Conference on the Future of Europe

DRAFT PROPOSALS – EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

I. CITIZENS INFORMATION, PARTICIPATION and YOUTH

Objective 1: Increase citizens' participation and youth involvement in the democracy at the European Union level to develop a 'full civic experience' for Europeans, ensure that their voice is heard also in between elections, and that the participation is effective. That is why the most appropriate form of participation should be considered for each topic, for example by:

1. Improving the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms by better informing on them. Ideally all the information about the participatory spaces should be centralized in an integrated official website with different features.[1] A mechanism should be devised to monitor policy and legislative initiatives which have emerged from participatory democracy processes;[2]
2. Increasing the frequency of online and offline interactions between EU institutions and its citizens through different means of interaction in order to ensure that citizens can participate in the EU policy-making process to voice their opinions and to get feedback, and creating a charter for EU officials on citizens' participation;[3]
3. Offering a user-friendly digital platform where citizens can share ideas, put forward questions to the representatives of EU institutions and express their views on important EU matters and legislative proposals, in particular youth. The platform should also allow for online elections and polls;[4]
4. Improving and streamlining existing mechanisms at the European, national, and local level, to make them more secure, accessible, visible and inclusive;[5]
5. Including in the citizens' participation process regional and local authorities;[6]
6. Holding Citizens' assemblies periodically, on the basis of legally binding EU law. Participants must be selected randomly, with representativeness criteria, and participation should be incentivized. If needed, there will be support of experts so that assembly members have

[1] ECP2 Recommendation 32, 37, BE, FR and NL National Panels
[2] FR National Panel
[3] ECP2 Recommendation 29
[4] ECP2 Recommendation 19, 32, BE, DK, FR and NL National Panels
[5] BE National panel
[6] *Ibid*.

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enough information for deliberation. If the outcomes are not taken on board by the institutions, this should be duly justified;[7]

7. Introduce a "Youth-check" of legislation, including both an impact assessment and a consultation mechanism with representatives of young people, when legislation is deemed to have an impact on young people;[8]
8. Strengthening cooperation between EU legislators and civil society organisations to utilise the link between decision-makers and citizens which civil society organisations constitute.[9]

Objective 2: Make the European Union more understandable and accessible and build common European identity, in particular by:

1. Guaranteeing a minimum level of education on the EU and especially its democratic processes, including the history of European integration and European citizenship. People of all ages should be able to benefit from such programmes, which should be designed in an engaging and age appropriate manner, for instance through the development of specific programmes and educational material for children and schools;[10] *(Partially overlaps with Education, Culture, Youth and Sport)*
2. Making reliable information on the EU easily accessible in an inclusive manner to all citizens. EU institutions should use more accessible language and avoid using bureaucratic terms in their communication, while at the same time maintaining the quality and expertise of the given information and adapting the information to different communication channels and audience profiles.[11] It should consider, for instance, creating a mobile application where information concerning EU policies is presented in a clear language.[12] A special effort should be made to reach out to young people through digital media, youth movements and various 'ambassadors' (organisations and individuals) promoting the EU project;[13]
3. Making a greater use of artificial intelligence and translation technologies to tear down language barriers;[14]
4. Defending and supporting free media, and encouraging media outlets, including public broadcasters and public news agencies and European media, to cover European affairs more regularly while respecting their freedom and independence, to ensure even coverage across the EU Member States;[15] (*Partially overlaps with Values and right, rule of law and security*);
5. Bringing Europe closer to citizens by setting up contact points and dedicated hubs, or "Houses of Europe", at local level to provide resources, information and advice to citizens on

[7] ECP2 Recommendation 39, BE National Panel 3
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] DK National Panel
[10] ECP2 Recommendation 24, 36, 38, BE National Panel
[11] ECP2 33, BE FR and NL National panels)
[12] ECP2 26
[13] BE National Panel
[14] ECP2 Recommendation 25
[15] ECP2 Recommendation 31, BE and NL National Panels

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EU matters, as well as listen to their concerns and engage in debates with associations to help spread citizens' views at European level;[16]

6. Taking further steps to strengthen common identity among Europeans, for instance through an EU fund for supporting online and offline interactions (ie. exchanges programmes, panels, meetings) of both short and longer duration between EU citizens, creating common sports events and teams, or making Europe Day (9 May) a European public holiday for all EU citizens.[17]

II. DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

Objective: Strengthen European democracy by bolstering its foundations, boosting participation in European Parliament elections, fostering transnational debate on European issues and ensuring a strong link between citizens and their elected representatives, in particular by:

1. Ensuring the protection of EU values laid down in the treaties, including the rule of law, which are at the core of the European democracy. In its relationship with external countries, the European Union should firstly strengthen common democratic values in its borders. Only after achieving this, the European Union can be an ambassador of our democratic model in the countries that are ready and willing to implement it, through diplomacy and dialogue[18] *[partially overlaps with Values and Rights, Rule of Law and security]*
2. Conceiving a EU wide referendum, to be triggered by the European Parliament, in exceptional cases on matters particularly important to all European citizens;[19]
3. Working towards amending EU electoral law to harmonise electoral conditions (voting age, election date, requirements for electoral districts, candidates, political parties and their financing) for the European Parliament elections, as well as moving towards voting for 'transnational lists', with candidates from multiple Member States, while taking into account the views expressed among citizens across the EU Member States on this issue.[20]
    - Some of the Members of the European Parliament should be elected through a European Union-wide list, the rest being elected within the Members' States;[21]
    - This reform should also aim at facilitating digital voting possibilities[22] and guaranteeing effective voting rights for persons with disabilities.[23]

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[16] BE and FR National Panels
[17] ECP2 Recommendation 27, BE National Panel
[18] ECP Recommendations 14
[19] ECP Recommendation 18
[20] ECP2 Recommendation 16, NL National Panel
[21] Based on ECP2 Recommendation 16, NL National Panel, Discussion in WG
[22] ECP2 Recommendation 19 and MDP
[23] European Economic and Social Committee

4. Strengthening links between citizens and their elected representatives, taking into account national specificities and citizens' desire to be closer to them and have a feeling that their concerns lead to specific action by elected representatives in the European Parliament. This is a universal issue and people of all ages should be engaged;[24]

    - European citizens should have a greater say on who is elected as President of the Commission.[25] Therefore, the lead candidate (number 1 on the transnational list) of the European political party that has obtained the highest share of votes at European elections, who is able to be supported by a majority of European Parliament's Members, shall be elected President of the European Commission. In case a coalition majority cannot be reached, the task should be assigned to the next lead candidate. To this end, European political parties may nominate candidates to run for the Commission President's post;[26]
    - The European Parliament should have the right of legislative initiative, in order to define the topics to be discussed and, subsequently, adopt the necessary texts to follow up on the recommendations that emerge from deliberations; [27]
    - European Parliament should decide on the budget of the EU as it is the right of parliaments at the national level; [28]
    - Make political parties, civil society organisations, trade unions more lively and accessible in order for citizens to be more involved and engaged in European democracy.[29] This would also contribute to stimulate the inclusion of EU topics in public debates via political parties, organised civil society and social partners, not only during European elections but ahead of national, regional and local elections as well.[30]

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[24] ECP2 Recommendation 36, BE and FR National Panels

[25] BE National Panel 3.2 "*We recommend that the composition of the European Commission be made more transparent, according to some basic rules, so that the composition reflects citizens' voice and citizens know how the selection was made*"

[26] Softer formulation of request for "Direct election of the European Commission President" – FR National Panel ("*in the longer term, electing the President of the European Commission by universal suffrage*"), MDP (*Final Kantar Report: "Group of contributions discusses the election of the Commission President and appointment of commissioners, including the Spitzenkandidaten system, and direct election of the Commission President by citizens),* EYE, pag. 23 ": *The candidates for the President of the Commission should not be elected in backroom negotiations among winning parties. We should enforce the so-called "Spitzenkandidaten" system, where each party announces their candidate for the President of the Commission before the election campaign in the case that this party gains a majority. Through active participation in the campaign and direct interaction with the citizens, the future President could become more closely connected to the European population*." , and discussion WG

[27] *Ibid.* BE National Panels (3.2), MDP (Final Kantar Report: "*Regarding the European Parliament, contributors most often call for it to be granted real powers of legislative initiative")*

[28] MDP (Final Kantar Report: "*Regarding the European Parliament, (…) There are also calls for it to be granted fiscal powers*)

[29] MDP (Final Kantar Report: "*According to another contribution, parties should become more accessible to people from different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds*")

[30] Committee of the Regions in WG

III. EU DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Objective: Improve the EU's decision-making process in order to ensure the EU's capability to act, while taking into account the interests of smaller Member States and guaranteeing a transparent and understandable process for the citizens, in particular by:

1. Reassessing decision-making and voting rules in the EU institutions, focusing on the issue of unanimous voting, which makes it very difficult to reach agreement, while ensuring a fair calculation of voting 'weights' so that small countries' interests are protected;[31]
    - The Kyev moment showed us that unanimity should be abolished, for instance in external affairs, so that Europe can speak with a single voice in the world.[32]

2. Ensuring transparency of decision-making, allowing independent citizens' observers to closely follow the decision-making process, guaranteeing the right of access to documents, and develop on this basis stronger links and an enhanced dialogue between citizens and the EU institutions;[33]
    - The EU needs to improve the transparency of its decision-making process and institutions. For instance, the meetings of the Council and the European Parliament, including its votes, should be broadcasted online in the same way. This would allow interested citizens to follow EU policy-making, and hold politicians and policy-makers accountable;[34]
    - EU decision-making process should be further developed so that national, regional, local representatives, social partners and organised civil society are more involved.[35]

3. Considering changing the names of EU institutions to clarify their functions and respective role in the EU decision-making process for citizens;[36]

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[31] ECP2 Recommendation 20

[32] ECP4 Recommendation 21: Decision-making and EU Foreign Policy: "All issues decided by way of unanimity are changed to be decided by way of a qualified majority. The only exceptions should be the admission of new membership to the EU and changes to the fundamental principles of the EU as stated in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU", Discussion in WG based on ECP2 Recommendation 20, MPD (Final Kantar Report). *Putin's attack happened on the 24th of February 2022, after the Final Citizens' Panel 2P in Florence. The Discussion in the WG, but also in the plenary has urged the Conference on the Future of Europe to give a response to it. To this end, Ukrainian citizens and Members of Parliament were invited to March 12 Plenary*

[33] ECP2 Recommendation 34, NL National Panel

[34] Discussion in WG based ECP2 Recommendation 34, NL National Panel, MPD (Final Kantar Report: "*Increased transparency and greater involvement of the citizens is supported*"
in EU decision-making process is also supported

[35] WG discussion(presentation by National Parliaments and Committee of the Regions)

[36] ECP2 Recommendation 15

- The EU decision making process should be based on a clearer and more understandable structure, resembling national systems;[37]
- For example, the Council of the EU could be called the Senate of the EU and the European Commission could be called the Executive Commission of the EU.[38]

4. Reopening the discussion about the constitution to help us align better on our values. A constitution would help to be more precise as well as involve citizens and agree on the rules of the game. Only then we would have true reform towards a more united and coherent European Union.[39]

IV. SUBSIDIARITY

1. Create a system of local EU Councillors, as a way to reduce the distance between the EU institutions and European citizens;[40]

1. Provide enhanced structural support, financial and otherwise, for civil society, especially for youth civil society and support local authorities in setting up local youth councils;[41]

2. The EU should review the mechanism allowing National Parliaments to assess whether new legislative proposals at the European level doesn't intrude on their legal competences (so-called "Yellow and Orange cards system"). In addition, the EU should elaborate a system for National Parliaments giving the possibility to suggest a legislative initiative to the European level. Such mechanisms should also be enlarged to all regional parliaments within the EU that have legislative power;[42]

3. Reform the Committee of Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, for example to make them function more efficiently. Reform the Committee of Regions to encompass adequate channels of dialogue for regions as well as cities and municipalities, or giving it an enhanced role;[43]

4. A lively society is crucial for the democratic life of the EU: given the importance of social partners and organised civil society in the European democratic life, they should be better included in the decision-making process.[44]

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[37] Discussion WG based on need expressed in ECP2 15 to "clarify EU institutions functions", MDP (Final Kantar Report: "There are also (…) suggestions to deepen the bicameral legislature in the EU"
[38] ECP2 recommendation 15
[39] ECP Recommendation 35, FR National Panel
[40] Final Kantar Report, pag. 85
[41] DK National Panel
[42] Discussion in WG, National Parliaments
[43] Discussion in WG, CoR and EESC; Final Kantar Report, pag. 85
[44] Discussion in the WG, Social partners and several other members

V. DELIVERY (*could also go under decision-making*)

1. The EU has to enhance its delivery in key important areas;
    - For example, by enhancing the role of all European agencies, such as Frontex and the European Asylum Office. The EU should organise process audits on the organisation of Frontex, as transparency is needed in its functioning to avoid all kinds of abuses.[45]

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[45] ECP 4 Recommendation 8