



RETHINKING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

- A stronger European Parliament after Covid-19 -

1. CONTEXT

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world and threatened to disrupt the normal functioning of the European institutions, the European Parliament took extraordinary measures and quickly developed new ways of working in order to remain operational and ensure the continuity of the democratic process and the exercise of its prerogatives for the sake of the citizens it represents.

The crisis has forced the Parliament to rapidly implement a comprehensive remote-working strategy, for both its Members and staff, in order to enable it to respond to the emergency. At the same time it revealed shortcomings in a year of constant adaptation and operational change, unlike anything that had ever been done before.

Time has come to draw lessons from this crisis and prepare for a new political and institutional reality. Therefore, now is the moment for Parliament to engage in a broad reflection and rethink how we should be working after the pandemic, with the aim of moving towards a more resilient and effective institution that would also be better prepared to deal with future crises or events.

Notwithstanding the obvious responsibilities falling under the remit of the governing bodies and other instances in Parliament, and the role they will necessarily play in this process, including in particular on the follow-up, this exercise aims at engaging Members broadly to build a common experience and draw on the ideas and contributions from a wide cross-section of Members.

The approach set out consists of three distinct phases. Beyond requesting feedback from individual Members in the first phase, the following phase entails a more focused discussion in five separate groups, each one comprising a diverse selection of Members. The purpose of these Focus Groups is to create a space of innovative thinking and exchange of ideas leading to a set of recommendations pertaining to each of their fields of action: plenary, parliamentary prerogatives, communication, external diplomacy and internal organisation. The final phase consists of the follow-up of the recommendations by the relevant bodies in Parliament.

2. ROADMAP

PHASE 1 MID-MARCH TO MID-APRIL: CONSULTATION OF MEMBERS

Members have been invited to provide feedback individually by mid-April. The feedback received will be collated and channelled into the following phase.

PHASE 2 MID-APRIL TO MID-JULY: FOCUS GROUPS

A. Composition of the Focus Groups

Each Focus Group would be composed of one Member nominated by each political group and of up to five Members selected from those who have provided feedback on a particular Focus Group subject in the initial phase of this exercise.

This composition ensures a manageable size, representation of all political groups while at the same time allowing interested Members to be fully part of the process.

B. Moderation and purpose of the Focus Groups

In order for the Focus Groups to be functional, they will need a steering structure - it is suggested that this should consist of three moderators out of quota who will be facilitating the debate and reporting to the President regularly.

The moderators will be selected reflecting a mix of more experienced and newer Members, while ensuring political, gender and geographical balance.

They will have a driving and agenda-setting role, ensure that the timetable is met, and that a concrete result is achieved at the end of the 3-month process in the form of specific recommendations.

C. Organisational aspects

Meetings are to be organised on a weekly/bi-weekly basis and primarily on fringe days such as Mondays and Fridays in order not to interfere with core parliamentary activities and to ensure that interpretation is available.

In addition to the meetings of the Focus Groups, a digital platform for each Focus Group will be accessible to all Members. This would provide the opportunity for Members, who are not part of a given Focus Group, to continuously follow the work and further contribute with input throughout this phase.

Each Focus Group will be supported by the relevant Directorate(s)-General in the administration for the organisation of meetings, preparation of documents, etc.

D. Areas to be covered by the Focus Groups

1. Plenary reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>agenda setting; relevance and political coherence</i>- <i>tools to create/foster dynamic debates</i>- <i>enhanced visibility</i>- ...
2. Strengthening parliamentary prerogatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>legislative and scrutiny powers and oversight</i>- <i>access to information and documents</i>- <i>budgetary control</i>- ...
3. Enhancing Parliamentary Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>relations with international partners</i>- <i>democracy and Human Rights worldwide</i>- ...
4. Relations with Citizens / Communicating effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>interactive tools</i>- <i>proactive information policies</i>- <i>citizen's feedback</i>- ...
5. Facilitating Internal Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>remote participation in the future</i>- <i>multilingualism</i>- <i>digitalisation</i>- <i>work space</i>- ...

Other relevant topics could be added in each of the Focus Groups if it is deemed opportune.

PHASE 3: SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER: GOVERNING BODIES AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Focus Groups should finalise their reflection process in the form of a concrete set of recommendations before the beginning of the summer break. These recommendations would subsequently be submitted to the relevant governing bodies within whose remit they fall for follow up straight after the summer break.

In order for the governing bodies to have a dedicated debate on the recommendations, an extraordinary meeting could be organised focusing solely on this subject (possibly taking the form of Away Days).

The next steps could be discussed on this occasion, depending as well on how the reflection process evolves and the outcome. A suggestion already at this stage would be to organise a General Assembly with all Members invited before further follow-up by the relevant bodies in Parliament.