



CLOSER TO THE VOTERS

Pursuant to the Treaty on European Union (TEU) “*The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.*” ([TEU Article 2](#)).

The TEU further declares that, in the Union based on representative democracy, citizens are directly represented in the European Parliament, while the Member States are represented in the European Council by their heads of state or government and in the Council by their accountable governments. At the same time, the Treaties give every EU citizen the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union and, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, stipulate that “*decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.*” ([TEU Article 10](#)).

Articles [20](#), [21](#), [24](#), [227](#) and [228](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union create opportunities for citizens to participate in policy-making and law-making, and to exercise their right to information and petition.

The Treaties consider representative democracy, citizen participation and civil dialogue as the cornerstones of democratic legitimacy. However, the democratic deficit, or the range of shortcomings in the application of democratic principles, such as accountability or transparency, is a constant topic of discussion in relation to the functioning of the EU. This may leave citizens feeling that they have few opportunities to voice their opinions and influence EU decisions (EUR-Lex: [Democratic deficit](#)).

In the hope of reducing the democratic deficit and strengthening representative democracy, the Treaty of Lisbon:

- gave national parliaments the right to participate in EU decision-making;
- introduced the European Citizens’ Initiative, which was renewed in 2019 [[Regulation \(EU\) 2019/788](#)];
- reformed the functioning of the European Parliament and strengthened its decision-making powers (EUR-Lex: [The Treaty of Lisbon](#)).

The importance of the principle of subsidiarity is shown by the fact that, in the list of recommendations (no. 40) of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#), the citizens of the Union identified active subsidiarity and multi-level governance as key elements. In this context, they proposed to strengthen the voice of regions, cities and municipalities, and to increase the role of national and regional parliaments in EU legislation ([General Secretariat of the Council 2022](#)).

To reduce the democratic deficit, the Plenary Meeting of the LXXII COSAC in Budapest in 2024 also called for a stronger role for national parliaments in shaping EU policies ([C/2024/7493](#)).

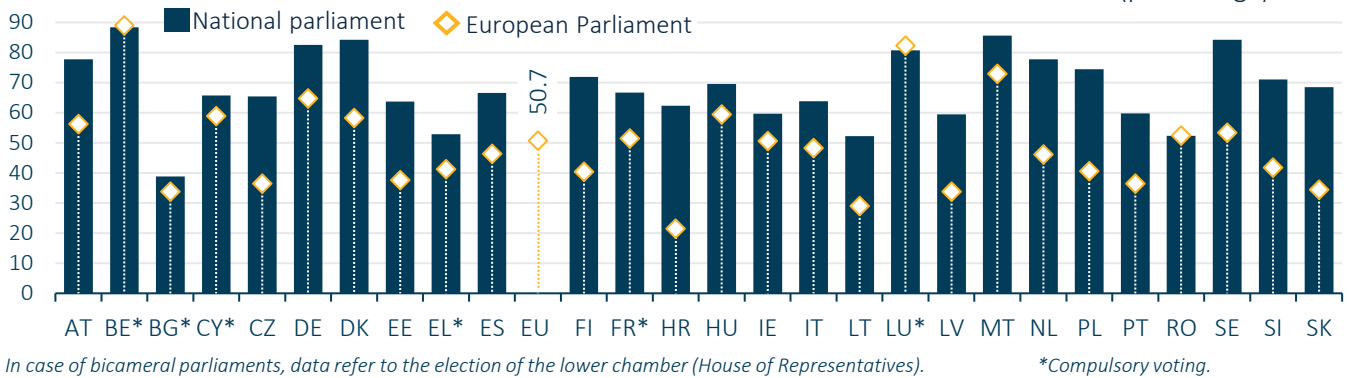
Promoting citizens’ involvement in EU decision-making and reducing the democratic deficit were called for by governments ([10119/24](#)), national parliaments ([C/2024/3416](#) and the European Commission [[COM\(2020\) 790 final](#); [COM\(2023\) 630 final](#); [C\(2023\) 8627 final](#)], as well as by the European Parliament [[P9_TA\(2021\)0345](#); [P9_TA\(2023\)0427](#)].

The European Council’s Strategic Agenda 2024–29 stresses the importance of strengthening citizens’ engagement ([EUCO 15/24](#), Annex). In addition, the EU Council has set the objective of increasing young people’s democratic engagement and their involvement in decision-making in the EU Youth Strategy 2019–27 ([2019/C 189/01](#)); the importance of which it continued to highlight in 2024 ([C/2024/3528](#)). This is the purpose of the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) series, where EU decision-makers listen to the views of young people in the EU in 18-month cycles.

As a non-EU institution, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers has also made a number of recommendations to strengthen democratic legitimacy, highlighting support for democratic participation at local level and examples of deliberative democracy in action [[CM/Rec\(2018\)4](#); [CM/Rec\(2023\)6](#)]. ♦

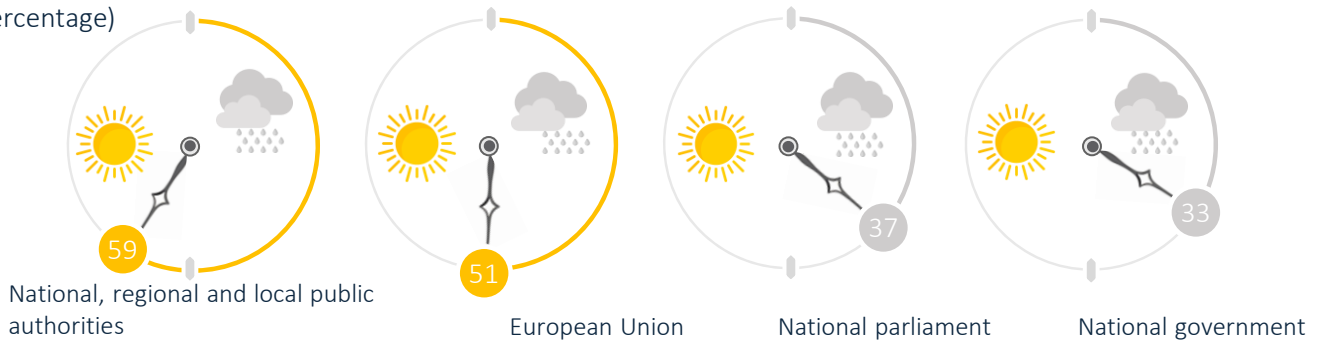
1

TURNOUT DATA FOR THE LAST NATIONAL AND THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS (percentage)



2

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO TRUST THE EU AND SPECIFIC NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AUTUMN 2024, EU-27 (percentage)



3



4

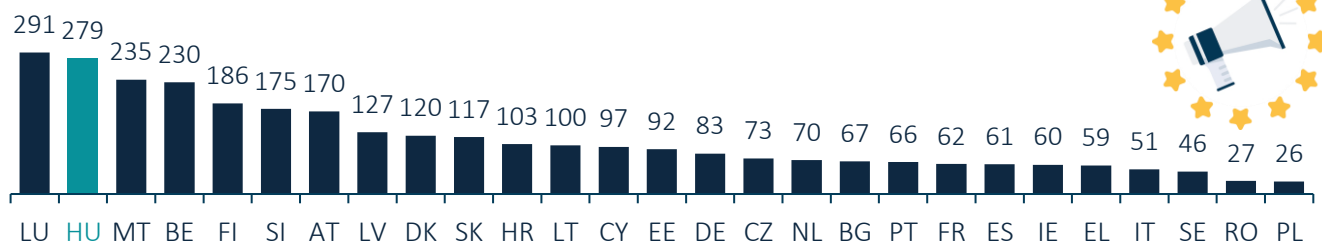
DATA FROM THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE, 2012–2025



5

ACTIVITY DATA FROM THE MULTILINGUAL DIGITAL PLATFORM OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Number of contributions (ideas and proposals) per 100,000 inhabitants



SOURCES

- European Parliament: [Results of the 2024 European elections](#); IPU Parline: [European Parliament elections](#); IDEA: Election turnout database |
- European Commission (2024): [Standard Eurobarometer 102 – Autumn 2024](#) |
- European Citizens' Initiative |
- Kantar Public (2022): [Multilingual digital platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#). Final report.