



**European
Movement**
International

Citizens' participation and transparency

Closing the gap

At a moment of low citizens' trust and confidence in European institutions, improving citizens' participation and transparency at EU level is necessary to close the perceived gap between the European Union on the one hand, and citizens and representative organisations on the other hand. Several ongoing developments offer the opportunity to address this gap and improve citizens' participation and transparency. This Policy Position offers several concrete proposals in this regard. However, the participation of citizens in the political life of the European Union depends to a large extent not only on the 'policies', but also on the 'politics', namely on progress in the integration process towards a real multilevel democracy.

Article 11 Implementation

The Lisbon Treaty introduced elements related to transparency, civil society dialogue, and participatory tools through its Article 11, but its implementation is still a process in the making. Further implementation of Article 11 is necessary, as well as further clarification of the actions mentioned, such as 'publicly exchange

“The European Council and the European Parliament should be required to publish a negotiation mandate in advance of debates on legislative proposals.”

views' and 'open, transparent and regular dialogue'. With regard to the first two provisions, the EESC Liaison Group Roadmap on Article 11 offers both a vision and concrete steps to this end. The points addressed below offer further ideas to implement the provisions of Article 11.

Proposal to the European Commission and European Council: endorse and implement the EESC Liaison Group Roadmap on Article 11.

Better Regulation and Stakeholder Dialogue

The Better Regulation Agenda of the European Commission, introduced by First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, is a step towards better implementation of Article 11 by streamlining consultations and setting up platforms (such as the Regulatory Scrutiny Board and REFIT-

platform) that give room for a more efficient collection of stakeholders' opinions. However, in the standardisation of the consultation process and the setup of the new platforms a balance between business-oriented lobby and citizens' participation must be ensured.

Not all stakeholders have equal access to the European institutions or information about their work. First of all, there is an underrepresentation of non-business-related entities (such as NGOs and other civil society organisations) in the current expert groups consulted by the European Commission, as well as a lack of transparency about the work of these expert groups. Secondly, there is no 'open, transparent and regular dialogue' as perceived by civil society



organisations, reflected also in the lack of a Commission-wide strategy for civil dialogue. Finally, the European Citizens' Initiative remains constrained by many organisational bottlenecks and has not been able to start a real dialogue on substance between the European institutions and European citizens, let alone

“At a moment of low citizens' trust and confidence in European institutions, improving citizens' participation and transparency at EU level is necessary to close the perceived gap between the European Union on the one hand, and citizens and representative organisations on the other hand.”



count on an active (legal) response of the European Commission.

Proposal to the European Commission, Parliament and Council: organise a structured and truly transparent consultation process at all levels, ensuring a balance between business-oriented lobby and citizens' participation. The Council of Europe's 'Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process' can be used as an example.

Transparency Register

By proposing a mandatory Transparency Register, the Commission has renewed its attention to transparency as a fundamental building block to construct a sound European decision-making process. This is par-

ticularly important with regard to, for example, international trade negotiations, which are often mistrusted by citizens. The update of the European Union Transparency Register is a step in the right direction towards well-governed lobbying activities, but only if it includes a mandatory register for lobbyists to all institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council) and all levels, including members of the expert groups consulted by the European Commission.

Proposal to the European Commission, Parliament and Council: include a mandatory register for lobbyists to all institutions and at all levels in the new Inter-Institutional Agreement.

Trilogues

The closed-door negotiations between the Parliament and Council in the form of trilogues undermine the legitimacy of decision making on the European level, as well as citizens' trust. Either the normal legislative procedure with conciliation talks should be favoured over trilogues, or the trilogue system should be reviewed in a way that reflects a balance

“A lack of transparency prevents public debate on any piece of legislation and plays into the hands of anti-EU populist forces across Europe.”

between accountability and efficiency. This can be done through a formalisation of the process, including the publication of agendas, minutes or four-column documents in order to balance the unequal access to information for stakeholders resulting from the current system. Furthermore, impact assessments on the final agreed legislation adopted through trilogues should be carried out, as their absence damages the quality and legitimacy of legislation.

Proposal to the European Parliament and Council: favour the normal legislative procedure over trilogues, or formalise the process of trilogues, making them more transparent and putting an end to unequal access to information.

Innovation of European democracy

The disinterest in European elections, with a declining voter turnout in many

“The closed-door trilogue negotiations between the Parliament and Council in the form of trilogues undermine the legitimacy of decision making on the European level, as well as citizens' trust. Either the normal legislative procedure with conciliation talks should be favoured over trilogues, or the trilogue system should be reviewed in a way that reflects a balance between accountability and efficiency.”

European Movement statement on 31 March 2016

To see this and other European Movement International policies, please take a look at our website: www.europeanmovement.eu/policies

“The European Union has to be able to react quickly to current developments and legislate accordingly. ‘Informal trilogues’ must, however, not come at the expense of democracy, transparency and the involvement of civil society in the legislative process, which are fundamental principles enshrined in the Treaties. First reading agreements between the legislators, the European Parliament and the Member States represented by the Council, should be limited to cases where time is of essence and be conducted in a transparent manner. The European Parliament, as well as the European Commission, already make sure their position in the negotiations is public, which is not the case for the Council. The introduction of specific criteria to determine the cases eligible for trilogues could reduce the usage of this procedure to necessary cases.”

Jo Leinen MEP, President, European Movement International

Member States and campaigns centered on national issues, must be countered in order to (re-)gain the interest and involvement of European citizens in European politics. To this end, the introduction of a transnational list, more ‘European’ political parties, and a more visible affiliation between European parties and national parties can provide a renewal of the European electoral process. E-Voting as a means to reach more people should be considered as well.

Proposal to the European Council: swiftly decide on the draft reform of the European Electoral Law, passed on 11 November 2015 by the European Parlia-

ment, to ensure more transparent and more democratic European Elections in 2019 through the introduction of a transnational list, more visible European political parties, and the consideration of e-Voting.



The European Movement

seeks to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development of European solutions to our common challenges. We offer thought leadership on the issues that affect Europe and we give the opportunity to representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders, through our 39 National Councils and 36 International Associations, to work together, towards improving the way that Europe works.

European Movement International

www.europeanmovement.eu

Rue Marie-Thérèse 21

B-1000 Brussels

T +32 (0)2 508 30-88

secretariat@europeanmovement.eu

[@EMInternational](https://twitter.com/EMInternational)



Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union