WORKSHOP

E-DEMOCRACY

Giancarlo Vilella | European University Institute and European Parliament and **Gaby Umbach** | European University Institute

Sala Triaria

Villa Schifanoia, Via Boccaccio 121 - Florence

25 JANUARY 2019

■ INTRODUCTION

The concept of E-Democracy is in constant progress. This workshop discusses the consequences of the introduction of technologies on the functioning of democracy. According to a European Parliament Resolution {P8_TA(2017)095 of 16 March 2017} "democracy should evolve and adapt to changes and opportunities related to new ICT technologies and tools". This statement expresses the clear awareness of a change of process in progress. According to the EP Resolution, increasing disaffection alienates citizens from politics resulting in a clear need to improve the democratic link between institutions and citizens. The latter would need to express themselves more frequently and more directly: citizen involvement is hence essential to the functioning of democracy.

Against this backdrop, what is the place of technology in this process of change? First, it can help make democracy more responsible. Digitalisation helps remedy weak spots of democratic systems. One such potentially weak spot is the transparency of political action as technologies can raise awareness and hence also transparency more quickly and directly. Another sector is access to documents: today, thanks to the link between digitalisation and the internet, it is possible to access documents directly uploaded by institutions. A third sector is data protection and privacy management. These three sectors can also help increase the quality of participation and the level of responsibility in modern democracy.

How is the role of representative institutions changing within this context? The relationship between representatives and represented is no longer only characterised by and constituted during elections, temporary meetings or sporadic assemblies. Thanks to technology, the electorate can access the activities of their representative at any time. Representatives can be directly linked to the people they represent and evaluate their choices on a constant basis. Within these newly established direct relations, there is hence a mutual responsibility at work with no hierarchical relations between controllers and controlled yet established. Strengthened mutual responsibility rather than eroded mutual trust should therefore be the product of the new interrelation of represented and representatives. In this context, new technologies allow for direct participation of citizens in order to share their opinions, judgments, requests and preferences.

This path towards e-democracy is based on two pillars. The first pillar regards the need for a general "technology literacy", even if the choice to become e-active remains with the single citizen. This technological literacy needs to be achieved for all, rather than for a minority of citizens. Therefore, public institutions should take responsibility for both the access to such tools ("a computer for everyone") and for training. The second essential pillar involves the public hand investing substantial resources so that all institutions and administrations are able to use the tools of digitalisation, online navigation and ICT communication. Only in this way (through technologically literate citizens and computerised public institutions) can we have the necessary balance for a sustainable path to e-democracy. In this way, technological change is not just a mere problem of redistribution for political systems; it can also help strengthen public powers and improve the effectiveness of their work.

■ PROGRAMME

14.30 - 14.45	Welcome
	Brigid Laffan	European University Institute and **Gaby Umbach**	European University Institute
14.45 - 15.00	Introduction
	Giancarlo Vilella	European University Institute and European Parliament
15.00 - 16.20	Roundtable
	Chair: **Gaby Umbach**	European University Institute
	Diana Urania Galetta	University of Milan
	Liav Orgad	EUI, IDC, and WZB
	Fabio Massimo Castaldo	Vice President European Parliament
	Theo Karapiperis	Head of Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA)/EPRS
16.20 - 16.30	Break
16.30 - 17.30	Chair: **Brigid Laffan**	European University Institute
	Discussion and Q&A