



**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OF
THE MEMBER STATES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

COLLOQUY of BRUSSELS

13 November 2014

***THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF
GLOBALISATION.
HOW TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS
AND THE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLES***

DECLARATION OF BRUSSELS

Approved by the delegates representing the members of the European Association of former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe

The European Association of Former Parliamentarians of the member states of the Council of Europe:

- thanks the European Parliament Former Members Association (FMA) for hosting the Colloquy in the premises of the European Parliament, the only EU institution elected directly by the people, the EU's major instrument for scrutinising democracy, and the body for deliberation on Community legislation.

recalls that its work is entirely in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, the Council of Europe European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the United Nations International Pact on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Universal Declaration on Democracy, adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1997 as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

- emphasises that the Brussels Colloquy aims in particular at the strengthening of democratic institutions and the participation of citizens. The principles of liberty and the respect of human rights must be respected by the governments. This colloquy's goal is to attract attention to the need for a totally new global equilibrium based on democracy and taking account of the effects of globalisation and the development of emerging countries.

A FEW REMINDERS

A - A FOUNDATION OF SHARED VALUES: THE BASIS OF DEMOCRACY

- Democracy is an ideal as well as a goal, based on fundamental values shared by all open-minded peoples on the planet, regardless of cultural, political, social or economic differences. It is founded on values such as the inviolability of human dignity, freedom, respect for human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, solidarity and social justice, protection of natural foundation of life, tolerance, freedom of religious belief, respect for minorities, cultural diversity, and peace.

Democracy – the government of the people, by the people and for the people – is based on essential principles: the individual participation and responsibility of citizens, which implies the existence of representative institutions at all decisional levels. Democracy comprises social, economic and cultural parameters which facilitate free and equal political choice for all and unrestricted freedom of expression and of the media.

- The future of democracy cannot be dependent on the specific situations of each country. We observe that, too often confronted with various interpretations with reference to traditions, religions and the political regime, in many of the world's countries, democracy is far from being successful.

- In the conclusions of our Rome Declaration of 30 November 2002 on 'Shared European values underpinning European construction':

"The former parliamentarians are convinced that a unified and structured Europe is in a position to rise to the challenges of globalisation not only in the economic and social, but also in the political and legal fields. Globalisation of democratic values must be promoted as well as a social and ecological market economy where sustainable human development and the rights of future generations form the reference point of a global politics offering a decent life to all human beings of the present and future generations."

B - SOME OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY ARE CHALLENGED BY GLOBALISATION

Globalisation is challenging some of the foundations of democracy in its 'earlier' definition:

- The rapid surge in new information and communication technologies, and particularly of the Internet, has allowed access to the 'global village'.

However, abuse and manipulation are blatant in many fields such as the challenging of the protection of privacy, identity theft and all forms of digital criminality. Transgressions originating in States themselves can also happen in these fields.

- The debts crisis has highlighted the decisive influence of the intervention of international financial institutions and of rating agencies, which crystallizes the feeling citizens have of interference in and supervision over national affairs, and even of being placed under regulation

Alongside the positive horizons that are opening up (e.g. swifter communication, international aid, promotion of trade...), globalisation is increasing the constraints on the autonomy of States and groupings of States in a context where, internationally, the necessary institutional conditions do not exist for the exercise of democracy.

- Faced with intransparency and complexity of power structures, citizens wish to participate in decision-making. The recent protests and rebellions have highlighted the ever greater influence of social networks; plurality of opinions is being expressed to a greater extent outside the representative institutions.

PROPOSALS

1. The role of political institutions and of their representatives is decisive in creating and sustaining a democratic framework in each country, locally, regionally, nationally and also at the inter-State level.

Yet the importance of elections today appears ever more limited, especially regarding social and economic issues where those in power appear to have the least room for manoeuvre. The rise in the abstention rate can be explained largely by this feeling of incapacity. However, the correct operation of democracy requires electoral participation of a significant if not massive scale.

We recall that the key element in the exercise of democracy is the periodic holding of free and fair elections with secret balloting being guaranteed to ensure the people's will is expressed. These elections must be held on the basis of universal suffrage so that voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness and transparency. Therefore civil and political rights are essential, and more specifically the rights to vote and to be elected, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, access to information and the right to organise political parties and carry out political activities.

2. We propose strengthening the representative democratic institutions by adapting them to the new context, for example by taking account of the emergence of social networks, which now compete with the traditional forms of public expression. To ensure that the idea of representative democracy retains its appeal, we need to open up the political system to permit greater public participation, and to launch a campaign to promote civic education. The interactive media available today can make a key contribution to modernising and supplementing representative democracy by boosting transparency and providing simple channels for involvement and participation. The legitimacy of a democratic community must not be weakened by allowing citizenship to be purchased.

We propose at the same time starting work in our association to define the new instruments to be implemented with a view to a concrete roll-out of participatory democracy including the new techniques of communication.

3. To be considered fully democratic a power must be subject to oversight systems.

We propose the implementation of advisory boards to public administrations at all levels, framed by legislation on transparency, in order to prevent the corruption and influence of pressure groups of whatever kind .

We also propose that the organisation, financial management, funding and ethics of political parties be duly regulated in an impartial manner to ensure the integrity of democratic processes as recalled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in its Universal Declaration on Democracy of 16 September 1997, and that the rights to access information on the activities of elected representatives be acknowledged.

4. The right of citizens' initiative has been recognised at the European level by the Treaty of Lisbon by enabling a million citizens to submit a proposal for a European legal act necessary to implement the Treaties, but the Commission keeps the power to decide on the opportunity of going forward with said initiative. In no case can the European Parliament evade its historic role of driving force in the European construction process. It remains the place of popular sovereignty across the whole European Union.

We therefore propose that the European Parliament facilitate a relaunch of the citizens' initiative laid down by the Treaty of Lisbon and initiate a reform of the citizens' initiative.

5. The European Parliament should also be strengthened by creating the post of an independent EU representative for fundamental rights, to be elected by the European Parliament.

6. It is of similar importance for Europe's democratic architecture that the powers of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe be strengthened by giving the Assembly the right to nominate candidates for the election of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, and by providing it with additional consultation and decision-making rights regarding its own budget.

7. One of the challenges to be resolved by parliaments is to ensure a proper balance between freedom and the right of the individual to determine the use of his or her data, the need to protect the dignity, privacy and reputation of other individuals and the community as such and ensure its security.

8. We propose that the major decisions concerning the population be taken after consultation and not by unelected bodies over which, and it's the most worrisome aspect, citizens feel even those governing them no longer have any influence. Citizen expertise must be able to be exercised fully, in particular by guaranteed access to prior objective information especially regarding public projects. These consultations represent an essential offering of participatory democracy. These decisions can concern for instance the infrastructure in the respective countries, where applicable beyond the borders, the construction of roads, electrical networks, etc.

9. Citizens' knowledge of decisions is a key element of democratic life. This supposes impartial and complete information with an open debate.

We propose that the participation of citizens in public life, and especially their rights to education and knowledge, be recognised and their roll-out promoted; for example : some measures could be adopted like the publication of the proceedings of the EU Council when it deliberates on legislative acts as does the European Parliament.

10. A cautious expansion of participatory elements at all levels does not run counter to representative democracy. However, we reaffirm that the political heart of democracy is the parliament as we stated in our 'Declaration of Malta' of 2 November 2012. Parliaments must therefore strengthen or regain their position as the central forum for public and political debate, and perform its other main functions effectively and responsibly – such as the passage of legislation, adoption of the budget, scrutiny of the government's work, its elective powers, and involvement in foreign and security policy.

11. The globalisation of democracy must impose itself on the globalisation of the economy.

If the desire is to increase the capacity of citizens to exercise a certain power over phenomena developing at the global level without their involvement, new modes of political organisation must be set in place internationally and account must be taken of the new societal requirements demanding more democracy, transparency and integrity of financial markets. In any case Europe must set priority to regain economic competitiveness on a global scale.

We therefore propose that States support the creation of a Parliamentary Assembly of the United Nations e.g. supervising the major financial institutions, IMF and World Bank, so as to promote progress of world governance along a democratic track. There must be a clear and transparent monitoring of the role played by the WTO. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe should also monitor the European Investment Bank (EIB) as it is done by the European Parliament.

12. As the debt of advanced countries has reached unprecedented levels, its impact on growth is today more uncertain than previously and therefore affects the democratic balance of the countries concerned and also of all the world's countries.