



## European Economic and Social Committee

### Ideas and proposals for the Working Group on European Democracy of the Conference on the Future of Europe

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The EESC, as an active partner on the Conference on the Future of Europe representing the organised civil society, has identified concrete proposals regarding four topics on European Democracy, as listed below.

#### 1. Promoting fair elections with voting rights for all

- That European Commission to be vigilant and work with the Member States and stakeholders to ensure **fair and transparent elections** by:
  - building on the lessons learned from the 2019 elections to improve the current state of the EU's electoral process to maximise a satisfactory voter turnout in the 2024 European elections and beyond;
  - **providing an enhanced regulatory oversight of European political parties** in respect of transparency in campaigning and party finances, compliance with data protection rules and adherence to EU values.
- The EESC calls for special attention to the burning issue of the inclusion of persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants, rural poor and other disadvantaged social **groups who have been chronically underrepresented in the European elections** across the EU Member States by:
  - taking measures to allow full participation in the democratic process of all marginalised and disenfranchised social groups.
  - giving special attention to inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD) by urgently amending the 1976 Electoral Act by setting standards and clarifying the principles of universality, directness and secrecy of elections, which would guarantee real voting rights for PWD. Ensuring that the standards used include, amongst other points, a ban on depriving people of the right to vote in European Parliament elections on the grounds of disability or health status, and an obligation to provide information on voting rules in an accessible form.

*Related EESC opinions: [SOC/630](#) - The effects of campaigns on participation in political decision-making and [SOC/638](#) – The need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections*

#### 2. Promoting active and democratic participation beyond elections

- The EESC proposes the **creation of a fourth pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan** for the involvement of civil society and social partners to pave way for a more sustainable and robust democracy in Europe. This pillar should include such as:

- promoting a culture of active participation through creating an open and enabling environment for civil society in Europe;
- assessing civic space in each Member state, monitoring the state of democracy and provide guidance to defend and promote civic action;
- prioritise education on democratic citizenship and human rights through proposing an ambitious strategy on communication, education and citizen awareness of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy;
- give citizens and their organisations a real say in EU decision-making processes, by initiating an inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue and organising an annual event to foster civil dialogue and draft an annual plan to strengthen democracy, participation and civil dialogue;
- strengthen support structures for social dialogue and collective bargaining including promoting labour democracy.

*Related EESC opinions: [SOC/672](#) – The European democracy action plan and [SOC/627](#) – Further strengthening the rule of law*

### **3. Fighting disinformation as a threat to democracy**

- The EESC believes that **disinformation is a threat to our democracies** and to the European Union and that action to combat disinformation should be prioritised by:
  - proposing regulation of social media and digital platforms, with a focus on the transparency of all aspects of political advertising;
  - ensuring full compliance and follow-up regulatory action in respect of the Code of Practice on Disinformation to counter disinformation – external and domestic;
  - focusing more on a preventive approach by tackling the emergence of disinformation rather than on moderating its content with key focus on protecting freedom of expression;
  - fostering an ongoing and determined discussions with digital platforms, specifically with a view to clarifying and advancing methodologies for processing information;
  - facilitate an open dialogue with all stakeholders and those who could have a role in this fight. This is particularly the case for researchers and all civil society organisations;
  - ensuring actions are accessible for and understood of people with disabilities, especially sensory, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, who are particularly vulnerable to false information.

*Related EESC opinion: [INT/955](#) - Guidance/Gode of practice disinformation*

### **4. Public services as stabilisers of democracy**

- National public services provide a protective function and uphold European values and act as a **stabilising element for democracy**, the rule of law and is a bulwark against populism.
  - Members States are to work on common European principles to make public services operate as a stabilising element for democracy and the rule of Law;
  - The EESC proposes an effective European legal framework that guarantees full compliance according to the "Copenhagen criteria".

*Related EESC opinion: [SOC/643](#) – Public services as stabilisers of democracy*