e-Democracy in the European Union: potential and challenges

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The European Parliament adopted by 459 votes to 53, with 47 abstentions, a resolution on e-democracy in the European Union: potential and challenges.

Parliament noted that it is important to **regain citizens' confidence in the European project** and that e-democracy tools can help foster more active citizenship in political life.

Potential and challenges: Members underlined the **potential benefits of e-democracy** to reinforce democratic processes while recalling the need to develop in parallel a **non-digital environment** to pursue political participation of citizens.

Parliament encouraged the use of e-participation as a key characteristic of e-democracy, encompassing **three forms of interaction** between EU institutions and governments on one hand, and citizens on the other, namely:

- e-information,
- e-consultation,
- e-decision-making.

The resolution pointed out the importance of **e-voting** and remote internet voting as systems able to widen citizens’ inclusion and facilitate democratic participation, especially in areas that are geographically and socially more marginalised. Further progress on cybersecurity and data protection is essential in order to enhance citizen participation in decision-making.

Proposals on improving the democratic system by means of ICT: Member States and the EU are encouraged in this regard to:

- provide educational and technical means for boosting the democratic empowerment of citizens and reduce the digital divide;
- integrate the acquisition of **digital skills** into school curricula and lifelong learning, and to prioritise digital training programmes for elderly people;
- develop networks with universities and educational institutions to promote research on and implementation of new participation tools;
- deliver affordable and high-speed digital infrastructure, particularly in peripheral regions and rural and economically less developed areas;
- invest in targeted programmes which promote ICT education and e-participation for women and girls;
- promote, support and implement mechanisms and instruments that enable the participation of citizens and their interaction with governments and EU institutions, such as crowd-sourcing platforms.

The European Parliament is urged, as the **only directly elected institution** of the European Union, to **take the lead in reinforcing e-democracy**.

Online platform: the resolution called for an online platform to be created so that members of the public can systematically consult it before the European legislator takes decisions, thus being involved more

directly in public life. It is important to simplify and accelerate the bureaucratic requirements relating to this and of making wider use of ICT, e.g. through digital platforms and other applications compatible with mobile devices

Increased participation: Parliament called on the Commission to expand and develop e-participation in the mid-term review of the Digital Single Market Strategy to be launched in 2017, and to promote the development and funding of new instruments connected with **e-citizenship** of the European Union.

The resolution suggested:

- reviewing the way the **European citizens' initiative** operates so that it can realise its full potential;
- giving priority to the development of **e-administration** for Member States and the EU institutions;
- rendering the **public consultation processes** effective and accessible to as many people as possible.

The Commission is called upon to provide an **independent assessment or consultation of public opinion regarding online voting**, with an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, as an additional option for citizens to cast their vote for consideration by the Member States by the end of 2018. Members called on the political groups in the European Parliament and the European political parties to **increase opportunities for public discussion** and e-participation.

Data protection: the resolution stressed the need to protect, as a matter of priority, privacy and personal data when using e-democracy tools and to foster a more secure internet environment.

Lastly, Member States are encouraged to adapt and update legislation to address on-going developments, and fully implement and enforce existing legislation on hate speech, both offline and online.