

**May 2021**

*The Conference on the Future of Europe, originally expected to start on Europe Day, 9 May 2020 and run for two years, was significantly delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. It has now been officially launched on 9 May 2021, Europe Day. This Topical Digest offers a selection of recent publications produced by the European Parliamentary Research Service on the Conference on Future of Europe and on the broader topic of the future of Europe, and offers in particular items giving an overview of the current debate on the future process of participatory decision-making at EU level.*

## **1. Preparation of the Conference on the Future of Europe**

### **Conference on the Future of Europe**

*Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, May 2021*

The Conference on the Future of Europe, announced by the Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen in her inaugural address, is set to start after a long period of standstill owing not only to changed priorities brought by the coronavirus pandemic, but also to lengthy negotiations among the institutions. The aim of the conference is to debate how the EU should develop in the future, identify where it is rising to the challenges of current times, and enhance those areas that need reform or strengthening. 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. Although the Conference on the Future of Europe has all the prerequisites to engage in a more structured debate between institutions and citizens, some have cautioned that the initiative must see to it that it receives a proper follow-up, so that it remains a meaningful endeavour. This is an updated edition of a Briefing from December 2019.

### **Conference on the Future of Europe**

*At a glance by Silvia Kotanidis, June 2020*

Announced by Ursula von der Leyen and supported by Parliament, the Conference on the Future of Europe should have offered the opportunity for a thorough reflection on the direction of the EU and its institutional set up. Due to the disruption cause by the Covid-19 pandemic the three institutions have not yet agreed on the format, composition and structure of the Conference. Parliament is nevertheless fully engaged in resuming this initiative as soon as possible in the post-coronavirus context, and will debate the issue with the Council and Commission during the June plenary session.

### **Hearings of the Commissioners-designate: Dubravka Šuica – Vice-President: Democracy and Demography**

*Briefing by Monika Kiss, September 2019*

This briefing was one in a set looking at the Commissioners-designate and their portfolios prior to their confirmatory hearings in the European Parliament. The briefing provides an overview of key issues in the portfolio area of the, now confirmed, Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, as well as Parliament's activity in the last term in that field. It also includes a brief biography of the Commissioner.

**FOLLOW EPRS**<http://epthinktank.eu>

@EP\_thinktank



european parliamentary research service



EPINFOGRAPHICS/EPRS



european parliamentary research service

## 2. Citizens' involvement

### [Democratic institutions and prosperity](#)

*Briefing by Jérôme Saulnier, Gianluca Sgueo and Ionel Zamfir, February 2021*

The ongoing structural transformation and the rapid spread of the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution are challenging current democratic institutions and their established forms of governance and regulation. At the same time, these changes offer vast opportunities to enhance, strengthen and expand the existing democratic framework to reflect a more complex and interdependent world. The introduction of a series of promising new tools could offer a potential way to support democratic decision-makers in regulating complexity and tackling ongoing and future challenges.

### [The practice of democracy](#)

*Study by Gianluca Sgueo, June 2020*

This study is part of the 'Re-thinking democracy' series, devoted to analysing current and future challenges facing direct and representative democracy. The study describes current challenges to democratic principles and infrastructure across the world. It then explores a selection of participatory initiatives run by local, national and supranational administrations. In doing so, the study identifies three trends that are driving innovation in democratic participation, as well as the key risks that threaten the success of participatory initiatives. In the concluding section, the study focuses on the European Union, and current attempts to foster transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making in the light of the preceding discussion.

### [Using technology to 'co-create' EU policies](#)

*Briefing by Gianluca Sgueo, February 2020*

What will EU decision-making look like in the next decade and beyond? Is technological progress promoting more transparent, inclusive and participatory decision-making at EU level? This briefing highlights the importance of technology, in particular the new digital communication channels as an innovative access tool between citizens and public administrations and EU policy-making. By using the technological innovation at their disposal, both citizens and decision-makers will benefit through turning it into an opportunity to shape new policies according to their needs and expectations, and making EU policy-making even more participatory.

### [What future for democracy?](#)

*At a glance by Eamonn Noonan, December 2020*

A panel at the 2020 ESPAS conference discussed the future of democracy in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. Participatory democracy was seen as a potential remedy for polarisation, while digitisation brings a need for careful governance. Misinformation and disinformation needs to be addressed through education. A poll of attendees identified tax equity as a key innovation for successfully rebuilding democracy.

## 3. Institutional and cross-cutting debates

### [Transnational electoral lists](#)

*Study by Maria Diaz Crego, February 2021*

The creation of a pan-European constituency, comprising the whole territory of the European Union, in which a number of Members of the European Parliament would be elected from transnational electoral lists, figures high among proposals to enhance the European dimension of the elections to the European Parliament. Although the idea to create a European constituency gained momentum with the prospect of 73 seats in the European Parliament becoming vacant as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, the proposal is far from new and has been debated in the European institutions and academia since the 1990s. This paper analyses the main proposals to create a European constituency (or constituencies) that have been discussed in the European

FOLLOW EPRS



<http://epthinktank.eu>



@EP\_thinktank



european parliamentary research service



EPINFOGRAPHICS/EPRS



european parliamentary research service

Parliament, other European institutions and academia, and details the legal changes that would be needed at European and national level to bring the idea to fruition.

### [Passerelle clauses in the EU Treaties](#)

*Study by Silvia Kotanidis, December 2020*

*Passerelle* clauses are a mechanism for introducing Treaty changes of a very specific nature. They modify the decision-making rules that affect acts of the Council, by allowing a shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting or from a special legislative procedure to the ordinary legislative procedure. This study explores the differences between *passerelle* clauses and other flexibility measures (enhanced cooperation, the flexibility clause, and accelerator or brake clauses) and explores the main legal issues surrounding the introduction, revocation, and effects of *passerelle* clauses and their relationship with the other Treaty revision mechanisms. The analysis focuses not only on the two general *passerelle* clauses set out in Article 48(7) TEU, but also on the specific *passerelle* clauses contained in the Treaties in the field of environment, social policy, the multiannual financial framework, common foreign and security policy, family law and enhanced cooperation. Finally, the study outlines recent Commission proposals to use general and/or specific *passerelles* in certain policy areas and the approaches taken by other institutions with respect to this constitutional tool.

### [Towards a more resilient Europe post-coronavirus](#)

*Study by EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service with the Directorates-General for Internal Policies (IPOL) and External Policies (EXPO), October 2020*

The coronavirus crisis emphasises the need for the European Union to devote more effort to anticipatory governance, notably through analysis of medium- and long-term global trends, as well as structured contingency planning and the stress-testing of existing and future policies. In order to contribute to reflection on and discussion about the implications of the coronavirus pandemic for EU policy-making, this paper builds on an initial 'mapping' of some 66 potential structural risks which could confront Europe over the coming decade. Taking 33 risks which are assessed as being more significant or likely, it looks first at the capabilities which the EU and its Member States already have to address those risks, and then looks at the various gaps in policy and instruments at the Union's disposal, suggesting possible approaches to overcome them in the short and medium terms.

### [Parliament's right of legislative initiative](#)

*Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, February 2020*

The European Commission has a near monopoly on legislative initiative in the European Union (EU), with special initiative rights for other institutions applying only in certain specific cases. However, the European Parliament and the Council may invite the Commission to submit legislative proposals. Whilst this 'indirect' initiative right does not create an obligation on the Commission to propose the legislation requested, the Treaty of Lisbon codified the Commission's obligation to provide reasons for any refusal to follow a parliamentary initiative. Most recently, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, pledged to strengthen the partnership with the Parliament, inter alia, by responding with a proposal for a legislative act whenever Parliament, acting by a majority of its Members, adopts a resolution requesting that the Commission submit legislative proposals.

### [Election of the President of the European Commission](#)

*Briefing by Laura Tilindyte, April 2019*

The European Parliament has long sought to ensure that, by voting in European elections, European citizens not only elect the Parliament itself, but also have a say over who heads the EU executive – the European Commission. This briefing, published in advance of the May 2019 European elections, explained what had become known as the '*Spitzenkandidaten* process', and gave an overview of the nominees, as well as looking more broadly at the process.

FOLLOW EPRS



<http://epthinktank.eu>



@EP\_thinktank



european parliamentary research service



EPINFOGRAPHICS/EPRS



european parliamentary research service

## [European Union electoral law](#)

*Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, October 2019*

The European Parliament has not always enjoyed the powers and democratic legitimacy it does now. This is clear from a quick glance at how Parliament has evolved. This briefing goes back through decades of transformation and reforms of the EU electoral process up to the current EU electoral rules, considering the various attempts and efforts made to 'Europeanise' and make the electoral process uniform in all Member States.

## [The Future of Europe Debates in the European Parliament 2018-2019](#)

*In-depth Analysis by Silvia Kotanidis and Ralf Drachenberg, May 2019*

This paper aims to give an account of the debates on the Future of Europe held in plenary sessions of the European Parliament in the period from January 2018 to April 2019, heading up to the 2019 European elections. These Future of Europe debates provided the opportunity for many different Heads of State or Government to speak in the European Parliament's plenary sessions throughout that period and put forward their views on the future development of the EU.

## [Election of the President of the European Commission: Understanding the Spitzenkandidaten process](#)

*Briefing by Laura Tilindyte-Humburg, April 2019*

By voting in European elections, European citizens not only elect the Parliament itself, but also have a say over who would head the EU executive – the European Commission. What became known as the 'Spitzenkandidaten process' is a procedure whereby European political parties, ahead of European elections, appoint lead candidates for the role of Commission President, with the presidency of the Commission then going to the candidate of the political party capable of marshalling sufficient parliamentary support.

### **Further reading**

#### [10 issues to watch in 2021](#)

*In-depth analysis by Étienne Bassot, January 2021*

#### [The State of the Union debate in the European Parliament, 2020](#)

*Briefing by Rafal Manko, September 2020*

#### [The powers of the European Parliament](#)

*Briefing by Laura Tilindyte, November 2019*

#### [Role and election of the President of the European Commission](#)

*Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, July 2019*

#### [The Future of Europe: Contours of the current debate](#)

*Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, Angelos Delivorias, Nora Milotay, Anja Radjenovic, Joanna Apap, Elena Lazarou and Magdalena Sapata, April 2018*

#### [From Rome to Sibiu](#)

*Study by Suzana Anghel, Desmond Dinan and Ralf Drachenberg, April 2018*

---

[eprs@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:eprs@europarl.europa.eu) | [www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank) (Internet) | [www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu](http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu) (Intranet)

You can access this Topical Digest online at the websites below,  
or by scanning the QR code:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD\\_Conference\\_FoE\\_final.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD_Conference_FoE_final.pdf)

<https://epthinktank.eu/topical-digests/>



**FOLLOW EPRS**



<http://epthinktank.eu>



@EP\_thinktank



european parliamentary research service



EPINFOGRAPHICS/EPRS



european parliamentary research service