

# EURO-LATIN AMERICAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY



## RESOLUTION:

### **Citizen participation and democracy in Latin America and the European Union**

on the basis of the report by the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights

EP co-rapporteur:

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LAC co-rapporteur:

William Vélez Mesa (Parlandino)

**Saturday, 29 March 2014 – Athens (Greece)**

## **EUROLAT – Resolution of 29 March 2014 – Athens (Greece)**

on the basis of the report by the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights

### **Citizen participation and democracy in Latin America and the European Union**

*The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly,*

- having regard to Articles 18-25 (Part two) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on non-discrimination and citizenship,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular Chapter V (Articles 39-46) thereof on citizens' rights,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative,
- having regard to the declarations made at the seven summits of Heads of State or Government of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union, held respectively in Rio de Janeiro (28-29 June 1999), Madrid (17-18 May 2002), Guadalajara (28-29 May 2004), Vienna (11-13 May 2006), Lima (15-17 May 2008), Madrid (17-18 May 2010) and Santiago de Chile (26 and 27 January 2013), having regard to the declarations adopted at the 17 Interparliamentary Conferences held between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (1974-2005)
- having regard to the Commission's 2001 White Paper on Governance,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- having regard to the Commission's initiatives to encourage citizen participation: 'Plan D: Broadening and deepening the debate on participatory democracy at European level' (2006) and the European Citizens' Initiative (2010),
- having regard to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report 'Deepening democracy in a fragmented world' (New York, UNDP, 2002),
- having regard to the UNDP report 'Democracy in Latin America: Toward a Citizens' Democracy' (New York, UNDP, 2004),,
- having regard to the UNDP/OAS report 'the Democracy of Citizenship, an agenda for building citizenship in Latin America' (UNDP/OAS, 2009),
- having regard to the UNDP/OAS report 'Our Democracy' (UNDP/OAS, Mexico, 2010),
- having regard to the Sixth Report of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) 'Trust: Basis for Governability and Democratic Coexistence in Latin America and the Caribbean' (FLACSO, San Jose, 2010),,

- having regard to the Report of the First International Forum of Santo Domingo, held on 28 and 29 October 2009, entitled ‘Democracy, Equitable Growth and Social Cohesion in Latin America’ (San José, 2010),
  - having regard to the debates on citizen participation and democracy in Latin America and the European Union held in the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EUROLAT) Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights on 22 November 2011 in Brussels (Belgium) and 9 November 2012 in Cadiz (Spain),
  - having regard to the working document on citizen participation and democracy in Latin America and the European Union submitted by María Irigoyen Pérez (S&D, Spain) to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights,
  - having regard to the working document on citizen participation and democracy in Latin America and the European Union submitted by William Vélez Mesa (Parlandino, Colombia) to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights,
- A. whereas representative democracy based on free, transparent multiparty elections and the respect for fundamental rights and basic freedoms offers enormous scope for improvement by means of ongoing, meaningful public involvement in the deliberative and decision-making processes of government bodies through transparency and participation;
  - B. whereas the concept of citizenship means guarantees of basic equality which, in modern terms, places on an equal footing the rights and obligations that all individuals have by belonging to a national state;
  - C. whereas the rights of citizens as a community are based on by their individual identity, the extent of their basic rights being enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; whereas no limits or restrictions may be placed on enjoyment of these rights by virtue of nationality;
  - D. whereas there is a need to improve the quality of democracy through greater citizen participation in decision-making and to reconcile democracy and equity and sustainable development with a view to achieving full civic participation;
  - E. whereas democratic governance and the strengthening of the State, of its institutions and of political parties are prerequisites for democracy and social cohesion;
  - F. whereas democracy alone as a form of government does not necessarily ensure prosperity and well-being for all citizens, although it should guarantee equal opportunities; whereas citizen participation provides an opportunity to improve government decision-making processes, factoring in all available knowledge and promoting the concept of joint responsibility in the running of public affairs;
  - G. whereas the public’s participation in decision-making is an essential prerequisite for the survival and proper functioning of the democratic system;

- H. whereas the greater the level of citizen participation in the political processes of a country, the healthier its system of democracy;
- I. whereas a number of political parties are needed in order for citizens to participate in modern democracies; whereas parties are essential for the holding of the regular, transparent elections required under a democratic system of government;
- J. whereas traditional electoral processes can be accompanied by real-time oversight of government decision-making, which must provide a channel of expression for not only the parties with the institutional representative status bestowed on them by elections, but also input from citizens;
- K. whereas this acceptance of participation enhances the value of representative democracy, strengthening its role as an arbiter, enabling it to intercede more actively between different interests and assume its responsibility for defining the common good;
- L. whereas democratisation and citizen participation may help consolidate more effective government and build freer societies, being as they are vital tools for improving governance, and should also be a cornerstone of the political process in any society;
- M. whereas citizen participation, which is essential to democracy, appears to be both a means to an end, by improving the quality of public policies, and an end in itself, i.e. it is both a cause and a consequence of greater social cohesion and, therefore, of a better-quality democracy;
- N. whereas, in recent years essential components of democratic systems, such as some governments, representative institutions and political parties and associations have failed to apply consistently new concepts of governance and have lost some of their support within society;
- O. whereas the effects of the global economic and financial crisis, the increase in social and economic inequalities, corruption, the failure to respond to citizens' needs, increased violence and insecurity, organised crime, human rights violations and attacks on the environment may contribute to the public's gradual disaffection with politics and politicians;
- P. whereas anti-democratic practices and interferences with the division of powers, economic circumstances restricting the freedom of the media and the erosion of democratic standards are undermining public freedoms;
- Q. whereas the poor impression created by political parties in the European Union and other regions of the world is resulting in disaffection and a decline in traditional forms of citizen participation in politics; whereas, as a result of that fact, new forms of political participation are emerging, spurred by the opportunities created by the advent of new social networks and other instances of social and technological change;
- R. whereas public distrust of political parties largely stems from their inability to reduce social inequalities, ensure citizen security and fulfil their election promises with a view to

combating the high levels of corruption and to forging closer links with social movements;

- S. whereas great strides have been made in promoting and safeguarding civil, political economic, cultural and social rights in recent decades;
  - T. whereas the participation of organised civil society (OCS) has become a major tenet of governance;
  - U. whereas the roles of OCS and political parties remain distinct yet complementary: civil society is a vehicle for citizen mobilisation and participation whilst political parties have an institutional representative role and function as a channel for demands;
  - V. whereas access to information and communication is a fundamental human right, as well as a necessary and unavoidable attribute of full citizenship within the framework of a solid and participative democracy; whereas information cannot therefore be exclusively controlled by market rules, operators and proprietors;
  - W. whereas new forms of communication such as the Internet and social networks are powerful tools for the dissemination and public discussion of political and social issues and can be a vast platform for debate and dialogue with citizens aimed at refashioning the political agenda; whereas these platforms have become an important medium which many new social and political movements are using to spread their messages, speak out in protest, and call to action, creating what we know today as Democracy 2.0;
  - X. whereas social movements are of great importance as a means of channelling initiatives and making demands;
  - Y. whereas respect for human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights, is crucial to the legitimacy of the state;
1. Takes the view that in a globalised world, the implementation of democratic principles needs to acquire practical validity at global level;
  2. Stresses that for civil society to emerge and take root, procedures within national, international and supranational institutions must be made more open, participatory and democratic, including measures designed to ensure equal participation in multilateral organisations;
  3. Recognises the efforts made by both public and nongovernmental organisations to promote democratic values; encourages the population as a whole to participate in continuously improving the democratic system;
  4. Calls for measures to promote the active participation of citizens in all forms of political life, as well as through political parties which are more open and accessible to civil society;
  5. Points out that the authorities have a responsibility to facilitate full citizen participation in political, economic and social life;

6. Stresses the importance of new ways to involve citizens in public discourse and in decision-making processes as a means of raising political awareness;
7. Stresses the importance of increasing public participation in decision-making in representative institutions by providing information on the issues at hand in real time and by opening channels for interaction with such institutions, setting up public assessment mechanisms and ensuring complete transparency in this interaction;
8. Notes and reiterates the importance of participatory mechanisms such as popular legislative initiatives, the right of petition or referenda for the purposes of direct citizen participation;
9. Calls for greater legitimacy to be accorded to State power by fostering democratic governance and modernising State institutions, bringing them closer to the public and ensuring they have sufficient human and financial resources;
10. Stresses that citizens' participation must necessarily be of a democratic nature, making use of established mechanisms, political parties and legitimate democratic institutions representative of all citizens;
11. Calls for stronger procedures for oversight of compliance with the democratic principles of independence of, and separation and balance between, State powers and for the strengthening of national (and, where necessary, supranational) reporting bodies with a view to achieving total transparency in public administration, compliance with the principle of accountability, and, thereby, greater public trust in the political system;
12. Believes that political representation will be enriched by a high level of citizen participation resulting from deliberative democracy;
13. Welcomes the paradigmatic model of citizen participation in the collegiate budgetary processes in Latin America, which facilitate investment in human development projects and programmes, and which are currently being implemented in more than 15 000 municipalities around the world;
14. Recommends promoting best practices such as municipal participatory budgeting in Latin America, so as to transfer some public powers from central authorities to local and regional levels with a view to developing a more participatory democracy relating more closely to the public;
15. Stresses the need for effective public policies in the key areas of taxation, social cohesion, respect for fundamental rights, social justice, basic social services, education and citizen security that can succeed in improving the quality of life for its inhabitants and the image of politics as a whole;
16. Calls for an effective, fair and redistributive tax policy to be implemented, taking into account that taxation is crucial to reducing social inequality and important for increased competitiveness;

17. Considers that, in a democracy, legislators must be aware of the possible repercussions of their decisions for the public; urges states accordingly to consult indigenous, cultural or immigrant minorities whenever decisions affecting them are taken (ILO Convention 169);
18. Urges states to respect national minorities and not restrict their enjoyment of fundamental rights or their participation in public affairs; urges states to reflect on what it means to be a nation in the twenty-first century in the light of the deliberations of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly;
19. Calls for measures to promote sustained dialogue with civil society and public bodies at every administrative level and support active citizen participation, especially among young people;
20. Points out that justice must be administered independently and in an efficient, prompt, and fair manner with a view to eradicating impunity and thereby securing greater public confidence in the justice system; points out that states must guarantee universal access to justice free of charge and without restrictions being imposed for any reason whatsoever;
21. Considers that the most advanced and stable democracies are characterised by more modern, more independent and freer media providing accurate and properly verified information and that media concentration and monopolies of information are incompatible with the creation of an informed public and thereby constitute a threat to democratic coexistence;
22. Urges the media to rethink their approach, by responsibly upholding the right to freedom of information and communication and regrets the impact of the crisis on this sector;
23. Congratulates those countries and peoples which have promoted the creation of public and community media and engaged in extensive, democratic debate on the risks of media concentration or monopolisation, highlighting the importance of press freedom and that there is a public and private responsibility to uphold it;
24. Stresses the importance of electronic channels and interactive social networks through which the general public can make their opinions known because these mechanisms create areas of political freedom and debate; and encourage public discussions and participation in political activity and in society in general;
25. Notes that the local and regional authorities, being traditionally close the public, are eminently well placed to test out political innovation and calls for the introduction of observatories and exchanges of good practices to document and consolidate the knowledge acquired in this field following standard procedures similar to those tested by the United Nations 'IT4all regions' initiative or the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament (ICTP);
26. Stresses that if we wish to further the cause of democracy, digital tools and new information and communications technologies should not be used merely to provide free and open access to official information, but must also be used to draw up proposals and create content, platforms and applications with a view to striking up an interactive

relationship with citizens, thus building social cohesion, giving added legitimacy to decisions and strengthening citizens' collective identity;

27. Recommends that those who have no access to new technologies be trained, this being a form of social and political inclusion and a way of avoiding the 'digital divide' and hence ensuring that no one will be excluded from these new tools of democratic debate;
28. Reaffirms its faith in democracy as the only form of government and political participation enabling citizens to express themselves politically through their legitimate elected representatives;
29. Calls for laws to be passed on the funding of political parties that provide for fair access to funding and equal campaigning conditions, punish embezzlement and misappropriation of funds and ensure accountability;
30. Reaffirms its attachment to civil society participation in the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly through the holding of regular meetings and the distribution to its members of recommendations from these organisations;

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31. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, and to the parliaments of the Member States of the European Union and all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the Andean Parliament and the Mercosur Parliament, the Secretariat of the Andean Community, the Committee of Permanent Representatives of Mercosur, the Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American Economic System and the Secretaries-General of the Organization of American States, the Union of South American Nations and the United Nations.