

A strengthened role of the national parliaments for the benefit of a more democratic Union

One of the main challenges facing the European Union is the low level of citizens' trust in the EU institutions and decision-making process observed in many Member States.

The source of this problem is to a large extent the conviction of citizens about the lack of transparency of EU procedures, their lack of influence on decisions taken in Brussels and the feeling that the interests of all Member States are not sufficiently taken into account in the EU decision-making process.

The elections to the European Parliament (EP) do not contribute enough to strengthening the sense of shared ownership of the European project among citizens. The low turnout in these elections shows that citizens do not consider them as having a real impact on their lives. The concept of direct legitimacy of the EU is noble, but it does not work in reality.

In this context, one of the most important tasks for the European Union should be to seek other solutions to bring the Union closer to its citizens. In order to be effective and efficient, the European Union needs strong democratic legitimacy, and has to be deeply rooted in the political reality of the Member States. The European project cannot be detached from the basic democratic communities, which are the national democracies. In order to overcome the democratic deficit in the EU and to renew the sense of shared responsibility for the future of the Union, it is necessary to strengthen the role of national parliaments.

Goals

The primary objective of the proposed changes should be not only to improve the functioning of the existing instruments defining the role of national parliaments in the EU decision-making process, but also to introduce new mechanisms designed to guarantee that the national parliaments of the Member States have real influence on the EU agenda and effective control of EU initiatives.

Proposed Actions

- I. Return in the new institutional cycle to the discussion on the introduction of the so-called red card mechanism, i.e. giving the national parliaments a collective right to block legislative initiatives of the European Commission (EC). The introduction of such a mechanism does not require a change to the Treaties - it could be based on the political agreement of the Member States. The mechanism suggested in the settlement agreement between EU Heads of State and Government and the United Kingdom, which was concluded during the European Council meeting on 18-19 February 2016 and expired with the result of the British referendum, may serve as a model. Such a red card could supplement the current yellow card procedure, which proved to be ineffective.
- II. Effective implementation of the practical recommendations of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently", including:
 - a common method to be used by the EU institutions and national parliaments to assess issues related to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and the legal basis of EU legislation, better presentation by the EC of reasoned opinions received from parliaments (inclusion of the opinions in the Commission's annual reports on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, providing the Council and the European Parliament during the legislative process with information about proposals where significant concerns have been raised in respect of subsidiarity).
 - adopting a flexible approach to the deadline for national parliaments to submit reasoned opinions on the non-compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, taking into account common

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holiday periods and recess periods, and in case of treaty reform - extending the time limit to submit reasoned opinions from 8 to 12 weeks and introducing a "mirror" deadline for the EC to provide a reply. In relation to the issue of common holiday periods and recess periods, it would be advisable for the national parliaments to call for a conclusion of an appropriate agreement in this regard by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.

- III. Strengthening the role of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments by increasing the frequency of its meetings to two per year (one meeting during a given Presidency of the EU Council).
- IV. Better communication between the EC and national parliaments in case of submittal of reasoned opinions on the non-compliance of a draft legal act with the principle of subsidiarity through the introduction of an obligation for the Commission to prepare a reply even if the number of reasoned opinions does not achieve a threshold needed to launch the yellow card procedure.
- V. Strengthening the importance of political dialogue between the EC and national parliaments by:
 - preparing EC replies to opinions submitted by national parliaments in the framework of political dialogue in a faster and more detailed manner,
 - requiring the EC to indicate whether a draft legal act includes opinions / proposals submitted by national parliaments,
 - introducing as a good practice the presence of the EC President or European Commissioners during institutionalized interparliamentary conferences (Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, COSAC, CFSP/CSDP Conference, Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU, the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol).
- VI. Strengthening the role of national parliaments in the European Commissioners' appointment procedure by introduction of the practice of inviting representatives of national parliaments to be present at the hearings of the Commissioners-designate before the European Parliament.