

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# MAKE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MORE MEANINGFUL

How to Reinforce Parliamentary Democracy at the EU Level

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The large degree of institutional entanglement and a very consensual political culture weaken accountability at the EU level and make European Parliament elections less meaningful.



To reinforce European parliamentary democracy, it is necessary to make European elections more consequential and to increase the scope of majoritarian decision-making in the EU.



This implies short and long-term reforms regarding the European electoral system, the parliamentarisation of the European Commission, and a more transparent and efficient legislative procedure.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Compared to most other democratic political systems, the European Union (EU) is characterised by an unusually high degree of institutional entanglement and little majoritarian decision-making (Costa/Magnette 2003). Originally intended to foster a culture of compromises, this strong consensualism not only reduces decision-making efficiency but also weakens parliamentary democracy at the European level, giving the European Parliament (EP) a more tenuous position in the political system of the EU than directly elected chambers at the national level usually have. Conflict lines in the decision-making process are often inter-institutional rather than between parties, incentivising the formation of broad alliances within the EP. The political culture of the EP is therefore characterised by changing majorities around an informal »permanent grand coalition« and a low level of competitiveness among the main pro-European parties.

This low level of competitiveness, for its part, limits the ability of citizens to exert democratic influence at the supranational level. Barring drastic vote shifts towards anti-EU parties, EP elections are unlikely to significantly alter the political course of the EU (Follesdal/Hix 2006). This failure to produce political turning points makes the EU less responsive to citizens' demands and reduces the democratic meaningfulness of EP elections. As a consequence, voters still treat the EP elections as »second-order« elections (Reif/Schmitt 1980, Träger/Anders 2020). Despite the uptick in 2019, participation is generally lower than at the national level; candidates and programmes are less well-known, and discourses are more heterogeneous, weakening accountability.

At the same time, in a way typical for overly consensualist polities, the absence of a loyal opposition within the system tends to create opposition against the system itself (Andeweg 2000: 552). As EU policy has an increasingly redistributive impact and therefore becomes inherently more contested, the low level of competitiveness between pro-European parties and the lack of meaningful elections remove an outlet for political dissatisfaction. This strengthens populist anti-EU parties, who can claim to be the only opposition to the political course of the EU (Müller 2014). Rather than pacifying conflicts over EU policy, the strong institutional consensualism thus transforms them into a conflict over European integration as such.

In order to solve this dilemma, it is necessary to increase accountability and competitiveness among political parties by making EP elections more meaningful and consequential, and by increasing the scope of majoritarian decision-making in the EU. This undertaking is both a sprint and a marathon: on the one hand, the rise of populist anti-EU parties over the past decade and the victory of the Leave side in the Brexit referendum underline the urgency of improving the democratic legitimacy of the EU. On the other hand, converting the EU into a full parliamentary democracy not only requires power shifts for which many national governments are not yet ready, but also certain societal conditions, like a common European public sphere, that need time to emerge.

While past experiences justify the expectation that a growing politicisation of the EU also leads to a Europeanisation of public debates (Risse 2014), the mutually reinforcing dynamic between institutional democratisation and the emergence of a transnational public debate cannot be rushed. Converting the EU into a full parliamentary democracy can therefore only be achieved in a step-by-step approach.

This policy brief dovetails both short and long-term perspectives. It first analyses reform needs regarding both the formal and procedural legitimacy of EP elections and the position of the EP in the political system of the EU. Secondly, it outlines specific reform paths regarding European electoral reform, the parliamentarisation of the European Commission, and the reform of the legislative procedure. These reform paths lead from immediate steps that do not necessarily imply treaty changes to more ambitious future reforms towards a fully-fledged parliamentary democracy at the European level.

The proposals presented here concentrate on procedural reforms that could be implemented top-down. All the recommendations and their respective term are summarised in the table at the end of this policy brief. The proposals are selected from the study *Enhancing the Democratic Legitimacy of the European Union* (Müller/Plottka 2020), which provides a more in-depth analysis of the reform needs and includes additional recommendations.

## 2 REFORM NEEDS

Starting with the first direct elections in 1979 and the gradual strengthening of the EP and the European political parties since the 1980s, parliamentary democracy at the European level has already progressed considerably. However, there are still substantial reform needs in several areas. From a legal point of view, the **lack of formal electoral equality** is a crucial obstacle to strengthening the EP. Regarding the societal preconditions of a functioning parliamentary democracy, the EP suffers from **weak transnational opinion formation and a lack of visibility of electoral alternatives**. Finally, the **lack of a decisive impact of EP elections on the EU policy agenda** limits their political meaningfulness.

### LACK OF FORMAL ELECTORAL EQUALITY

While the EP elections fulfil most formal criteria of a democratic election, they suffer from a lack of transnational equality. In order to ensure a relevant representation even of the smallest states, national seat contingents in the EP follow the principle of »degressive proportionality«, i. e. a more populated member state elects more MEPs than a less populated one, but less MEPs per inhabitant. A vote cast in a more populated state is therefore less likely to influence the composition of the EP.

This lack of equal representation not only exposes the EP to public criticism, but has also become a major legal obstacle to a further parliamentarisation at the European level. Ac-

cording to the German Federal Constitutional Court's Lisbon Judgment of 2009, the fact that in »a narrow decision among opposing political groupings« a majority in the EP does not necessarily represent a majority of EU citizens bars Germany from agreeing to the formation of a parliamentary government in the EU (Federal Constitutional Court 2009: para. 281). Therefore, a mechanism to **guarantee proportionality among political groups** (if not among member states) is needed in order to allow further progress towards parliamentary democracy at the EU level.

## WEAK TRANSNATIONAL OPINION FORMATION AND LACK OF VISIBILITY OF ELECTORAL ALTERNATIVES

Beyond this formal level, there are also concerns regarding procedural legitimacy. As voters can only influence the party-political composition of the EP, but not the relative weight of each member state, a European parliamentary democracy requires that opinion formation processes follow transnational social and ideological cleavages rather than national interests.

In fact, however, transnational opinion formation usually still takes place downstream of aggregation processes at the national level. For example, candidate selection processes for EU positions are still dominated by national parties, creating structural incentives for EU politicians to follow the line of their national party rather than engage directly with a transnational public. As a consequence, the political parties at the European level (the so-called Europarties) often lack a clear political profile and are internally divided along national lines. To overcome this situation, it is necessary to **strengthen the role of Europarties in EU election/selection processes**. As representatives of transnational social cleavages, Europarties are best-suited to organising transnational opinion formation processes and to giving public debates a transnational framing. They should thus be a key transmission belt between the European citizenry and the political institutions of the EU.

At the same time, even where transnational party positions exist, they often suffer from a lack of visibility in the public sphere. While the EP itself is already a very transparent institution, the legibility of the EU decision-making process as a whole suffers from both its high complexity and from the still very opaque opinion-formation procedures inside the Council and the informal trilogue. As a consequence, the level of public knowledge about the different actors in EU politics, their positions, and their contribution to EU decision-making, is generally low. Therefore, measures are needed to **increase the transparency and legibility of EU decision-making** in order to give visibility to transnational electoral alternatives and ensure accountability at the European level.

## LACK OF DECISIVE IMPACT OF EP ELECTIONS ON THE EU POLICY AGENDA

In order to make EP elections meaningful, election results must have a direct impact on EU policy. Currently, this is not

really the case. Due to the established consociationalist practice of changing majorities around a »permanent grand coalition«, voters have almost no opportunity to convert EP elections into turning points for EU policy. This is most acute in the relationship between the EP and the Commission. As Commissioners are proposed by the national governments, the Commission reflects the party-political composition of the Council at the time of the nomination rather than an EP majority. This ideological fragmentation cements the »permanent grand coalition« within the Commission and makes it more difficult for any major political group in the EP to take on the role of an opposition.

A key approach to solve this problem is to **facilitate democratic alternation** in the form of a parliamentarisation of the Commission and a clear contrast between a stable majority and a loyal opposition within the EP. Breaking up the permanent grand coalition and allowing one of the major pro-European parties to take an opposition role will make European politics more adversarial and increase the impact of EP elections. At the same time, the existence of a loyal opposition will increase the Commission's political accountability and allow dissatisfied voters to vote against current EU *policy* without turning towards parties that reject the EU *polity*.

Another crucial obstacle to meaningful EP elections is the position of the Council of the EU. It is involved in all the substantial decision-making with a similar or even stronger position than the EP. The relationship between the EP and the Council can therefore be understood as an example of »perfect bicameralism« (Müller 2016), which is a rather uncommon model for parliamentary systems. As a majority is needed in both chambers, perfect bicameralism is prone to fostering grand coalitions and easily becomes dysfunctional with growing party polarisation. Even more problematically, the high decision-making thresholds in the Council, which for most substantial decisions require either a qualified majority or even unanimity, increase the risk of political blockages. This gives disproportionate power to single member states, while further diminishing the capacity of EP majority parties to implement their agenda. Therefore, it is paramount to **prevent blockages in and by the Council** in order to make EP elections more meaningful.

## 3 REFORM PROPOSALS

In order to address these reform needs, a broad range of measures is necessary. A **reform of the European electoral system** ensures transnational electoral equality and strengthens the role of European political parties. The **parliamentarisation of the Commission**, while also strengthening the Europarties, is key to facilitating democratic alternation. Finally, a **reform of the legislative procedure** can prevent blockages by minorities of member states and make European decision-making more transparent. In the following section, specific reform proposals in these three areas will be outlined.

## REFORMING THE EUROPEAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The electoral system of the EU is still nationally fragmented. While the Direct Elections Act only provides for some general requirements such as the need for a proportional system, most specific regulations – including rules regarding voting age, preparation of candidate lists, campaigning, and the precise voting day – are left to the member states. In the long term, the **creation of a uniform electoral procedure** will strengthen the perception of EP elections as a coherent European voting act and make transnational campaigning easier. As such a step is explicitly foreseen in art. 223 TFEU, it would only require a reform of the Direct Elections Act.

Even without full harmonisation, however, it is possible to **further synchronise national voting procedures**. The Hübner/Leinen report adopted by the EP in 2015 proposed a number of steps in this regard. These include a common deadline for the establishment of national electoral lists, a common closing time for polling stations in all member states, a harmonised minimum voting age, and an enhanced visibility of Europarties by placing their names on the ballot papers (European Parliament 2015; see also Nogaj/Poptcheva 2015). Unfortunately, the Council did not follow through on these proposals. The as of yet unratified electoral reform adopted in 2018 only brought minimal progress, focusing mostly on a minimum national threshold and on measures to avoid double voting (Council of the European Union 2018). Still, the Hübner/Leinen proposals remain the plausible next steps for electoral reform.

A further measure to strengthen Europarties is the **introduction of a transnational electoral threshold**, by which only parties who receive 3% of the EU-wide vote are eligible for seats in the EP, but national parties belonging to the same Europarty are counted as one (Decker 2015). This reform would strongly incentivise national parties to become a member of a Europarty before the EP elections instead of only joining an EP group afterwards, rendering the European party system more transparent and increasing national parties' political dependence on and structural loyalty to their Europarties. At the same time, it would keep out small parties without European partners in a more efficient way than national thresholds do, thus facilitating majority-building in the EP beyond the grand coalition.

The electoral reform that offers most leverage to strengthen Europarties is the **introduction of transnational (EU-wide) lists** (Verger 2018). While there are different options for their implementation, each version of transnational lists gives Europarties a role in the selection of EP candidates and thus creates structural loyalty on the part of the candidates towards them. At the same time, EU-wide lists give public visibility to Europarties on the ballot paper and, as a consequence, in the electoral campaigns.

Finally, EU-wide lists can also be used to **create a mechanism for proportional compensation among political groups** in the EP, while maintaining degressive proportion-

ality for national seat contingents. To achieve this, transnational seats would be allocated in such a way that the overall seat share of each political group – including seats won via national lists – corresponds to the share of votes that the group has received on the European level. (A similar system of proportional compensation exists in Austria for national parliamentary elections.) Maintaining degressive proportionality for national seat contingents while introducing proportional compensation among political groups will make it possible to satisfy both the concerns of small countries and the conditions set out by the German Constitutional Court's Lisbon Judgment.

For a quick introduction of transnational lists, they should initially comprise the 46 seats left vacant by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. However, based on past electoral results, this number would only allow for a partial proportional compensation (Müller 2017). In the medium term, therefore, the **number of transnational seats should be increased to about 1/6 of the EP** (125 seats). For this, national seat contingents will have to be reduced. This could be done either in a uniform way, by maintaining the current level of degressivity. In this case, a treaty change is necessary, as it implies lowering the smallest national contingents from six to five seats. As an alternative, the reduction could also be realised by maintaining the minimum contingent of six seats. This would increase the degressivity of national seat contingents at the expense of the bigger member states, but avoid the need for a treaty reform. (A reform of the Direct Elections Act would still be necessary.)

## PARLIAMANTARISING THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Creating a strong link between the parliamentary majority in the EP and the European Commission is essential to establishing democratic alternation. However, the current impact of EP elections on the composition of the Commission is low. The EP has a right to elect the Commission President, but can only vote on the proposal of the European Council. And while, according to art. 17 (7) TEU, the European Council must »[take] into account« the result of the elections in this proposal, there is no consensus over the exact meaning of this obligation.

The introduction of lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*) in 2014 was intended to operationalise the link between EP elections and the Commission Presidency and to increase the visibility of Europarties during the electoral campaign. However, their potential to foster a transnational public sphere has not yet fully materialised. As a short-term measure to give them more public presence, Europarties should **nominate their lead candidates earlier and with a more inclusive procedure**. The decision about this lies with each Europarty.

In 2019, the lead candidates procedure was unsuccessful because the EP groups failed to form a majority backing any of the lead candidates and the European Council insisted on

its proposal prerogative. As the nomination of the Commission President always depends on parliamentary majorities, which can only be determined after the election, there should not be any formal obligation to elect a lead candidate as Commission President. Still, even when there is no parliamentary majority for any lead candidate, EP groups must remain the driving forces in the selection of the Commission President without being strong-armed by the European Council. Therefore, the timeline following an EP election should be adjusted to **give EP groups sufficient time to agree on a Commission President**.

In the medium term, the primacy of the EP in the selection procedure should be made explicit. For this, the art. 17 (7) TEU should be amended in such way that if the person proposed by the European Council is not elected by an EP majority, **EP groups are enabled to propose their own candidates**.

Regarding the College of Commissioners as a whole, the connection between the parliamentary majority and the Commission is even weaker. The EP has the right to a vote of consent on the College, which it has repeatedly used as leverage to veto specific candidates. However, it has little to no influence over the selection of candidates, who are proposed by national governments. As a consequence, the Commission represents the variegated party-political composition of the Council rather than the EP majority, further institutionalising the »permanent grand coalition«. Moreover, the fact that Commissioners depend on a proposal by their national government creates a structural dependence that counteracts the idea that they should only serve the common European interest.

A first step to solve this situation is the **reduction of the number of Commissioners**, overcoming the principle that each member state proposes one Commissioner. This reform would render the Commission more efficient and underline that Commissioners do not represent their home countries, but the EU as a whole. The reduction of the number of Commissioners is already provided for in art. 17 (5) TEU, but has been suspended by a European Council Decision (European Council 2013), which should be repealed.

In the medium term, the appointment of Commissioners should be reformed by a requirement that national governments **select the Commissioner candidates from among the Members of the European Parliament**. This will increase the visibility and name recognition of the Commissioners, who will already have been publicly present as candidates in the electoral campaigns, and strengthen the link between EP elections and the appointment of the Commission. This reform will require a treaty change and an adjustment of incompatibility rules that currently prevent MEPs from being Commissioners.

In the long term, the system by which national governments propose Commissioners should be eliminated altogether and **Commissioners should be appointed by the Commission President alone**. (Abolishing the »one Commissioner

by member state« rule would not be strictly necessary for this reform but would make it easier to implement.) As the Commission President will be responsible to the EP, this reform will in fact significantly increase the role of political groups in the selection of the Commissioners and incentivise the formation of stable majorities in the EP, creating a clear distinction between majority parties that are represented in the Commission and opposition parties that are not. This will induce a more competitive and confrontational political culture and foster democratic alternation, making EP elections significantly more meaningful and ultimately strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Commission itself as a supranational political body. This reform will require a treaty change.

The election procedure only ensures that the Commission has the confidence of the EP at the beginning of the electoral term. Once it has taken office, the Commission can only be voted out by a vote of no-confidence, which in its current form (art. 234 TFEU) requires a 2/3 majority in the EP. This high threshold weakens parliamentary control and disincentivises the formation of stable majorities in the EP. Therefore, **the quorum for a vote of no-confidence should be lowered** to an absolute majority of MEPs, the same that is needed to vote the Commission in. This will lead to closer cooperation between the Commission and the majority parties in the EP.

Moreover, the current no-confidence procedure is »destructive« in the sense that it forces the Commission to resign, but does not replace it with a new one. Instead, it triggers a regular nomination procedure according to art. 17 (7) TEU, in which the European Council (and not the EP) has the right of nomination. This separation of the right to vote out the old Commission from the right to nominate a new one is prone to creating political instability and should therefore be replaced by a **constructive no-confidence vote**. In this model, a motion of no-confidence against the sitting Commission must always be accompanied by the nomination of a new Commission President. The EP itself would thus nominate and elect the new Commission President at the same time as the old one is voted out. This reform will require a treaty change.

Still, linking the Commission closely to the parliamentary majority brings a risk of blockage if no parliamentary majority can be formed. In order to overcome such situations, the full parliamentarisation of the Commission should be accompanied by a **right of self-dissolution for the EP** by a 2/3 majority. This will require a treaty change.

## REFORMING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

Making EP elections more meaningful requires the elected parliamentary majority to decisively influence EU policy. Currently, the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP, art. 294 TFEU) establishes the EP as a co-legislating body on an almost equal footing with the Council. However, its position in the legislative procedure is still weak compared to most other

directly elected chambers in national parliamentary systems. In order to increase the impact of EP elections, the legislative procedure must allow the parliamentary majority to implement its own policy preferences more effectively. At the same time, the procedure must become more transparent to make political alternatives visible to the public.

As a short-term measure, **the EP should receive a right of legislative initiative**. Currently, the monopoly of initiative lies with the Commission, and art. 225 TFEU only allows the EP to »request« that the Commission submit proposals. Although Commission President von der Leyen (2019) has committed to honour all such requests, there is no formal obligation for the Commission to do so. A right of legislative initiative – be it through an interinstitutional agreement or, more robustly, through a treaty change – will give the parliamentary majority an agenda-setting power and allow them to publicly show their positions. It also has an important symbolical value, as it is highly unusual for any democratic parliament not to have a right of initiative. Still, as a stand-alone measure its impact on actual policy will remain limited because the Council could still block any legislative initiative of the EP. Moreover, given the comparatively weak personal and financial resources of the EP, its initiatives would probably be limited to a number of high-profile symbolic issues. In the long run, the EP's right of legislative initiative will lose practical importance with a progressing parliamentarisation of the Commission itself.

Another reform to be addressed in the short term is to **increase the transparency of informal trilogues**. As the current OLP requires an agreement between the EP and Council, informal trilogues have been developed as a means of speeding up interinstitutional negotiations parallel or previous to the formal legislative procedure. Today, the vast majority of legal acts are agreed in this way and then rubber-stamped in the first formal OLP reading (Kluger Dionigi/Kloop 2017). However, informal trilogues lack basic transparency, which makes EU decision-making hard to understand for the general public and obscures political accountability. As a first step, the proposals recommended by the European Ombudsman in 2016 should be implemented in an interinstitutional agreement between the EP, Commission and Council. These proposals include the publication of trilogue meeting dates, summary agendas, the positions of the three institutions, the names of the involved decision-makers, and a list of the documents tabled during trilogue negotiations (European Ombudsman 2016).

In the long run, **informal trilogues should be abolished** completely or reduced to very exceptional matters, allowing the formal legislative procedure to regularly take its course. While no formal legal change is necessary in order to stop using informal trilogues, this reform requires further changes to the formal legislative procedure in order to maintain law-making efficiency and avoid the risk of legislative blockages.

One of these risks is that art. 294 (4) TFEU currently does not include any time limit, permitting the Council to delay legal acts indefinitely. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a

#### **time-limiting provision for the Council's first reading.**

If after the EP's first reading the Council does not take a decision within a certain time frame (e. g. six months), the legal act should enter into force in the version of the EP's first-reading position. The introduction of a clear time frame would render the ordinary legislative procedure more efficient and reduce the need for informal trilogues. Moreover, this provision would mirror the corresponding time limit for the EP's second reading in art. 294 (7) (a) TFEU and thus eliminate an asymmetry to the detriment of the EP. This reform requires treaty change.

Another obstacle to a swift legislative procedure is the increased quorum in the EP's second reading. While the EP usually decides by a majority of votes cast, art. 294 (7) (c) TFEU requires an absolute majority of all MEPs to amend the Council's first-reading position. This creates a problematic incentive for the EP to avoid the second reading entirely and use the informal trilogue instead. Moreover, given that not all MEPs are usually present in plenary votes, the absolute majority quorum reinforces the need for large cross-party alliances like the »permanent grand coalition« and hampers democratic alternation. Therefore, **the quorum for the EP's second reading should be lowered to a majority of votes cast**. This reform requires treaty change.

On the side of the Council, decisions within the OLP currently require a qualified majority vote (QMV) of 55 % of the member states representing 65 % of the population. This high threshold renders decision-making less efficient and gives disproportionate power to blocking minorities in the Council. Moreover, it reinforces the »permanent grand coalition« and impedes a stronger party-political polarisation of EU decision-making, as all three major Europarties (EPP, PES, ALDE) participate in enough national governments to form a blocking minority if the Council votes along party-political lines. To overcome these problems, **the QMV quorum should be lowered to a »double absolute majority«** of 50 % of member states representing 50 % of population. This reform requires treaty change.

The risk of a blockage in or by the Council is even greater in policy areas in which a special legislative procedure requires unanimity instead of a qualified majority vote. National veto rights give disproportionate influence to single member states, diminishing the meaningfulness of EP elections. It is therefore not only in the interest of decision-making efficiency, but also of supranational democracy to **replace unanimity procedures with the ordinary legislative procedure**. In the short term, this effort should focus on specific policy areas, especially tax and social policy. For this, the passerelle clause in art. 48 (7) TEU could be used, which requires unanimity by the European Council, but not formal treaty reform.

In the long term, transforming the EU into a full parliamentary democracy requires even more ambitious steps. On the one hand, **all unanimity procedures should be replaced with majority voting**. For decisions with constitutional relevance (e. g. treaty reform, enlargement), unanimity might

be replaced with an increased qualified majority quorum, such as 75 % of the states and population. It must be noted, however, that a complete abolition of national veto rights would not only require treaty reform, but would also have major legal repercussions at the national constitutional level.

On the other hand, even with all these reforms, the Council would still have a co-decision right in all legislative procedures, which is highly unusual for a second legislative chamber and unparalleled for one that is not directly elected. To transform the EU into a full parliamentary democracy, this situation should be solved by introducing a ***new legislative procedure in which the EP receives explicit priority over the Council***. Under this procedure, which would be applied to the most integrated policy fields, the Council would only have a suspensive veto over the EP's first-reading position and could be overruled by a majority of members of the EP.

## 4 CONCLUSION

In order to strengthen parliamentary democracy at the EU level and make EP elections more meaningful, it is necessary to increase the scope of majoritarian decision-making in the European political system and enable the parliamentary majority to implement its policy preferences more effectively. This policy brief has outlined reform needs regarding both the formal and procedural legitimacy of EP elections and the position of the EP in the political system of the EU. To meet these needs, it has explored several reform avenues regarding the European electoral system, the parliamentarisation of the Commission, and the legislative procedure.

While some of these reforms could be addressed through changes in secondary law or interinstitutional agreements, the more effective ones require treaty reform. In several cases, a step-by-step approach is necessary in order to create the preconditions for more ambitious reforms. The Conference on the Future of Europe should provide a fresh impetus to implement urgent short-term measures, but also to initiate the debate about a full parliamentary democracy at the European level in the long term.

## OVERVIEW

	<b>Short-term (no treaty change necessary)</b>	<b>Medium-term (requires treaty change)</b>	<b>Long-term (implies fundamental changes in functioning of the EU)</b>
<b>Reforming electoral law</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Synchronize national voting procedures</li> <li>– Create transnational (EU-wide) lists, used for proportional compensation</li> <li>– Create a pan-European threshold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Widen number of transnational seats to allow for full proportional compensation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create a uniform European electoral system</li> </ul>
<b>Parliamentarising the European Commission</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Nominate lead candidates earlier</li> <li>– Give more time to EP groups to agree on a Commission President</li> <li>– Reduce number of Commissioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Give EP groups the right to nominate Commission President</li> <li>– Select the Commissioner candidates from among the Members of the European Parliament</li> <li>– Lower quorum of no-confidence vote to absolute majority</li> <li>– Make no-confidence vote constructive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Let Commission President alone appoint Commissioners</li> <li>– Give EP right of self-dissolution</li> </ul>
<b>Reforming the legislative procedure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Give the EP a right of legislative initiative</li> <li>– Increase transparency of the informal trilogues</li> <li>– Replace unanimity procedures by OLP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Introduce a time limit for the Council's first reading in OLP</li> <li>– Lower quorum for the EP's second reading in OLP to majority of votes cast</li> <li>– Lower QMV quora to double absolute majority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Abolish informal trilogues</li> <li>– Replace all unanimity procedures with (qualified) majority votes</li> <li>– Give EP the right to overrule the Council</li> </ul>

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# MAKE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MORE MEANINGFUL

## How to Reinforce Parliamentary Democracy at the EU Level



Compared to most other democratic systems, the EU is characterised by an unusually large degree of inter-institutional entanglement and the lack of a real parliamentary opposition. Rather than pacifying political conflicts, this strong consensualism weakens accountability, makes European elections less meaningful, and ultimately emboldens populist anti-EU parties.



To overcome this situation, it is necessary to reinforce European parliamentary democracy in several regards. At a formal level, the lack of electoral equality must be tackled. Regarding procedural legitimacy, transnational opinion formation must be strengthened and the transparency and legibility of EU decision making must be increased. Finally, EP elections must become more consequential by facilitating democratic alternation between a stable governing majority and a loyal opposition and by widening the scope of majoritarian decision-making.



To address these reform needs, a broad range of both short and long-term measures is necessary. A reform of the European electoral system ensures transnational electoral equality and strengthens the role of European political parties. The parliamentarisation of the Commission, while also strengthening the Europarties, is key to facilitating democratic alternation. Finally, a reform of the legislative procedure can prevent blockages by minorities of member states and make European decision-making more transparent.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

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