

PSSG 1

EU Democracy: citizen power and the actions to overcome the «disconnect»

PSSG 1 aims to address the following question: **how can the EU become a laboratory for strengthening transnational democracy in a “post-international law” world?** This question, which appears especially timely in these difficult times, also raises two additional issues that have been central to previous editions of our conference but still seem largely neglected: is there necessarily a trade-off between democracy and efficiency? And how can we make the European project popular again?

More specifically, in this edition of the conference, the working group devoted to EU democracy seeks to develop a **concrete reflection** on the ways in which, on the one hand, theoretical thinking on deliberative and participatory democracy and, on the other hand, analyses of the crisis of representative institutions can converge beyond the “ivory tower” of academic debate and engage more directly with citizens’ needs, particularly those of younger generations.

The discussion will therefore begin from the need to involve each PSSG participant in a concrete debate on how to strengthen collective awareness of **citizen power** within the EU, so as to achieve a sufficiently stable position within supranational decision-making processes while, at the same time, reducing the perception of a “**representative disconnect**” within the European democratic environment.

There are **several concrete examples of deliberative processes that we can propose or discuss**. They may concern both specific issues related to decision-making within the European Union—such as institutional policies, future enlargements, and decision-making procedures within the Council—as well as broader questions of international politics that, in the current critical moment, the Union must be able to address in a unified manner.

For this reason, we will ask the pool of experts – drawn from different professional backgrounds and, above all, from different generations – thanks to the participation of students and pre- and post-doctoral scholars within the group – to reflect on the best way to design a decision-making process grounded in the institutional chain of representation within the EU, yet strengthened by deliberative experiences capable of enhancing citizens’ power. The aim is to foster informed, conscious, and broadly shared decisions on issues such as the possible revival of nuclear energy production.

The students from the University of Siena participating in the working group had already explored a range of ideas and reflections. A recurring theme in their discussions was the need to **strengthen civic engagement initiatives aimed at younger generations** and to foster a deeper commitment to democratic participation. Traditional civic engagement models frequently misinterpret youth political behavior as apathy. To address the "representative disconnect" within the European Union, theoretical frameworks of participatory democracy must evolve to leverage the digital public sphere and integrate digital diplomacy and transnational communication infrastructures to capture youth political energy (Ksenia).

Alongside traditional communication tools and renewed opportunities for youth mobility and social interaction, specific measures such as **young sortition quotas** and **youth check juries** appear increasingly necessary to ensure the sustained engagement of Generation Z (Federico). As extensively discussed by other students (i.e. Paula), the emphasis placed on transparency and citizen involvement should be at least as strong as that placed on efficiency, and this principle can be tested across a variety of decision-making processes.

The participation of younger generations should be guaranteed by deliberately over-representing these groups in citizens' assemblies operating at the local/national level or, potentially, in coordinated formats across EU member states. Such assemblies could experiment with deliberative processes based on a two-way model of **epistemic democracy** (Sena): on the one hand, providing citizens with information, knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful exchange; on the other, updating and stimulating institutions and formal decision makers through the effective transmission of informed public preferences and collective demands.

The issues addressed within these forums may vary considerably. The group discussed one particularly ambitious example: **a common European decision on the possible revival and expansion of nuclear energy**. Precisely because of its exceptional complexity, this type of decision – one that is crucial to the future of the European Union – could serve as a key testing ground for a **democratic reconnection strategy built around the logic of citizen power**.

.