

Achieving Better Citizen Participation in European Union Activity - Facts and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Better citizen participation in the activity of the European Union is an overview that the European Union must consider in order to build a future for its citizens, allowing them to express their own voice. In order to achieve the proposed objective, the article addresses both the legislation of the European Union, the literature, but also the current perspectives on the participation of citizens in the life of the European Union. At the same time, a series of statistical data on European elections and representation in the European Parliament are analysed, as a form of democratic participation in the life of the European Union, as well as information on the evolution of the citizens' initiative over time on the dialogue with citizens and their participation in the decision-making process, aiming to strengthen and improve these aspects. As consolidating the European dimension of participation in the democratic life of the European Union contributes to the direct involvement of European citizens, in relation to the individual interest of the citizen and the general interest of the Union, we believe that solutions can be identified for developing participatory instruments and shaping an open, accessible and inclusive future for all European citizens, consequently, building up the democratic legitimacy of the European Union.

KEYWORDS: *citizen, democracy, participatory tools, good administration, legitimacy.*

1.Introduction

The functioning of the European Union and its desire to lay a solid foundation for the architecture of a future Europe demonstrate that it respects several democratic principles, which

contribute to the modelling and continuous improvement of the process of achieving an ever-closer union between the peoples in Europe and important decisions are taken in favour of the citizens.

Globalization and its challenges followed by strengthening the European Union's role as a global player emphasize that European governance and the effective implementation of public policies involve new approaches or improved perspectives compared to existing ones, in order to ensure better citizen involvement in the European Union's decision-making process. It is recognized that “effective and sustainable mechanisms for dialogue, consultation and cooperation between civil society and authorities at all levels” are important levers that “enable the participation of all individuals in decision-making”¹ and there is an increased recognition in European countries of the need to introduce legislative mechanisms or various models to facilitate civil participation”.

This article outlines the existing mechanisms and tools for citizen participation in the democratic life of the European Union, recognizing that there is a past, a present reality, but also perspectives for improving them and identifying solutions for a better and more effective citizen involvement in order to shape the future of the European Union.

We believe that the relationship between the European Union and its citizens must be seen as a fundamental relationship, as the Union identifies with its citizens, just as the European citizen identifies with the Union, and citizens' participation in public decision-making is a *sine qua non* of European governance. Of course, increasing confidence in the work and institutions of the European Union, identifying possible prospects for improving citizens' participation in the life of the Union (e.g. European citizens' initiative, visibility and efficiency of the European Ombudsman, efficient resolution of petitions to the European Parliament, etc.), drafting effective public policies, that presuppose the active involvement of citizens are the current and permanent goals of the European Union and of each Member State.

¹Council of Europe, The European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), *Civil Participation in Decision-Making Processes, An Overview of Standards and Practices in Council of Europe Member States*, Strasbourg, May 2016, p.2.

2.Theoretical Aspects

Obviously, “in order to be considered democratic, the European Union must be characterized by representativeness, transparency, accountability and, consequently, by legitimacy and authority. How democracy is understood in the European Union also derives from the involvement of civil society in the various stages of European policy-making, from the way in which public interest is represented, to the detriment of private interest, and from the transparency it seeks to demonstrate”². One should take into consideration that before the Treaty of Lisbon in 2001, there was *the White Paper on European Governance*, where the author, the European Commission identified five principles on good governance, improving the legitimacy of the decision-making process at EU level. Thus, we are talking about *transparency* (which involves adopting an openness of all European Union institutions to the public), *participation* (to achieve a high quality and efficiency of policies at EU level), *accountability* (which involves delimiting the role of each European institution and taking responsibility for the role in question), *efficiency* (which means that public policies promoted must be effective and timely) and *the coherence of the policies* promoted for this purpose. It is true that “good governance is neither more nor less than political leaders acting for the common good of the citizen. As the 21st century is the century of good administration, of good governance, it acquires multidimensional values, with a wide applicability and represents a step forward for recognizing the need to perform out activities of good administration, respecting the rights of citizens”³.

The participation of citizens in the decision-making process at the level of the European Union⁴ finds its legitimacy in the values and general principles that underlie the European Union. Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union (hereinafter “the TEU”) states that “the functioning of the Union shall be based on the principle of representative democracy” and that “every citizen

²Marinică, C.E., *European Union issues - protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law*, in *Fiat Justitia*, no. 2/2018, Cluj, p.166.

³Moroianu Zlătescu, I., Marinică, C.E., *The right to happiness of citizens and the improvement of the quality of urban life*, in *International Law Review*, vol. X, Issue 2, July-December 2020, p. 115.

⁴For a comparative approach in relation to national level (eg. Romania) see Berceanu, I.B., *Citizens Legal Instruments for Controlling the Public Administrations System. Overview on the Romanian Case* (June 14, 2018). Proceedings of 5th ACADEMOS Conference -2018, Filodiritto Editore Proceedings, Bologna, available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3349730>.

has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union”; at the same time, “decisions are taken as openly and as closely as possible regarding the citizen”, while at the same time giving citizens the opportunity to make their views known and to exchange views in public, in all areas of action of the European Union.

We agree with the statement that “international and European standards for civil participation in decision-making have evolved considerably recently in order to strengthen guaranties of participation” and that “the right to participate has been emphasized in many binding and non-binding documents. Also, “international standards clearly reinforce the notion that participation is a right that should be regulated and enforced rather than left to decision-makers”⁵.

In addition to the fact that every citizen of the European Union must have the opportunity to exercise active citizenship and exercise his rights acquired by virtue of European citizenship, also contributing to developing the European democratic political culture, it is known that citizen participation can occur both during elections of the European Parliament members, but also at any other time, on the occasion of the various stages of elaboration, development and implementation of European Union policies and legislation.

The European Citizens' Initiative is one of the basic instruments for ensuring participatory democracy at European Union level, governed by Articles 11 TEU⁶ and Article 24 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union⁷ and (hereinafter “TFEU”), as well as Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 17, 2019 on the European

⁵Council of Europe, *The European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG)*, *ibidem*, p.45.

⁶Article 11 of the TEU - 1. The institutions shall give citizens and representative associations, by appropriate means, the opportunity to make their views known and to exchange views publicly in all areas of Union action. 2. The institutions of the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and constant dialogue with representative associations and civil society. 3. In order to ensure the coherence and transparency of the Union's actions, the European Commission shall carry out extensive stakeholder consultations. 4. At the initiative of at least one million citizens of the Union, nationals of a significant number of Member States, the European Commission may be invited to submit, within the limits of its tasks, an appropriate proposal on matters which it considers necessary. a legal act of the Union for the application of the Treaties. The procedures and conditions necessary for the submission of such an initiative shall be determined in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

⁷The European Parliament and the Council, acting by using of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall adopt the procedures and conditions necessary for the submission of a citizen's initiative within the meaning of Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union, including the minimum number of Member States. presenting such an initiative.

Citizens' Initiative⁸. The aim of this Regulation is to make “the European Citizens' Initiative more accessible, less burdensome, easier to use for organizers and supporters, as well as to strengthen the actions taken following citizens' initiatives, in order to fully exploit their potential as a tool for stimulating the debate”. At the same time, “the procedures and conditions necessary for European citizens' initiative should be effective, transparent, clear, simple, easy to apply, accessible to people with disabilities and proportionate to the nature of this instrument. They should ensure a sound balance between rights and obligations and ensure that valid initiatives are given a proper examination and response by the Commission”⁹.

It is appreciated that “the European citizen becomes, through this mechanism, an instigator of European legislation. From the passive reception of a predetermined set of rights, the citizen of the European Union becomes the initiator of possible rights that will shape his status in the European Union. The significance of giving the indirect legislative initiative is to stimulate public debate on European policies that will help shape the European consciousness and create a genuine European public space”¹⁰. This regulation replaces the old regulation, Regulation (EU) No 211/2011, among the problems identified being “low level of knowledge and awareness of the ICE instrument among citizens and institutions at national level”, the need that “the registration process be more transparent and efficient, and the information and awareness-raising efforts regarding the citizens' initiative strengthened, through various information campaigns, by the wider promotion of the evolutionary stages of the citizens' initiative processes, by the Commission, by guaranteeing multilingualism so that the number of participants is high”¹¹. Also, “through the improvements made by the new Regulation, the European Citizens' Initiative should become an easier tool for all EU citizens to use, by launching and supporting such initiatives much more easily, through close collaboration with the organizers, by making a free online data collection service available to

⁸Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European Citizens' Initiative, published in the Official Journal of the European Union L 130/55 of 17.5.2019.

⁹*Ibidem*, p.55.

¹⁰Mătușescu C., 2013, *Drept instituțional al Uniunii Europene. Curs universitar*, Bucharest: Editura Pro Universitaria, p.131.

¹¹Marinică, C.E., *Improving the European Citizens' Initiative from the good administration perspective*, in *Supplement of Valahia University Law Study*, 2019, pp. 300-311.

initiative organizers and ensuring that all initiatives are translated into all EU languages, by reducing the amount of data required and using only two types of support forms”¹².

The European Ombudsman was instated on the occasion of the regulation regarding the concept of European citizenship by the Maastricht Treaty, his role being to investigate complaints of maladministration in the work of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the European Union. With this establishment and exercise of this function, maladministration and good administration have gained new value considering the work of the European Ombudsman. The European Ombudsman has now managed to establish himself as a promoter of a culture of good quality services, supporting and encouraging good administration, transparency and access to documents, leading the European Parliament (to which he reports annually on his work) to become co-legislator together with the Council of the European Union, in order to obtain the most visible and constructive effects for the citizens. Moreover, Article 15 TFEU provides that “in order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society, the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union shall act with the utmost respect for the principle of transparency”, so that the citizen of the European Union and any person natural or legal person who has his or her residence or statutory seat in a Member State shall have access to documents of the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies’.

We believe that “the Ombudsman must play a key role in ensuring the accountability of the EU institutions and the maximum transparency and impartiality of EU administration and decision-making processes, in order to successfully protect citizens' rights, thus increasing their confidence, involvement and participation in democratic life of the Union”¹³. Despite these assessments, the statement of the current European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly, in her second term, that Europe, at least at the level of 2013, is facing “not only an economic crisis, but also a crisis of democratic legitimacy. Negativism and the tendency to fragmentation are on the rise in Europe, citizens' trust in the European institutions is declining and many of them feel that their opinion simply does not matter”. In the years that followed, her goal was to increase impact and

¹²*Ibidem.*

¹³European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2018 on the annual report on the European Ombudsman's activities in 2017 available at <http://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?Lang=fr&reference=2018/2105> (INI)



visibility. All European citizens and EU residents must benefit from an effective administration whose attention is fully focused on their needs”.

At the same time, the European Parliament “encourages the Ombudsman to maintain and expand contacts with bodies at Union and national level, in order to exchange information and good practice and to adopt common approaches, where possible, on administrative, financial, personnel and general IT issues, as well as on ethics, transparency and public integrity”¹⁴. The European Ombudsman ensures an open and efficient administration, complementing good administration¹⁵ and the right to it, a right introduced at the proposal of the European Ombudsman that re-emerged until now in various legal instruments. However, a draft of the European Parliament on dialogues with citizens and citizen participation in EU decision-making¹⁶ states that the mandate of the European Ombudsman “excludes increasing citizen participation in EU decision-making. Additionally, the role of the European Ombudsman is often not understood or known at local and national level”. We agree with the view that “the tendency of citizens to get involved in the administration's activity has become increasingly pronounced over the years, but it has been found that this is not enough and that there is a substantial need to strengthen and perpetuate the citizen's confidence to influence public decision”¹⁷, including at the level of the decision-making system of the European Union.

The right to petition the European Parliament is a right conferred by Article 227 TFEU according to which “any citizen of the European Union, as well as any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, has the right to individually or in association with other citizens or persons, submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject who is part of the fields of activity of the European Union and which concerns him or her directly”.

It is true that the European Parliament is “the contact point for petitions and therefore has a responsibility to ensure that the concerns expressed in those petitions are fully taken into account

¹⁴European Parliament, P9_TA (2021) 0171Discharge 2019: EU general budget - European Ombudsman, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0171_EN.pdf

¹⁵For more details on the right to good administration see Bălan E., 2008, *Instituții administrative*, Bucharest: Ed. C.H. Beck, București, p. 32 and next pages.

¹⁶Draft Report of the European Parliament on dialogue with citizens and citizen participation in EU decision-making, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, dated 22.03.2021.

¹⁷Marinică, C.E., *The evolution of the relationship between administration and citizens in Romania*, in *Academic Journal of Law and Governance*, no.8/2020, pp. 22-31.

in the EU”, creating the Committee on Petitions, considering that the petitions are a key element of participatory democracy. Parliament also emphasized the importance of the role played by petitions in highlighting cases of incorrect transposition and implementation of EU law by Member States. In fact, several petitions have led to legislative or political action, EU Pilot cases, preliminary rulings or infringement proceedings”¹⁸. In addition to the Committee on Petitions, the European Parliament launched in 2014 an online portal on petitions, “which improved and strengthened the publicity and transparency of petitions, as well as the interactions of citizens and natural and legal residents with EU and their participation. in matters relating to the Union”¹⁹.

However, “although petitions to the European Parliament are an increasingly popular tool for challenging the application of EU law”, “the impact on EU policy-making is quite limited, as its purpose is not to involve citizens in the legislative processes of EU”²⁰.

3. Scientific research

In order to motivate the participation of EU citizens in the decision-making process, it is essential that they are motivated, convinced that their voice matters, that they can influence possible events and actions and, last but not least, that they can be given the opportunity to speak freely on topics of public interest at the level of the European Union.

European Parliament elections analysed from the perspective of involving and consulting European citizens are a mechanism for participatory democracy. The beginning of participatory democracy was in 1979, when the first meeting of the members of the European Parliament elected by direct universal suffrage, numbering 410 MEPs took place, so that in the 2014-2019 legislature, including the current one, it reached the threshold of 751, in the 27 member states of the European Union. “The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon has made the right to vote and stand for election a fundamental right granted to European citizens, guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; thus any citizen of the Union who resides in a Member

¹⁸Fact sheets on the European Union, The right to petition, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/148/dreptul-de-a-adresa-petitii>, accessed on 10.05. 2021.

¹⁹*Ibidem*.

²⁰Draft Report of the European Parliament on dialogues with citizens and citizen participation in the EU decision-making process, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, dated 22.03.2021.

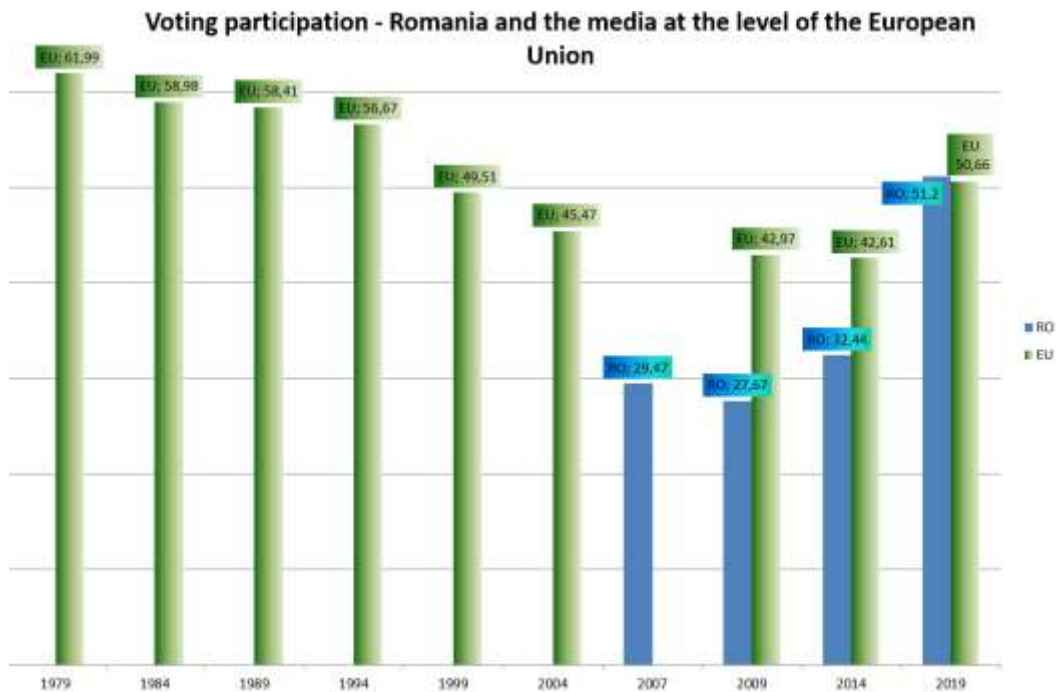
State and who is not a national of that Member State has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament in the Member State in which he or she resides”²¹.

The European elections are held every five years, so that “the last European elections took place between 23-26 May 2019, the result of these elections having a direct impact on each Member State in the next 5 years. In the last elections, there was a high turnout, demonstrating the interest of citizens in the European Union, but at the same time, the same elections also highlight a high level of dissatisfaction with some of the political parties, which is why there was a high number of votes given to anti-European parties. Ongoing dialogue with citizens is essential, they must be actively involved in ensuring European democracy”²².

Exercising the right to vote in European elections is a mechanism for participating in the decision-making process of the European Union, European citizens having the necessary leverage to decide the future composition of the European Parliament, thus establishing political representation at the European institution whose main role is co-legislator alongside the Council of the European Union. Therefore, the political orientation of European citizens can be identified, as well as their affiliation to certain political parties, the presence at polls demonstrating the involvement of citizens in the election of political representatives, but also the individual and collective responsibility of each member state in the European Union.

²¹Moroianu Zlătescu, I., Marinică C.E., 2020, *Instituțiile Uniunii Europene*, Bucharest: Editura Universul Academic și Editura Universitară, p.61.

²²*Ibidem*, p.63.



As the graphic shows, from 1979 until now, the interest and presence of European Union citizens has been steadily declining, the only exception being the last European elections in 2019, when turnout increased. This may underline the disinterest of the citizens of the European Union in expressing their choices about their political representation. A significant moment in the evolution of turnout is given by the 1999 elections when turnout fell below 50%. The explanation for the steady decline in voting in the European Union can be justified, on the one hand, by the large number of states that have joined the European Union over time, states whose democratic tradition has not always been substantial, and on the other hand, the lack of communication, accessible transparency, information and dialogue between the European Union, its institutions and its citizens. For Romania, the last European Parliamentary elections represented the elections with the highest turnout from 2007 to date.


Regarding gender equality and Romania's representation in the European Parliament, current statistics show that ~ 40% of the total structure of the European Parliament is represented by women, constituting one of the largest proportions of a parliament worldwide; in the image below you can see a downward direction for Romania, in the period 2007-2019. Thus, at the beginning, Romania was represented in the European Parliament by 29% women compared to



71% men, in 2009 by 36% women, in 2014 by 31% women, and in the last elections, the lowest value was registered, of 22%.

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MEPs' gender balance by year
Romania - Constitutive session



Year	Romania		European Union	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
2004	29%	71%	31%	69%
2009	36%	64%	35%	65%
2014	31%	69%	37%	63%
2019	22%	78%	41%	59%

Source: the image was taken from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/romania/0027.png>, accessed on 10.5.2021

Regarding *the right to petition*, there was a real interest followed by subsidiary activities in the areas of fundamental rights and freedoms (eg “children's rights, discrimination, minority rights, justice, freedom of movement, voting rights, Brexit), environment and animal welfare, internal market, social rights, migration, trade agreements and public health. The Committee on Petitions plays a special role in the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities through the EU Framework for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and also organizes an annual workshop on disability issues”²³.

The European Citizens' Initiative - an instrument made available to citizens that is found in the Treaty of Lisbon, offers the opportunity to participate democratically in order to enforce European Union policy, by collecting one million signatures from at least a quarter of the Member States, then calls on the Commission to create new laws that are within its competence.

In addition to the regulations stipulated in the Treaties, since the entry into force of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European Citizens' Initiative, European citizens have begun to move closer to the political scene

²³Fact sheets on the European Union, The right to petition, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/148/dreptul-de-a-adresa-petitii>



of the European Union. So far, 102 applications have been registered, of which 78 are registered initiatives and 6 are successful initiatives, which indicates a significant evolution compared to the old regulation.

From these, we have chosen several initiatives representative for the European Union, but also for the public administration in the European Union. The first initiative we would like to mention is the “Civil Servant Exchange Program”, registered with the European Commission on 21.04.2021, which aims to “create an exchange program for civil servants (CSEP), an exchange and training program for civil servants in the Member States of the European Union. The aim of this Erasmus project for the Civil Service would be to give civil servants in EU Member States the opportunity to gain professional experience in a similar service in another Member State for a period of 2 to 12 months. During the exchange, civil servants could continue to receive their salary in their country of origin, subject to compensation from the EU if the salary is lower than that received in the host country for an equivalent post”²⁴. Moreover, this initiative argues that this would “strengthen the freedom of movement of workers in the EU, encourage the exchange of good practices between public services and improve relations between Member States” by creating “a new spirit of unity, initiated by citizens for citizens thanks to civil servants in European countries”. The criterion underlying the choice of the second chosen initiative is that it represents the sixth successful European citizens' initiative, entitled “End the Cage Age”, which managed to raise a number of 1.397.113 signatories, calling for an end to the inhuman treatment of farm animals, which are confined in cages and are suffering, despite the fact that there are currently viable cage-free rearing systems that ensure increased welfare. The highest number of signatures comes from Germany (474,753), followed by the Netherlands (153,958), Italy (90,085) and France (89,600). 8,308 signatures were collected from Romania, placing it next to states such as Slovenia, Malta, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Greece, Estonia and Cyprus in an inferior position compared to the others.

An action taken by the European Union in promoting the participation of citizens in the life of the European Union is represented by organising this year's Conference on the Future of Europe, its main objective being to reconnect citizens disappointed by the European Union and the

²⁴For more details visit https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000002_en.



European project, regaining their trust in the European Union and its values, an important step for democracy in Europe. The conference involves creating a multilingual digital platform where citizens can make proposals and express ideas.

“A key aspect of this initiative is to bring the public closer to the EU institutions, listen to people's concerns, involve them directly in the process of the Conference and provide an adequate and meaningful response. In this respect, the ambition is to set up pan-European forums for discussion, for the first time ever, where citizens of all Member States can debate the EU's priorities and make recommendations, to be taken into account by the political-institutional powers that be and, ideally, translated into practical measures”²⁵. In fact, according to the statement of the co-chair of the executive committee of the Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt, this conference wanted to create a “real upward momentum. The conference will be much more than an exercise in listening to opinions, it will be a way to truly involve citizens in shaping our common European future”²⁶. The foundations have been laid: digital and deliberative democratic experiments that have never been put into practice at EU level. We will guarantee that the concerns and proposals expressed will then receive a political response. This process is new and exciting, and it begins today”²⁷.

At the same time, the European Commission has launched “a new generation of EUROPE DIRECT centres, which will have a mandate that will last until the end of 2025”²⁸, their aim is to “bring the European Union, its policies and values to all corners of Europe”, including establishing an important link between the EU institutions and citizens, involving the public in events, supporting dialogue with citizens in various forms of off-line and online interaction, promoting active European citizenship in schools etc.

²⁵Kotanidis, S., *European Parliamentary Research Service*, in *Conference on the Future of Europe*, May 2021, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690590](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2021)690590)

²⁶ For the way Europe and international organisations are heading toward unity and cohesion see Cocoşatu, M., 2012, *Governance in Europe*, Bucharest: Ed. Pro Universitaria, p.12.

²⁷Press release, Conference on the future of Europe: make your voice heard, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20210509IPR03801/conferinta-privind-viitorul-europei-fa-ti-heard-voice>

²⁸For more information see the Commission launches a new generation of EUROPE DIRECT centres, interacting with EU citizens available at https://ec.europa.eu/romania/news/20210504_centre_europe_direct_en

4. Conclusions

With an extremely important role in the active participation of citizens in the life of the European Union, in principle, “European citizenship” can be seen in favourable terms from the perspective of its continuing potential, even if the political and electoral dimensions of citizenship have developed very slowly. A successful future for the EU urgently calls for greater political and democratic participation, and the provisions on citizenship seek to lay the foundations for this”²⁹.

As mentioned above, the European Parliament elections approached from the perspective of involving and consulting European citizens are also a mechanism for participatory democracy, which requires attention and promotion in order to make the result of the vote more efficient.

Having European citizenship as a starting point, the citizens' initiative comes to complete the picture of democratic participation in the life of the European Union, being, according to the specialized literature³⁰ “a tool that can mobilize citizens for a specific purpose and channel their contribution to the political process”. In the coming years, it remains to be seen whether “the European Citizens' Initiative will become more attractive, better known to EU citizens, and whether it will be a step forward in participatory democracy in the EU, EU getting closer to citizens”, and the proper implementation of the provisions of this new regulation should bring benefits both to the EU and to all European citizens, who cooperate and act as partners in the European legislative process, with the EU institutions. with responsibilities in this regard”³¹.

At present, the European Parliament considers that “existing participatory instruments do not provide citizens with highly effective means of influencing EU decision-making and do not exploit the full potential of citizen participation to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the EU. In order to develop permanent mechanisms for citizen participation, an inter-institutional working group should be set up, as suggested by the CoR and EESC presidents. Organizing regular dialogues with citizens could be useful for several purposes, such as setting annual political and

²⁹Craig, P., De Búrca, G., 2017, *European Union Law. Comments, jurisprudence and doctrine. 6th Edition*, Bucharest: Hamangiu Publishing House, p. 998.

³⁰Marxsen, C., *Participatory Democracy in Europe Article 11 TEU and the Legitimacy of the European Union*, in: Federico Fabbrini / Ernst Hirsch Ballin / Han Somsen (eds), 2015, *What Form of Government for the European Union and the Eurozone?*, Oxford:Hart Publishing, pp. 151-169.

³¹Marinică, C.E., *Improving the European Citizens' Initiative from the good administration perspective*, in *Supplement of Valahia University Law Study*, 2019, pp. 300-311.

legislative priorities, drawing up concrete proposals on specific issues, discussing institutional issues or making decisions about spending certain public resources”³².

Therefore, strengthening the European dimension of civic education, inclusive approach, citizen involvement from the beginning of employing such mechanisms through multiple methods (online and off-line), by introducing pilot projects, all these will help to optimize citizens' participation in life of the European Union.

We appreciate that the participation of citizens in the life of the European Union is extremely important, and the constructive and permanent dialogue between them and the institutions, bodies, agencies, and civil society in the European Union, will turn them into visible partners, whose opinion is and will be taken into account, influencing the decision at the level of the European Union, working together for good governance in the European Union, thus emphasising the qualities and values of democracy.

It is easy to understand that without a better involvement of European citizens in democratic life and in the decision-making process at the level of the European Union, without the permanent updating of the mechanisms and instruments of citizen participation in the democratic life of the European Union, we cannot talk about a qualitative and effective involvement, or a dynamic future of the European Union as the Union identifies with its citizens and the European citizen identifies himself as one of the Union. If the Union does not do its part, encouraging the development of European citizens' participation will be relatively difficult, certainly less effective and its activities will not run smoothly.

³²Draft Report of the European Parliament on dialogues with citizens and citizen participation in the EU decision-making process, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, dated 22.03.2021.

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