



### Basic information: European democracy / values, rights, rule of law, security

The Panel “**European democracy/values, rights, rule of law, security**” addresses topics related to democracy, such as elections, participation outside election periods, perceived distance between people and their elected representatives, media freedom and disinformation. The Panel also addresses issues related to fundamental rights and values, the rule of law and the fight against all forms of discrimination. At the same time, the panel deals with the internal security of the EU, such as protection of Europeans from acts of terrorism and other crimes.

This document provides you with background information on the different topics of the Panel. Most importantly, it lays out what the EU already does in these areas and what the users of the Multilingual Digital Platform (<https://futureu.europa.eu>) have expressed as their main concerns and wishes for the future. Lastly, the document also includes links for more information on many topics.

### Your task

In this panel, we will invite you to deliberate and to formulate a set of recommendations for the Union’s institutions to follow-up on for the future of Europe in the areas of European democracy/values, rights, rule of law and security. For example, recommendations can state which general direction to follow or how to solve a specific problem.

Over the course of three sessions, you will discuss and collaborate directly with other citizens from all over Europe, together with whom you will draft the recommendations. At the third and last session, you will collectively vote on the recommendations, which will be presented and discussed with the other participants in the Conference Plenary.

## European democracy

Contributing to European democracy means making your voice heard, both by participating in European elections, where citizens directly elect Members of the European Parliament every 5 years, and also outside of election periods. The last European elections, held in 2019, had the highest turnout in 20 years, with over 200 million voters and a sharp rise in young voters.

At the same time, democracy in the EU and its countries is facing challenges such as rising extremism, disinformation and a perceived distance between people and their elected representatives.

### ***What is the EU doing?***

High participation rates are one of the hallmarks of healthy democracies. We will continue to both inform citizens about European Union policies and encourage them to vote.

People want to be more involved in the way decisions and policies are shaped at European level, and not just at election time. That is the purpose of the Conference on the Future of Europe. There are also a number of other EU initiatives that support public participation, such as Citizens' Dialogues, European Citizens' Initiative and petitions addressed to the European Parliament.

Faced with rising extremism and fake news, we have adopted a [European Democracy Action Plan](#) to make our democracies more resilient. The plan will promote free and fair elections, uphold media freedom and step up the fight against disinformation.

### ***Input from the Multilingual Digital Platform (19 April – 2 August 2021)***

By 2 August 2021, the topic of 'European Democracy' had a total of 1,016 ideas, 2,296 comments and 329 events submitted on the digital platform. Contributors call for a restructuring of European institutions or even a federalisation of the European Union. Various suggestions also call for increased citizen participation and engagement. Overall interactions under this topic are constructive and forward-looking, even if some interactions express a fear of the EU being at risk of implosion due to tensions, populism, and nationalism.

The contributions cover a large variety of themes:

- **Federalisation of the European Union**
- **Institutional reforms**
- **European Parliament elections**
- **Citizen representation**
- **Citizen participation and consultations**
- **Media**
- **Languages and fostering the European spirit**
- **Protecting and strengthening democracy**

## Federalisation of the European Union

A large number of contributors under the topic of European Democracy call for a federalisation of the European Union. This is also a recurring subject of events linked to this topic (see example of [event](#)).

Contributors see federalisation as the best way forward for the EU to reach its full potential (see example of [idea](#)), but also as a means of giving the EU more credibility and influence in the global political arena and the power to deal with the transnational problems we are facing today, such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic (see [idea](#)). In addition, it would overcome Euroscepticism and nationalist sentiments according to the participants who support the idea.

As an example, a highly endorsed and debated idea advocates a constituent Assembly to develop a European Constitution defining the key elements and principles of a democratic European Federation (see [idea](#)). The discussion also includes more specific calls for a common fiscal and economic policy, one European army and the federalisation of foreign policy, alongside a redesign of the EU institutions along federalist principles.

Nevertheless, some contributors are sceptical with the federalisation of the EU and promote decentralisation with greater power for Member States instead of federalisation (see example an [idea](#)), with more freedom and respect for the identity of Member States and free cooperation in areas where it is useful (see example of an [idea](#)).

## Institutional reforms

A substantial volume of ideas also discuss reforms of European Institutions more specifically, with the aim of making them more efficient and transparent, and bringing them closer to the citizens. This includes proposals for a bigger overhaul of the institutional set-up (see example of an [idea](#)).

Regarding the European Parliament, contributors most often call for it to be granted real power of legislative initiative (see example of [idea](#)). There are also calls for it to be granted fiscal power (see [idea](#)). The seat of the European Parliament is discussed as well, with contributors calling for a choice between Strasbourg and Brussels (see example of an [idea](#)).

Discussing the European Council and the Council of the European Union, a recurring idea on the platform and within the topic of European Democracy is to move to a qualified majority voting to end the national veto power (see example of an [idea](#)).

There are also discussions about the role of the Council in the EU institutional set-up (see example of [idea](#)) and suggestions to deepen the bicameral legislature in the EU (see example of an [idea](#)).

When it comes to the European Commission, a group of contributions discusses the election of the Commission President and appointment of Commissioners, including the Spitzenkandidaten system (see example of an [idea](#)), and direct election of the Commission President by citizens (see example of an [idea](#)). Participants also raise the issue of the number of Commissioners (see example of an [idea](#)).

Additionally, reforms of the Committee of Regions and the Economic and Social Committee are mentioned, for example to make them function more efficiently. This includes suggestions to reform the Committee of Regions to encompass adequate channels of dialogue for regions as well as cities and municipalities (see [idea](#)) or to give it a stronger role (see [idea](#)).

One much discussed idea is to have a directly elected EU President, for instance by merging the roles of the President of the European Commission and the European Council (see example of an [idea](#)). There are also calls to have a single contact point for the EU to speak with one voice in external relations (see example of an [idea](#)).

## European Parliament elections

A group of ideas related to institutional reforms calls for changes to the way European Parliament elections are held as means of creating more citizenship engagement in the EU democratic processes. One of the more discussed proposals concerns the creation of EU-wide transnational electoral lists to encourage candidates to focus on European, rather than domestic issues (see [idea](#)). Other ideas for promoting pan-European debate, as well as bringing European Parliament members closer to the citizens, are also debated (see example of an [idea](#)).

Some of the proposals more specifically address ways to increase voter turnout at the European elections. There are calls for the introduction of mandatory voting (see [idea](#)), as well as suggestions to facilitate participation, for instance by allowing postal ballots and same-day voter registration, or making the voting day a public holiday (see [idea](#)). Some contributors also discuss digital voting, including an idea to create a pool of pan-European digital voters (see [idea](#)). The issue of digital voting is also covered under the topic 'Digital transformation'.

There are also proposals to unify the minimum age to be eligible to vote at European Parliament elections (see example of an [idea](#)) and to preferably set it at 16 years old (see [idea](#)).

## Citizen participation and consultations

Contributions to the platform include a number of suggestions to strengthen citizen engagement and a sense of ownership as regards EU decision-making.

A group of ideas and events discuss developing more permanent mechanisms based on participatory democracy and interaction among citizens to strengthen and complement representative democracy, including by building on the experience of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Participants have proposed, for instance, a more systematic use of citizens' assemblies and panels to prepare the most important and difficult political decisions in the EU (see example of an [idea](#)). Other contributors propose an online digital forum where EU citizens could discuss EU legislation, using a social media-derived system of upvotes and commentaries (see [idea](#)). A related idea involves a citizen lobbying platform as an alternative way for ordinary EU citizens and smaller companies to channel their expertise and views on legislation in the EU decision-making process (see [idea](#)).

The contributions also include a 'proposal to devise one an online one-stop-shop platform centralising all public input, be they European Citizens' Initiatives, complaints or petitions, into the EU institutional participatory architecture (see [idea](#)).

Some contributors have proposed a 'Citizen Parliament', an 'Assembly dedicated to civil society organisations' (see [idea](#)) or a 'Constituent Assembly' (see [idea](#)) to advise the European Parliament. Participants also discuss the idea of EU wide referenda as an alternative to national referenda on EU institutional and policy topics (see example of [idea](#)).

## Citizen representation

When it comes to the theme of citizen representation, there are several calls on the platform to have a particular generational focus. This includes suggestions to have a European commissioner dedicated to the elderly (see [idea](#)) and giving young people opportunities to regularly present their views in the European Parliament (see [idea](#)). A related contribution suggests establishing a quota for Members of the European Parliament who are under 35 years old (see [idea](#)).

There is also an idea suggesting a gender parity list at the European Parliament elections (see [idea](#)).

One more widely supported and discussed idea suggests to have a European citizenship which is not linked to citizenship of an EU member state (see [idea](#)). Contributors also raise the question of allowing non-EU citizens living long-term in a Member State to vote in their country of residence for EU elections (see [idea](#)).

Another idea calls for the EU to push for the establishment of a UN Parliament to allow citizens to express their will directly, independent of their respective national governments, in decisions on a global level (see [idea](#)).

## Media

A number of contributions under the topic of European Democracy focus on the media. This theme of ideas is also discussed by contributors under the topic of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

One recurring suggestion is to have pan-European media outlets or networks (see example of [idea](#)) or creating a single public EU broadcaster (see example of [idea](#)). This is mainly proposed to increase knowledge on EU issues among citizens, with for example live streaming of discussions and events, but also to foster a common EU spirit celebrating the European values and European cultures, with documentaries on EU countries. Some contributors also call for an EU TV and radio channel to project its values beyond its borders (see example of [idea](#)).

Other participants suggest training journalists on EU reporting or imposing an obligation for public broadcasters to dedicate a percentage of broadcasting time to EU matters.

## Languages and fostering a European spirit

Another group of ideas on the platform concern issues related to languages and a common European spirit and identity. This is also a recurring theme under the topic of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

A large number of participants discuss the idea to choose a common language for better communication and understanding among citizens across the EU (see example of [idea](#)), including the proposal to have Esperanto as a unifying language (see example of [idea](#)). Both suggestions give rise to strong opinions for and against in the comment sections. Some participants also call for the principle of multilingualism to be better respected (see example of an [idea](#)).

Additionally there are ideas for establishing an EU sports team (see example of [idea](#)), having 9 May as a public holiday in all Member States (see [idea](#)), or creating an EU Passport (see [idea](#)) to foster European spirit.

## Protecting and strengthening democracy

A number of ideas under this theme relate to the protection of democracy in the EU, with calls for strong action against governments that violate democratic principles, with reference in particular to Hungary and Poland (see example of an [idea](#)). This issue is covered in more detail under the topic of 'Values and rights, rule of law, security'.

Contributors also acknowledge the danger disinformation and fake news can pose to democracies. There are calls for a strengthened approach to counter the spread of misleading information, including proposals to create a mobile fact-checking app (see [idea](#)) or an independent EU Media Fact-Check Institute (see [idea](#)).

A number of ideas and comments discuss the need to regulate lobbying, with calls for a code of conduct for politicians or the establishment of an independent European body with the means to fight against corruption and undesired influence of the lobbies (see example of [idea](#)). In this regard there are also calls for general measures to be taken to fight corruption, for example in the granting of tenders at a local level.

***Find out more about the topic:***

[A new push for European democracy](#)  
[The European Democracy Action Plan](#)  
[Fundamental rights in the EU](#)  
[Democracy and human rights](#)

## Values and rights, rule of law, security

Rule of law allows us to guarantee fundamental rights and values and support an investment-friendly business environment. It is one of the core values on which the European Union is based.

The EU ensures laws are respected and supports the equality of all citizens. This means we are actively protecting human rights, the rights of victims and children, and combatting racism and religious discrimination. It means promoting justice and gender equality, the rights of the LGBTIQ+ communities and those with disabilities.

At the same time, we must help protect Europeans from acts of terrorism and crime.

***What is the EU doing?***

The European Union has set out concrete measures to strengthen our capacity to promote and uphold the rule of law. We monitor the rule of law in all EU countries and have adopted a new 'rule of law framework'.

The EU constantly works to tackle inequalities in our Union, for example through the [EU Gender Equality Strategy](#), the [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) or the [LGBTIQ Equality Strategy](#). These actions build upon anti-discrimination rights established in the Charter of Fundamental Rights that prohibit any discrimination based on any ground such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, as well as ethnic or social origin.

Over the last 5 decades, the EU has put in place a robust set of policies and rules to ensure a high level of protection and rights for consumers. The [New Consumer Agenda](#) safeguards those rights while protecting and empowering consumers.

The new [EU Security Union Strategy](#) provides the tools and measures that ensure security in our physical and digital environments. Its 4 strategic priorities for action are: a future-proof security environment, tackling evolving threats, protecting Europeans from terrorism and organised crime, and a strong security ecosystem.

***Input from the Multilingual Digital Platform (19 April – 2 August 2021)***

The topic 'Values and rights, rule of law, security' has generated a total of 1,635 contributions (547 ideas, 949 comments and 139 events) since the launch of the digital platform. A substantial proportion of interactions under this topic discuss what is described as the "dangers of the rise of illiberal democracies" within the EU, which do not respect EU values

and tend towards autocratic regimes. These are seen as a threat. Contributors call for action to ensure respect for the rule of law.

The contributions can be grouped into the following themes dealing with:

- **Values**
- **Rights and freedoms**
- **Protecting the rule of law and human rights**
- **Security**
- **Lobbying and corruption**

## Values

A group of ideas on the platform discuss what it means to be European and the values that the EU should embody and promote (for example, see [idea](#)). In particular, several citizens mention the principles of human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law, human rights, pluralism, justice, solidarity and gender parity, to mention a few, as constituting the European Union value system, and believe that these should guide its policies.

One main strand calls for greater gender equality (see example of an [idea](#)). There are suggestions of increasing the number of women among political and economic decision-makers (see example of an [idea](#)), as well as proposals for encouraging good practices. Some of the specific suggestions include a call to end gender discrimination in freedom of movement within the EU, with reference to Mount Athos peninsula, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Greece where entrance to women is forbidden, following Orthodox Christian norms (see [idea](#)).

Another strand of discussions focuses on the role of Christian values and the need to protect them (see [idea](#)). In line with this, one idea calls for the EU to take a firm stand against the genocide of Armenians and of other Christian minorities (see [idea](#)).

Some contributors also discuss the need for a European Constitution to clearly define a set of fundamental European values that need to be respected in the EU (see example of an [idea](#)).

## Rights and freedoms

On rights and freedoms, a number of contributions focus on issues related to the protection of privacy. One highly endorsed idea calls for the prohibition of social credit systems based on facial recognition (see [idea](#)). There are also other calls for limitations on the use of biometric data for surveillance (see [idea](#)) and on the collection and sharing of personal data more generally (see example of an [idea](#)). Various citizens suggest that cash payment options should be recognised as a democratic right (see example of an [idea](#)). The need for better legislation and tools to address privacy concerns related to the internet and social media, as well as all new technology, has also been raised (see [idea](#)).

Another group of contributions underline the need to lift Covid-19 measures once the effects of the pandemic allow in order to ensure a return to normality and restore citizens' freedoms. This includes a call to prevent discrimination against citizens who have chosen not to be

vaccinated or undergo regular tests to gain access to basic facilities (see example of an [idea](#)). Issues related to vaccination are addressed in more detail under the Health topic.

A further discussion relates to the fundamental importance of human rights and freedoms within the Western value system. Along these lines, numerous participants call for LGBTI people to be protected and same-sex marriages to be recognised across the EU Member States (see example of an [idea](#)).

Some participants call for the right to self-medicate with cannabis (see example of an [idea](#)) and discuss the decriminalisation and legalisation of drugs more broadly (see example of an [idea](#)). This issue is also addressed under the Health topic as well.

A much discussed and endorsed idea is a call for the EU to take the lead in protecting animal rights (see [idea](#)). Contributors consider that although the EU treaties recognise animals as sentient beings, abusive and cruel treatments still exist in the farming and meat industry (see example of an [idea](#)).

## Protecting the rule of law and human rights

A large group of participants express concerns about democracy and the rule of law in the world and in particular in parts of the EU. Citizens who contribute on this theme call for a tougher stance to defend the EU's values vis-a-vis countries such as Russia and China, but also towards a growing number of illiberal democracies in the EU, referring mostly but not only to Hungary and Poland (see example of an [idea](#)). Participants are also worried that women, LGBTI minorities and human rights are under attack, especially in light of the recent developments in Poland and Hungary (see example of an [idea](#)). Several contributors are critical of the Hungarian government and call for more action from the Commission in this regard (see [idea](#)).

In order to ensure that the rule of law is upheld, some participants suggest reducing grants to the countries that breach it, taking away their voting rights in the Council or even ending their EU membership (see example of such an [idea](#)). There are calls for using the budgetary protection mechanism in the new long-term EU budget (see [idea](#)), as well as suggestions that the Article 7 procedure under the treaties should be reviewed to make it easier to sanction governments that breach EU values (see [idea](#)). One participant has suggested that the European Court of Justice should become the watchdog to protect democracy and the rule of law in the EU (see an example of the [idea](#)). A number of contributors have endorsed a proposal to introduce a Review Mechanism on Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in the EU (see [idea](#)).

There is also a call on the platform to eliminate the unanimity rule to ensure that Member States that do not respect the rule of law cannot block decision-making in the EU (see [idea](#)).

As regards the protection of human rights in general, one broadly endorsed idea suggests to strengthen the enforceability of various human rights instruments in the EU legal order (see [idea](#)).



## Security

One of the most widely endorsed and commented ideas currently on the platform is a proposal to create an EU army, to better protect member states against hostile foreign actors in the context of uncertainties regarding the US position (see [idea](#)). However, several participants have questioned this proposal, commenting mostly on the political implications and the relationship between EU defence and national defence. This idea is also discussed under the topic 'EU in the world'.

Given the freedom of movement within the EU, some citizens endorse the establishment of a European agency to strengthen collaboration across Member States in the fight against terrorism and organised crime (see [idea](#)).

## Lobbying and corruption

As in the case of the topic 'European Democracy', some contributors focus on issues related to lobbying and corruption. There are calls for the EU to act against tax avoidance and corruption in Member States (see example of an [idea](#)), as well as suggestions to enhance regulation and transparency of lobbying by private interests and limit its influence on EU policy (see [idea](#)). Other participants discuss how to tackle corruption related to the EU and the use of EU funds and the protection of whistle-blowers (see example of an [idea](#)).

### ***Find out more about the topic:***

[Promoting our European way of life](#)

[Terrorism](#)

[European rights and values: Protection and promotion of human rights](#)

[Security - response to the terrorist threat](#)

### ***Find out more about all EU policies and activities:***

[European Parliament website](#)

[Council of the EU website](#)

[European Commission website](#)

This document was prepared by the Common Secretariat of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Please follow the digital platform on the Conference on the Future of Europe ([www.futureu.europa.eu](http://www.futureu.europa.eu)) to see more information and to read the posts of other citizens who have already posted their ideas and thoughts. **To find out more about the ideas submitted so far, please also consult the first interim report from the Platform.**