# European governance

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Max van den BERG (PES, NL) in response to the Commission paper on European Governance. It looked at four aspects of this issue: improving legislation, greater involvement, the use of experts and, lastly, global governance. The committee reiterated its view that, while the aim of improving the quality of legislation, transparency and opening up the institutions to "organised civil society" (i.e. professional, trade union and business sectors) and to citizens as a whole was a worthwhile exercise, it could not be a substitute for citizens' access to public power by means of open and increasingly democratic electoral processes. The bond between citizens and the EU institutions should therefore be improved primarily by increasing the European Parliament's legislative powers and by means of genuine transparency in the work, sessions and proceedings of the Council relating to its legislative function. The report was critical of the fact that there was still no single uniform on-line contact point for all EU institutions where members of the public could monitor the formulation of policy proposals throughout the decision-making process. It therefore called on all the institutions to combine the various internet sites to create a single portal. MEPs welcomed the Commission's proposals for minimum standards for the consultation of third parties and said that such consultation should take place "in a transparent and efficient manner" so as not to slow down the legislative process and in order to guarantee openness. They also wanted to see an Interinstitutional Agreement laying down uniform minimum rules for consultation for all institutions. At the same time, the committee repeated its warning that such consultation must not become a substitute for parliamentary democracy, which is based on the role of Parliament and the Council as co-legislator and on proper control by national and regional parliaments. The report added that there was a need for greater institutionalisation of the social dialogue and consultation of the two sides of industry. While recognising the added value of experts as a source of information during the legislative process, the committee expressed a "decided preference for parliamentary democracy over a democracy of experts". The Commission was therefore urged to publish the evidence and the way it was used in the legislative process so that Parliament could be informed about how fundamental policy choices were made. MEPs also reiterated their previous calls for the Commission to attach to each legislative proposal or policy paper a list of all committees, experts, associations, organisations, institutions and other parties consulted for the purpose of drafting those documents. They further recommended that the Commission should maintain constant dialogue with representatives of local and regional authorities during the preparatory stage, as this would increase the practicability and acceptance of legislation at an early stage by those who had direct experience of the ultimate implementation and handling of EU policies and rules. Moreover, it should become a standard requirement for the Commission to consult representatives of the relevant European organisations at an early stage when it submits initiatives. Lastly, the committee said that the EU's international representation should be so revised that in the near future the Union could be represented by a seat of its own in international organisations. It also expressed the hope that, as proposed in the draft constitution, a reinforced EU would also be able in future, through a common European diplomatic service headed by its foreign minister, to represent the principles of better global governance on the international stage.