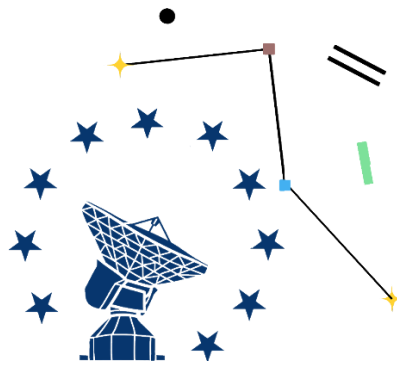


THE FIFTH SIENA *VISION* CONFERENCE ON THE EUROPE OF THE FUTURE FIRST WEBINAR ON DEMOCRACY



**EUROPEAN ELECTION OR 27 NATIONAL REFERENDA?
EU AS A LAB TO EXPERIMENT NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATION AND
DECISION MAKING
(AND ATTRACT YOUNGER GENERATIONS TO POLITICS)**

**DEFINING THE IDEAS TO BE EXPERIMENTED AND SCALED UP
(VISION INITIAL CONCEPT PAPER)**

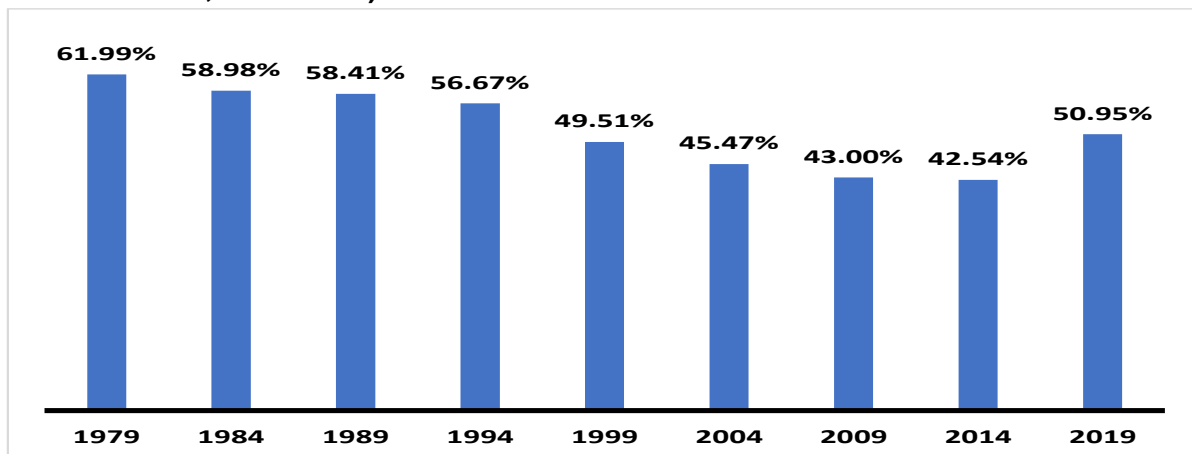
THE (IN PROGRESS) PROBLEM SETTING

If there is an argument in the ongoing debate across the EU that is shared by almost all political parties governing their respective Member States, it is the urgency of a more efficient European Union (EU) decision making process.

The previous SIENA VISION CONFERENCES demonstrate that almost all political sides agree that all big policy issues – from defence to immigration, from governance of the digital to reaction to emergency – require speed. Yet, what almost all EU political actors appear to ignore is the longstanding and acknowledged basic law on any functioning democratic systems: “no taxation, without representation¹”. We cannot pool any longer armies and monies without engaging citizens (“the people” in its very diversified and increasingly polarized positions) into the debate. A debate that needs to be – somehow – not exclusively bound to national dimensions. If we need to decide as European citizens, we also need some European fora.

If the basic law of democracies still holds, we can thus argue that a more efficient EU is not consistent with a electoral format that has not been modified for 45 years (since the first election of the EP). We will have once again 27 referenda on national governments with very little debate on what should be the future of the institutions that for most of the 450 million EU citizens is perceived as an alien. The “EU-deficit” is nothing new (as the graph below) shows and yet the urgency to have stronger European responses towards multiple emergencies make the argument much stronger.

GRAPH 1 - EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION TURNOUT (PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE, 1979–2019)



Source: Vision on European Parliamentary Research Service Data

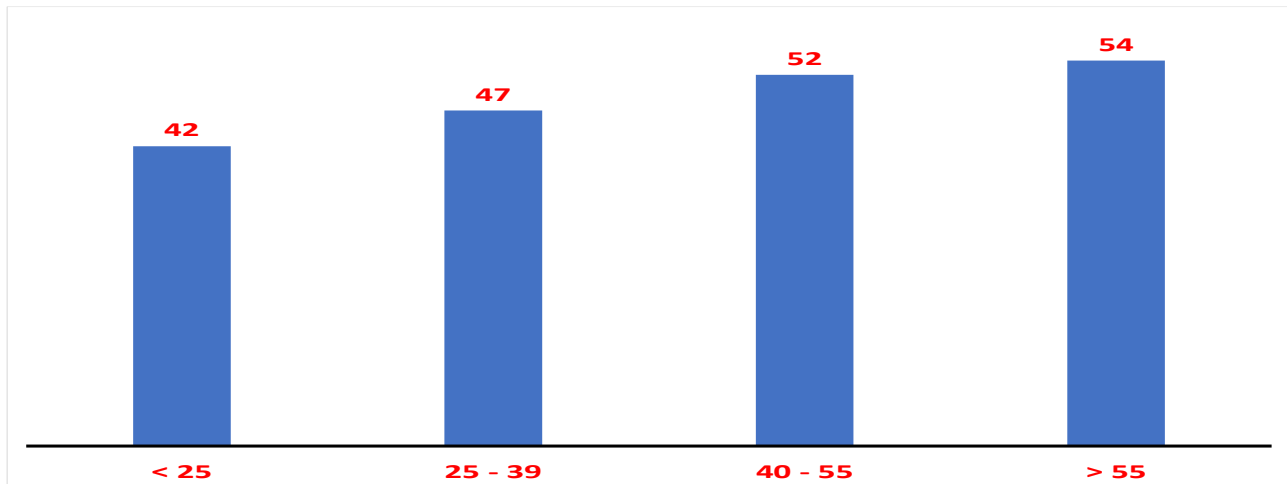
The paradox is that turnout has progressively gone down, while the power of the EP has gradually been increased, the only exception being the last 2019 election, and yet that was the election in which the vote for parties which appear not to be in favour of a “federalist” view of the EU reached

¹ It was William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, and Prime Minister of Great Britain that acknowledged, in 1768, that “taxation” of (American) colonies that were not “represented” at the British Parliament was not morally acceptable. . [Edmund Morgan](#), *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (1989).

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its highest (31% of the total votes). More importantly, even at the last election, the younger electors tend to vote less than the older ones (as for graph 2).

GRAPH 2 - EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION TURNOUT PER AGE GROUP (PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE, 2019)



Source: Vision on Eurobarometer Data

SOME HINTS FOR THE PROBLEM-SOLVING

The SIENA CONFERENCE Problem Solving Group on democracy starts from two intuitions.

The first is that we should no longer focus on the old, unresolved issue of the so-called “European democratic deficit”; the European Union should not replicate mechanisms which appear to be suffering at the national level and it should be seen as a possible laboratory to experiment the innovations we need to make liberal democracies work in a century which is very different from the ones in which the present political model was invented. The second is that any attempt cannot move from a “federalist” point of view: we need more democracy for Europe and to shape European institutions so that they can flexibly reflect European citizens' opinions and needs.

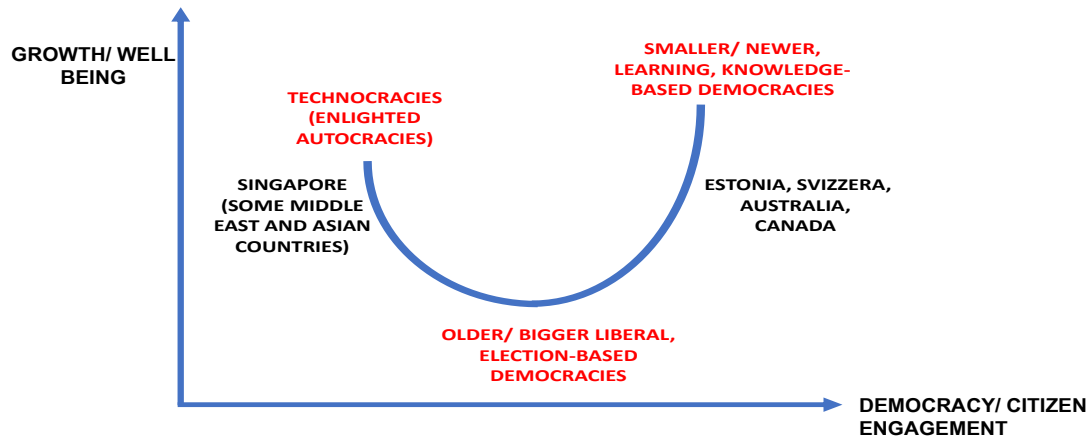
The thesis that VISION is proposing to the “SIENA CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE” is that the crisis that we are witnessing is not a decline of democracy as such but more about the technological obsolescence of the instruments that liberal democracies have used for decades to reflect the opinions of citizens in policy making².

As for the chart below, the idea is that what made liberal democracies outperform their autocratic competitors was their superior capability to make decisions based on information. Today some

² The thesis is that the crisis ultimately comes from a widening gap between the quantity of information we can access, elaborate, and transmit and the tools (elections every four years, binary referendums, etc.) we still use to make people participate. The former increases the expectation of individuals to have their opinions taken on board; the latter act as a bottleneck creating frustration. Such an interpretation of the crisis of liberal democracy draws on a comparison between the printing machine in the Middle Ages and the Internet in the twenty-first century. They both hugely reallocated information and thus power and therefore they both had as a direct consequence a transformation through which power was acquired and exercised. The printing machine started a revolution ending with the end of absolute monarchies and the birth of liberal democracies; the Internet will demand liberal democracies to reinvent themselves to survive technological obsolescence.

technocracies have the advantage of quicker decisions, as the internet lessens the information disadvantage; whereas smaller liberal democracies are experimenting tools to update participation mechanisms.

FIGURE 1 - DEMOCRACY AS AN INFORMATION SYSTEM
A THESIS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE OF A POLITICAL REGIME
AND ITS DEMOCRACY DEPTH



Source: Vision

This brings us to propose the idea that in order to save democracy, we must increase it and make it deeper and more information rich. And have Europe become forerunners of the process.

Citizens' assemblies as a participatory democracy tool that the "Conference on the Future of Europe has promoted". Electronic voting as an enabler of more frequent and informed participation in the deliberation process. Flexible constituencies that take in account that citizenship may not be necessarily bound to a specific geographical area (as for Vision's proposals on "flexible transnational constituencies"). Europe-wide referendums with more than two possible answers. These may be some of the experimentations that Europe may pioneer and of which the conferences may discuss the feasibility.

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