



Democratic Europe



DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL

Posted by: Democracy International



2014 Pledge Campaign "Democratic Europe Now!"

The pledge campaign of Democracy International aimed at building pressure on the candidates for the European Parliament (EP) to commit to real democratic reform of the EU.

Institutional democratic reforms can only be made with a Convention. As the EP has the right to call for a Convention since the Lisbon Treaty, our campaign put pressure on the candidates to call for a Convention if elected into the new parliament.

By signing the pledges, the candidates promised: (a) to support an EP initiative for an open and inclusive Convention to reform the treaties for a more democratic EU, and (b) to call for a pan-European referendum on the results of the Convention, giving the European citizens a say on the future of Europe.

More than 1200 candidates pledged their commitment, of which 114 were elected into the new parliament. Of the 114 MEPs, 68 were re-elected and 46

elected into the new parliament. Of the 114 MEPs, 66 were re-elected and 48 were new to the Parliament; 31% are S&D, 25% are from Greens/EFA, 13% from GUE/UEF, 9% ALDE, and 3% EPP.

Developments: institutional democratic reform

After the elections and the dramatic increase in populist, eurosceptic parties in the EP, almost all MEPs that had signed our pledge took a step back from their commitments, claiming it too big of a danger to have a non-controlled democratic debate in such a political climate.

Within the formal decision-making process, two reports were initiated on the subject: one on what reforms could be made within the Lisbon Treaty (by MEPs Bresso and Brok) and one on future EU institutional reforms which would require treaty change (by MEP Verhofstadt).

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The report on **Possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union** by MEP Verhofstadt was adopted by the EP by 283 to 269 votes with 83 abstentions in February 2017. Paragraph 5 of the report refers explicitly to a convention:

5. Stresses that a comprehensive democratic reform of the Treaties must be achieved through a reflection on the future of the EU and an agreement on a vision for present and future generations of European citizens, leading to a Convention that guarantees inclusiveness through its composition of representatives of national parliaments, governments of all the Member States, the Commission, the European Parliament and EU consultative bodies such as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social

such as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, and also provides the proper platform for such reflection and engagement with European citizens and civil society;

The report by co-rapporteurs MEPs Bresso and Brok **on improving the EU through building of the Lisbon Treaty** was also debated in the EP in February 2017 and adopted by 329 votes to 223 with 83 abstentions. This report referred to already existing legal possibilities to expand democratic engagement, including strengthening the right of Parliamentary inquiry, the reform of the ECI, and making it easier to take part in the European voluntary service programme.

Since the Brexit referendum and the decision for the UK to leave the EU, the need for a public debate on the future of Europe, a democratic Convention and even a pan-European constitutional referendum are again on the table. Within this context, many MEPs from across the political spectrum have renewed their call for institutional democratic reform of the EU (especially vocal MEPs include Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE), Danuta Hübner (EPP), Jo Leinen and Mercedes Bresso (S&D), Barbara Spinelli (Left) and others).

Developments: European Citizens' Initiative

The Commission has also recognized that the political crisis faced by the EU stems from a growing discontent of citizens. In a concrete development towards democratizing the EU and in hopes of bringing the EU closer to the people, the Commission's First Vice-President Frans Timmermans made the historic announcement in March 2017 that the European Citizens' Initiative will begin a revision process this year. A successful revision of the ECI would mean a great step towards the democratization of Europe.

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process has become the focal point of Democracy International's work over the past several months as we recognize that a real reform of the ECI is the best opportunity we have to revive the role of citizens in EU decision-making and foster citizen trust and approval of the EU.

Looking forward

Brexit has been a wakeup call that the EU cannot continue with business as usual, and that serious reforms are needed to make the institutions more democratic and closer to the people.

The decision by the Commission to hold a revision of the ECI and the support by the EP demonstrates that the EU recognizes this dilemma as well. Democracy International fully supports the reform process, and we have campaigned tirelessly since the announcement to make our demands heard loud and clear to make the ECI more simple, user-friendly, and more legislatively binding.

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The Commission will take into account the results of a 12-week long Public

Consultation, the final report of the Parliament, and the role of civil society actors in presenting their demands for the ECI. This unique opportunity to foster citizen-driven democracy in the EU will be decided by the end of the year. Until then, Democracy International will continue to call on the Parliament to strengthen their recommendations, and we will continue to maintain pressure on the Commission to produce a real, true revision of the ECI.
