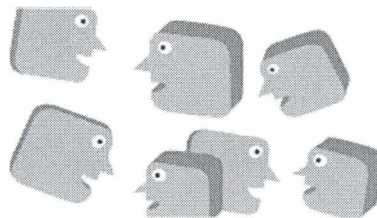




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Consultation for the PES Manifesto for the European elections 2009: Discussion Paper

EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY AND DIVERSITY

1. The Challenge

Democracy is one of the **founding principles** of the European Union and the process of strengthening it must continue.

The European Union also recognises the diversity of Europe's peoples, their cultural and linguistic diversity, national and regional diversity, and is committed to promoting Member State cultures, while highlighting our common cultural heritage.

The current challenges for democracy and **diversity** are arguably a product of the success of the European project. As the European Union has been strengthened and as it has enlarged the need has also grown for a more democratic system at an EU level. With **direct elections to the European Parliament** and co-decision-making between national governments and the European Parliament in most EU policy areas, democracy at an EU level is stronger than ever before, but far from complete.¹

Even though more than two-thirds of Europe's citizens see the EU as being modern and democratic, just under half also think that the EU is technocratic and inefficient.² Most citizens are much less interested in European politics than in national politics and do not have basic knowledge of how the EU operates.³ The proportion of citizens voting in European elections has consistently fallen, since the introduction of direct elections, from 63% in 1979 to 46% in 2004. For these reasons, there has been concern about the current state of European democracy, compounded by the "No" votes to the draft constitutional treaty in the referenda held in France and the Netherlands in 2005.

The diversity of the European Union has grown both within and between Europe's Member States. Firstly, European countries are becoming **increasingly diverse**, due to immigration and to more and more people moving from one member state to another. Secondly, diversity within the EU has grown particularly over the past three years, as it has enlarged from fifteen to twenty-five member states in 2004 and to twenty-seven member states in 2007. For these two reasons, there are questions as to whether the EU should **adapt further** to reflect this diversity. For example, there is a debate as to whether the European Parliament should be more representative of the European population as such: for example, only about 30% of MEPs are women and under 2% of MEPs are from ethnic minorities (over 5% of the European population is of ethnic minority origin). In our increasingly diverse societies, it remains highly important to fight all forms of discrimination.

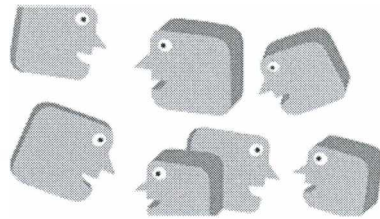
¹ In some policy areas, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy, national governments take decisions in the Council of Ministers and European Council, without European Parliament participation in decision-making.

² Eurobarometer, The Future of Europe, 05/2006, p.23

³ Eurobarometer, The Future of Europe, 05/2006, p.15



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Therefore, there are multiple challenges to European democracy and diversity, which must be addressed in the coming years.

2. What's Europe got to do with it?

The European Union is founded on the **principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law**, as set out in Article 6 of the Treaties. In the case of a serious and persistent breach by a Member State of these principles, European heads of state and government can suspend certain rights of the Member State in question, including voting rights. In addition, the European Union is bound by its treaties to respect cultural and linguistic diversity, regional and national diversity. The treaties **prohibit discrimination** on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive prohibit discrimination, harassment and victimisation in employment and training on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. They also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, in employment and areas beyond such as education, social security and social advantages, including housing and healthcare, and access to goods and services.

European citizens have the freedom to live and work anywhere in the EU; the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections; the right to diplomatic and consular protection; the right to petition the European Parliament and complain to the European ombudsman; and the right to write to the EU's institutions and to obtain a reply in their own language. The Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out the full range of citizens' rights, but is not yet legally binding.

The Lisbon Treaty will bring a range of innovations to citizens' rights and democracy, if Member States complete the ratification process by 2009: establishing the principles of **democratic equality, representative democracy and participatory democracy**; taking account of the national identities of peoples; introducing for the first time a right of citizens' initiative – giving real meaning to participatory democracy - allowing a petition with at least one million signatures to be presented to the European Commission inviting it to make a legislative initiative; recognising the rights of minorities as a European value; making the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** legally binding.⁴ Therefore, there are various ways in which the EU could become more democratic and **closer to citizens** in future, if the political momentum is created to introduce these changes.

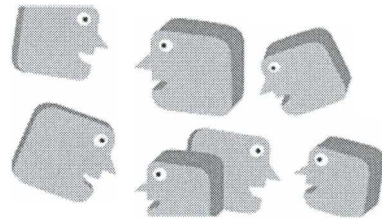
The main institutions of the European Union, forming the core of the EU's democratic system are the European Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament. There are several respects in which the democratic nature of these institutions have been improved and could be further strengthened.

The **European Commission** drafts proposals for new European laws – which are then decided upon by the Council and Parliament - and ensures that EU policies are implemented and that the EU budget is spent. The Commission President is nominated by European heads of state and government and this nomination is ratified by the European Parliament. The Commission President chooses his/her Commissioners, in consultation with Member

⁴ Please note, Protocol 7 on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights to Poland and to the United Kingdom.



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States, which is subject to the approval of the European Parliament. Under the current treaties, there is one Commissioner per member state (currently 27), but as of 1st November 2014 onwards, the number will have to be reduced and a rotation system will be put in place. The European Parliament does not participate in the choice of the Commission President or Commissioners and can only approve or reject nominations it receives. The Lisbon Treaty will bring about a major change in this area: the European Council will have to take into account the results of the European elections in its nomination of a Commission President and the European Parliament will elect the President by a majority, failing which the Council will be obliged to propose an alternative candidate. The Parliament also has the power to dismiss the Commission by adopting a motion of censure; in this way, the Commission can be held to account. However, the Parliament cannot dismiss the Commission President or Commissioners individually.

The European Commission has been criticised in the past for not being sufficiently democratic, transparent and accountable and for not consulting widely before presenting draft pieces of legislation. Steps have been taken in recent years to improve **transparency** and **accountability**, including: systematic consultation of the social partners and civil society on all policy areas and proposals; the carrying out of economic, social and environmental impact assessments in advance of presenting draft legislation; the publication of all draft legislation (on the internet); the transmission of all documents and draft legislation to national parliaments. However, the debate continues as to whether the European Commission should be made more democratic and accountable, for example, through: direct election of the European Commission President by European citizens; election of the European Commission President and Commissioners by the European Parliament, based on candidates proposed by European political parties; introducing the possibility for the European Parliament to dismiss individual Commissioners (rather than just being able to sack the entire Commission).

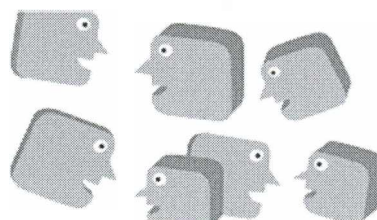
With 785 representatives from 27 countries (751 members upon the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty), the **European Parliament** is the world's only directly elected international parliament, and a pillar of European democracy. The Parliament is responsible for jointly deciding on EU laws with the Council (but not in all policy areas), exercising democratic supervision over the other EU institutions, and sharing the authority with the Council over the EU budget. Over the years, the Parliament has gained more powers on law-making, but there are still notable areas where it has no powers of co-decision such as common foreign and security policy and trade policy. Candidates to the European Parliament are chosen by national political parties. There has been criticism in the past at the lack of diversity amongst **MEPs** (Members of the European Parliament): few women and even fewer citizens of ethnic minority origin, which does not reflect the European population properly. MEPs are elected over the same time period in all member states, according to nationally determined voting systems and electoral constituencies, which means that MEPs are elected in different ways and do not all represent the same number of citizens. There have been attempts by the European Parliament to propose one electoral system for all member states, but European heads of state and government have never agreed to their proposals.

Furthermore, there is a debate as to whether national parliaments should be more involved in European policy-making. One of the main innovations of the Lisbon treaty is to set out that national parliaments should be able to ensure that the European Commission does not take initiatives for which it is not competent.

The **Council**, bringing together national governments, is arguably the most powerful European institution. Debates on reform of the Council have mostly focused on making it



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more effective and transparent and giving it more **visibility**, to strengthen Europe's voice in the world. Therefore, the Lisbon treaty proposes to create a post of President of the Council – elected unanimously by member states - with a mandate to ensure the coherence and continuity of the Council's work and represent the EU in the world. It also proposes that the Council should meet in public when it considers and votes a draft legislative text, a proposal which has now already been implemented. Another innovation is the creation of a strengthened position of foreign affairs representative to make the European Union's external action more effective and coherent and to create a stronger, single EU voice at global level. The introduction of these important democratic innovations now depends on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

European political parties, such as the PES, have been created with the specific purpose of contributing to European awareness and representing the political will of European citizens. The PES has strengthened itself in recent years in order to fulfil this role, and with its group in the European Parliament, seeks to represent Europe's citizens and pursue social democratic objectives in the policy-making of the EU. There is a debate as to how European political parties could further develop their representative and democratic role in European politics. One proposal is for European political parties to name their candidate for President of the European Commission before the European elections and for European leaders to be bound to nominate the candidate whose European party has gained most seats in the elections.

3. Our ideas

The PES has appealed to civil society, to the social partners, and to all progressive forces to work together for a more democratic, social, open, transparent, and efficient EU, for more and better Europe, for the benefit of European citizens. The PES supports a Charter of Fundamental Rights.

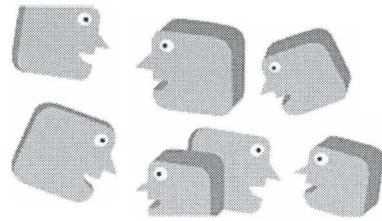
Political debates amongst progressive Europeans have focused on some of the following ideas on how to improve European democracy, reflect better Europe's diversity and fight discrimination:

- Introducing the innovations relating to democracy and diversity of the Lisbon treaty, as explained above.
- Having European political parties propose their candidates for the European Commission Presidency and giving the European Parliament the power to elect the Commission President;
- Giving the European Parliament the power to dismiss individual European Commissioners;
- Introducing one electoral system for European parliamentary elections.

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4. Questions for you

1. In what ways should European democracy be strengthened?
2. How can European citizens' participation in and understanding of European politics be improved?
3. How can the EU reflect Europe's diversity better?
4. How can the EU contribute further to the fight against discrimination?
5. Should the European Parliament have more democratic powers in policy-making and holding the European Commission to account?
6. Should the President of the European Commission be directly elected by European citizens or by the European Parliament on a proposal by European political parties?
7. How should European political parties develop their democratic role in the European Union?

Background documents

PES Leaders' Declaration on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty

http://www.pes.org/downloads/declaration_leaders_24March_final_EN.pdf

Eurobarometer 66, 12/2006

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf

Special Eurobarometer, The Future of Europe, 05/2006

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_251_en.pdf