

Professor Danuta Hübner

„Europe must do more to make “Citizens’ Europe a reality”

Debate on the resolution on Citizens dialogue and citizens participation in the European decision-making

Meeting of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

European Parliament, Brussels (online), 12 April 2021

Thank you for the proposals you have made in the draft report. I embrace many of them and I have been always in favor, as you might remember, of developing in the EU a permanent mechanism of consultation with the citizens and that the Conference on the Future of Europe should lay the foundations for such mechanisms. Today we already know that there will be a digital platform which could be a beginning of such a mechanism.

In the twenty-first century, European citizens are well informed, confident, have opinions and are therefore critical. They have at their disposal efficient and effective communication tools. They want to contribute to democracy beyond parties and elections. A sustainable democracy responds to the changes in society and responds to the citizens' changing expectations about participation. New ways and modern forms of direct participation offer the opportunity for citizens to be directly involved in political discussion and decision-making processes. The EU in particular can and must do more, in order to make "Citizens' Europe" a reality.

It seems obvious that deliberative democracy can be a positive amplifier of representative democracy. We are not starting from scratch. The existing participatory instruments should be improved to make citizens' participation more accessible and effective. We should engage more in particular with young people in the political debate on the future of Europe, as the decisions we are taking today will shape their future.

There is a clear need for proper follow-up mechanisms for citizens' dialogues in order to take citizens' input seriously.

Moreover, I definitely support the proposal from the Presidents of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions to set up an interinstitutional working group on citizens' participation in the EU decision-making process.

Of course, we should be careful not to make promises and raise expectations that purport to involve citizens more in decision-making, but fail to really do so.

I think we have common understanding across the Conference membership that citizens' participation structures do not need to impose legal obligations to create legislation there should provide input and guidance. They should not duplicate or unduly interfere with the established legislative processes. Any new mechanisms should represent the voice of citizens in co-operation with existing structures while respecting the principles of representative democracy.

The European Union exists through the support of its citizens. Today's citizens want to be more directly involved in policymaking, political discussions and decision-making. And in order to ensure that it remains strong in future, democracy must react to changes in society's expectations, needs and dreams and address them. In her "Political Guidelines", the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has pledged to ensure "A greater say for Europeans" and increase the participation of European citizens in European policymaking during her term in office.

The EU is in no way self-evident, its democratic legitimacy needs to be continuously re-established and created and this is why the EU depends on the support of their citizens, even more than the member states.