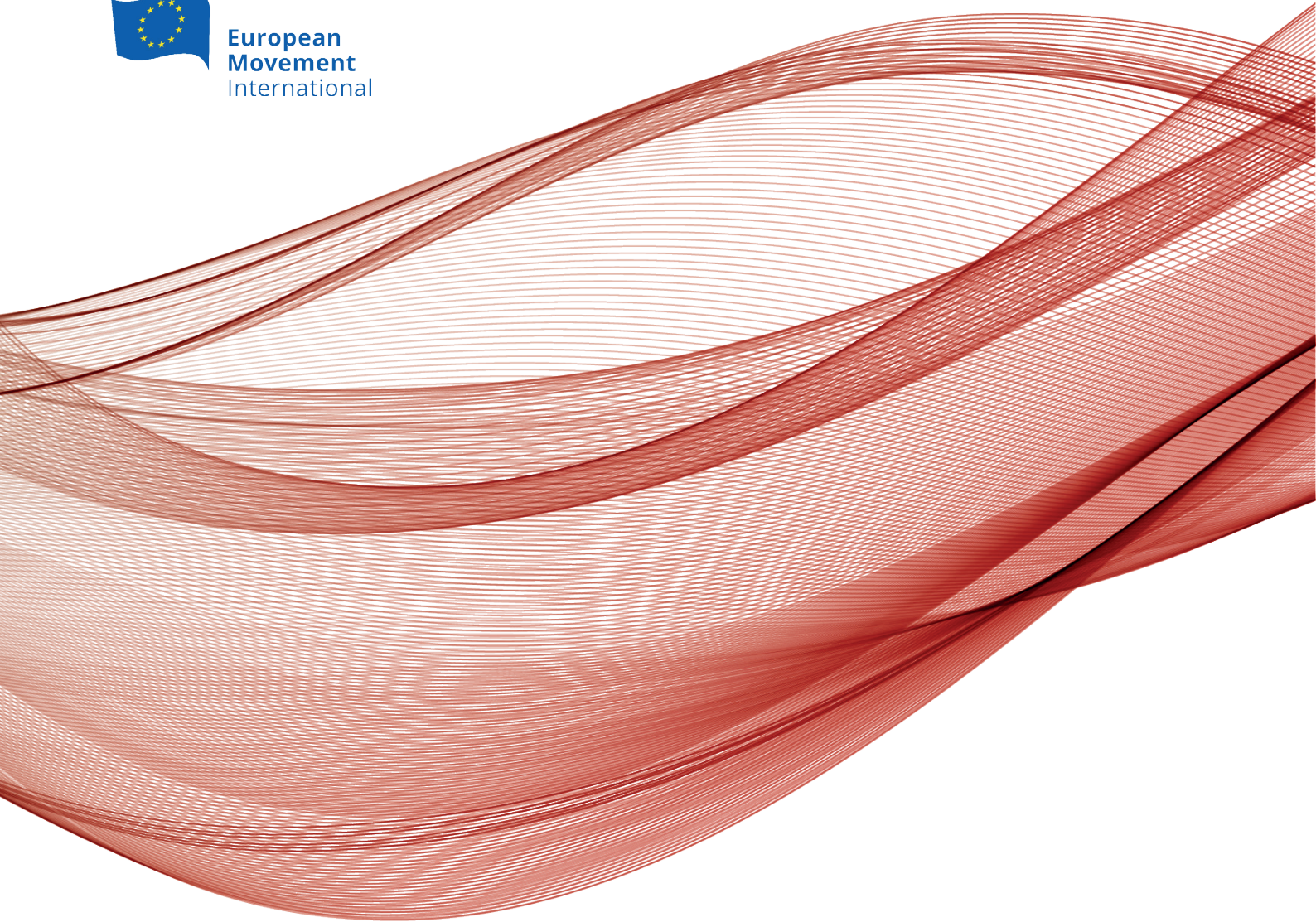




European
Movement
International



Enhancing Citizen Participation in the European Union

#Eurmove





Enhancing Citizen Participation in the EU

Across Europe, citizen trust in governments and the institutions is at an all-time low, while nearly half of EU citizens claim they are unsatisfied with the way democracy works in the EU. With populist and nationalist parties gaining ground in Europe, we believe that fostering citizens' participation in the European democratic process has become more crucial than ever.

Citizens need to be given a meaningful say in shaping the EU's future, to avoid people feeling left behind by what they believe to be an elitist project. Innovative and inclusive forms of participation as well as the use of existing structures can bring European citizens closer to the EU and enhance civic engagement, allowing to restore and redefine the EU's purpose and objectives.

European Citizens' Initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) could be a powerful democratic instrument. But for it to be more accessible to all citizens and reach its full potential, the European Commission should consider simpler and more uniform data requirements across all EU states. Not

many EU citizens know about the ECI, and the platform would benefit from using all public communication channels to draw attention to its objectives, as well as advertising initiatives that are currently running.

The ECI could improve by examining and learning from successful citizens' initiatives at national level. For instance, initiatives in Finland and Latvia have proven successful due to their significant digital dimension. The ECI does not stand out in this respect, as its site is hindered by clunky design and limited functionality.

Individual membership of political parties

Involvement, participation and the ability to influence are key aspects for active citizenship to succeed. Citizens must feel engaged in what is going on around them and should be able to see how their participation has an impact on the end result.

Allowing individuals to become members of European political parties would give them a chance to directly influence and contribute to the debates at EU level. So far only the ALDE

Party and the Green Left have introduced individual membership. This initiative would not only benefit citizens but also parties, given that they could reach parts of the EU where they currently might not have representation.

'Spitzenkandidaten' Process

The European Movement International supports the idea of allowing European political parties to nominate candidates for the post of President of the European Commission, otherwise known as the 'Spitzenkandidaten' process, in its aim to foster political awareness of European citizens. By connecting their respective elections more directly to the choice of the voters, it reinforces the political legitimacy of both Parliament and the Commission. We therefore welcome the further development of this process and the implementation of primaries on a regular basis. The process also holds the potential of introducing a greater diversity in the President selection process.

Moreover, a clear European dimension in the European elections can re-energise European democracy and citizen participation, through for example



pan-European lists headed by lead candidates, European manifestos and an increased presence of European political parties in media and public debates. A debate between the 'Spitzenkandidaten' broadcasted on national television could be especially beneficial to communicate the main priorities of the different campaigns with voters. Furthermore, the European Movement International calls on European parties to nominate men and women as their lead candidates.

E-tools

New technologies bring opportunities that need to be grasped to stimulate citizens' involvement in the democratic process. As a specific form of e-democracy, e-voting could be introduced throughout Europe as a time-, effort- and money-saving alternative to traditional voting practices. Recognising the risks of online voting, fraud or any type of irregularity should be avoided at all times, and an existing or new EU body should be tasked with guaranteeing the fair functioning of online voting systems.

Fully embedding e-tools in the European political process can

increase their legitimacy and usage, which would be further supported by the active usage of these tools by the European institutions themselves. Integrating e-tools in existing processes can be extended to other forms of participation and consultation, for example the implementation of article 11 TEU on dialogue with civil society.


Digital tools come with the risk of compromising the protection of personal data and privacy. E-democracy tools should not undermine data security, and citizens' privacy should be safeguarded at all times. The structured involvement of the European Data Protection Supervisor in the development and implementation of tools could ensure this. In addition, e-democracy tools should be equipped with a form of monitoring to counter the spread of disinformation on these platforms and enable fact-based discussions.

Nevertheless, a persistent problem that comes with increasing digitalisation is the digital divide between those who are able to access and effectively use online tools, and those who do not

have access or the capabilities to make use of them. To avoid unequal digital opportunities, internet access should be made available throughout Europe and emphasis should be placed on developing and improving people's e-skills. Lastly, feedback is essential to show that citizens' contributions have been taken into consideration. Each tool should have clear and easily accessible information on the use of input and provide feedback to those that contribute.

Article 11 Implementation

The Lisbon Treaty introduced elements related to transparency, civil society dialogue, and participatory tools through the new Article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union, but its implementation is still a process in the making. Further implementation of Article 11 is therefore necessary, as well as reinforcing the participatory mechanisms at EU level. It is equally essential to improve the accountability of the Council's legislative work. A clearer and more structured framework for citizen participation, spanning all institutions and stages of policy-making, would enable transversal and permanent civil dialogue. Ac-



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offers both a vision and concrete steps to this end. When it comes to the Trilogue, the institutions involved should only use the shortened procedure for particularly urgent matters. As of now, around 80% of EU legislative processes are decided in such an upstream procedure. However, this undermines the principles of transparency and publicity, crucial for political legitimisation.

Citizen Consultations

Citizen consultations can serve as a constructive tool for engagement if they are organised in a transparent and inclusive manner and if they allow for a meaningful dialogue between citizens and EU institutions. Communication by the institutions about how and whether citizens' contributions affect the policy-making process is key. The European Movement welcomes new and innovative formats for discussions that constructively engage citizens and stakeholders from all sectors in the debate around Europe's future. While a bottom-up and inclusive approach is crucial, the follow-up of the consultations need to be consistent and transparent.

Youth, refugees and minorities

In order for citizens to be able to participate more actively in Europe and to understand how

the EU concretely affects their daily lives and what opportunities it can offer, the notion of European politics, citizenship, culture, and the workings of the EU institutions needs to feature more prominently on schools' agendas. It is equally crucial to foster digital competencies and media literacy in schools to encourage active e-citizenship participation early on. The mechanisms through which young people can have a say in policy-making should be further developed by integrating a more efficient and continuous form of participation where young people become the main stakeholder. Furthermore, lowering the voting age to 16 could strengthen the representation of young people in decision-making forums.

Additionally, one should not underestimate the role played by refugees and other marginalised groups when promoting active citizenship. In order for them to have a voice, we need to ensure that they are fully included in society and are given the right to participate politically, and by facilitating their self-organisation through civil society organisations and other representative bodies.

Non-formal adult education

Non-formal education and informal learning for young people and adults can be an impor-



tant tool in the promotion of the European idea and active citizenship, but more financial and political support is needed in order for it to reach its full potential. This is why we suggest the extension of the EU Citizenship Programme to include a strong emphasis on non-formal adult learning. The launch of an adult education initiative would in turn promote key EU competences, such as digital and civic competences and entrepreneurship. At the same time, university education should also pay more attention to education on the EU, for instance by integrating classes on the EU for all participants of the Erasmus study exchange programme.

Budgeting for Citizen Participation

A great number of civil society organisations and projects across Europe already successfully support citizens' active participation in democratic decision-making, promote critical thinking and channel voices of underrepresented groups and provide essential services. While financial support from

national governments is not always available, the EU can stabilise and diversify the European associative democracy and civil society landscape by dedicating more funding through its next multiannual financial framework (MFF). Financial support, in form of not only project grants but also long-term operating grants, should be distributed in a transparent and inclusive manner to both large pan-European NGOs as well as small organisations and projects operating locally.

Media

The revival of European democracy and citizen participation needs take into account the role of the media in shaping citizens' opinions and its potential to increase a sense of EU citizenship and foster engagement. While upholding an independent and diverse media landscape across Europe, the EU could benefit from further measures that tackle disinformation and misreporting in the media on EU issues, for instance through trainings in journalism schools across Europe, increased support for fact-based, pan-Eu-

ropean media projects and by strengthening public broadcasting corporations.

Conclusion

For citizen participation and civil dialogue to flourish, the ECI should be more vocal about the benefits and objectives of the initiative while becoming more user-friendly. Allowing individuals to become members of European political parties and ensuring that minorities, refugees and young people are included in the discussion is also essential. Formal and non-formal adult education could be an important tool to promote active citizenship, as well as e-tools when used responsibly and increased support for a balanced and fact-checking reporting of EU media. Overall, the European democracy can benefit from a bottom-up approach starting at the local level. At the same time, the EU needs to improve its dialogue with civil society and promote more clearly the existing participation tools with EU citizens.



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