



European Committee  
of the Regions

# YEPs meet the High-Level Group on European Democracy



## Event type

Online YEP event

## Date

15 September  
2021

## Audience

Around 135 participants

## Organisers

European Committee of the Regions

## Themes

Future of Europe, European Democracy



## Speakers



## Key messages

Members of the High-Level Group on European Democracy:

- **Herman Van Rompuy**, Chair of the HLG and former President of the European Council;
- **Androulla Vassiliou**, former European Commissioner for Health and for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth
- **Joaquin Almunia**, former European Commissioner for Competition and for Economic and Financial Affairs
- **Rebecca Harms**, former Member of the European Parliament (MEP);
- **Maria João Rodrigues**, former Minister for Qualification and Education of Portugal and MEP
- **Silja Markkula**, President of the European Youth Forum;
- **Tomasz Grosse**, Professor of the University of Warsaw;

1. Cooperation between all levels of government is key to improve European democracy
2. Democracy can be efficiently boosted at all levels
3. Complementarity between representative and participatory democracy is needed
4. Empowerment of citizens and involvement in decision-making is key
5. It is necessary to involve young people in the public sphere, by working on topics of interest for them
6. Digital media are a useful tool, but they cannot replace the direct engagement and contact between citizens and politicians
7. Digital access and literacy are key elements in reaping the benefits of digital media, which can generate greater inclusion and participation, but can also be sources of disinformation and fake news
8. Democracy must deliver and show its added-value to citizens.

Herman Van Rompuy, Chair of the High-Level group on European Democracy and President emeritus of the European Council:

*"The exercise of strengthening European democracy requires a review of the roles of all levels involved, and of the interaction between them. The involvement of citizens - and notably our youth living in regions, cities and villages - must be at the heart of this process."*



## Press/Social media coverage

### Media coverage

[Ansa.it](https://www.ansa.it)  
[EURADIO](https://www.euradio.it)

### Website

[Future of Europe](https://www.futureofeurope.eu)  
[CoR Events](https://www.co-revents.eu)

### Social Media

[#EUlocal](https://twitter.com/EUlocal)  
[#YoungLocalLeaders](https://twitter.com/YoungLocalLeaders)  
[YEP liveblog](https://www.yep-liveblog.eu)



## Context

The HLG is composed of seven wise men and women tasked with helping the European Committee of the Regions reflect on how to strengthen the 'European House of Democracy', with cities and regions as the foundations, member states as the walls, and the EU as the protective roof. This event sought to engage with Young Elected Politicians (YEPs), bringing their experience and wishes for the future of Europe. Democracy is a value in itself, and the challenges of democracy at all levels need to be addressed.

### 1. What does European democracy mean to you?

There may be a growing sentiment of alienation between citizens and their elected representatives. The reasons are different: fragmentation of the political party system, populism, polarisation and raising of inequalities. Democracy is the framework to improve inclusiveness in our society, through the empowerment of citizens. This can be done in particular at the local level, with civic consultations and deliberation, new technologies and referenda. Most of the challenges faced in the EU – such as climate and pandemics - require cooperation between all levels of government. The achievements and the added-value of this joint project should be promoted and explained, focusing on areas that contribute to improve aspects of people's everyday lives – jobs, health, quality of water and air, etc.

### 2. How can the house of European democracy be strengthened and the involvement of citizens be enhanced?

The first step is to ensure people understand how EU democracy functions. This can sometimes be difficult, as for example during the pandemic, where rules differed. Healthy national democracies are the foundation of a healthy EU democracy. The vote is the first possibility to be better represented, and people must know that each vote counts. In addition political parties could be more active in EU elections campaigns, and their interest in EU topics boosted. Women and young people need to be more represented and involved in politics, but for a young woman entering the political arena it is still extremely difficult. Citizens should be able to propose their projects at local level, and be responsible for their realisation, as an empowerment exercise.

### 3. What is the role of social media and the digital world in democracy, especially for young people and LRAs?

Even if it is easy to get in touch with politicians digitally, barriers such as internet access and digital education still exist. Digital tools should therefore be seen as complimentary to direct engagement between politicians and citizens in their environment. Digital media can bring transparency, equality and boost participation, but they are also a source of disinformation and fake news. Quality journalism and digital literacy is key.

## Conclusions

To strengthen democracy, it is important to start from the local level, by involving people in decision-making, encouraging citizens' initiatives, and consulting civil society. But only cooperation between all levels of government can bring about the change and solutions needed for Europeans in a rapidly changing and inter-connected world. Young people are underrepresented at all levels of politics. In order improve their participation, it is important draw their attention and interest by engaging with them on topics that affect their life. Early engagement is key for success. Democracy is challenged and can be strengthened at all levels of government: it is vital to show that democracy matters and delivers to people on the issues that most matter to them.