



Resolution 1746 (2010)¹

Final version

Democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes with concern that the recent world economic crisis has accentuated symptoms of a crisis of democracy which have been present for some time now. In particular:

- 1.1. lack of necessary regulation and co-operation at the international level to help face the challenges of globalisation, as well as lack of political control over financial interests;
- 1.2. highly centralised executive decision making and global negotiation mechanisms with little parliamentary control, insufficient transparency and without opportunities for citizens' participation. This has further deepened people's distrust in democratic institutions and the quality of the democracy they live in and increased their feeling of powerlessness and frustration;
- 1.3. concentration of power and money and, in some Council of Europe member states, also an excessive concentration of the media, in the hands of a few. More and more politicians have become dependent on the huge fortunes or the favours of those who own the media. As inequality and the concentration of wealth increase, so does the corruption of democratic institutions;
- 1.4. a disinterest in the current institutionalised procedures of democracy and a crisis in representation. Election turnouts have gone into freefall in most European countries and abstention rates reached up to 80% in some of them in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament;
- 1.5. populist and extremist movements, identity politics and nationalistic rhetoric have been reinforced during recent years under crisis conditions in many member states;
- 1.6. an almost unlimited collection of personal data by state agencies, notably the police and social security agencies, as well as by private companies, threatens personal freedom and privacy, which are preconditions for free participation in democratic life.

2. The Assembly considers that the current crisis in representation requires that, apart from the traditional forms of mandate and delegation, with which fewer and fewer citizens are satisfied, the political relationship between society and the authorities must also be approached in a different manner. Thus, without putting into question representative democracy, the Assembly underlines that representation can no longer be the only expression of democracy; the latter has also to be developed beyond representation, in particular by the following means:

- 2.1. more sustained forms of interaction between citizens and the authorities must be established, beyond the conventional representative approach, in order to include, in a carefully designed manner, direct democratic elements in the decision-making process;
- 2.2. participatory democracy should be enhanced as a process in which all people, and not only nationals, are involved in the conduct of public affairs, at local, regional, national and European levels;

1. *Assembly debate* on 23 June 2010 (24th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12279](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Gross). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 23 June 2010 (24th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1928 \(2010\)](#).



2.3. democracy should be understood not just as a system or the sum of individual rights, but as a form of society which requires rules for social justice and redistribution and implies not only delegating and taking decisions, but also discussing and living together in dignity, respect and solidarity. It is work in progress which is put to the test on a daily basis;

2.4. the renewal of politics also requires the development of a new culture of civic and political responsibility. The latter needs to be considered in terms of responsiveness and accountability, as well as transparency, on the part of those who govern. This also applies to civil society actors who participate in the political debate. As far as the accountability and transparency of political parties are concerned, the Assembly refers to the newly adopted code of good conduct in the field of political parties.

3. The Assembly stresses that the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, be it at local, regional, national or European levels, is a human right and a fundamental political freedom, which should thus be embodied as such in the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention, ETS No. 5).

4. Humanising and democratising the process of globalisation is another challenge the Council of Europe is facing. Its contribution could consist in developing, along with other actors, guidelines to regulate globalisation in full respect of human rights, including women's rights and social rights, ecological imperatives and the rule of law.

5. Stronger support should be given to transnational networks formed by citizens to address specific issues, such as environmental, social or even constitutional questions, especially in view of the advent of transnational European democracy building. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) provided for by the Treaty of Lisbon of the European Union, which gives European citizens an opportunity to present legislative proposals to the European Commission, thus constituting the first instrument of direct and transnational democracy in the European Union. The Assembly expects that the European Union institutions will implement the ECI in such a manner as to enable all democratically engaged civil society groups, and not only the privileged ones, to make use of it in the common European interest.

6. With a view to contributing to enhancing people's participation in the conduct of public affairs, improving the quality of democracy and promoting the common interest, the Assembly:

6.1. calls on Council of Europe member states to:

6.1.1. establish participatory and deliberative processes and structures, such as participatory budgeting, citizen initiated referendums and citizens' juries or conferences, open to all those living in a country and not only to nationals;

6.1.2. set up, enhance and promote independent supervisory institutions, such as ombudsperson's offices and bodies dealing with access to public documents and data protection, so as to enhance the concept of political responsibility and accountability;

6.1.3. improve citizenship education and political training by ensuring compliance with the new Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7), as well as implementing the Council of Europe's programmes in the field of democratic citizenship and human rights education;

6.2. decides to undertake further reflection, in close consultation with the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), with a view to elaborating an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights guaranteeing the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs as a human right and fundamental freedom. This would supplement, on the one hand, the right to vote and stand for elections, guaranteed by the Protocol to the Convention (ETS No. 9, ratified by all but two member states of the Council of Europe) and, on the other, similar initiatives taken at local level;

6.3. resolves to organise open public debates in the context of the drafting process of the new protocol so that this process offers an opportunity to promote public discourse and raise awareness on the need to increase citizens' active participation and ensure further involvement of all people in the conduct of public affairs.

7. The Assembly, recalling its earlier proposal in Resolution 1886 (2009) on the future of the Council of Europe in the light of its sixty years of experience, and reiterating that, among the three main pillars of the Council of Europe, the democracy pillar needs to be strengthened, further conceptualised and gain in visibility, proposes that:

7.1. a Strasbourg Democracy Forum be set up as an umbrella structure providing an international reference in the field of democracy and a laboratory for new ideas and proposals – including older ones which have been forgotten and need to be put back on the agenda – with a view to restoring and strengthening democracy. Such a structure could also serve as a barometer with respect to the main new challenges to democracy in Europe today, including those raised by globalisation;

7.2. a high-profile personality, a sort of a delegate for democracy, be entrusted with the task of leading and animating the Strasbourg Democracy Forum, as well as disseminating, on a permanent basis, the Council of Europe's message on democracy-related issues of major current interest.

8. The Assembly invites the national parliaments of the Council of Europe member states to examine the present report and resolution and provide their feedback in an appropriate manner with a view to ensuring relevant follow-up in the framework of national legislation and policies.

9. The Assembly invites the European Union institutions to open a discussion on ways of getting the parliaments of the member states of the European Union more closely involved in Community decision making.