

# CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS' DEMOCRACY

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# CREATING A CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENS' DEMOCRACY

## The call for citizens to participate in building democracies

The Russian attack on Ukraine, the uncertainty and security challenges in the Western Balkan and in the new candidate countries, as well as tensions with individual member states have illustrated how much the geopolitical situation influences democracy and vice versa how important the state of democracy is in geopolitics. It has become more complicated and more urgent to secure effective democracy in member states, pre-accession and Eastern neighbourhood countries.

There is a significant need for long term support to democratic development through increased engagement of citizens between and during the national and European elections.

Europe's People's Forum (EPF) was established in 2017, at a time when UK had decided to leave the EU, Donald Trump had just been elected president of the United States, and many European countries saw a growth in extreme nationalist movements. It was a period when the EU as a project of peace was severely threatened. Several analyses indicated that the citizens lost trust in democracy, first due to the consequences of the financial crisis, and then the economic decline and the globalisation that often led to a perception of being marginalised in society.

EPF believes that a stronger involvement of also marginalized and apathetic citizens will build stronger democracies at EU and at national level. The same belief has our 35 professional member organizations and universities specialised in citizen participation and democracy as well as our more than 50 civil society member organizations.

After serious consultations with the European institutions and actors within democracy and citizens engagement, the EPF's General Assembly in June 2022 decided to launch the Center for European Citizens' Democracy (CECD).

We work to secure the basis for CECD to support local and national policy makers with civil society organisations to find the best possible ways to involve citizens in decision and policy making at all levels of society. And to offer the most innovative measures and methods to the European institutions. CECD's expertise is based on EPF's broad practical and theoretical membership but will work on an even broader basis through collaboration with local and international CSOs and institutions focusing on also issues like parliamentarism, fair elections, rule of law and free media.

## Center for European Citizens' Democracy (CECD)

### Overall objective:

- To strengthen democracy and renew trust and the sense of ownership in the European Union, its member states, pre-accession and neighbourhood countries through increased engagement of citizens in all democratic processes at local, national, EU and European level.

### Specific objectives are to:

- Deepen a commitment of legislative and executive public bodies to engage and listen to the citizens at local, regional, national and European level, while involving public authorities, civil society organizations and independent media.
- Improve the quality of policymaking, strategic reviews and other aspects of institutional decision-making by drawing on a fair and diverse public debate and on systematic mechanisms for a representative engagement of all population groups.
- Develop and support innovative state-of-the-art methods for citizen- and community led

participation as part of the EU's democratic toolkit and build the capacity of local, national and European practitioners to implement such processes.

- Carry out and make use of existing research within democracy, participatory and deliberative democracy to successfully help EPF's member organisations to strengthen their work.

### Background for the CECD

EPF has been active in building strategies for the long-term democratic development by supporting the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) on preparing the Parliament's report and resolution on Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making (2020/2201 (INI)). The CECD is a response to the European Parliament's proposal for a permanent mechanism for participatory involvement of citizens in EU's decision making.

It also responds to the EC President Ursula Von der Leyen's ambition to engage citizens regularly in EU decision and policy making.

In addition, as Vice President Dubravka Suica underlines, the CECD falls well in line with the citizens' visions and recommendations from the Panel 2 of the Conference on the Future of Europe as well as civil society organisations' ambition to enhance citizens' participation.

CECD as an independent non-profit organisation will work closely connected with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union as well as with national and local authorities on strengthening and engaging citizens in our democracies.

### *The CECD Scope of Work*

The Centre for European Citizens' Democracy will:

1. Be responsible for the design, methodological coordination and preparation of citizens' participatory processes undertaken on behalf of EU-institutions, national and local authorities. This happens in a methodology cluster, that is supported by its practitioners and research institutions. The methodology cluster lends its support to strengthen existing citizen-led initiatives such as the European Citizens Initiative, submission of petitions to the EP and complaints to the Ombudsman and innovative new democracy instruments.
2. Develop designs, measures, ensures quality control, evaluates and promotes the participatory and deliberative processes that contribute to strengthening citizens' awareness and influence of EU policymaking between and during election periods. This happens in close collaboration between its professional practitioners, researchers and its civil society members CECD.
3. Develop advanced and effective methods to involve citizens in future convention processes ahead of treaty changes with the aim both to secure citizens' ownership and to ensure that citizens in the whole process at European level contribute to the possible treaties.
4. Function as a Policymakers Observatory assisting European and local levels of political authorities to be aware of possibilities for citizens participation in different aspects of decision making or policy making. And to help advise on the best design and methodology for their needs.

5. Coordinate with partners and networks working with other aspects of democracy building like human rights, collaboration between legislative and executive institutions, media freedoms, digital democracy etc. to adequately address local issues.
6. Organize events at local, multinational and EU levels with politicians and public authorities to inspire to new participatory methods that strengthen democracy and renew trust and ownership in the EU and in local democracies and their policymaking.
7. Serve as the Secretariat for the networks of professional institutions, universities and experts that are experienced in citizens participatory processes and democracy research as well as for the permanent mechanism's network of civil society organisations and of a network of advocates for citizens participation that with its local partners builds the knowledge base for all target countries and alert on new options.
8. Liaise with the EC Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, member states, EESC, CoR and umbrella civil society organizations.

### *The CECD and the Digital future*

The multilingual platform and the Interactio system for multilingual deliberative dialogues used during the Conference on the Future of Europe yielded new insights with regard to digital participatory processes. It will be a key research and innovation project for CECD to develop a digital solution that can effectively:

- Reach all European citizens who link up to the Internet, social media, mobile phones and other devices,
- Allow for European residents and expats to prioritize between themes, recommendations and proposals so the outcome is a close to representative reflection of the population in socio-economic, demographic and geographic terms,
- Provide easily accessible technology that encourage all citizens, including especially vulnerable citizens with limited literacy capacity to have a voice on EU and national policies, strategies and solutions,
- Ensure that the digital solution may be used for multilingual deliberative dialogues as well as by students and groups of citizens keen to design and detail European solutions to be presented to the EU-institutions,
- Facilitate other activities aiming to increase citizen participation in Europe.

### *The CECD – Policymakers Observatory*

An observatory function to assist European and local levels of political authorities to be aware of and consider possibilities for citizens participation in different aspects of decision making or policy making. And to help develop the best design and methodology for the needs, and assist to identify possible project funding,

- Builds on flexible regional networks of practitioners, civil society organisations and political actors across member states and non-member states
- Interactions at all levels between CECD, local and national authorities, assemblies and governments
- Mutual support of the political independence of all national practitioners and technical organisations

### *The CECD – Research and Capacity Building*

The CECD takes part in research projects concerning democracy and further development of participatory, deliberative and other methods that contribute to a vibrant and modern democratic Europe.

- Active participation in Horizon research, innovation and practice projects that seek to stimulate democracy or citizens involvement in the shape and implementation of various policy areas
- Workshops between researchers and practitioners and their institutions and organisations
- Networking with other think tanks dealing with relevant EU policies and possible events on European research with a citizens' perspective
- Ideally, such events will take place in a geographically remote location to focus the participants' concentration such as is the case for the World Economic Forum in Davos. It is the ambition that this event may attract civil society organisations and scholars whose research on policies and societal development has a citizen perspective.

### *Europe's People's Forum a continued network*

EPF aims to strengthen democracy and renew trust and ownership in the European Union by engaging citizens in discussions and in influencing the policy making so the EU may better reflect the needs and visions of European citizens. EPF also collaborates with partners that work with citizens, media and authorities to enhance national and European democratic processes between the elections

EPF consists of a professional network of interested and qualified national universities, institutions and civil society organisations in all EU member states. They have technical experience in the design, implementation, and facilitation of citizens participation in policy making between European or national elections. Some of them are research institutions with special expertise in citizen participation. The network currently counts around 35 partners.

EPF also includes a network of civil society organisations and social partners around Europe. The informal network of CSOs is adaptive to thematic and methodological needs. This network currently has around 50 partners.

When the CECD has been established and is up and running the CECD will refrain from being part of the planning and implementation of participatory projects and leave this to the professional partners in the current EPF network. There shall be no direct link between the economic interests of the technical partners and the CECD.

### **Organisation**

The CECD could be organised as a non-profit foundation and the following organisational structures could be considered.

A **Citizen Panel** with randomly chosen citizens from all member states will meet every three months online to discuss the CECD activities and local, national and European needs for new participatory processes.

A **Strategic Council** will meet annually to evaluate the CECD's strategic development and identify the strategic challenges and opportunities for CECD in the coming year. Council members are appointed by the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council and the member states as well as the CoR and EESC.

The **Board of Directors** is the highest level of authority. Its members will be appointed by the General Assembly of EPF as well as by relevant citizens initiatives like European Citizen Initiative, the Ombudsman, Petitions and other relevant stakeholders. The board hires and dismisses the Director. It is responsible for the budget, accounts and approval of strategies.

## Economy

The CECD aims to secure an initial five-year funding to cover running costs. Sources of funding should be as diverse as possible and could include independent foundations, national public budgets and other sources.

Besides basic running costs the running costs are expected to be related directly to projects implemented with participation of CECD. This could be modelling and design towards political authorities at European, national or local levels. Funding from Horizon Europe Research and Innovation or EU programmes like the Citizen, Equality, Rights and Values programme and several others that will support establishing innovative open democratic practices.

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