Parliamentarism, European Citizenship and Democracy

2023/2017(INI) - 26/07/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Alin MITUA (Renew, RO) and Niklas NIENASS (Greens/EFA, DE) on parliamentarism, European citizenship and democracy.

Parliamentarism

The report considers that the current trend within the EU of moving from a ‘parliamentary’ towards a ‘governmental’ democracy weakens all parliaments in the decision-making process. Members regret the **increasing power imbalance shifting towards the Council and the European Council**, which erodes the institutional architecture of the EU. The European Council’s practice of ‘tasking the Council and the Commission’ goes beyond the role of strategic guidance assigned to it by the Treaties, and is therefore contrary to both the word and spirit of the Treaties.

Members are convinced that in a democracy, Parliaments must be part of every decision-making process. They stressed that the European Parliament, as the only directly elected EU institution, should be granted the **general direct right of legislative initiative**, the right of inquiry and **full authority over the budget**, and that as the chamber of the EU citizens it should be the driving force behind the strategic priorities of the European legislative agenda. They called in this regard for an amendment of Articles 225 and 226 TFEU.

Members reiterated their proposal that the Council be transformed into a true legislative chamber by reducing the number of Council configurations by means of a European Council decision, thus **creating a genuinely bicameral legislative system** involving the European Parliament and Council, with the Commission acting as the executive.

The report stressed the following points:

- the **rotating presidency** system of the Council of the EU should be reformed with a view to increasing the efficiency of the legislative process within a bicameral system. Members suggested that the General Affairs Council should become the legislative Council meeting in public, similar to the European Parliament in plenary, while all other Council configurations should become transparent preparatory structures, with regular meetings to be held in public;

- the Council should **switch from unanimity to qualified majority voting** wherever this is possible under the Treaties in the short term, for example by activating the various passerelle clauses in the Treaties;

- Parliament should strengthen its functions of **political scrutiny over the Commission**, including introducing the possibility of triggering motions of censure against individual commissioners;

- **special legislative procedures** where the right of legislative initiative is conferred on Parliament by the Treaties should include mutual exchanges on the establishment of a legislative calendar for the initiatives concerned in order to ensure respect of the principle of sincere cooperation among all three institutions;

- the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission to continue to improve **cooperation** modalities with the CoR and the EESC, including at the pre-legislative stage.

It is also necessary to:

- **improve the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality** in the work of the EU institutions, in particular by cooperating with national parliaments in line with the prerogatives already included in the current Treaties and to ensure a more prominent role for national and local level representatives in the process in order to achieve 'active subsidiarity', with the aim of promoting greater ownership of EU policies;

- establish **regular exchanges on the protection of their democracies** against foreign interference and information manipulation with the European Parliament as a part of COSAC inter-parliamentary cooperation;

- strengthen the electorate's confidence in **electoral processes** by ensuring that all elections are free and fair.

European citizenship

The report called for the creation of an **EU Statute of Citizenship** to clarify and consolidate citizenship-specific rights and freedoms that connect the citizens in the Union. It called 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.

The Commission and the Member States should better inform non-national Union citizens (i.e. Union citizens who reside in a Member State of which they are not nationals) about their **right to vote** in or run for office in municipal and European elections. It recommended the introduction of a minimum voting age of 16.

The European Parliament recalled that the European Parliament has consistently expressed its concern that any national scheme that involves the direct or indirect sale of EU citizenship undermines the very concept of European citizenship. Members called on the Member States concerned to put an end to such practices.

Complementing representative democracy through improving citizens' participation

The report called for a swift and consistent implementation of the results of the **Conference on the Future of Europe** (CoFE), encompassing 49 proposals and 326 concrete measures delivered by the CoFE' s European Citizens Panels; reiterates its call for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties.

Members believe that one of the ways in which European citizens' expectations for more regular and meaningful involvement in the democratic life of the Union can be addressed by improving and developing **participatory mechanisms within the EU**.

The report suggested:

- the institutionalisation of representative deliberative participation processes based on the model of the CoFE's European Citizens Panels;

- the need to address the lack of familiarity with EU policies and decision-making among the general public through better education about the EU in schools;

- the creation of a **structured participation mechanism, called the European Agora**, which should work on yearly basis, deliberating on the EU's priorities for the year ahead with the results of the

deliberations to be presented on 9 May 2023 as an input to the consultation process on the Commission Annual Work Programme (CAWP).

Members suggested that a **Youth component** of the Agora should form a European Youth Assembly, which may monitor the application of a 'youth check' throughout the EU's legislative process as requested by the CoFE. They reiterated their long-standing call to evaluate the possibility of amending the EU Treaties to allow EU-wide referendums on fundamental matters that initiate paradigm changes in the European Union's actions and policies such as a reform of the EU Treaties.