

European Movement International

Resolution on the transnationalisation of European democracy and the innovation of the European political system

Democracy is one of the key values on which the European Union is founded. To ensure the functioning of a representative democracy on the European level, the treaties determine that the citizens of the European Union are directly represented in the European Parliament, as well as indirectly represented by their elected leaders in the European Council.

Political parties fulfil an essential role in a representative democracy. They are indispensable to the democratic and electoral process. The founders of the first European political parties in the 1970s and the drafters of the subsequent European treaties recognized this role, and at present European political parties are firmly established in the European democratic structure.

In democratic theory and practice, a political party is expected to perform several functions, which amongst others include the aggregation and articulation of voter's interests, develop political programmes, recruit political leaders and contest in open elections. **The principle role of a political party is to create a direct link between the citizens and the political system, and thus enhancing the legitimacy of the system. In this vein, political parties on a European level are expected to contribute to forming European political awareness and to express the will of the citizens of the Union, as is laid out in the treaties.**¹

Though bringing the European Union and its citizens closer together was the main objective of the founders of the European political parties, as well as the incentive for several reforms on the rules governing European political parties, there is still much discussion about the so-called democratic deficit of the European Union and the continuing gap between the Union and its citizens. In this context, the unsatisfactory turnout at European elections and the failure to engage the European public in electoral campaigns is frequently mentioned. Indeed, a persisting incongruity can be observed between the accepted functions of political parties as well as the functions laid down in the treaties, and the actual functioning of European political parties in everyday European politics.

To remedy this incongruity, the European Parliament has consistently consolidated the position of European political parties. Several legislative acts² have been adopted that regulate the funding of European political parties, the involvement of European political parties in European-wide campaigns, the creation of political foundations, and that address the legal status of European political parties. The

¹ See Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union [2012] OJ C326/13, art 10 (4): "Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union" and Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [2012] OJ C326/391, art 12 (2): "Political parties at Union level contribute to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union."

² See Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding [2003] OJ L297/1, and Position of the European Parliament adopted at first reading on 16 April 2014 with a view to the adoption of Regulation (EU) No .../2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 as regards the financing of European political parties [2014] P7_TC1-COD(2012)0237.

2014 European elections also included the novelty of nominating candidates for the presidency of the European Commission (in one occasion even through an open primary), introduced to engage the European public more in the election campaign.

The European Movement is convinced that the realisation of a truly transnational European democracy starts with an innovation of the European political system. A reform of the European electoral system and the rules governing the European parties is necessary to strengthen the link between the European parties and the European public.

In order to strengthen the public engagement in the European democratic process and to enable the European political parties to truly express the will of the citizens of the Union, the European Movement proposes:

- The creation of a European constituency in addition to the national party lists and voting procedures, to create a truly trans-national European democracy. The introduction of a European constituency will take into account the adaptations proposed to ensure the representation of minorities and to alleviate the concerns of smaller member states.
- More autonomy for the European political parties with respect to their national members. This will enrich the role of European political parties that now function predominantly as coordinating institutions.
- Selection of candidates for the European constituency by European political parties. This will ensure more attachment of MEPs to their European political parties instead of their national delegations and party leaders, and enable European wide campaigns.
- Expansion of individual membership to all European political parties, as to present European citizens the opportunity for direct political participation in the European political system.
- Possibility to found European political parties based solely on individual membership of citizens from several member states of the European Union. Currently the membership of national political parties is a pre-condition for the creation of a European party.
- Consolidation of the democratisation of internal party procedures, including the adoption of party programmes on party congresses and a vote on the commission presidency candidates on party congresses or through open primaries.
- The adoption of clear party programmes at party congresses as a basis for national election campaigns.
- A clear focus on European themes in European elections, based on the European party programmes. The focus on European instead of national themes in the campaigns will provide a

link between the voter's choice in the elections and the actual work of the European political parties and groups in the European Parliament.

- Enhanced coordination between the European political parties and the European parliamentary groups. The connection between the parties and groups will create a closer link between the elections and the parliamentary work, and increase the accountability of MEPs to voters.
- Increase the presence of European political parties in media and public debates, aided by the European selection of candidates and European-wide used party programmes.