



# A DEMOCRATIC EUROPE NOW

## Democracy International's call for a new European Convention

### WHAT IS AN EU CONVENTION?

Democratic legitimacy and a genuine European identity can only stem from people's actual participation in EU decision-making. The first step on the path to a more democratic EU is striving towards a new EU Convention.

The Convention process is enshrined in Article 48 of the Lisbon Treaty as the only legally valid way to really change the way the EU functions. It is also the only instrument in the EU toolbox that offers the possibility of a more open and democratic way of making major decisions. Article 48 is vague in detailing the Convention process, but Democracy International advocates for a process that is democratic, transparent and inclusive of citizens and civil society actors.

It's clear that the EU must take real and legally secured steps towards reform - reform which can only be implemented if approved by a Convention. As participants in the Convention, citizens can directly help form Europe's future!

### LESSONS LEARNED

Around the turn of the millennium, the EU tested the convention method with some success. In 1999/2000, an EU Convention established the Charter of Fundamental Rights and in 2002/2003 a Convention drafted the Constitutional Treaty. These two extensive exercises offered useful insights in the opportunities for civil society and citizen participation, whose input was instrumental in introducing the European Citizens' Initiative in the EU Treaties. However, as citizens were not included throughout the entire process, the success of these Conventions was limited. In the end, only a handful of member states allowed their citizens to have a final say by means of a popular vote on the EU Constitutional Treaty and the process failed.

### CRITERIA FOR A DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

- 1 Maximum democratic legitimacy**  
In addition to official representatives of the EU institutions and the Member States, most importantly, representatives from civil society, social partners and representatives directly elected by the European citizens must participate as members of the Convention. Participation must remain open to all throughout the process.
- 2 Transparent meetings open to the public**  
A new Convention process must have fully transparent rules, assuring that all sittings of the Convention members and those of the Presidium are recorded and made available to the public.
- 3 Decisions made in plenum according to fully democratic rules**  
Rather than elaborating proposals that are then to be decided on by the Presidium, the Convention members should directly determine what the final draft should entail.
- 4 Sufficient time for serious and thorough deliberation**  
As opposed to the last Convention which was abruptly aborted, the new Convention must not place any time pressure on the working groups to comprehensively complete their analyses and proposal.
- 5 Participatory mechanisms that allow citizens and civil society to give inputs and to contribute to the proceedings**  
It is paramount for the legitimacy of the Convention to facilitate digital and traditional platforms for citizens and civil society to continuously provide their input. An agenda-setting initiative could permit civil society to put certain issues on the Convention's agenda.

### A CONSULTATION IS NOT NECESSARILY A CONVENTION

#### Citizens' consultations

- Informal process
- Deliberative debates
- Aims to collect citizens' proposals on the future of the EU
- Can be a pre-phase of an official Convention process

Both must be inclusive, citizen-led, and transparent at every stage throughout the entire process

#### European Convention

- Legal, formal process referenced in Article 48 of the Lisbon Treaty
- Citizens' proposals have the possibility to be implemented in new EU reforms
- Only process where real treaty change is possible

### 4 STEPS TO AN EU CONVENTION



#### Citizens' consultations take place across Europe in 2018:

Discussions take place to gather ideas about the EU from citizens and encourage the open debate needed in Europe. This is the pre-phase to the Convention, which is a formal, legal process.



#### The European Parliament of 2019 calls for a Convention:

The new European Parliament calls for a Convention, as is enshrined as their right in Article 48. Once a Convention is proposed, the EU Council decides by simple majority to initiate the Convention process.



#### The Convention process begins end of 2019 or in 2020

At the outset, citizens and civil society organisations must be included in every step of the process. Inclusiveness is key in maximizing a successful outcome! The ideas gathered at citizens' consultations throughout 2018 should be revisited at the Convention, where they can be considered as real proposals for treaty change. Sufficient time, possibly up to 5 years, should be allotted to discuss EU reforms and a potential new EU treaty.



#### An EU-wide referendum on the Convention outcome

Once consensus is reached on the draft outcome, the EU's 500 million citizens must be given the right to vote on the proposals by referenda in each Member State. Two-thirds (2/3) of the Member States must approve the proposal in order for it to enter into force as the new treaty of the EU. The draft outcome should be given the opportunity to be considered by all Europeans in order to be a truly democratic and inclusive process from start to finish.