first months of each year with national and regional citizens agoras that should prepare the priorities to be discussed in a transnational European citizens agora, which could be concluded on Europe Day; points out that the priorities resulting from the European citizens agora should be presented to the EU institutions in order to feed into the consultation mechanism that leads to the establishment of the annual Work Programme of the Commission;
65. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Reasons for engaging with citizens

According to several Eurobarometer surveys⁶, an important part of the European population is not satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU and tends to distrust the EU institutions. Despite a higher turnout in 2019, especially amongst young people, participation in European elections remains low. A considerable proportion of citizens does not feel heard and considers the EU to be far away. In order to address this perception of remoteness, it is crucial to engage with citizens in debates on EU policies. Such transnational discussions are essential for developing a European public sphere and reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Currently, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), complaints to the European Ombudsman and petitions to the European Parliament are the only bottom-up instruments, with which citizens can challenge policies or institutions in the EU. Consequently, through continued dialogues with citizens a new public forum should be established to increase their influence on EU policy-making.

Objectives when engaging with citizens

The aim of citizens' participation is to increase the sense of ownership among citizens towards an EU that reflects their needs and visions. Specific objectives are:

- to create participatory instruments that offer individual persons a possibility to express their ideas and concerns and meaningfully contribute to shaping the future of the EU;
- to give opportunities for discussions and deliberations among citizens as well as between citizens, politicians, stakeholders and experts, while allowing a plurality of opinions and perspectives as well as a balanced and diverse participation of citizens;
- to ensure that all participatory instruments focus on EU policies and include transnational exchanges of views between citizens from different Member States;
- to develop permanent participatory mechanisms that become regular and frequent exercises and an integral part of the EU decision-making process.

Experience with participatory initiatives

In the past years, EU institutions have taken various initiatives to engage with citizens, such as the online consultation on the Future of Europe carried out by the Commission and the biennial European Youth Event hosted by Parliament. EU bodies have also organised citizens' consultations, such as the consultation initiative "Reflecting on Europe" conducted by the CoR and national consultations called "EESC consultations on the future of Europe" held by the EESC. At national level, Member States have simultaneously carried out "European Citizens' Consultations" in their respective countries. Other participatory initiatives run at different levels of administration are analysed in a recently published EPRS study⁷. There are also projects organised by citizens' movements, such as "European HomeParliaments"⁸, introduced by "Pulse of Europe".

⁶ See for example Standard Eurobarometer, EB93, 2020.

⁷ The practice of democracy - A selection of civic engagement initiatives, Study EPRS, June 2020.

⁸ <https://homeparliaments.eu>

The largest endeavour in citizens' participation at EU level is to be made with the Conference on the Future of Europe, which should become an opportunity to closely involve citizens in a bottom-up exercise, this being an important condition for its success. It will provide valuable experience of engaging with citizens on a large scale, from which lessons will have to be drawn in the future.

Shortcomings of existing participatory instruments

The ECI is an important instrument of participatory democracy. However, independent assessments on the ECI conclude that its legal and political impact has been minimal⁹. While 76 ECIs have been registered since 2012, only six of them have reached the threshold of one million signatures and therefore have been examined by the Commission. The lack of an obligation to follow up on successful ECIs is one of the reasons for the limited effects of this instrument.

The European Ombudsman, whose role is to improve the protection of citizens in connection with cases of maladministration at EU level, contributes to the improvement of transparency and democratic accountability in the decision-making and administration of the EU. However, its mandate is not about enhancing citizens' participation in EU decision-making. Furthermore, the European Ombudsman's role is not often understood or known at local and national level.

Petitions to the European Parliament are an increasingly popular instrument of challenging the application of EU law. However, its impact on policy-making in the EU is rather limited, since its aim is not about citizens' participation in legislative processes of the EU.

Art. 11(3) TEU obliges the Commission to carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent. Therefore, the Commission holds public online consultations in order to allow citizens to give their feedback on EU policies and laws, which is supposed to be taken into consideration in the decision-making. Although participation is open to any individual citizen, the Commission usually identifies a target group according to the policy concerned, so that participants are mostly organised interest groups. Furthermore, the Commission self-selects its topics for public consultations.

Pursuant to Art. 11(2) TEU, the Commission conducts Citizens' Dialogues, which bring citizens together with representatives from EU institutions and bodies as well as national, regional and local politicians. Even though any person can participate, these events tend to attract citizens already interested in EU politics. Since the meetings mainly consist of questions and answers, they do not lead to a real exchange of views. Moreover, the input received from citizens is not fed into EU decision-making. Therefore, Citizens' Dialogues rather serve to inform citizens than to engage with them in a proper debate that will have an impact on the political agenda of the EU.

Development of permanent participatory mechanisms

⁹https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/509982/IPOL_STU%282014%29509982_EN.pdf
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519240/IPOL_STU%282015%29519240_EN.pdf
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615666/EPRS_STU\(2018\)615666_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615666/EPRS_STU(2018)615666_EN.pdf)

The existing participatory instruments do not provide very effective means for citizens to influence EU decision-making and do not exploit the full potential of citizens' participation for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the EU. In order to develop permanent mechanisms for citizens' participation, an inter-institutional working group should be established, as suggested by the Presidents of the CoR and the EESC. Regularly held citizens' dialogues could serve different purposes, such as determining annual political or legislative priorities, developing concrete proposals in relation to specific questions, discussing institutional matters on a continual basis, like the lead candidate system and transnational lists, or deciding on the spending of certain public resources.

Each of these exercises would need a special design that must be adapted to the purpose of citizens' participation. The choice of the design is particularly relevant at EU level because of the complexity of EU affairs and the general lack of knowledge about the functioning and the decision-making of EU institutions. There is also a need to enhance the European dimension of citizenship education in order to enable citizens' participation.

Phases of permanent participatory mechanisms

Preparatory phase

In order to engage as many citizens as possible an inclusive approach must be taken. Citizens' participation should include not only EU nationals, but also EU residents. Special attention should be paid to the involvement of young people. The selection of participants should ensure a well-balanced representation of persons from different ages, genders, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, including minorities, so that the diversity of societies is fully reflected. Participants must come from different countries of residence, including from rural and remote regions as well as from EU candidate countries. Furthermore, persons with different opinions about the EU should be involved in these exercises.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should play a major role in participatory instruments, since they are able to reach out to all kinds of citizens, including marginalised groups. For the success of such instruments, it is also essential to involve the CoR and the EESC. Moreover, existing EU networks and agencies should be included to raise awareness about and to facilitate participation in such exercises, notably through a Civil Society Convention, composed of European Platforms of associations that include national platforms and networks.

It might be useful to implicate citizens from the outset in the designing of such mechanisms. They could have a say on the scope and the structure of the process as well as on its follow-up. Above all, they should be able to set the agenda and prioritise the issues to be discussed. The early involvement of citizens increases the legitimacy of the exercise. It can also improve public understanding and awareness of the instruments.

In order to engage different types of participants, a combination of online and offline methods is needed. Recourse should be taken to already existing online tools of citizens' participation. The »Have your say« website of the Commission could become a one-stop resource granting access to all instruments of participative democracy. In-person events should be organised throughout the EU, including in rural and remote areas.

For the effectiveness of citizens' dialogues, it is important to communicate their purpose from the very beginning. Prior to their start, the EU institutions must commit themselves to follow up on the outcome of the citizens' participation in order to avoid a sense of disappointment and frustration at the end of the process.

Implementation phase

The topics for discussion should not be too vague, but rather focus on specific policy issues. They must be covered by EU competences, while being in full respect of EU values. Discussions should be clearly structured according to the topics to be debated. Participants should be supported by experts, who could provide guidance and assistance by presenting subjects or evaluating proposals. Debates should be neutrally moderated, without pre-empting discussions. There could also be discussion rounds between CSOs advocating on either side of the topic, before citizens deliberate and conclude.

Citizens' participatory processes must respect the highest possible level of transparency. Events should be livestreamed, recorded and made publicly available. The related documents should be published in all official EU languages. Citizens' dialogues need to be publicised at local, national and EU level, by using all available means, analogue and digital. Furthermore, citizens' dialogues should have their own visual identity, and use a single multilingual online platform.

Follow-up phase

The outcome of participatory mechanisms must be precisely defined, so that it can be subject to a legally binding follow-up. Participants should be provided with a written feedback at the end of the process. EU institutions should explain in detail, which of the citizens' proposals will be adopted or will be rejected, and give their reasons for these decisions. Such a feedback ensures the accountability of the institutions and the credibility of the process.

Additionally, the outcome could be presented to citizens in a setting similar to democracy festivals, with the participation of representatives of EU institutions and CSOs. Part of the follow-up could be to translate the outcome of the process into initiative reports or public hearings.

An independent Civil Society Forum should be set up in order to monitor the process and its follow-up by the EU institutions. This Forum should consist of CSOs across Member States and should be regularly invited to give input throughout the process, finalised by a report. Furthermore, sufficient EU funds should be made available for these dialogues.

Citizens' consultations on proposals for Pilot Projects

In order to spark an idea of participative budget at EU level, a mechanism of citizens' consultations on Pilot Projects (PPs) could be introduced. PPs enable the Parliament, the Commission and the Council to propose new budgetary lines to the Union's annual budget in order to finance new ideas and projects, for which there is no legislative basis (provided the actions fall within the competences of the Union). The consultation process should ensure that citizens or civil society can add proposals for PPs to those already declared by EU

institutions.

ANNEX: LIST OF ENTITIES OR PERSONS FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

The following list is drawn up on a purely voluntary basis under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur. The rapporteur has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the draft report:

Entity and/or person
Citizens Take Over Europe
Civil Society Europe
Democracy International
European Citizens' Initiative e.V.
European Committee of the Regions (CIVEX Commission)
European Democracy Lab
European Economic and Social Committee
European House, Hungary
European Ombudsman
Europe's People's Forum
Pulse of Europe
RegioParl
Values Unite
Young European Federalists

19.4.2021

POSITION IN THE FORM OF AMENDMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

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

On behalf of the Petition Committee: Dolors Montserrat (rapporteur)

AMENDMENT

The Committee on Petitions presents the following amendment to the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, as the committee responsible:

Amendment 1

Motion for a resolution

Recital D

Motion for a resolution

D. whereas the legal and political impact of the only bottom-up instruments for citizens in the EU, namely the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), complaints to the European Ombudsman and petitions to Parliament, ***is rather minimal***;

Amendment

D. whereas the legal and political impact of the only bottom-up instruments for citizens in the EU, namely the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), complaints to the European Ombudsman and petitions to Parliament, ***must be strengthened***;

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

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

Date adopted	19.4.2021
Result of final vote	+: 26 -: 1 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	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
Substitutes present for the final vote	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 Nienaa, Diana Riba i Giner

1	-
ID	Gilbert Collard

1	0
ID	Gianantonio Da Re

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

27.5.2021

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

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

Rapporteur for opinion: Loránt Vincze

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs calls on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas Articles 10 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 20, 21, 24, 227 and 228 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union form the basis for citizens to participate in the making of EU policies and legislation;
- B. whereas citizens' participation in the democratic life of the Union is a core fundamental right as recognised in the Treaties and one of the prerequisites for a well functioning democratic Union and for fostering democratic scrutiny; whereas effective democracy depends on citizens having a say and being heard; whereas meaningful citizens' participation should be ensured in theory and in practice; whereas according to a Eurobarometer survey on socio-demographic trends (2007-2020)¹, only 45 % of citizens consider that their voice counts in the EU;
- C. whereas improving citizens' participation and transparency at EU level is key to bringing the Union closer to citizens and increasing citizens' trust and confidence in EU institutions, as well as achieving a real multi-level democracy; whereas a lack of transparency prevents public debate on any piece of legislation; whereas not all stakeholders have equal access to the EU institutions or information about their work; whereas the Commission should carry out open, transparent and regular dialogues with citizens and civil society organisations; whereas the EU should ensure that civil society can participate actively in the public debate and has the capacity to influence policy and

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/socio-demographic-trends-edition-7>

decision-making processes;

- D. whereas the EU institutions and Member States should ensure citizens' participation without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation, in line with Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; whereas citizens' dialogues and participation mechanisms should fully reflect the diversity of our society as the cornerstone for better policies and enhanced good governance; whereas specific attention needs to be paid to guaranteeing that all voices are heard and that the participation of all citizens in EU decision-making is ensured in a meaningful, inclusive, transparent and accessible manner;
- E. whereas the voice of young people is exceptionally important and the future of Europe is theirs; whereas Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child lays down the right of all children to be heard and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity, ensuring the effective participation of children in public decision-making processes; whereas Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prescribes that children may express their views freely and that such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity;
- F. whereas the EU institutions should pay special attention to socially and economically disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded groups of the population that have few opportunities to participate in EU decision-making processes and should guarantee their involvement in public life and decision-making, including by removing institutional and structural barriers to equality, inclusion and participation and promoting their role; whereas the 2019 elections to the European Parliament showed that there is still progress to be made to increase participation of people with a racial or ethnic minority background in European elections and their representation as elected members of the European Parliament; whereas the EU institutions should create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in decision-making and public affairs; whereas allowing migrants a voice in the formulation of policies that directly affect them may result in policies that better serve migrants and enhance their sense of belonging; whereas Member States should consider increasing their participation in relevant public consultations; whereas political rights – including the acquisition of citizenship – are a major driver for migrant inclusion²; whereas Member States have exclusive authority to establish the rules regarding access to citizenship;
1. Underlines the need to distinguish between citizens' tools for holding elected representatives accountable, participation, dialogue and consultation and calls on the EU institutions to enhance and develop tools for all these respective areas; stresses the need to grant European citizens effective access to the procedures and legislative processes of the EU and enable them to have their say through consultations and participatory actions;
 2. Emphasises that citizens' main tools for influence are universal suffrage and

² EU Fundamental Rights Agency, *Together in the EU – Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants*, 2017.

representative democracy; points out that transparent and widely accessible participatory instruments complement representative democracy in the EU; is of the opinion that in consultation processes, a balance must be ensured between the participation of organised interest groups and citizens; points out the importance of systematically holding consultations with NGOs to improve citizens' dialogues and participative democracy;

3. Underlines that the level of EU citizens' engagement in the EU participatory democracy process and the subsequent use of tools is proportionate to the level of knowledge of EU actions and policies and to the available instruments of participation within the Union's multi-level governance system; points out that European citizens are not sufficiently aware of their rights as EU citizens, including the right to vote in European and local elections when they exercise their right to mobility; believes that the EU institutions should develop an awareness-raising strategy on the functioning and decision-making processes of the Union to be promoted at local, regional and national level, in order to overcome the lack of knowledge in this field; calls on the Commission to increase funding for projects promoting the understanding of the functioning of the EU and its fundamental values; stresses, in this regard, the need to ensure access to funding for civil society organisations, including through micro grants and simplified and adapted application processes; recommends strengthening the role of the media in improving citizens' knowledge about the functioning of the EU institutions;
4. Highlights that citizens' participation is instrumental in achieving more democratic and representative decisions, which is an element of empowerment and thus, a component of good governance alongside political accountability; stresses that a functioning democracy also requires that people are free to point out deficiencies in the system and to suggest improvements; underlines that citizens' dialogues and participation are necessary for democratic scrutiny;
5. Points out that access to information, consultation and active involvement throughout the whole EU decision-making process are essential elements to achieving meaningful participation; calls on the EU institutions to refrain from tokenistic forms of engagement; stresses the importance of ensuring the involvement in the EU decision-making process of those affected by a decision, with particular attention to ensuring the participation of underrepresented people in vulnerable situations as well as providing adequate feedback;
6. Stresses the need to build and reinforce inclusiveness in our societies, thereby empowering all citizens to exercise their rights and to play an active part in democratic life; calls on the Commission to promote diversity and pluralism, and ensure all citizens of all backgrounds are involved in the EU decision-making process; considers political pluralism to be a fundamental part of democracy, contributing positively to the resilience of open and free societies; calls for an evaluation of existing and initiated tools and mechanisms with regard to diversity in the representation of citizens, civil society organisations and organised interest groups; calls on the Commission and the Member States to proactively address the under-representation of minorities in public institutions and public and political life, and to support their increased participation;
7. Highlights that all citizens should have equal access and opportunities to exercise their

rights and asks for specific inclusion measures in citizens' dialogues for persons with fewer opportunities as well as of vulnerable and marginalised groups; highlights the importance of outreach to persons living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods;

8. Stresses the need to ensure broader representation of minority, disability, children's and youth organisations in advisory bodies to the EU such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC);
9. Highlights that while turnout consistently fell in EU elections from 1979 to 2014, the 2019 elections bucked this trend, registering the highest turnout of any elections to the European Parliament in the last 20 years, with 50.66 %, (an increase of eight percentage points compared to 2014); considers that the interaction between EU citizens and their elected representatives in Parliament should be strengthened in order to improve citizens' participation;
10. Points out that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced national authorities to enact unprecedented restrictions on the fundamental rights of citizens; highlights the specific challenges faced by people with a minority racial or ethnic background in the COVID-19 crisis, notably the risk of rising racism and xenophobia, with negative consequences for their societal, democratic and political participation;
11. Notes with concern that the contracts signed by the Commission with pharmaceutical companies developing COVID-19 vaccines have sections and provisions which have not yet been made public; emphasises that all official acts or contracts adopted or signed by the European institutions or entities, or Member States that concern the rights, freedoms, liberties and/or health of European citizens must be public in their entirety;
12. Stresses the need for supportive measures aimed at increasing civic literacy through formal and non-formal citizenship education and building civic capacity to encourage citizens' understanding of the policymaking process and to promote civic engagement in the actions of the Union; considers to that end that stronger action by Member States and the Commission in fostering EU civic and citizenship education, including on EU values, is necessary; calls on the Commission to provide support to complement educational programmes and training in all Member States, notably by supporting the development of a common curriculum on European civic and citizenship education, promoting active and participative European citizenship; invites the Commission and the Member States to develop a comprehensive European strategy on civic and citizenship education accompanied by supporting platforms to promote its implementation;
13. Encourages EU Member States to include children's rights in their civic and citizenship education curriculums and promote engagement of young people in EU decision-making processes;
14. Considers that citizens' trust in the EU institutions is fundamental for democracy, good governance and effective policymaking; believes that the EU institutions must strive for the highest possible standards of transparency, accountability and integrity; stresses that citizens' access to documents of the European institutions is fundamental for participatory democracy; calls in particular on the Council to increase transparency as regards its decision-making process and access to documents;

15. Welcomes the inclusion in the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme of a citizens' engagement and participation strand designed to promote citizens' engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union; stresses the importance of ensuring continuity and increased resources for this strand in future programming periods as well; calls for the swift establishment of the Civil Dialogue Group included in this programme;
16. Calls on the Commission to strengthen existing instruments of engagement with citizens, particularly those referred to in the Treaties; believes that adequate measures are needed to raise awareness of citizens' rights to use the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), to make complaints to the European Ombudsman and to petition the European Parliament;
17. Notes that the ECI has not reached its potential as a key instrument for active citizenship and public participation and considers that this important tool lacks visibility, accessibility and follow-up; believes that the lack of follow-up by the Commission on almost all successful ECIs prevents this tool from genuinely achieving its goal of enhancing the democratic functioning of the Union through the participation of citizens in its democratic and political life; points out that this lack of follow-up may eventually jeopardise the potential use of this participatory tool by European citizens and engender loss of trust in EU decision-making; strongly regrets the Commission's dismissal of the Minority SafePack ECI, which addresses basic values and objectives enshrined in the Treaties; underlines, in this regard, that by means of a resolution adopted in plenary, Parliament asked the Commission to ensure a legal follow-up to the Minority SafePack ECI;
18. Believes that the ECI should be evaluated with a view to identifying how its impact and effectiveness can be improved; points out that the concept of the ECI is still largely unknown in the EU³; underlines the need to increase public awareness of the ECI and urges the Commission and the Member States to maximise their communication efforts to bring the instrument to the attention of as many citizens as possible and encourage active participation in it; points out that while a successful ECI may not automatically lead to the introduction of new legislation, the Commission is always obliged to give it due consideration and to provide sufficient motivation for its decisions on it;
19. Stresses the importance of the right to petition granted by the Treaties to EU citizens and residents, which is an important complement to representative democracy, allowing them to submit a petition to the European Parliament on an issue that falls within the EU's fields of activity; points out that the right to petition allows citizens to convey information to the institutions with regard to implementation problems on the ground and shortcomings of individual cases; considers, however, that the right to petition should be strengthened; considers it is worth recalling that the EU often stands accused of complexity and detachment from its citizens; recalls that the expectations of most petitioners in relation to the rights conferred on them by the Charter are high and go beyond their current scope of application; calls for strengthened involvement of the Commission in the process of providing responses to petitions in order to ensure that citizens receive timely and precise responses to their requests and complaints;

³ <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12717/23>

20. Recalls that EU citizens have the right to address the European Ombudsman, which is one of the main rights conferred by the European citizenship, and that the Ombudsman has an important role in ensuring good administration, accountability and transparency in the EU institutions; stresses that in her 2019 annual report, the Ombudsman stated that she regularly receives complaints concerning fundamental rights such as equality, non-discrimination and the right to be heard; recalls, furthermore, that according to the Ombudsman, in order for citizens to exercise their democratic right to participate in the EU's decision-making process and hold those involved to account, legislative deliberations must be transparent; welcomes, in this regard, the series of recommendations that the European Ombudsman has made to the Council of the European Union to improve the transparency of its legislative process; insists that the Council must be as accountable and transparent as the other institutions;
21. Highlights the importance of equality bodies, national human rights institutions and Ombudspersons in addressing concerns of citizens regarding their rights; stresses that the independence of such structures from governing authorities is a prerequisite to enable and protect meaningful engagement of citizens;
22. Stresses the need to address the interplay between digitalisation and democracy and to combine traditional methods of engagement with digital platforms as a participation instrument to allow citizens to better understand and explore the democratic process and how to better contribute as active members of society;
23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop accessible, innovative and inclusive tools for citizens' participation and dialogues, making better use of digital technologies to allow all citizens (such as younger and older people, people with disabilities, mobile EU citizens, people living in rural or less populated areas) to play an effective part in EU decision-making, building on the lessons from the way the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as an accelerator for the use of digital tools; points out the added value of a non-bureaucratic and comprehensive website providing citizens with information about all European participatory initiatives; underlines the crucial role of social media, especially for children; stresses that the purpose of such innovative tools should be to support representative democracy and that transparency at all levels should be ensured;
24. Calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to ensure participation by a diverse range of people and to introduce necessary measures to reduce discrimination or exclusion; believes that participation could be enhanced by ensuring predictable, flexible, adapted and multilingual processes and tools of consultation; considers that it is important to foster participation of people belonging to minorities in all public consultations in order to enable them to share their experiences and to promote further diversity in all policies; underlines that availability and accessibility of information in citizens' mother tongues is of importance if they are to be actively engaged; is concerned that citizens' engagement and participation in the political process may be limited by language barriers; encourages, therefore, the use of minority languages in participatory processes;
25. Underlines the importance of giving full access to persons with disabilities to all the different instruments that the EU provides to citizens, particularly through systematic

interpretation and translation into sign language and easy-to-read language;

26. Supports the establishment of a structured dialogue with citizens to ensure that their views directly inform EU decision-making and public policy, as proposed in December 2018 by the Committee of the Regions and the EESC;
27. Calls on the Commission to work with European political parties, the European Cooperation Network on Elections and civil society to improve political participation; calls on the Commission to commit to this work under the European democracy action plan and its forthcoming report on EU citizenship;
28. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to encourage the active participation of EU citizens in EU matters, notably young people, in order to support their involvement in shaping society and politics; sees the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe as a timely opportunity to improve citizens' participation; calls for transparency and inclusiveness in the preparation of the Conference and for pluralism and the open debate of all ideas expressed to be guaranteed, in line with the Conference Charter; calls on the Commission to devote sufficient resources to promoting the broad participation of young people through appropriate tools;
29. Calls on the Commission to establish mechanisms for dialogue and participation on relevant matters for young people; calls on the Commission, to this end, to engage together with youth organisations in capacity building, including to make documents youth friendly and accessible, in order to ensure meaningful and informed participation;
30. Calls for genuine involvement of young people and youth organisations in the planning, implementation and evaluation of events and programmes; commends the efforts made by the EU Youth Dialogue to include young people and youth organisations in creating policy and decision-making; calls on the EU institutions to commit to taking tangible action based on the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue;
31. Applauds the ongoing engagement in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to institutionalise a permanent consultative seat for youth representatives⁴;
32. Calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to guarantee the rights of children to participate in all matters affecting them, including public decision-making processes in accordance with their age and maturity; stresses that sufficient financial and other resources must be made available to ensure that sustainable and effective mechanisms are introduced and maintained;
33. Calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to facilitate direct contact between children and decision-makers and provide adequate training and support to adults engaging with children; notes that the benefits of child participation should be shared with the wider community in order to generate widespread acceptance of the practice; urges the EU institutions and the Member States to make provisions for dedicated spaces for children to come together to participate in decision-making processes; recalls that all processes should be fully transparent and clearly explained to all involved and

⁴ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29115>

that processes and spaces should be child-friendly and safe;

34. Commends child-specific consultations conducted by the Commission and supports the setting up of an EU children's participation platform in the future; welcomes the inclusion of young people in the Digital Platform and Citizens' Panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe; urges the EU institutions to create ways to ensure similar engagement with children and young people in the future on a structural basis and with adequate feedback mechanisms;
35. Calls on the Member States to fully respect the rights of mobile EU citizens and to ensure that they can fully exercise their right to participate in European and local elections, without being at risk of disenfranchisement in their countries of origin, and to safeguard the right of all EU citizens to choose to vote either in their Member State of origin or their host Member State in European elections.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	26.5.2021
Result of final vote	+: 53 -: 13 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Magdalena Adamowicz, Malik Azmani, Katarina Barley, Fernando Barrena Arza, Nicolas Bay, Vladimír Bilčík, Vasile Blaga, Ioan-Rareș Bogdan, Patrick Breyer, Saskia Bricmont, Joachim Stanisław Brudziński, Jorge Buxadé Villalba, Damien Carême, Caterina Chinnici, Clare Daly, Marcel de Graaff, Anna Júlia Donáth, Lena Düpont, Cornelia Ernst, Laura Ferrara, Nicolaus Fest, Jean-Paul Garraud, Maria Grapini, Sylvie Guillaume, Evin Incir, Sophia in 't Veld, Patryk Jaki, Marina Kaljurand, Assita Kanko, Fabienne Keller, Peter Kofod, Łukasz Kohut, Alice Kuhnke, Jeroen Lenaers, Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Lukas Mandl, Nuno Melo, Roberta Metsola, Nadine Morano, Javier Moreno Sánchez, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, Nicola Procaccini, Emil Radev, Paulo Rangel, Terry Reintke, Diana Riba i Giner, Ralf Seekatz, Michal Šimečka, Birgit Sippel, Sara Skytvedal, Martin Sonneborn, Tineke Strik, Ramona Strugariu, Annalisa Tardino, Tomas Tobé, Dragoș Tudorache, Milan Uhrík, Tom Vandendriessche, Bettina Vollath, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Elena Yoncheva, Javier Zarzalejos
Substitutes present for the final vote	Tanja Fajon, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Hilde Vautmans, Loránt Vincze, Petar Vitanov

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

53	+
NI	Laura Ferrara, Martin Sonneborn
PPE	Magdalena Adamowicz, Vladimír Bilčík, Vasile Blaga, Ioan-Rareş Bogdan, Lena Düpont, Jeroen Lenaers, Lukas Mandl, Nuno Melo, Roberta Metsola, Emil Radev, Paulo Rangel, Ralf Seekatz, Sara Skyttedal, Tomas Tobé, Loránt Vincze, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Javier Zarzalejos
Renew	Malik Azmani, Anna Júlia Donáth, Sophia in 't Veld, Fabienne Keller, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, Michal Šimečka, Ramona Strugariu, Dragoş Tudorache, Hilde Vautmans
S&D	Katarina Barley, Caterina Chinnici, Tanja Fajon, Maria Grapini, Sylvie Guillaume, Evin Incir, Marina Kaljurand, Łukasz Kohut, Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Javier Moreno Sánchez, Birgit Sippel, Petar Vitanov, Bettina Vollath, Elena Yoncheva
The Left	Pernando Barrena Arza, Clare Daly, Cornelia Ernst, Miguel Urbán Crespo
Verts/ALE	Patrick Breyer, Saskia Bricmont, Damien Carême, Alice Kuhnke, Terry Reintke, Diana Riba i Giner, Tineke Strik

13	-
ECR	Joachim Stanisław Brudziński, Jorge Buxadé Villalba, Patryk Jaki, Nicola Procaccini, Jadwiga Wiśniewska
ID	Nicolas Bay, Nicolaus Fest, Jean-Paul Garraud, Marcel de Graaff, Peter Kofod, Annalisa Tardino, Tom Vandendriessche
NI	Milan Uhrík

2	0
ECR	Assita Kanko
PPE	Nadine Morano

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	15.6.2021
Result of final vote	+: 23 -: 4 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Gabriele Bischoff, Damian Boeselager, Geert Bourgeois, Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, Pascal Durand, Daniel Freund, Charles Goerens, Esteban González Pons, Sandro Gozi, Brice Hortefeux, Laura Huhtasaari, Giuliano Pisapia, Paulo Rangel, Antonio Maria Rinaldi, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Helmut Scholz, Pedro Silva Pereira, Sven Simon, Antonio Tajani, Mihai Tudose, Guy Verhofstadt, Loránt Vincze, Rainer Wieland
Substitutes present for the final vote	Gunnar Beck
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Anne-Sophie Pelletier

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

23	+
NI	Fabio Massimo Castaldo
PPE	Esteban González Pons, Brice Hortefeux, Paulo Rangel, Sven Simon, Antonio Tajani, Loránt Vincze, Rainer Wieland
Renew	Pascal Durand, Charles Goerens, Sandro Gozi, Guy Verhofstadt
S&D	Gabriele Bischoff, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Giuliano Pisapia, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Pedro Silva Pereira, Mihai Tudose
The Left	Anne Sophie Pelletier, Helmut Scholz
Verts/ALE	Damian Boeselager, Gwendoline Delbos Corfield, Daniel Freund

4	-
ECR	Geert Bourgeois, Jacek Saryusz Wolski
ID	Gunnar Beck, Laura Huhtasaari

1	0
ID	Antonio Maria Rinaldi