

DEMOCRACY



**European
Movement
International**

Citizens' participation in the digital age: e-democracy

In an increasingly digitalised world, there are numerous opportunities to improve democratic practices through online tools, which can be headed under 'e-democracy'. Fostering citizens' participation in the European democratic process is a key objective of the European Movement International. The new opportunities offered through technological developments should be seized on to stimulate citizens' involvement in the democratic process, which, together with 'offline' measures to improve citizens' participation, ultimately aim to close the perceived gap between the European Union on the one hand, and citizens and representative organisations on the other.

Make sure e-democracy contributes to the creation of the European public sphere

The process of digitalisation offers the opportunity to foster a European public sphere by bringing people closer together and better connecting people across borders. In this way, a European space for communication on matters of common interest can be created. Creating and improving appropriate digital tools makes it easier to have large-scale public debates and to take collective action on a European level. In this regard attention should be paid to supporting Digital Single Market initiatives such as the development of translation services. Effective online tools can help create a more 'common European audience' and will help to further increase the democratisation of the EU.

E-voting to foster truly European elections

A clear European dimension in the European elections, through for example

European lists headed by 'Spitzenkandidaten' (European lead candidates for the European Commission presidency), European manifestos and European political parties on national ballot papers, could be aided by the introduction of e-voting. As a specific form of e-democracy, e-voting could be introduced throughout Europe as a time-, effort- and money-saving alternative to traditional voting practices. Recognising the risks of online voting, fraud or any type of irregularity should be avoided at all times, and an existing or new EU body should be tasked with guaranteeing the fair functioning of online voting systems.

Make sure e-democracy tools are functional and embedded in the political process

Make existing tools more functional and take functionality as a pre-condition for new tools

Existing e-tools such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and Online EU Public Consultations have great potential, but are hindered by their complex-

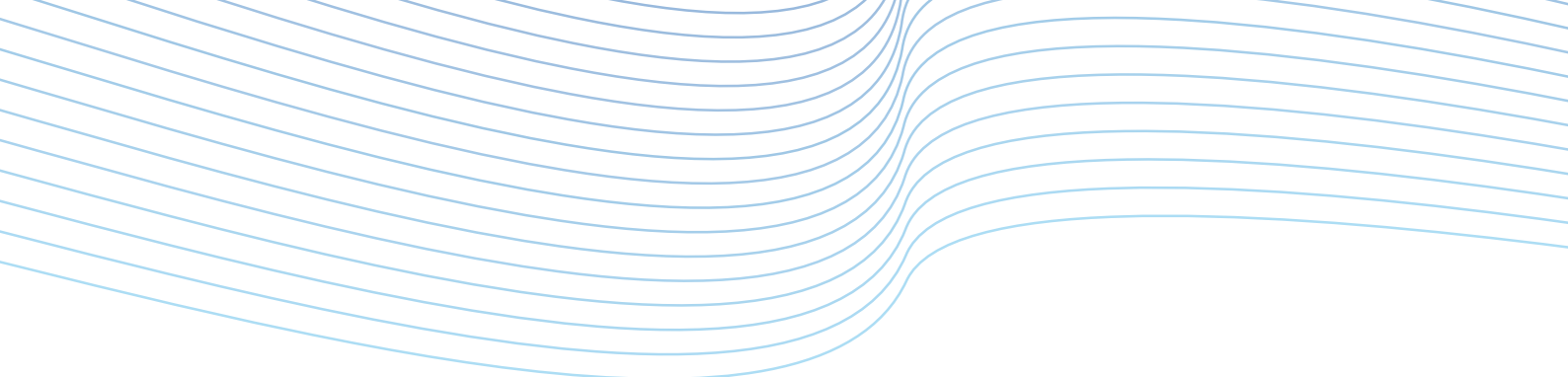


ity. The ECI should be better promoted and made more user-friendly through clearer, proportionate and more flexible requirements regarding admissibility, quorum and personal data – concretely also through a better online signature collection system. Online EU Public Consultations would benefit from using similar formats and better organised web-pages, as well as clearer information on what happens with citizens' feedback or where they can find results. The introduction of new tools should be preceded by elaborate smaller-scale testing and consultation with experts.

Integrate e-tools in the political process

fully embedding e-tools in the European political process can increase their legitimacy and usage, which would be further supported by the active usage of these tools by the European institutions themselves. Integrating e-tools in existing processes, like public consultations and the ECI, can be extended to other forms of participation and consultation, for example the implementation of article 11 TEU on dialogue with civil society.





Make online participation secure and factual

Digital tools come with the risk of compromising the protection of personal data and privacy. E-democracy tools should not undermine data security, and citizens' privacy should be safeguarded at all times. The structured involvement of the European Data Protection Supervisor in the development and implementation of tools could ensure this. In addition, e-democracy tools should be equipped with a form of monitoring to counter the spread of disinformation on these platforms, and enable fact-based discussions.

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Make sure e-democracy tools enable the participation of all citizens

A key aspect to keep in mind when developing e-democracy tools is the objective of fostering citizens' participation, and in particular youth participation. If we want to increase citizen's participation in democratic life, and thus improve the quality of our European (e-)democracy, the first step will be to focus on the engagement of citizens. Before citizens will

participate more actively in European politics, they need to see that their ideas can help shape EU decision-making and that their contribu-

tions can make a difference. This can be fostered through:

Active promotion of tools:

If we want citizens to actually use the online tools available, we need to focus more on actively promoting them at all

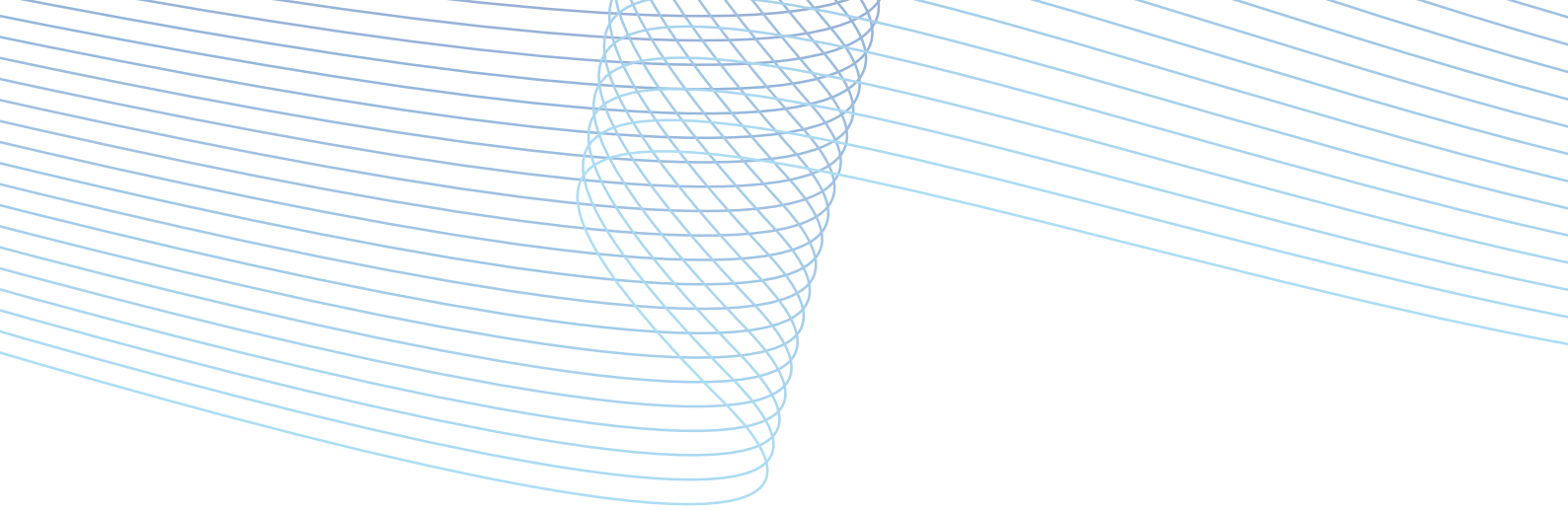
levels: whether the tools are used by EU institutions, political parties or for example individual MEPs. Several promising initiatives are currently in the pilot phase, and will benefit from extensive promotion in order to trigger and foster citizens' participation and to reach out beyond the 'usual suspects'. A central online portal that gathers all tools, across institutions and political actors, will aid their promotion and usage.

Bridge the digital divide for all citizens

A persistent problem that comes with increasing digitalisation is the digital divide between those who are able to access and effectively use online tools, and those who do not have access or the capabilities to make use of them. To avoid unequal digital opportunities, internet access should be made available throughout Europe and emphasis should be placed on developing and improving people's e-skills. This can be achieved through investment in better infrastructure in rural areas as well as free wifi, and implementing and further developing skills programmes such as the New Skills Agenda for Europe.



To see this and other European Movement International policies, please take a look at our website: www.europeanmovement.eu/policies



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Reach out to youth

European youth are now more connected (online) with each other across borders than ever before. The potential of getting them more involved in EU politics and digital democratic processes should not be underestimated. Teaching and informing European students from a young age about (the functioning of) the EU raises the chances of creating a better understanding of what the EU stands for and how citizens' can engage with it directly. Bringing the EU into schools and universities should ideally be part of regular school education, and include information about available e-democracy tools.

Provide feedback

Once citizens use e-tools it is essential to provide them with feedback on their contributions. For example, with regard to public consultations: what has been done with citizens' input? What are the results of their input? This element is often lacking and makes citizens become demotivated to continue using e-tools. Each tool should have clear and easily accessible information on the use of input and provide feedback to those that contributed.

The European Movement

seeks to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development of European solutions to our common challenges. We offer thought leadership on the issues that affect Europe and we give the opportunity to representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders, through our 39 National Councils and 34 International Associations, to work together, towards improving the way that Europe works.

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