



**Federation of Young European
Greens**

fyeg

Direct Democracy

Policy paper as adopted during the General Assembly 2011, Luxembourg.

Democracy and Development

Democracy is an ongoing process. It constantly needs to be developed, actualised and has to keep up with the internationalisation of politics. If it is not developed further to accommodate the needs of modern societies and extended to the transnational level, democracy is at risk. People's voices have to be heard and they must have an influence on political decisions.

Problem of representative democracy

Representative democracy has the aim to represent the people. The representative system has come to its limits, especially because people have become more independent and individual. People do not want to decide only every four years on candidates who should represent them. They also need to have the possibility to vote on vital issues that affect them directly.

Democratic Deficit in the European Union

We think there is a democracy deficit at the European level. This results in skepticism of many people concerning the European Union (EU). We think that it is very important to democratise the EU and eliminate the gap between people and Brussels.

Direct Democracy as a complementary tool

Direct democracy is complementary to the representative system. People should have the possibilities to vote on issues and not only on parties and candidates. Direct democracy gives the people a voice, gives more legitimacy to decisions made and creates dialogue and public debate.

Vision:

Power to the people

We strive for more direct democracy. People should have the power to initiate new legislation and prevent legislation they do not want to have. This political culture creates responsibility, more debate, dialogue between people and social cohesion. We strive for the implementation of direct democracy on all levels of law making.

Important values in Democracy:

For direct democracy to function, there are some preconditions and values we have to consider:

- Fundamental rights need to be respected. Nevertheless, we think that debate should not be restricted as we believe discussion will strengthen these rights.



- It is very important that people have access to relevant information prior to a popular vote. To assure this, transparency and impartial information sources are needed.
- Popular votes are educational events. People inform themselves, share information and debate. Nevertheless, a good political education in schools and open spaces for debates are essential for functioning democracies.

Demands:

Based on the vision above we demand the following:

Expanding the European Citizen Initiative with the option for a binding popular vote

Expanding the European Citizens Initiative with the option for a binding popular vote. The European Citizen Initiative can be an interesting tool to create a transnational discourse about European policy. It's more than a regular petition and enhances the citizens up to the same level as the Parliament and the European Council.

But FYEG still sees the danger frustration, if the final decision – after years of creative and proactive work – is given away to the European Commission. FYEG thinks that in the longer term, the rights of EU citizens must extend beyond this new tool. Non-binding initiative is not enough: the EU should adopt a binding popular initiative in order to improve direct democracy.

Improve the ECI

Binding popular initiative and referendum are our main goal, but meanwhile there is still need for improving the ECI.

FYEG demands the barriers for putting the ECI into practice to be lowered. The number of countries where the signatures have to be gathered should be 1/5 instead of 1/4 of the EU

member states. Citizens should not be forced to give their ID or passport number in order to participate. Everyone living in the EU, independently of their nationality or age should be able to support an ECI. A financial reimbursement of groups, which have collected a certain amount of signatures should assure the access of smaller groups without big financial resources to the ECI. The time period for the collection of signatures should be extended to 18 months to give more time to the initiatives to create an European network.

Veto-Referendum to dispute decisions of the EU Parliament and the EU Council

Direct democratic decision-making can not only be guaranteed by the possibility of initiating new laws, but there must also be the possibility to reject decisions taken by representatives.

For this reason, FYEG strives for a binding citizen's veto-referendum.

Implement binding popular votes and veto-referendums on the national, regional and local level

When it comes to active popular decision making, the citizens need to feel that their decisions are close to their actual life.

For this reason, direct democratic instruments should not only be implemented on EU level. Depending on the topic of policy, different groups of people are



affected. In general, the lower the level of decision making is, the better people know about the issues. Therefore, decisions are more democratically legitimate. FYEG strives for initiatives and veto-referendums on national, regional and local level.

Increase participatory processes for major projects

When decisions are made by the parliament, participatory democracy should be used. Elected politicians need to consult experts and stakeholders before deciding on major issues. Consultation should be made early in the decision making process, so people can truly have an impact on those decisions. Too often, consultation is made after most of the thinking is already made. This is not what participatory democracy should be. Stakeholders and experts can be from the civil society, the NGOs, the political parties or any other organisation. A focus should be made on Youth organisations.

In some cases, participatory processes should even go as far as giving decision making power to the citizens: Participatory budgeting is a good example. It is already working in different cities and local governments. It allows the citizens to choose how the public money should be invested. FYEG wants tools like this to be used in all decision-making processes.

Lower the barriers for young people and foreigners

Democracy is defined by the possibility of all people being able to participate in decision-making. But the group of people who really have the right to vote and take part in decisions is limited. In many democracies, it took a long time until women had the right to vote. Foreigners and young people are still excluded from the voting-right.

To enlarge the legitimacy of democratic decisions, FYEG demands that formal barriers for voting-rights are lowered and thus the group of people allowed to vote is enlarged.