



## MORE DEMOCRACY IN THE EU

More Power for the European Parliament?

ALINA SAVU

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## SUMMARY

The EU is the most unique international organization because of its institutions and the way they function in coordination with each other. They have both intergovernmental aspects as well as supranational ones who help the member states, the European citizens and the Union altogether. Out of all EU's main institutions the European Parliament is even more unique, being the only one directly elected by European citizens. Throughout the years the EU started to act more and more like a federal state, especially after the Lisbon Treaty came into force in 2009.

In spring 2022 the European institutions have decided to organize the final stage of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) which allowed them to listen to the European citizens' opinions on what the future holds for the EU member states as well as making recommendations. The following proposal contributes to the area 'Democracy in the EU'. More specifically, it will focus on discussing how the citizens can help to make a more democratic Union through the European institutions. The main idea that I want to get across with this paper is that the European Parliament's role in the EU needs in the near future an update regarding its prerogatives. This way not only the institutional system will be strengthened and become more inclusive and democratic, but also the citizens will feel like their voices are heard in more domains than until now.

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## CURRENT STATE OF THE AFFAIRS

In the past few years, some events have occurred that have weakened the structure of the Union and raised questions on EU's democratic legitimacy. As a result, more and more European citizens started to lose trust in the EU institutions, claiming that they were overpowered by the circumstances and could no longer manage the situation on their own in order to help the member countries recover from the debt and political consequences that occurred. As the [Eurobarometer](#) shows, more than 50% of citizens are not satisfied with the way they are represented at the European level. I would say that one of the most important problems the EU is facing at the moment is the fact that the European institutions are overwhelmed with the overlapping crises - referring to either the pandemic or the ongoing Russia's aggression in Ukraine, at EU's borders. The European institutions have their prerogatives in accordance with the [Lisbon Treaty](#). However, given the current situation, the institutions are facing another problem. They have to do something in order to keep the EU as democratic and as transparent as they can, but they can't go farther than their legal prerogatives. This, in my opinion, is a challenge because when it comes to the European Parliament, as the only institution elected by the people and their loss of trust needs to be seriously addressed.

## THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S PREROGATIVES

Nowadays, the EU is confronted with a significant challenge related to its democratic conduct, particularly within the European institutions decision making and the citizens' participation, their opinions, and their trust in these institutions. In this framework, my proposal focuses on a reform of the institutional system in order to create a more stable and more democratic European Union. In my view, the institutions that have responsibilities in the decision-making process should enlarge their areas of prerogatives. Therefore, this will imply a treaty change or a revision of the current treaty, when all member states have to vote in favor of this idea. [The last treaty \(Lisbon Treaty\)](#) came into force in 2009 and since then, the European scene has changed constantly: the institutions don't have the same focus areas as they did almost 15 years ago. New political realities require a more adapted and agile EU that should start from empowering its institutions.

Looking at the European Parliament, we must underline that this institution has evolved a lot throughout the years, gradually receiving more and more responsibilities through the European Treaties. According to the [Lisbon Treaty](#), the European Parliament is a co-legislator along with the Council of the European Union, sharing the power to amend and adopt the legislative proposals made by the Commission, and the two institutions also share the power to decide the budget at the European level. Furthermore, the Parliament also controls the work of other institutions. This responsibility is important because it ensures the democratic legitimacy of the Union. But there is still space for improvement.



## A MORE POWERFUL EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

The Lisbon Treaty states that the [ordinary legislative procedure](#) and also the Parliament's legislative prerogatives have limited areas of applicability, approximately 85 domains. A specific idea for an institutional reform is increasing the number of areas in which this procedure can be applied. If the areas of applicability of the ordinary legislative procedure will be extended, as well as the prerogatives of the Parliament, in order to have the same powers as the Council has in the present; then I can argue that this will contribute a lot to the democracy in the EU and to strengthen the institutional system. I would suggest extending those prerogatives to all the legislative sectors, for both the Council and Parliament, such as the tax system, competition law, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, where, at the present, the Parliament is only consulted. I will shortly give three examples of domains where I believe it is of utmost importance for the Parliament to get more prerogatives.

One of the most important topics that I can argue that has to be a matter of the ordinary legislative procedure is the [taxation law](#), which are subject to a special legislative procedure in which the European Parliament is only consulted about the matter and the Council is not legally obligated to adopt the law and take into consideration what the Parliament has suggested. In this context, my proposal refers to extending the taxation matter to the ordinary legislative procedure, letting the Parliament make amendments to the proposal, and splitting the prerogatives between the Council and the European Parliament. Due to the fact that it is the only institution directly elected by the citizens; as a result, they will feel more included in the decision-making process and their voices will count. The tax system and taxation laws have an effect on all member states and the people as well, being the ones that have to pay the taxes annually and every time they get their salary. Of course, every country has its own laws regarding the taxation matter, though in the EU, the member states have to make those laws taking into consideration the European rules as well. My proposal would give the European Parliament the prerogative to have a saying in the tax discussion in the EU and as a result, the citizens will believe that their voices matter and will be able to participate in the decision-making through the Parliament and with this the democracy in the EU will be consolidated more.

Another important domain in which the European Parliament is only consulted is the competition law. Competition is a key element in a free market economy, which is one of the principles promoted by the EU as noted in the [Copenhagen criteria](#). The companies in the member states and at the European level must have a competition between them. As a result, people have a vast variety of goods to choose from at different quality levels, and they can pick the ones that are the most pleasant for them. However, [competition laws in the EU are subject to a special legislative procedure, whereby the Parliament is only consulted and its suggestions may or may not be taken into consideration by the Council](#). In my opinion, this institution should be through the ones having the final say in the decision-making on this matter because it is the only one that represents the people, the European citizens, who are, in fact, directly affected by those laws. They are the consumers and the demand for those goods or the companies that supply those goods and their opinions would be taken into account better if their representatives, the MEPs, have those responsibilities regarding the competition in the European market.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is an important domain in the EU, aiming to preserve the security of the member states and the Union as a whole. [The main objective of the](#)



[CFSP is to maintain international peace and respect the UN principles referenced in the Charter.](#)

When it comes to decision-making in this field, the Council has a lot of responsibilities, but the European Parliament, on the other hand, is in charge of making only recommendations that can be taken into consideration or can be ignored. This possibility makes the citizens think that they are not represented well and that they don't participate in this matter. Moreover, their opinion when it comes to the foreign policy of the EU and diplomacy at the European level is considered not to be a priority because the member states are the ones that can make those decisions as part of the Council. [The Lisbon Treaty states that the European Parliament has power when it comes to the CFSP because of its responsibilities over the EU's budget.](#) In my opinion, the Common Foreign and Security Policy should be subject to the ordinary legislative procedure as well as other domains because the people need to have a say in this matter too, and the prerogatives can be split between the two institutions.

## DEMOCRACY IN THE EU IN THE HANDS OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS

The participation of citizens in the decision-making process is very important for democracy in the EU. The three domains mentioned before are just a few policy areas that should be the subject of new prerogatives for the European Parliament that will include the citizens' opinions when they make a decision that will affect them or their countries in any way. How are these concepts related? I would say that through institutions that are strong and consolidated and promote democratic values, every country can be considered a democratic state. In my view, a stronger EU for the future is an EU that operates more and more as a federal state. That is why its institutional system should be strengthened, even now, when the world faces so many challenges, in order to re-establish the democratic model that every European country desired to be a part of. The European Union needs a reform of the institutional system because the last decade's subsequent crises left a strong imprint on every level of the organization and citizens need to be at the heart of it.