



Resolution 2003 (2014)¹

Final version

Towards a better European democracy: facing the challenges of a federal Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that, while the economic crisis in Europe remains a central concern, the process of European integration, particularly the form and polity of the European Union, has also become a matter for reflection, criticism and political dispute.
2. While considered for some decades as part of the solution for most economic and political problems, many citizens have more recently begun to perceive the way Europe's integration has proceeded as another source of negative economic development, increasing social disparity and the erosion of democracy.
3. The rise and strength of nationalist parties in many European countries is another indication of the fact that the political form of European integration is being questioned. Too many citizens are turning their back on the European Union because they have the impression that the more competences it acquires, the less powerful democracy becomes.
4. To regain the trust of citizens, the main challenge the European Union seems to face today, beyond the management of the fiscal and economic crisis, is the need to advance the process of democratisation and to develop itself as a polity which bases its powers on a strong transnational European democracy. For this purpose, several alternatives are available, including that of a federal Europe empowered with a federal democracy.
5. The Assembly believes that it can provide an ideal forum for deliberations on these alternatives for the future political form of the European Union and more specifically the challenges of opting for a European federal democracy, given that:
 - 5.1. the project underlying the creation of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, in the aftermath of the Second World War, was precisely the establishment of a "democratic European federation" on the basis of a European constitution;
 - 5.2. the Assembly is used to deliberating on how the fundamental European values, such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, are developing and how they can be better protected. For many years, it has gained relevant experience through the adoption of numerous reports dealing with the crises which today's democracies face and looking for answers to the question of how democracy has to be developed in order to re-empower itself, while fully respecting the integrity and sovereignty of States, and how to strengthen its substance and prevent what might be seen as the erosion of democracy and its reduction to a kind of "post-democracy";
 - 5.3. composed of representatives of national parliaments who can enrich and enlarge the essential debate back home, the Assembly bridges the emerging divide between European and national arenas of politics and can discuss available options without committing any governments or the European Union itself;

1. *Assembly debate* on 25 June 2014 (23rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 13527](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Andreas Gross). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 June 2014 (23rd Sitting).



- 5.4. all Council of Europe member States and their citizens are linked to the European Union in different ways and to different degrees and thus have an interest in the realisation of institutional reforms which will re-empower democracy and help the European Union to overcome its crisis and move closer to its citizens.
6. The Assembly notes that, despite its different historical roots and diverging interpretations, federalism relates mainly to the principle of organising, in a multicultural society, a polity by dividing powers between levels of government. Rather than constituting a model for an ever-closer political union or a European State, federalism implies a process of balancing power in a differentiated political order which enables unity while guaranteeing diversity.
7. The Assembly further notes that the guiding principle for the distribution of powers within a federation is subsidiarity, in the sense that responsibility is to be given, in principle, to smaller units and that the solution to any problem should be sought from as close to citizens as possible.
8. Provided that it is based on democracy, federalism helps integrate diversity while respecting differences. A European federal democracy, therefore, would not mean more Europe and fewer nation States. It would imply a decentralised government with European competences based on the will of the European citizens, enabling it to face, in the interest of European citizens, transnational issues which could not be addressed effectively by a nation State alone.
9. Such a European democratic federalism would be a mode of organisation more compatible with the multinational character of societies in today's European Union and the will of its member States to share only those powers with each other which could not be better exercised at home. As such, it would constitute a political system requiring a continuous search for a balance between integration and differentiation.
10. For the above-mentioned reasons, the Assembly invites all interested Europeans and European institutions and States, including both governments and parliaments, to consider the challenges of a European federal democracy and to evaluate ways to transform today's treaty-based European Union into a constitution-based European federal union. The latter would decentralise power and strengthen only those European competences which are necessary for tackling transnational policy challenges better than any State in Europe can alone, in the interest of the majority of European citizens.
11. For its part, the Assembly considers that, for historical reasons and in view of its functions and composition, it could offer an interparliamentary public space where regular evaluations of "the state of European federal democracy" could contribute to the search and the establishment of the right federal balance.