

# CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS' DEMOCRACY

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# CREATING A CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS' DEMOCRACY

## [The call for citizens to participate in building democracies](#)

Currently the conflict between democracies and autocracies is intensifying – inside as well as outside the European Union. There is a significant need for practical support to democratic development through increased citizen involvement between and in the representative elections at national and at European level.

In the past several years, numerous Eurobarometer surveys have shown a lack of trust in European and national democracies. 40-45% of citizens have felt that their voice was not heard and that they were marginalized in the political process as.

Europe's People's Forum (EPF) was established in 2017, at a time when UK after the Brexit referendum had decided to leave the EU, Donald Trump had just been elected president of the United States, and many European countries saw a growth in new extreme nationalist parties and movements. It was a period when the EU as a project of peace was greatly threatened. Several analyses indicated that the citizens reacted to first the consequences of the financial crisis, the economic decline and the globalisation and their perception of being marginalised in society.

EPF believes that a stronger involvement of citizens at all levels of society will engage also marginalized and apathetic citizens in building stronger democracies at EU and national level. The same belief has our members of 35 professional organizations and universities specialised in citizen participation and democracy as well as our more than 50 civil society organizations from at least all 27 EU member states.

To strengthen the political will and help ensure increasing citizens participation EPF has been very active in strengthening the long term democratic development by supporting the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) on preparing the Parliament's report and resolution on Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making (2020/2201(INI)) and has supported and advised both the AFCO and the Commission on the inputs to the joint declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe. EPF's members and EPF itself have been quite active in the implementation of the Conference.

The lack of trust in democracy and influence in both the EU's and the member states' political development has clearly proven to be both an ethical and political challenge. The Russian attack on Ukraine, the uncertainty in the Western Balkan and in the new candidate countries, as well as tensions with individual member states have illustrated how much the geopolitical situation influences democracy and vice versa how important the state of democracy is in geopolitics. It has become more complicated but much more urgent to secure democracy in both member states, pre-accession and Eastern neighborhood countries.

Therefore, after long discussions with the European institutions and actors within democracy and citizens engagement, the EPF's General Assembly in June 2022 decided to launch the Center for European Citizens' Democracy (CECD).

Now we hope to secure a diverse funding and support to let CECD support the policy makers and civil society organisations in member states to find the best possible ways to involve citizens in decision and policy making at all levels of society. And at the same time to offer the most innovative measures and methods to the European institutions for European participatory processes.

CECD's expertise is based on its broad practical and theoretical membership but will work on an even broader basis through collaboration with local and international CSOs and institutions focusing on also issues like parliamentarism, fair elections, rule of law and balanced media.

## Center for European Citizens' Democracy (CECD)

Overall objective:

- To strengthen democracy and renew trust and the sense of ownership in the European Union, its member states, pre-accession and neighbourhood countries through increased engagement of citizens in all democratic processes at local, national, EU and European level.

Specific objectives are to:

- Deepen a commitment of legislative and executive public bodies to engage and listen to the citizens at local, regional, national and European level, while involving public authorities, civil society organizations and independent media.
- Improve the quality of policymaking, strategic reviews and other aspects of institutional decision-making by drawing on a fair and diverse public debate and on systematic mechanisms for a representative engagement of all population groups.
- Develop and support innovative state-of-the-art methods for citizen- and community led participation as part of the EU's democratic toolkit and build the capacity of local, national and European practitioners to implement such processes.
- Carry out and make use of existing research within democracy, participatory and deliberative democracy to successfully help its member organisations to strengthen their work.

## Background for the CECD

The establishment of the Centre for European Citizens' Democracy is proposed in response to the European Parliament's proposal for a permanent mechanism for participatory involvement of citizens in policy making.

It also responds to European Commission President's ambition to develop a new approach to engage citizens in EU decision and policy making.

In addition, the Centre for European Citizens' Democracy represents the citizens' visions and recommendations from the Panel 2 of the Conference on the Future of Europe as well as civil society organisations' ambition to enhance citizens' participation.

Thus, Centre for European Citizens' Democracy will institutionalise the activities of the Europe's People's Forum (EPF) - a network of professional and civil society organisations - as an independent non-profit organisation closely connected with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union as well as with national and local authorities.

### *The CECD Scope of Work*

The Centre for European Citizens' Democracy will:

1. Be responsible for the design, methodological coordination and preparation of citizens' participatory processes undertaken on behalf of EU-institutions, national and local initiatives. This happens in a methodology cluster, that is supported by its practitioners and research institutions. The methodology cluster lends its support to strengthening of existing citizen-led initiatives such as the European Citizens Initiative, submission of petitions to the EP and complaints to the Ombudsman and innovative new democracy instruments.
2. Develop designs, measures, ensures quality control, evaluates and promotes the participatory and deliberative processes that contribute to strengthening citizens' awareness and influence of EU policymaking between and during election periods. This happens in close collaboration between its professional practitioners, researchers and its civil society members CECD.
3. Develop advanced and effective methods to involve citizens in future convention processes ahead of treaty changes with the aim both to secure citizens' ownership and to ensure that citizens in the whole process at European level contribute to the possible treaties.
4. Coordinate with partners and networks working with other aspects of democracy building like human rights, collaboration between legislative and executive institutions, media freedoms, digital democracy etc. to adequately address local issues.
5. Organize events at local, multinational and EU levels with politicians and public authorities to inspire to new participatory methods that strengthen democracy and renew trust and ownership in the EU and in local democracies and their policymaking.
6. Serve as the Secretariat for the networks of professional institutions, universities and experts that are experienced in citizens participatory processes and democracy research as well of for the permanent mechanism's network of civil society organisations and of a network of advocates for citizens participation that with its local partners builds the knowledge base for all target countries and alert on new options.
7. Liaise with the EC Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, member states, EESC, CoR and umbrella civil society organizations.

### *The CECD and the Digital future*

The multilingual platform and the Interactio system for multilingual deliberative dialogues used during the Conference on the Future of Europe yielded new insights

with regard to digital participatory processes. It will be a key research and innovation project for CECD to develop a digital solution that can effectively:

- Reach all European citizens who link up to the Internet, social media, mobile phones and other devices,
- Allow for European residents and expats to prioritize between themes, recommendations and proposals so the outcome is a close to representative reflection of the population in socio-economic, demographic and geographic terms,
- Provide easily accessible technology that encourage all citizens, including especially vulnerable citizens with limited literacy capacity to have a voice on EU and national policies, strategies and solutions,
- Ensure that the digital solution may be used for multilingual deliberative dialogues as well as by students and groups of citizens keen to design and detail European solutions to be presented to the EU-institutions,
- Facilitate other activities aiming to increase citizen participation in Europe.

#### *The CECD – Policymakers Observatory*

An observatory function to assist European and local levels of political authorities to be aware of and consider possibilities for citizens participation in different aspects of decision making or policy making. And to help develop the best design and methodology for the needs, and assist to lobby for project funding,

- Builds on flexible regional networks of practitioners, civil society organisations and political actors across member states and non-member states
- Interactions at all levels between CECD, local and national authorities, assemblies and governments
- Mutual support of the political independence of all national practitioners and technical organisations

#### *The CECD – Research and Capacity Building*

The CECD takes part in research projects concerning democracy and further development of participatory, deliberative and other methods that contribute to a vibrant and modern democratic Europe.

- Active participation in Horizon research, innovation and practice projects that seek to stimulate democracy or citizens involvement in the shape and implementation of various policy areas
- Workshops between researchers and practitioners and their institutions and organisations
- Networking with other think tanks dealing with relevant EU policies and possible events on European research with a citizens' perspective
- Ideally, such events will take place in a geographically remote location to focus the participants' concentration such as is the case for the World Economic Forum in Davos. It is the ambition that this event may attract civil society organisations

and scholars whose research on policies and societal development has a citizen perspective.

### *Europe's People's Forum a continued network*

EPF aims to strengthen democracy and renew trust and ownership in the European Union by engaging citizens in discussions and in influencing the policy making so the EU may better reflect the needs and visions of European citizens. EPF also collaborates with partners that work with citizens, media and authorities to enhance national and European democratic processes between the elections

EPF consists of a professional network of interested and qualified national universities, institutions and civil society organisations in all EU member states. They have technical experience in the design, implementation, and facilitation of citizens participation in policy making between European or national elections. Some of them are research institutions with special expertise in citizen participation. The network currently counts around 35 partners.

EPF also includes a network of civil society organisations and social partners around Europe. The informal network of CSOs is adaptive to thematic and methodological needs. This network currently has around 50 partners.

When the CECD has been established and is up and running the CECD will refrain from being part of the planning and implementation of participatory projects and leave this to the professional partners in the current EPF network. There shall be no direct link between the economic interests of the technical partners and the CECD.

### Organisation

The CECD could be organised as a non-profit foundation and the following organisational structures could be considered.

A **Citizen Panel** with randomly chosen citizens from all member states will meet every three months online to discuss the CECD activities and local, national and European needs for new participatory processes.

A **Strategic Council** will meet annually to evaluate the CECD's strategic development and identify the strategic challenges and opportunities for CECD in the coming year. Council members are appointed by the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council and the member states as well as the CoR and EESC.

A **General Assembly** is the highest authority within CECD and will convene annually. The General Assembly decides the strategy, budget and accounts for the CECD. It also elects the members of the Board, including the President. Eligible participants in the General Assembly are technical and national members of Europe's People's Forum as well as other categories of civil society organisations. The European Citizen Initiative, the Ombudsman, Petitions or other citizens initiatives will participate in the General Assembly and each be represented on the Board of Directors.

The **Board of Directors** hires and dismisses the Secretary General. It is responsible for the budget, accounts and the draft strategies to be presented to the General Assembly.

### Economy

The CECD aims to secure an initial five-year funding to cover running costs. Sources of funding should be as diverse as possible and could include independent foundations, national public budgets and other sources.

Besides basic running costs the running costs are expected to be related directly to projects implemented with participation of CECD. This could be modelling and design towards political authorities at European, national or local levels. Funding from Horizon Europe Research and Innovation or EU programmes like the Citizen, Equality, Rights and Values programme and several others that will support establishing innovative open democratic practices.

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