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**European Economic and Social Committee**

"Visits and Publications" Unit  
Tel. +32 2 546 9604 • Fax +32 2 546 9764  
Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99  
1040 Bruxelles / Brussel • BELGIQUE / BELGIË  
[www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu)  
CATALOGUE NUMBER: EESC-2011-10-EN

doi:10.2864/95632



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**Group III "Various Interests"**

**Participatory Democracy  
in 5 Points**



**European Economic and Social Committee**



# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN 5 POINTS

## 1. Participatory democracy in the 'Treaty on European Union'

Participatory democracy is now an integral part of the European model of society. The Lisbon Treaty enshrines the complementarity between representative democracy and participatory democracy, referring to them in Articles 10 and 11 respectively. In addition, Article 10.3 confers upon citizens «the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union» and stipulates that «decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen», a reference to the requirement to comply with the subsidiarity principle. Thus, participation becomes a civic right and subsidiarity becomes a pillar of participatory democracy.

### Article 11

1. *The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.*
2. *The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.*
3. *The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.*
4. *Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.*

*The procedures and conditions required for such a citizens' initiative shall be determined in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.*

## 2. What is Civil Society?

Civil society is a collective term for all types of social action, by individuals or groups, that do not emanate from the state and are not run by it. Civil society organisations can be defined in abstract terms as the sum of all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens. Both quantitative and qualitative criteria should be applied to assess the degree of representativeness of civil society organisations.

## 3. What is Civil Dialogue?

Civil Dialogue is a democratic and public opinion-forming process that can take various forms depending on the actors involved:

- horizontal: dialogue between European civil society organisations on the EU's development, future and policies;
- vertical: structured, regular dialogue between these organisations and the EU;
- sectoral: daily dialogue between civil society organisations and their contacts within the legislative and executive authorities.

It is interesting to note that the concept of horizontal and vertical civil dialogue set out by the EESC as long ago as 2000

was subsequently included verbatim in Article 11(1) and (2) of the Lisbon Treaty.

Civil Dialogue can take place via a *bottom-up* process where the organisations take the initiative through to a *top-down* process where the institutions activate the process.

Civil dialogue is an essential instrument for applying the governance principles: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, coherence and subsidiarity.

## 4. What is the distinction between civil dialogue and social dialogue?

From 1999 until the present, the EESC has not ceased calling attention to this important distinction. Unlike civil dialogue, European Social Dialogue is a mechanism with quasi-legislative powers according to articles 153 and 154 of the Treaty. It is clearly defined in terms of participants, powers and procedures and has quasi-constitutional status. It derives its distinctiveness from the special powers and responsibilities of its participants playing their role in an autonomous way. For this reason, their role and responsibilities cannot be transferred to other policy areas or actors. Social dialogue is thus an excellent example of the principle of participatory democracy at work.

## 5. The role of the EESC in making Participatory Democracy a reality

By setting up the Economic and Social Committee, the Rome Treaties gave sectoral interest groups access to the European decision-making process. The Committee is a key player as the

representative, centre of information and legitimate mouthpiece for *organised civil society*, and thus an essential bridge between Europe and its citizens: **it «consists of representatives of organisations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society, notably in socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural areas (art. 300.2 of the TFEU)».**

The EESC is aware that it only partially reflects the diversity and developments covered by the term «organised civil society», and so it has taken initiatives and implemented reforms to ensure as broad a representation as possible of organised civil society, adopting a pragmatic, non-exclusive approach, while gradually structuring its relations with European organised civil society.

Over the last decade, the EESC has undoubtedly come a long way down the road of European civil dialogue being defined, recognised and put into practice. Obviously, however, as demonstrated by the demands of civil society organisations and the Committee itself, the journey must continue and we must work for an accelerated and tangible implementation of Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty.

The history of the EESC has taught us that, to create and implement new and effective structures for dialogue, you need sound organisation, institutional continuity and permanent structures. That is why we think that the EESC is still an undoubted and highly experienced keystone of this process.

*This leaflet is based on extracts from the Compendium "Participatory Democracy: a retrospective overview written by the EESC"; <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-events-and-activities>*