Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2397 (2021)[1]

More participatory democracy to tackle climate change

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The 2015 Paris Agreement adopted by the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was signed by all 47 Council of Europe member States, calls for stronger climate action and, along with a worldwide citizen movement strongly driven by young people, has created political pressure and momentum for more ambitious climate action throughout the world.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution 2210 (2018) "Climate change and implementation of the Paris Agreement" stressing the importance of parliamentary action in taking strong national measures to promote the implementation of the Paris Agreement at all levels of governance, and calling on national parliaments to ensure that dedicated structures, mechanisms and resources are in place for stepping up national efforts to fight climate change.

3. Noting that the climate crisis caused by humankind is also responsible for the upsurge in pandemics and zoonotic diseases, the Assembly reiterates its call for immediate action to prevent future catastrophic events. Climate change demands long-term adaptation and changes in behaviour, production and consumption patterns, and only informed and committed citizens will be able to show resilience and engage in a collective dynamic.

4. While protest movements have shown their strength, the positions voiced need an institutional structure to allow for sustainable, regular and effective public participation. The Assembly strongly believes that representative democracy can be enriched by meaningful public participation, which also provides a credible response to citizens' demands, especially from young people, to be more regularly involved in decision making and in the debate on the ecological transition and the green recovery plan.

5. The Assembly therefore urges governments to combine clear political engagement and top-down leadership with bottom-up, participatory governance, to tackle the urgency of the climate crisis and ensure meaningful contributions from citizens. Deliberative democracy can also provide an antidote to the resurgent threat of authoritarian regimes and reinvigorate democratic practices.

6. In this respect, stressing the need to increase citizens' active participation and ensure further involvement of all people in the conduct of public affairs, the Assembly refers to its Resolution 1746 and Recommendation 1928 (2010) "Democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives", in which it called on all Council of Europe member States to establish participatory and deliberative mechanisms, such as citizens' juries or conferences, to facilitate citizens' participation in decision making on a public matter that is of urgent concern to them.

7. In line with its Resolution 2271 and Recommendation 2150 (2019) "Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and Resolution 2369 (2021) "The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe", the Assembly also reiterates its firm support for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal number 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development", which includes Target 16.7, "Ensure responsive, inclusive, and participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

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1. *Assembly debate* on 29 September 2021 (27th sitting) (see Doc. 15351, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr George Papandreou). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 September 2021 (27th sitting). See also Recommendation 2212 (2021).

8. The Assembly notes that citizens' assemblies in particular represent a way to tap into collective wisdom, restore trust in politics and allow citizens to reclaim the public space which has been taken over by social media. Citizens' input can inform environmental action and provide governments with useful information on people's preferences, the compromises they are ready to make and the public support for action.

9. To be relevant and credible, citizens' assemblies should:

9.1. base their work on reason, evidence, arguments, perspectives and different forms of knowledge and not be dominated by power, money or partisan logic;

9.2. aim to reduce the excessive influence of interest groups and lobbies and select citizens randomly while ensuring that they represent different age groups, qualification levels, socio-economic backgrounds and areas of residence;

9.3. ensure close co-operation with the scientific community to reach meaningful science-based decisions;

9.4. challenge vested interests and engage a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly youth NGOs, and industry and environmental activists;

9.5. generate a national debate to create a sense of empowerment and self-confidence among citizens, prepare the ground for public support of the proposed measures and put pressure on policy makers to implement the recommendations.

10. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of decision makers to give power to the recommendations and proposals of citizens' assemblies and ensure that they are incorporated into the policy process, including via parliamentary committees.

11. The Assembly argues that the fight against climate change may require action far beyond what citizens' assemblies have proposed thus far and future citizens' assemblies need to address the underlying systemic drivers of the climate emergency. This involves, *inter alia*:

11.1. being explicit about the need for ambitious systemic change;

11.2. sharing with citizens the most significant forecasts available of the impacts of climate change to explicitly illustrate the real consequences on the lives of people throughout the world;

11.3. taking into account all possible scenarios by adopting a future-focused approach;

11.4. designing a robust independent process, including procedures on key decisions, the setting of an agenda, the selection of experts and voting procedures;

11.5. allowing citizens to influence the agenda, which enhances ownership and creativity, and has the benefit of addressing polarisation;

11.6. ensuring that citizens' recommendations are complemented by expertise, cost assessments and evidence-based input;

11.7. providing for an accountable follow-up, allowing citizens' assembly members to evaluate and provide input to any draft legislation which results from their deliberations.

12. The Assembly believes that involving young people in decision-making processes addressing the fight against the climate crisis is of key importance and refers to the work of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, which is a living example of participatory democracy at European level and serves as a model to all member States engaging in participatory processes.

13. Referring to the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and to the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, the Assembly calls on all Council of Europe member States to encourage continuous youth participation and citizenship education in schools and universities, as well as with groups of citizens and NGOs. This includes giving children and young people the right to participate in decision-making processes, which is key to empowering them to participate in public life and fosters critical thinking and engagement in democratic practices.

14. Furthermore, the Assembly welcomes the European Union Conference on the Future of Europe, an open and inclusive exercise in deliberative democracy which seeks to engage citizens directly to help guide Europe's future direction and policy making through a Europe-wide series of citizens' assemblies and panels, including multilingual digital platforms. As a follow-up to its joint debate on the environment and human rights, the Assembly should contribute to the conference to make the case for the universal legal recognition of the right to live in a healthy environment.

15. Finally, the Assembly underlines the potential to use public deliberation to tackle public policy problems that require the consideration of both values and evidence, and encourages all Council of Europe member States to embed deliberative processes in the policy cycle to facilitate the constructive reconciliation of a multitude of interests.