Proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that decision

2020/2220(INL) - 04/04/2022 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Domènec RUIZ DEVESA (S&D, ES) on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that decision.

Despite the provisions of the Electoral Act, elections to the European Parliament are largely determined by national rules, which differ considerably across Member States, resulting in a range of different electoral systems. Elections for the European Parliament take place on different days, and votes are cast for national parties with national candidates on the basis of national programmes. Approximation of those different electoral systems through the adoption of a more unified European electoral law based on clear common principles and rules would ensure voter equality for all citizens of the Union and strengthen the European public sphere.

The turnout registered in the 2019 European elections was the highest of any elections to the European Parliament in the last 20 years. However, the participation rate hides wide disparities between Member States.

The report stressed that **communication efforts** must be made to increase citizen’s interest in European issues and the role of European political parties and foundations.

Reform of the electoral procedure

Members suggested the reform of its electoral procedure with the goal of shaping in a concrete way a European public sphere, by suggesting common minimum standards and legislative changes ahead of the 2024 European elections. They consider it essential to improve the **transparency and democratic accountability of the Parliament**, by strengthening the European dimension of the elections, notably by transforming the European elections into a **single European election**, especially with the establishment of a Union-wide constituency, as opposed to the collection of 27 separate national elections, which is the way that European elections are organised today.

Recalling that diverging electoral cultures have resulted in a range of different electoral systems and different voting rights across the Union, Member consider that a **common framework, with benchmarks and minimum standards for election rules** across the EU can promote a genuine public European debate and ensure equality of the Union citizens, including as regards: the right to vote, the right to

register a party, association of voters or other electoral entities and to stand for elections, access to ballots, the fielding of candidates, including gender equality, accessibility of voting for all citizens, especially for persons with disabilities, or what happens on the day of the elections.

Members also considered:

- it essential that both European and national political parties and associations of voters and other European electoral entities adopt democratic, informed and transparent procedures for the selection of candidates to the European Parliament, including the **lead candidate**, ensuring the direct involvement of individual citizens who are party members, including, but not limited to, the election of delegates;

- that all European voters should be allowed to vote for their **preferred candidate for the President of the Commission**, and that lead candidates should be able to stand in all Member States on Union-wide lists, nominated by a European political party, by a European association of voters or by other European electoral entity, putting forward a common electoral programme.

The European political parties, European associations of voters and European electoral entities are called on to nominate their candidates for the position of President of the Commission at least **12 weeks before the election day**.

EU-wide constituency

The establishment of a Union-wide constituency in which lists are headed by each political family's candidate for the post of President of the Commission is proposed. This would strengthen European democracy and further legitimise the election of the President of the Commission and his/her accountability. This could contribute to the construction of a **European political space** and to make the elections for the European Parliament truly based on European issues and not on issues of exclusively national interest.

The report considered that the **funding** of European political parties and other European electoral entities from the general budget of the European Union or from any other source may be used to finance campaigns conducted by the European electoral entities in the context of elections to the European Parliament in the Union-wide constituency in which they or their members participate.

Voting age

Members call for the introduction of a single, harmonised age for voting rights across Member States. The **minimum age of voting rights is proposed at 16** which would reflect current rights and duties that the European youth already has in some Member States.

European Electoral Authority

Members proposed establishing a European Electoral Authority in charge of coordinating information on the European elections, managing the European electoral roll, proclaiming the electoral results, and supervising the exchange of information on voting by citizens of the Union outside their home country.

Accessibility

Members stressed the need to facilitate access to voting in European elections and to guarantee that all those who have the right to vote are able to exercise this right. Member States are called on to ensure access to information and voting on an equal basis for all citizens, including for persons with disabilities

by allowing for instance the renting of adapted premises when public structures are not adapted. They should also introduce common requirements allowing all citizens of the Union living or working in a third country to be granted the right to cast their vote in elections to the European Parliament.

The report stated that the introduction of **postal voting** is needed for voters who are unable to go to the polling stations on election day, making the conduct of European elections more efficient and more appealing for voters in specific or exceptional circumstances. Advance physical voting and proxy voting, as well as **electronic and online voting**, should also be considered.

Lastly, Members considered that establishing a common European voting day would create a more coherent pan-European election and therefore suggest fixing **9th May as the European election day**.