Working Group report and nine policy recommendations by the PES Working Group on fighting voter abstention

Chaired by PES Presidency Member Mr. Raymond Johansen

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SUMMARY

The labour movement fought and won the right to vote for all. Therefore we in particular are concerned about the trend of too many voters not using the fundamental democratic right to vote. Since the European Parliament was first elected in 1979, we have seen turnout steadily decrease. Turnout in 2014 reached a historic low. We must analyse the reasons and find strategies to turn the tides. Europe’s democracy must be strengthened through fighting voter abstention.

On 20 November 2014 the PES presidency decided to establish a special working group dedicated to fighting voter abstention, chaired by Raymond Johansen, PES presidency member on behalf of the Norwegian Labour Party. The mandate was to explore and propose policy recommendations, aiming to increasing turnout by making voting easier and more accessible. Since the presidency decision the working group has gathered 4 times in Brussels and has arranged a study visit to Oslo with the mission to analyse more deeply the strategies to fight voter abstention in Norway.

This report is a result of these working group session for which member parties and a number of external experts had been invited. This report is written by the Working Group chaired by me, the undersigned. This report offers a policy menu on how to make voting easier and more accessible. Voter abstention is one of the biggest challenges for democracy in Europe. As this report thoroughly describes, there are several reasons for voter abstention, but particularly two main explanations: 1) Citizens lost trust in established political parties and systems 2) there are practical obstacles to turnout in the electoral system.

In addition, when it comes to European elections, these are considered as second order elections and this element forms an extra obstacle for voters to reach the polling stations. Following the mandate given by the PES Presidency this working group has mainly focused on the practical obstacles for citizens to vote – not on reasons rooted in policy choices, nor on anti-politics and anti-establishment trends.

The European elections are the sum of 28 national elections, carried out in different ways. Only some basic principles are set by EU law. Diverse electoral traditions and diverging constitutional law in the Member States are the reasons why these 28 elections are organized differently. The European Parliament has repeatedly tried to harmonize the rules for European parliamentary elections, but has so far not found enough support in Council or Commission to succeed.

We respect the diversity of democratic traditions and cultures among EU’s member states. This report is not written as an attempt to harmonize national electoral law as such, but is written to share knowledge on voter abstention, offering strategies to reconnect with voters and policy recommendations which we encourage member parties to choose from and work towards as they see fit, within their country’s context.

The majority of Europe’s political parties and electoral laws were established more than 100 years ago. Now we need new leadership to strengthen Europe’s democracy by making voting easier and more accessible. Practical obstacles to vote have deep political consequences. This issue is very close to my heart, and the reason why I agreed to chair this PES working group.

In order to fight voter abstention we must understand all voters, especially the youth. Our working group has therefore spent a substantial amount of time on the topic of “millennials”, born between
1980 and 2000. This generation is often labelled as disengaged, but that is a myth we must bust. The good news is that millennials are ready to engage and turn out to vote. The reality is that they feel their views are largely being ignored by traditional parties. We have an opportunity to involve this generation in new ways. The PES member parties must understand this generation in order to connect with them. We have therefore included a section with key findings from the FEPS research project “millennial dialogue”1 and FEPS strategies to incentivize their participation and turnout.

Our working group has narrowed the discussions down to seven key issues, and has developed all together nine concrete policy recommendations. To summarise the nine recommendations: 1) Extend the number of election days 2) Implement or extend early voting 3) Expand access to polling stations 4) Introduce pilots with voting age limit at 16 5) Lower the age limit to run as a MEP to 18 6) Remove voting registration as a precondition where it is an obstacle to turnout 7) Improve voting from abroad 8) Carefully consider the testing of safe electronic voting systems2 under the right conditions 9) Strengthen citizens’ knowledge on the process of voting and participation.

This report is structured in six parts. 1) Summary. 2) Summary of the nine policy recommendation to make voting easier and more accessible. 3) Brief overview on European elections with national electoral laws. 4) Key findings about the Millennial generation and actions to connect and increase participation 5) Summery of the working group’s activity 6) Seven areas of discussion and nine policy recommendations to make voting easier and more accessible.

It has been a privilege to chair this group, with many honest and fruitful discussions. I want to thank the PES member parties joining this conversation and sharing their experience, and the PES partners and external contributors that have taken their time to share knowledge during our working group meetings. I encourage all our Presidency members and member parties to read this report, pick the recommendations that are relevant to each country/party, lift public debate and push for national electoral reform, with the goal to make voting easier and more accessible, and thereby fight voter abstention, through strengthening the voters’ democratic right to vote.

With best regards,

Raymond Johansen
PES Working group chair

1 https://www.millennialdialogue.com/
2 PES member parties are encouraged to carefully consider exploring the possibility to introduce pilot projects with web-based voting, given that the member state has certain preconditions (read more on page 41)
SUMMARY OF THE NINE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Early voting:** We encourage all PES member parties to consider working for better access to polling stations in various places and shapes that will enable more citizens to vote (1).

**Access to polling stations:** We encourage all PES member parties to consider working toward a four-day election (not limiting to European Election Day - but election days during the official period set by the EU) (2). We encourage all PES member parties to consider working towards introducing or expanding the early voting period (3).

**Age limits for voting and standing for election:** We encourage all PES member parties to consider implementing pilot projects opening for voting for 16-18 year olds - and consider this project to be followed by a study to measure the effect on turn out (4). We encourage all PES member parties to consider lowering the age limit for MEP candidates to 18, where that isn’t already the limit (5).

**Voting registration as a precondition:** We encourage all member parties with registration procedures as a precondition to vote considers working towards removing those procedures that represents barriers for voters to turn out, in order to make voting easier and more accessible (6).

**Voting from abroad:** We encourage all PES member parties to consider implementing or simplifying and strengthening the possibility to vote from abroad. We therefor encourage all PES member parties to consider implementing or extending the possibility to vote by post, proxy-voting, at embassies or by e-voting³ (7).

**Safe electronic systems of voting**

If a member state has these preconditions:

1) Widespread Internet penetration
2) Legal structure that addresses Internet voting issues
3) Identification system that allows for digital authentication of the voter (digital signature)
4) Political, public and administrative culture that is supportive of Internet voting

We encourage PES member parties to carefully consider exploring the possibility to introduce pilot projects with web-based voting, in order to make voting easier and more accessible, followed by a study to measure the effect on turnout. It is wise to start gradually with a limited number in the local elections or voting from abroad (8).

**Citizens’ awareness:** We encourage all member parties to undertake actions to strengthen citizens’ knowledge of the political system, the right to vote, the process of voting and the differences between the parties (9).

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³ PES member parties are encouraged to carefully consider exploring the possibility to introduce pilot projects with web-based voting, given that the member state has certain preconditions (read more on page 41)
EUROPEAN ELECTIONS, NATIONAL RULES

Elections to the European Parliament take place every five years by universal adult suffrage. 751 MEPs are elected to the European Parliament, which has been directly elected since 1979. No other EU institutions are directly elected. The Council of the European Union and the European Council are indirectly legitimated through national elections. European parties have the right to campaign EU-wide for the European elections, but unsurprisingly campaigns still take place through national election campaigns, advertising national delegates from national parties.

There is no uniform voting system for the election of MEPs; rather, each member state is free to choose its own system, with some restrictions:

- The system must be a form of proportional representation, under either the party list or the single transferable vote system.
- The electoral area may be subdivided if this will not generally affect the proportional nature of the voting system.

Turnout EP elections

Voter turnout in the European elections has fallen steadily from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2009. Many thought history was written during European Parliament election night in 2014. Turnout was estimated at 43,1%. Had the common candidate process broken the negative trend? No, the European election in 2014 reached a historic low turnout at 42,6%. The number of absentees was 57.4%. This is the lowest turnout since the first EU election in 1979, and very dramatic.

Source: TNS/Scytl in cooperation with the European Parliament
Turnout EP election 2014

The European Parliament election in 2014 was made up of the national elections held in the 28 member states between 22 and 25 May 2014. 400 million Europeans were eligible to vote. The turnout was 42.6 %. This means that only around 170 million European used their right to vote. The participation was down by 0,36 % compared to 2009. Voter abstention was an all-time high at 57,4%, which means that over 230 million voters did not turn out to vote.

In reality this means that if all abstainers were represented as one group in the European Parliament they would have an absolute majority. These figures would be even worse if there wasn't compulsory voting in Belgium, Greece and Luxembourg. In Slovakia the turnout was as low as 13 percent. How far can turnout fall before elections are no longer legitimate?

The turnout trend differed significantly across the member states, ranging from +26.37 points in Lithuania to -23.46 points in Latvia. Turnout increased significantly in seven member states compared to 2009 EP elections, was relatively unchanged in six and decreased in 15. More men than women used their right to vote. Voter turnout was 45 percent for men against 40.7 percent for women. The gender gap has widened from 2 points in 2009 to 4 points today.

Reasons for voter abstention

Reasons for voter abstention are many and complex. Loss of trust towards the established political parties is one of the main reasons, and among the most serious issues for Europe's democracy, but it is not new. Established political parties have discussed these trust issues for decades. These discussions must be replaces by urgent action. This challenge is outside our mandate, but it provides a crucial context for our work, and naturally we must address it briefly here.

When people lose trust in political institutions, organizations and politicians, the legitimacy of democracy weakens, and this in turn undermines our democracy. Do we fully grasp the power of the global drivers such as globalization, urbanization, migration, digitalization and climate change, which are changing the everyday lives of our citizens faster than ever? These drivers are very different from those that prevailed when our political system was built. Do we offer a positive progressive narrative to our voters?

Turnout among European youth

According to the Eurobarometer only 28 percent of young EU-citizens (between 18 and 24) turned out to vote in 2014. This is lower than any other age group, although the levels differed significantly. This is a big drop from the 64 percent of young people (15-30 year olds) surveyed in May 2013 who said they intended to vote in the European elections. But it continues the trend from 2009 when 29 percent of youth voted. Research by the League of Young Voters showed that young people are interested in politics, but that political parties are out of touch with them and the different ways that young people wish to get involved.

Only three countries bucked this trend; in Belgium, Luxembourg, and Sweden youth turnout was higher than the average turnout. As Belgium and Luxembourg have mandatory voting, their differences are small. In Sweden, 66 percent of youth voted, which is about 15 points higher from the average. But there are also countries where the negative gap is much wider – only 21 percent
of Irish and 10 percent of Finnish youth turned out, with a difference of more than 31 points compared to average in these countries. Another great concern is the turnout in Eastern Europe. The countries ranked lowest in overall turnout are all eastern – with Romania, Latvia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia all having a turnout lower than one third. This is not a strong mandate for a European Parliament.

Election systems country by country

Members of the European Parliament are elected according to national electoral systems, but these have to observe certain common provisions established by EU law such as proportional representation. As a general rule, voters can choose between political parties, individual candidates or both. While in some member states, voters can only vote for a list, without the possibility to change the order of candidates on the list (closed list), in other member states voters can express their preference for one or more of the candidates (preferential voting).

Most member states of the European Union elect their MEPs with a single constituency covering the entire state, using party-list proportional representation. There is however a great variety of electoral procedures: some countries use the highest averages method of proportional representation, some use the largest remainder method, and some open lists and others closed.

In addition, the method of calculating the quota and the election threshold vary from country to country. Countries with multiple constituencies are Belgium, France, Republic of Ireland, Malta, and the UK. Germany, Italy and Poland use a different system, whereby parties are awarded seats based on their nationwide vote as in all of the states which elect members from a single constituency; these seats are given to the candidates on regional lists.

With the number of seats for each party known, these are given to the candidates on the regional lists based on the number of votes from each region towards the party's nationwide total, awarded proportionally to the regions. These subdivisions are not strictly constituencies, as they do not decide how many seats each party is awarded, but are districts that the members represent once elected. The number of members for each region is decided dynamically after the election, and depends on regional voter turnout. A region with high turnout will result in more votes for the parties there, which will result in a greater number of MEPs elected for that region.

Reasons of abstention

It has been asserted that European elections are fought on national issues and used by voters to punish their governments mid-term, making European Parliament elections national elections of second rank. Turnout has been falling steadily since the first elections in 1979, indicating increased apathy about the Parliament despite its increase in power over that period.

Actually, the large majority of PES parties – in 20 out of 28 member states – suffered electoral losses in the 2014 European election. If we compare the results of the turnout from the EP election 2014 with the results from the different European general elections in 2014 all, except from Belgium, experienced a dramatic decrease in the EP election.
Overview of reasons for voter abstention (European average)

After the 2014 EP elections⁴, we got a deeper analysis behind people’s different reasons for not turning out and using their right to vote. Overall the main answers were that a quarter of the population (23%) did not vote because of lack of trust in politicians, 19% because they were not interested in politics and 14% of people thought that voting does not change anything. The number of abstainers stating practical reasons for not turning up is as high as 40%. To give these number some context the survey allowed to tick maximum three boxes out of 17 (TNS, European average).

- **On holiday or away from home** (10%)
- **Sick or health problems at the time** (7%)
- **Too busy or no time or at work** (13%)
- **Involved in family or leisure activity** (6%).
- **Registration or voting card problem** (4%)

No citizen should be prevented from exercising their fundamental right to vote because they are sick, have to work or live too far from a polling station. We must extend the possibility to vote, simplify the action of voting and make sure that people can more easily take part in democracy. The electoral system must not be a hinder to turnout or access to the fundamental right to vote.

**Brief historic overview**

The Treaty on European Union contains a mandate for the European Parliament to put forward a proposal for a uniform procedure for European elections or an electoral procedure in accordance with principles common to all Member States. Parliament has continuously made efforts to increase ‘harmonization’ of electoral rules for the EP elections, beyond those enshrined in the 1976 Act (as amended in 2002). But the procedure for European elections is still governed to a great extent by national electoral rules.

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⁴ TNS Post Election Survey 2014
Practical arrangements for the elections in 2014

The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on improving the practical arrangements for holding European elections in 2014 (2013/2102(INL)). Here is an excerpt from European Parliament resolution showing the EU’s keen interest in making voting easier and more accessible for Europeans, calling on the member states to adjust: The 2014 elections will be the first to take place after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty – which widens significantly the powers of the European Parliament, including its role in the election of the President of the Commission – and, accordingly, will provide a key opportunity to increase the transparency of the elections and strengthen their European dimension;

➢ Turnout at the elections is likely to be enhanced by a lively political campaign in which political parties and their candidates compete for votes and seats on the basis of alternative programs which address the European dimension of politics

➢ Repeated opinion polls suggest that a large majority would be inclined to vote if they were better informed about the European Parliament, the political parties, their programs and candidates; whereas all media outlets are therefore encouraged to bring maximum attention to the elections;

➢ Calls on the political parties to ensure that the names of the candidates selected to stand for election to the European Parliament are made public at least six weeks before the start of polling;

➢ Calls on the Member States and the political parties to press for a higher proportion of women on the lists of candidates and, as far as possible, to encourage the drafting of lists that ensure equal representation;

➢ Calls on the national political parties to inform citizens, before and during the electoral campaign, about their affiliation with a European political party and their support for its candidate for the Commission presidency and for his or her political program;

➢ Encourages the Member States to permit political broadcasts by the European political parties;

➢ Recommends that the Member States take all necessary steps to give effective implementation to the measures agreed on to assist citizens who wish to vote or stand as candidates in states other than their own;

➢ Calls on the Member States to organise a public campaign to encourage citizens to turn out to vote, with the aim of halting falling participation rates;

Reform of the EU Electoral Law

On November 6 2014, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) decided to draw up a legislative initiative report on the “Reform of the EU Electoral Law” (Co-Rapporteurs Danuta Hübner and Jo Leinen). The aim of the report was to draft proposals for changes, pursuant to article 223 TFEU, to the electoral law of the European Union as it is laid down in the 1976 Electoral Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 1976, as amended in 2002.

In September 2015 the legislative initiative report on the “Reform of the Electoral Law of the European Union” was published, drawn up by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs that called for amendment of the Act concerning the election of Members of the European Parliament. In this report, the Co-Rapporteurs propose a number of measures with the aim of enhancing the democratic nature of the European elections. This report was a crucial part of the preparations for the resolution passed in the European Parliament on 11 November 2015.

The Treaty of the European Union gives the Parliament the right to initiate reform of the European electoral law by formulating proposals, which the Council must decide upon by unanimity. Then, the amendments to the European Electoral Act are submitted for ratification to the member states. If the process succeeds, this would be a reform of the EU electoral law, which dates back to 1976. The resolution was passed by 315 votes to 234, with 55 abstentions.

Among policy in the resolution⁷: European elections should be fought with formally endorsed, EU-wide lead candidates (“Spitzenkandidaten”) for the Commission presidency. The candidates should be formally nominated at least 12 weeks before the elections. For bigger EU countries, the EP advocates mandatory thresholds for obtaining seats in the European Parliament, ranging from 3 to 5% of the vote. All EU citizens living abroad must be able to vote in EU elections. Electronic, online and postal-voting systems should be made available in all member states.

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THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

As described in the section “turnout among European youth”, only 28 percent of young EU citizens (between 18 and 24) turned out to vote in 2014. This is lower than any other age group and continues the trend from 2009, when 29 percent of youth voted. 72% in this age group did not use their fundamental right to vote. Sweden was the only country without mandatory voting that had higher turnout than average (66% of the youth vote, which is actually 15 points higher).

As mentioned, research released by the League of Young Voters\(^8\) shows that young people are interested in politics, but that political parties are out of touch with them and the different ways in which young people wish to get involved. These findings correlate with the research from the FEPS Millennial Dialogue project, which simply put is the most comprehensive and far-reaching international survey of Millennials ever taken.

This study’s goal is to understand the values, aspirations and attitudes that Millennials have with regards to politics and political systems. Since then, research has expanded over 23 countries in 5 continents and is set to grow even further with the valuable assistance of FEPS partners all across the world.

Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, are often labelled as lazy and disengaged. This myth must be busted, especially from, and within the PES member parties. It is crucial for the labour movement to understand this generation, in order to connect with and engage these voters. The good news is that millennials are ready to engage and turn out. The reality is that they feel their views are largely being ignored by traditional parties. At the same time, millennials do not think the established parties and some of their politicians take ethics, leadership and their democratic legitimacy seriously. This is very serious for Europe’s democracy.

What many European millennials witness are broken promises, lost jobs and an economic crisis. Today more than 4.5 million young people (under 25) are unemployed in the EU, with peaks of more than 40% in some countries. Over 4.5 million young lives are put on hold. Trust is lost when decent hard-working taxpayers are given countless broken promises of prosperity, and wars are started on false grounds.

This next chapter is formulated by Ania Skrzypek, FEPS Senior Research Fellow and Maria Freitas, FEPS Policy Advisor, who have been crucial contributors in our PES working group on fighting voter abstention and increase turnout among Millennials. Skrzypek and Freitas have boiled down their research to key findings and strategies to increase Millennials’ participation in political parties and to incentivise their turnout.

**Connecting Millennials with Progressive Politics and Parties**

Millennials do not find political parties or partisan life particularly appealing. This statement is backed by survey results that show consistently that Millennials are profoundly sceptical about traditional, institutional politics and, in particular, that they lack confidence in politicians and political parties. In fact, across Europe, most politicians and political parties are perceived as removed and distant from

\(^{8}\) https://euobserver.com/opinion/126431
real problems, as they are frequently seen as self-serving, corrupt, deceitful and ineffective.

Here we have included three of the main findings from the report “10 cornerstones for a Dialogue between the Progressive Family and the Millennials Generation”\(^9\). You can find the full version of this summary at https://www.millennialdialogue.com/

**1. Millennials are not interested in politics in its current format. They are, however, politically aware. And they would be ready to vote should elections take place tomorrow.**

Only one fifth (or less) of Millennials declare themselves interested in politics. About half of them claim *not to be interested at all*. Even lower scores are noted among the youngest part of the surveyed group (15 – 17 years old), in which less than one in ten is interested in politics.

But at the same time, a vast majority states that they would be ready to vote *should elections take place tomorrow*. The contrast between remaining uninterested and yet being willing to cast a vote is best shown by Spanish and German data, where four fifths would go and vote, while less than one fifth consider themselves interested in politics.

Millennials believe that the global economy is one of the greatest forces defining their lives and their futures. Its primacy both internationally and nationally is reconfirmed by the fact that they consider economy more powerful than politics on global, national or local levels respectively.

Although Millennials declare themselves uninterested in politics, they are well aware of the main parties and who the leading politicians are in their respective countries. Typically, over ninety percent can name the head of their state, and also know the largest parties. On average the progressive and the conservative families are almost equally known, with the exception of France - where progressives (Socialists) are twice as familiar to the Millennials than any party of the centre right.

**Conclusion:** It is not the lack of knowledge or lack of willingness to engage that keeps Millennials away from polling stations or partisan life. It is rather an idea that contemporary politics is weak, subordinated to the economy and does not represent a quality that would match Millennials’ clear expectations.

**2. Millennials don’t think that the traditional parties represent them, but know what would need to be done to repair the broken link.**

Over two thirds of Millennials believe their views are being largely ignored by politicians. Young Bulgarians, Romanians and Italians are most disappointed – where the numbers are higher than 80%. It contrasts with the fact that a very small group believes that they can make themselves heard. This is the case for only one third of young Romanians; for as little as only one in five young Brits, Spanish and Irish; and only one in ten young Austrians, Bulgarians or Hungarians.

Millennials feel that politicians are more concerned with older people than they are with them. This is the view expressed by two out of three Millennials, with the numbers most critical for Spain, the UK and Germany.

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\(^9\) This summary includes the main findings, which derive from the paper issues by the same authors in June 2016 under the same title. The original, extended version can be retrieved here: http://www.calltoeurope.eu/assets/b6bba582-cc87-4023-8b2c-39e895e7477fa/2016%2006%2014%20md%20final%20paper_done.pdf
At the same time, an average of half of Millennials feel that politicians want to control and restrict them. This contrasts especially strongly with the numbers that show how few among them believe that most politicians want the best possible future for young people. The average here is one in five. The two extremes on the scale here are above thirty five percent of young Brits and little more than ten percent of the young Hungarians.

**Conclusions:** The data show that Millennials feel unrepresented and that they believe the current political system caters mostly to the vested interests of older generations. They see politicians as people who actually narrow opportunities and seek to control them. This would indicate that a new agenda is needed to prove that politics can serve all demographics, building on solidarity and common hopes for improvement. To that end, clearly it would need to embody a new, distinctive understanding that the nature of freedom can be described in a modern manner offering broadening of choices and possibilities to all.

### 3. Millennials do not feel a connection with the contemporary partisan system, but they are ready to imagine themselves as initiators or as a part of a campaign.

Millennials believe personal integrity (embodied by qualities such as honesty and trustworthiness) and social competences (represented by ability to listen to others and to understand young people) are indispensable to win their support. These abilities score much higher than the ability to come across well on TV/ radio or the ability to keep up with the latest technologies. The gap between the values given to the two above is on average a third of all votes.

Even if knowledge of IT and skills in new technologies are not the most important for the Millennials, while asked, they generally do not see the progressive parties to champion these fields (with exception of Partito Democratico in Italy and the Labour Party in the UK).

Millennials see social networks equally suitable to the more traditional media (TV and radio) in terms of offering a platform to launch a campaign. In some cases, such as Ireland, Poland and Spain, TV and radio are in fact more highly valued as a starting point. They would consider both should they themselves be in charge of a launch, along with getting a well-known personality to back the campaign. One in three Millennials would address a well-known personality to back their campaigns, while only one in six would contact a local member of parliament first.

Millennials say that launching a campaign through media (traditional or new) is more appropriate than starting with a peaceful demonstration or by addressing a government with a petition. The latter would only be chosen as a means to campaign by one in ten. The data show that their objective would be first of all to reach out to broader audience (generally speaking ‘society’) and not to address politicians or institutions in the first instance.

Though social media are popular amongst Millennials as a potential platform for starting and running a campaign, Millennials remain attached to the written word in traditional forms. As a communication method, more than two thirds among them would choose to write an article in a newspaper and in most cases only a few less would opt for online articles or blogs. Social networks are less popular, while posters, leaflets and YouTube videos are even less preferred.

**Conclusions:** Millennials indicate that they see campaigns first and foremost as mobilizations aiming at connecting and engaging broader groups within society. Institutionalized political outcomes are
consequential, but secondary in outlining a strategy. Contrary to assumptions, they consider traditional media and social media to be equally important in terms of effective political communication.

And finally, they also value words, especially the written word, which may suggest that published manifestos are not at all out of fashion. With that in mind, it would seem that the recipe for a successful modern campaign would lay in balancing traditional and new communication methods, with the initial objective being to gather broader social attention for the issue in question.

The Millennials deception can be summarized in three issues:
- Millennials feel that their views are being ignored;
- Millennials feel that politicians are more concerned with older people than with younger people;
- Millennials do not feel that they can make themselves heard.

The questions of how to re-engage young people – Millennials, those born between 1980-2000, aged 15-35 – in politics, and how to make progressive political organizations fit for this distinct demographic, are some of the key issues for revitalising and modernising the labour movement. It is crucial that our movement is successful in this regard.

1. Strategies to increase Millennials’ participation in political parties

The decline in trust towards political institutions, organizations and political parties is a consequence of the turbulent times in which we live – and this is even more so for Millennials.

Entering the labour market is a test for many young people throughout Europe. The process of finding a first job can be lengthy and often without meeting Millennials’ expectations. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, it is not just difficult for Millennials to access the labour market but it is equally difficult to remain in the labour market and to have a good quality job. This of course means that today’s youth cannot be independent, cannot make plans for the future and hence become quickly disillusioned when governments do not seem able to provide quick and effective solutions to the current state of things.

But there is reason for optimism because, despite the gloomy context that surrounds this generation, Millennials are not only happy and positive about their future but also show openness to change by listing the conditions that would incentivize them to take part in partisan life. Formalized party membership, for instance, is in no longer an attractive formula (A. Skrzypek) for Millennials, but there are other ways forward to reduce their disaffection with traditional political parties:

For Millennials, political parties need to:
1. Be more creative and provide participatory channels where Millennials are team players in the intra-party debates and internal decision-making. The answer is therefore local - local party branches should be empowered to have a greater say in the making of internal decisions; for instance the EU’s Structured Dialogue on youth, whereby Millennials are co-deciders in key decisions across several policy fields, is a positive framework that should be replicated elsewhere at different levels (T. Deželan).
2. **Propose a ‘new opening’** to broadly engage not only members but also sympathisers and potential groups of interest, for example, by **introducing a ‘trial membership’** for those interested in taking part but who are discouraged by high membership fees (F. Wolkenstein).

3. **Enable discussions through online political forums and e-consultations.** This would be an overall way of reducing participatory costs and of embracing the Millennial culture.

**Online political forums** tend to be organized at the national level by government institutions or media organizations to enable an interactive relationship between politicians and citizens. Despite their merits, these tools fall short in their objective to enhance a constructive debate between these two actors, firstly because government representatives tend not to participate since they lack time and secondly because the forums prove to be an outlet for ill-informed opinions, prejudice or abuse (D. Janssen, R. Kies).

Another digital tool that allows online participation of citizens in the political process is the **e-consultation forum**. These can take a variety of forms - with(out) identification / moderation; strong / weak public spaces, and can refer to different topics, but generally they have the same objective as online political forums - to raise the voice of citizens. How online political forums and e-consultation forums differ from another is that in the latter, there is a direct implication of citizens in the decision-making process.

Then again, this tool faces the same challenge – the active participation of government officials or politicians and the extent in which these are actually deliberative. However, the example of the first UK e-consultation forum on a draft Bill (Commbill.net) proved to have a direct impact in the policy-making process. In fact, the e-consultation was referenced a number of times by both Houses of Parliament, and two of its key policy-recommendations were incorporated into the Bill (D. Janssen, R. Kies).

**2. Strategies to incentivise Millennials turnout**
Contrary to common belief, **Millennials are not averse to voting.** In fact, the global results of the Millennial Dialogue show that **this group cohort declares to be ready to vote should elections take place tomorrow.** This striking finding needs to be interpreted in conjunction with the low interest that they have in politics. The conclusion is that it is wrong and unhelpful to pathologise this generation in a negative manner by labelling them as withdrawn, introverted and uninterested (A. Skrzypek, M. Freitas). **Millennials have pulled out of the traditional political framework but they are politically aware and ready to speak up for their civic rights** (A. Skrzypek).

In this context it is worthwhile to consider Millennials’ own proposals of electoral reform:

**E-voting and Smart voting**

The Internet has allowed for a widespread usage of online campaigning both by political parties and candidates in the run-up to elections. However, much rarer are the tools that allow the electorate to cast their vote online (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel). The Millennial generation embraced the technological progress that was brought about by the ICT revolution and see the new digital world as an opportunity. So it does not come as a surprise that Millennials believe the electoral process should be reformed and modernised. In this context, **online voting could be a promising way forward, as the Estonian case positively attests.** Evidence shows that **Internet voting increased turnout.** Online voting lowers significantly the barriers that Millennials
face when they want to turn out to vote and **is in fact an attractive way of securing Millennials electoral participation.**

**Challenges of e-participation:** Even though younger voters prefer Internet voting, it is important to address some challenges of e-participation and outline circumstances that need to exist to make Internet work. **Gender:** Research shows that e-voting could potentially worsen the gender gap as the ‘digital divide’ generally includes a divide between a more male access to the internet (A. Trechsel). The same applies for 2005 local online elections in Estonia – Millennials turnout was high but most e-voters were young and male.

**Language:** E-voting turnout can be hindered in a given country due to language. Again, the Estonian case attests that a large number of Russian-speaking citizens did not vote as the Internet voting platform was only presented in Estonian. Therefore, the natural recommendation would be to have a bilingual or multilingual Internet platform to avoid exclusion or discrimination (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel).

**Preconditions necessary to make Internet voting work**
(R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel)

- Widespread Internet penetration;

- Legal structure that addresses Internet voting issues (possibility of pre-voting, authentication process, ensuring that Internet voters do not cast ballots on the election day, final ballot reconciliation);

- Identification system that allows for digital authentication of the voter (digital signature makes it easier to introduce Internet voting but it is not a prerequisite);

- Political, public and administrative culture that is supportive of Internet voting (Internet voting was at the heart of intra-governmental activities in Estonia for a long period of time).

**Smart voting is another Internet-based tool suggested to enhance political participation.** Research shows that the introduction of smart voting during electoral campaigns helps citizens evaluate their political preferences and match them with those of the candidates. This system has been tested in numerous elections (ex: Swiss elections in 2003, Dutch elections in 2006), but again in most elections men tended to participate much more than women.

In sum, one should be cautious to assign a priori inclusive qualities to ICT innovations to increase electoral participation. The Internet is not a magic bullet to incentivize Millennials to take part in politics but it is definitely a starting point to bring politics closer to this part of the electorate – technology can produce a positive change in our democracies.

**Ability to vote in more places**

Millennials often responded that the technical barriers to voting should be reduced. By this they meant that the time frame to cast your vote should be extended but also that one should be able to vote online, via a secure app or website and/or to be able to vote in more places, like in shopping malls or libraries.

**Lowering the voting age**

Giving younger Millennials the right to vote is a rational incentive to make them more interested about politics and potentially become politically active (M. Wagner, D. Johann and S. Kritzinger).
Millennials aged 16 and 18 who are legally considered old enough to marry, drive a car, own a business, pay tax or die for their country were not even allowed to vote in the EU Referendum in the UK (although a poll conducted by The Student Room showed that 82% of voters in this age group would have voted to remain).

At present, Austria, the only European country where the voting age for national elections is 16, shows that teenagers do not lack the competence to make informed electoral choices and hence effectively participate in the democratic process. Lowering the voting age does not appear to have a negative impact on input legitimacy and the quality of democratic decisions (M. Wagner, D. Johann and S. Kritzinger); quite the contrary. This institutional reform should be seriously considered because of its potential positive impact.

The EU referendum outcome in the UK confirmed that British youth was excluded from the political system and its decision-making processes (K. Owen, C. Macfarland). According to the polling organisation YouGov, 75% of 18-24 year olds and 56% of 25-49 year olds voted to remain in Europe but their wishes have been set aside by older generations who arguably have less to lose, or at least less time to endure the consequences.

The recent outcome of the US 2016 elections should also be analysed as it heightened the significance of these divides – the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton had a nearly nationwide advantage with Millennials over the Republican nominee and now President of the United States Donald Trump. The Scottish independence referendum is yet another positive example in which 16 year-olds showed to be interested in politics and engaged in political conversations. Millennials do take part, especially if they see the impact of their vote.

Instead of suggesting intergenerational warfare (K. Owen, C. Macfarland), these two cases call for deeper reflection: Millennials are more likely to vote in order to have their opinion heard or because they feel strongly about a certain issue. In light of this, political parties should be aware that younger people are more easily deterred from voting if they do not think that their vote will achieve something. The challenge for progressives is to prove that their politics are dictated by a clear system of values that would not be undermined by coalition agreements (FEPS Young Academics).

3. The importance of civic education to foster Millennials political engagement

Millennials are politically well informed but they also believe that it is important to keep the connection between civic education and political literacy as a critical component on how to improve their trust and participation in politics. This would allow young people to manage their expectations towards the politics of today and increase their sensibility towards political participation, as would lowering the voting age.

Research shows that citizens’ education needs to go beyond the school curriculum and should provide students with practical opportunities to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. This could be done by helping set up frameworks of collaboration between schools and youth organisations to run joint citizenship programmes focusing on topical issues such as human rights, immigration, the environment, and intergenerational solidarity (T. Deželan).
SEVEN KEY ISSUES WITH NINE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier in this report, participation is the most important component of Europe`s democracy. It is argued that without public involvement in the political decision-making process, democracy loses both its legitimacy and its guiding force. Voting in elections is one of the basic and conventional types of participation. It is also the most common and longstanding method of citizen engagement in political decision-making process. In other words, voting is the key act of political participation in a democracy.

One of the labour movement`s political goals in 2019 is to increase turnout by fighting voter abstention. This working group`s mandate is to develop concrete policy recommendations to the PES Presidency to address and fight voter abstention. Our working group has chosen to narrow down the focus to seven key areas for which we have developed nine policy recommendations.

We have great respect for the diversity of democratic traditions and cultures among our European national states. The policy recommendations are therefore not a "one size fits all" approach. Instead, they are suggestions that our PES member parties are encouraged to explore, and possibly to spark a national debate in their respective countries to change policies in national electoral law as they see fit, in their country's context, to strengthen the fundamental right to vote.

1. Early voting
2. Access to polling stations
3. Age limits for voting and standing for election
4. Voting registration as a precondition
5. Voting from abroad
6. Safe electronic systems of voting
7. Citizens' awareness

1. Early voting

Early voting (also called pre-poll voting or advance polling) is a process by which voters in a public election can vote prior to the scheduled elections day(s). The goal is to increase voter participation and relieve congestion at polling stations on election day. Early voting can take place remotely, such as via postal voting, or in person, usually in designated early voting polling stations. The availability and time periods for early voting vary among countries that have implemented early voting.

In the United States, Texas become the first state to offer early in-person voting, by the late 1980s. In 1995, Oregon became the first state to conduct a federal primary election entirely by mail. In 2000, Oregon became the first all vote-by-mail state after a citizen`s initiative. Washington did the same in 2011 and Colorado in 2013.

After the Florida recount and "hanging chad" debacle of the 2000 presidential election, a wave of states started adopting early voting because they were worried election officials were too rushed on election day, and to reduce the likelihood of long queues or polling station problems. In 2016, 37 states (and D.C.) allowed some form of early voting before election day on November 8th 2016.
The election days to the European Parliament (EP) is set at EU level. In 2014 the election was held in all EU member states between 22 and 25 May 2014. The precise day of elections was set by Member states. Among the 28 EU member states early voting is not implemented in a large scale.

Lengthening the voting period has proven to have a positive effect on turnout. This is due to several factors, among them the fact that the news on ongoing voting keeps being repeated by the media. There is also more chance for citizens to come across those who have already voted through social interactions and in that way find themselves more encouraged or motivated to vote.

**The Nordic examples**

As stated earlier in this report, Sweden has a much higher turnout than the European average, even among young people. In Sweden, 66 percent of young people voted, which is about 15 points higher than the European average. Early voting can be performed anywhere in Sweden, not just in the home municipality. Sweden has had early voting for many years, and the length of early voting is 30 days prior to election day. In the 2010 elections, 39.4 percent of voters cast their ballot early, compared to 31.8 percent in 2006. Voting in county and municipal elections is open to anyone who has lived in Sweden for at least three years, while EU citizens can vote locally no matter how short a time they have lived in Sweden.

Not only is the length of the voting period relevant in the Swedish context, but so is the extent of places you can cast your vote. There are around 3000 spots around the country where voters can cast early votes. The locations are typically schools, libraries, grocery shops, museums, and train stations, and must all have disabled access. This is a related, but separate issue for policy recommendations from this working group.

In Norway it is possible to vote in advance in any municipal authority area in the whole country, meaning that electors can vote in another municipal authority area from the one where they live and where they are included in the register of electors. Voters are offered two different methods of early voting. As an example from the Norwegian Parliament election on 14 September 2015, the first round of early voting started from July 1, 2015 and lasted till 9 August. This was a scheme for those who were unable to vote on election day or in the ordinary advance voting period. On August 10 the ordinary advance voting started, and lasted till the last Friday before election day (11 September).
At the local elections in 2011, 22.2 percent of the votes were submitted in advance, an increase of 5.5 percentage points compared with the 2007 election and 10.3 percentage points since 2003. The increase in the last election was particularly strong in the ten municipalities that participated in trials of so-called e-Voting, the opportunity to vote electronically.

According to findings from the Institute for Social Research, the increase in voter’s turnout starting in 2003 also follows the increase in the early votes that have been cast. According to Bergh, this does not necessarily mean that a raise in early votes is linked to a higher turnout in general. Those who vote in advance are often the bedrock of voters, who would have voted anyway. However, it is fair to assume that advanced voting has prevented a fall in turnout.

Policy recommendations:
- We encourage all PES member parties to consider working toward a four-day election (not restricted to European election day, but during the official period set by the EU).

- We encourage all PES member parties to consider working towards introducing or expanding the length of early voting.

2. Access to polling stations

Many European citizens live busy lives, and in a variety of ways. Working hours are not regular, family situations can be complicated, people travel and work abroad etc. Short election periods make it more difficult for people to find time to vote. We know that several EU member states have taken action to make polling stations more accessible for voters, but there is great potential for these measures to be extended. There is no rule that says a polling station has to be in a building.

To show some creative solutions to make voting easier, we use examples from European elections in the UK. Voters in Sheffield Hallam could vote at the oldest football ground in the world Hallam FC (picture on the left). Local residents arrived to cast their votes at a polling station in the East Hull Boxing Club in Kingston-Upon-Hull, northern England. Another polling station was set up in a launderette in Oxford. Voters could cast their ballot in a residential garage in Croydon, south London. A caravan was used being as a polling station on Grange Farm, Garthorpe in central England. Voters could even walk into The Crown pub, which is being used as a polling station in South Moreton, southern England.

10 http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/9-weirdest-election-polling-stations-5564422
In Norway mobile booths are available for early voting (picture on the right). As mentioned earlier in this report, there are around 3000 spots in Sweden where early votes can be cast. The locations are typically schools, libraries, grocery shops, museums, and train stations, and must all have disabled access. As we have written about earlier in this report, Millennials often stated that the practical barriers to voting should be reduced, i.e. to be able to vote in more places, like in shopping malls or libraries or other locations used by many people.

Policy recommendation: We encourage all PES member parties to consider working for better access to polling stations in various places and shapes that will enable more citizens to vote.

2. Age limits for voting and standing for election

The minimum age to be eligible to vote and to stand as a candidate in the European elections is established by national law. While the age necessary to be eligible to vote is 18 years in all member states, except Austria where voting age is 16, the minimum age necessary to stand as a candidate in the European elections varies considerably.

Age limit to vote

First time voting is important for developing the habit of voting. According to studies, 16–17 year-olds are interested in politics. Where tested, 16–17 year-olds have voted more than the slightly older young adults. European Parliament and the Council of Europe have recommended it. Already in use in Austria and Estonia, Scotland and Norway have tested it, Sweden making plans for a pilot. Clearly, there is a handful of arguments why that would be beneficial. Among them in a willingness to open politics towards a group of voters who clearly manifests new views on politics and who, to that end, frequently seem profoundly more positive, progressive and pro-European that the contemporary median voters.

Pilot projects with lowering the voting age could bring new energy to the process. But while the 16+ citizens political preferences have been mirrored by many studies, statistics also show that already the little bit older voters, so called “Millennials”, are a generation that tends to abstain from voting. So this recommendation goes hand in hand with an understanding that much work would need to be done by traditional political parties to ensure that the lowering of the voting age is accompanied by intense work to reconnect with young voters.

Giving younger Millennials the right to vote is a rational incentive to make them more interested about politics and potentially become politically active (M. Wagner, D. Johann and S. Kritzinger). Millennials aged 16 and 18 who are legally considered old enough to marry, drive a car, own a business, pay tax or die for their country were not even allowed to vote for the EU Referendum in the UK (although a poll conducted by The Student Room showed that 82% of voters in this age group would have voted to remain).

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and S. Kritzinger), quite the contrary, and this policy should be seriously considered due to its potential positive impact.

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Instead of declaring an intergenerational warfare (K. Owen, C. Macfarland), these two cases call for a deeper reflection: Millennials are more likely to vote in order to have their opinion heard or because they feel strongly about a certain issue. In light of this, political parties should be wary that younger people are more easily deterred from voting if they don't think that their vote will achieve something. The challenge for Progressives is to prove that their politics are dictated by a system of values that would not be retrenched by coalition agreements (FEPS Young Academics).

**Age limit to stand for election**

The average age of MEPs at the constituent session in July 2014 was 53 years, with the oldest MEP being 92 years (Greece) and the youngest 26 years (Denmark). This is a serious challenge in the context of connecting with the millennial generation. The age limit to stand for election is 18 years in the majority (15) of EU member countries. In ten countries the age limit is 21 years, and in three countries it is 23 years (1) or 25 years (2).

**Policy recommendation:**

- We encourage all PES member parties to consider implementing pilot projects opening for voting for 16-18 year olds - and consider this project to be followed by a study to measure the effect on turn out.

- We encourage all PES member parties to consider lowering the age limit for MEP candidates to 18, where that isn't already the limit.
3. Voting registration as a precondition

Voter registration or enrolment is automatic in many member states, but in some countries registration is a requirement as a precondition to be able to vote. The rules governing voter registration varies largely between EU member states. In some countries registration by those of voting age is compulsory, while in most it is merely voluntary. In countries where registration is voluntary, an effort may be made both by political parties, NGOs and the state to encourage persons otherwise eligible to vote to register.

In some countries, people eligible to vote must “opt in” to be permitted to participate in voting, generally by filling out a specific form and submitting the form to the relevant electoral agency. They often need to re-register if they change residence across jurisdictional or divisional boundaries. In other cases, when a person registers their residence with a government agency, say, for a driver's license, there may be automatic voter registration at the same time by the government if the citizen is of voting age.

Even in countries where registration is the individual's responsibility, many reformers, seeking to maximize voter turnout, argue for a wider availability of the required forms, or more ease of process by having more places where one may register. Other argue that the states without automatic voter registration or enrolment make an effort in modernizing its national registration system in order to enrol citizens automatically.

The recent referendum in the UK sparked a new discussion on voter registration. UK Election Commission survey found that around one in ten people (12%) said they think they are able to register to vote right up to the day of the referendum on Thursday 23rd June. Only 3% of people are spontaneously aware of the correct deadline and three in four (74%) either don’t know the date or believe it is later than 7 June.

Adding to these numbers was the fact that UK government's voter application website crashed at around 10:15 pm 7th June 2015, less than two hours before the deadline. Statistics showed 50,000 people were using the service at the time it crashed. The Electoral Commission called for a change to laws governing registration deadlines, opening the door to an extension. The Government announced that they plan to introduce legislation that will allow people who make applications to register on Wednesday 8 and up to midnight on Thursday 9 June to vote in the EU Referendum.
«No one should miss out on voting in this historic referendum because of the problem with the Government’s registration website» states Alex Robertson, Director of Communications at the Electoral Commission. With this philosophy one might argue that the whole idea of voting registration as a precondition to vote in an election should be part of history as more and more countries are taking digitalization much more serious, also in the public sector, ensuring that they have a safe and modern system of information about their citizens and ability to register citizens automatically.

There are obviously privacy concerns also connected to elections, and especially after the US government publicly announced in October that it was "confident“ Russia orchestrated the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and other political organizations of the Democratic Party. These privacy concerns must be essential to all governments on voting data, as well as all other data they have about their citizens. This issue however should not block the importance of making voting easier and more accessible to fight voter abstention.

This working group therefore concludes that all inhabitants that are registered as citizens holding voter rights should be automatically registered and able to vote. This standpoint will also over time reduce the multiplying administration around the process.

**Policy recommendation:** *We encourage all member parties with registration producers as a precondition to vote considers working towards removing these registrations producers that represents barriers for voters to turn out, in order to make voting easier and more accessible.*

5) * Voting from abroad

According to the European Parliament almost all member states allow the possibility to vote from abroad in EP-elections, but the scope of this possibility differ widely. Some member states require voters to pre-register with their national electoral authorities to be eligible to vote from abroad by post or at an embassy or consulate.

Four countries, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, and Slovakia, did not provide possibilities for citizens abroad to vote in 2014. Several member states confer the right to vote only to those citizens living abroad in another EU member state. Six Member States disenfranchise their citizens after a certain time spent abroad, usually in a third country. The most common options to vote abroad are 1) By post 2) By proxy-voting 3) On Embassy 4) By e-voting (only Estonia).

**Fundamental right to vote – also from abroad**

An estimated 8 million Europeans of voting age live outside the country they were born in, roughly equivalent to the entire population of Austria. With 2.2 million and 1.9 million respectively, Germany and the UK have more than half of the EU’s expat community, followed by Spain and Italy. With over 600,000 non-national EU citizens, however, Belgium has the largest number of expats as a proportion of its population.

Registrations by EU citizens to vote in their country of residence rather than origin have doubled in the past twenty years, from 5.9 percent in 1994 to 11.6 percent in 2009, but expats are surprisingly reluctant to exercise their right to vote. Around 10 percent of EU citizens living in another EU country

had taken advantage of their right to vote and stand in local elections, according to a 2012 report by the European Commission.

EU citizenship gives every EU citizen the right to vote for and stand as a candidate in municipal and European Parliament elections in whichever EU country the citizen resides, under the same conditions as nationals. This right is conferred directly on every EU citizen by Article 22 of the EU Treaty. It is also taken up in Articles 39 and 40 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. There are however a few exceptions.

The Direct Elections Act does not contain provisions as to the right of EU citizens to vote from abroad or to retain their electoral rights when residing abroad. There has been a mixed record of implementing EU voting rights by governments. 11 member states Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia, were instructed by the Commission in 2011/2012 to re-write domestic electoral law following claims that they were requiring additional registration requirements for non-nationals and failing to provide them with adequate information about their voting rights.

Overview of national electoral rules on voting from abroad

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By post   Proxy
Embassy  E-voting
Some member states make voting from abroad easy. 14 EU countries - Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden - automatically include all residents, including non-national EU citizens, on the electoral rolls when they register as a resident. In states, registering to vote can either be done online or in the local town hall.

Many member states however do make special arrangements for diplomats and military personnel abroad. Some member states (e.g. Denmark) offer early voting at embassies. Malta, which did not provide possibilities for citizens abroad to vote in 2014, passed a law one month before which allowed eligible voters who declare they will be away on polling day to apply to vote the Saturday before. 1,000 people applied. Air Malta also made available and sold return tickets to people eligible to vote, and operated 4 extra flights from Luxembourg and Brussels.

There are no statistics on the number of citizens of EU Member States deprived of their right to vote in European elections held in their country of origin either due the impossibility to vote from abroad or because they have lost their electoral rights due to residence abroad. We do know that in 2013/2014 over 272 000 young Europeans participated in the Erasmus+ program\(^\text{12}\). The ERASMUS program has been described as one of the big success stories of European integration, and freedom to move in Europe. Many of these young European voters are not given a fair chance to participate, due to early voting registration requirements in many member countries, combined with several obstacles to vote from abroad, as we address in our recommendations on policy change to fight voter abstention.

The question of getting EU nationals to vote outside their home country remains a vexed one. Most expats will continue to vote in their country of nationality. However, there are millions of Europeans who cannot or will not be able to do that. Arguments brought up against this, being that the citizens living abroad are the ones who refrain from upholding other relations with the state they come from (paying taxes, contributing to their local communities) and hence should withhold from exercising the right to decide about the reality that they indirectly influenced from. While the two sides of the argument would need to be put in balance, the recommendation in itself would need to take a principle standpoint about relating the vote as a right of every citizen that can be exercised at any point.

**Policy Recommendation:** We encourage all PES member parties to consider either implementing or simplifying and strengthening the possibility to vote from abroad, to make voting easier and more accessible. We therefor encourage all PES member parties to consider implementing or extending the possibility to vote by post, proxy-voting, on embassies or by e-voting \(^\text{13}\).

6. Safe electronic systems of voting

The 1976 EP Elections Act does not include provisions on electronic voting, but several Member States have tested the use of electronic voting systems with various results. In Germany and the Netherlands electronic voting has been tested but discontinued. In Ireland, UK and Italy there has


\(^\text{13}\) PES member parties are encouraged to carefully consider exploring the possibility to introduce pilot projects with web-based voting, given that the member state has certain preconditions (read more on page 41)
been pilots, but not continued. In Belgium and France electronic voting is currently used in parts of the countries. In France it is mainly for voting from abroad. In the 2014 European Parliament elections Estonia was the only EU Member State allowing electronic voting. There are several different types of electronic systems to cast and count votes. The two main types of e-voting is 1) voting via electronic voting machines in a physical location supervised by electoral staff. 2) Internet voting: web-based voting. The main difference it that internet voting is web-based while electronic voting is machine-based.

**Estonian case**

More than 103,000 Estonians voters used e-voting (31%) with an application (web-based) that encrypts the vote. The encrypted vote can be regarded as the vote contained in the inner, anonymous envelope. After that the voter gives a digital signature to confirm the choice. By digital signing, the voter’s personal data or outer envelope are added to the encrypted vote. I-voting is possible only during the 7 days of advance polls prior to Election Day. This is necessary in order to ensure that there would be time to eliminate double votes by the end of the Election Day. To ensure that the voter is expressing their true will, they are allowed to change their vote by voting again electronically during advance polls or by voting at the polling station during advance polls.

Especially younger people, whose turnout in elections is low, say that they would be interested in electronic voting. Opening a possibility for citizens to cast their votes electronically has proven to contribute to boosting of the electoral turnout. While this can be a possible initiative, it has to be made clear that this proposal does not imply erasing of the possibility for the voters to come and to cast their ballot at the polling station. Still many consider that a symbolic act of duty and a way to take part in collective experience by meeting others at the polling stations.

As this report elaborates on Millennial turnout, this generation embrace technological progress and sees the new digital world as an opportunity. It is not a surprise that Millennials believe the electoral process should be reformed and modernized. In this context, online voting could be a promising way forward as the Estonian case positively attests. Evidence shows that Internet voting increased turnout. Online voting lowers significantly the hazards that Millennials face when they want to turn out to vote and is an attractive way of securing Millennials electoral participation.

**Challenges with e-voting**

Even though younger voters prefer Internet voting it is also important to nuance some challenges of e-participation and outline the circumstances that need to exist. Research shows that e-voting could potentially worsen the gender gap as the ‘digital divide’ generally includes a divide between more male accesses to the internet (A. Trechsel). The same applies for 2005 local online elections in Estonia – Millennials turnout was high but most e-voters were young and male. E-voting turnout can also be hindered in a given country due to language. Again, the Estonian case attests that a large part of Russian-speaking citizens did not vote as the Internet voting platform was only presented in Estonian. Therefore, the natural recommendation would be to have a bilingual or multilingual Internet platform to avoid exclusion or discrimination (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel). Security, confidentiality or being pressured to vote in a certain way also needs to be taken into consideration. Member States must proceed with great caution in order not to damage citizens’ trust toward the electoral system.
It is also important to highlight that the Dutch government has recently (1st of February 2017) decided to revert to manual vote counting and processing in the upcoming March parliamentary elections. The reason is fear of any potential attempts by hackers to influence the result. Voting machines have been banned in the Netherlands since 2009, with votes now cast on paper and counted by hand. The computer program – Ondersteunende Software Verkiezingen (OSV) – which generated files containing the total votes cast in each district has been used for the past eight years. The system has critical security holes, an example is that OSV can be installed on any machine and another is that OSV stores results in an unencrypted XML file, and voting results are transferred via unencrypted USB sticks or unencrypted email over the internet.

Preconditions necessary to make Internet Voting work (R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel)

- Widespread Internet penetration;
- Legal structure that addresses Internet voting issues (possibility of pre-voting, authentication process, ensuring that Internet voters do not cast ballots on the election day, final ballot reconciliation);
- Identification system that allows for digital authentication of the voter (digital signature makes things easier for politics to introduce Internet voting but it is not a pre-requisite);
- Political, public and administrative culture that is supportive of Internet voting (Internet voting was at the heart of intra-governmental activities in Estonia for a long period of time).

Policy Recommendation: Given that the member state has these preconditions;

1) Widespread Internet penetration
2) Legal structure that addresses Internet voting issues
3) Identification system that allows for digital authentication of the voter (digital signature)
4) Political, public and administrative culture that is supportive of Internet voting:

We encourage PES member parties to carefully consider exploring the possibility to introduce pilot projects with web-based voting, in order to make voting easier and more accessible, followed by a study, to measure the effect on turnout.

7. Citizens’ awareness

Democracy is an ideal, a set of principles and an institutional set up. This means that while the mechanisms embodied in the system are one preoccupation and should be improved, what remains relevant is the mission to invest in the culture of democracy.

12 % of the abstainers according to Eurobarometer (TNS, 2014, max 3/17 answers) states that lack of knowledge or public debate was the reason they did not turn out to vote in 2014.

- Do not know much about the EU and the European Parliament or the European Parliament Elections 7%
- Lack of public debate or electoral campaign 3%
- Did not know there were European Elections 2%

As we can read in this report about the millennial generation they are politically well informed, but they also believe that it is important to keep the connection between civic education and political literacy as a critical component on how to improve their trust and participation in politics. This would allow young people to manage their expectations towards politics of today and increase their sensibility towards political participation, as lowering the voting age would do.

Research shows that citizens’ education needs to go beyond the school curricula and should provide students with practical opportunities to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. This could be done by helping set up frameworks of collaboration between schools and youth organisations to run joint citizenship programmes focusing on topical issues such as human rights, immigration, the environment, and intergenerational solidarity (T. Deželan).

**Social dimension of turnout**
As PES working group member Merja Jutila Roon, researcher at Kalevi Sorsa Foundation states the social dimension of turnout is important to address. She used an example from Finland showing that that turnout for those with vocational training is 20 percent lower than for the academically educated. The difference in voter turnout in Finland is doubled between 18-34 year-old citizens getting or having earned academic education vs. citizens with only basic elementary education. Knowledge increases interest in politics.

This shows that citizens with higher education get more information on political affairs than others, reinforcing the practice of political participation as a class issue. Actions could be to provide more information about the political system, the right to vote, the process of voting and the differences between the parties.

**Policy recommendation:** *We encourage all member parties to purpose actions to strengthened citizen’s knowledge on the political system, the right to vote, the process of voting and the differences between the parties.*
Annex
SUMMARY OF THE PES PRESIDENCY WORKING GROUP ACTICITY

‘If democracy is going to be rule of the people, by the people, and for the people, the people, by definition, must be interested and active’ L. W. Milbrath (1965: 142).

Participation is the most important component of Europe’s democracy. It is argued that, without public involvement in the political decision-making process, democracy loses both its legitimacy and its guiding force. Voting in elections is one of the basic and conventional types of participation. It is also the most common and longstanding method of citizen engagement in political decision-making process. In other words, voting is the key act of political participation in a democracy.

What are the reasons for voter abstention?
As we have thoroughly described in this report, there are several political reasons and practical reasons for voter abstention. Almost a quarter of the population (23%) did not vote due to lack of trust in politicians, 19% because they were not interested in politics and 14% of the population were of the opinion that voting does not change anything. 40% of the abstainers, possibly as many as 92 million voters, gave up practical reasons for not turning out (TNS, 2014, max 3/17 answers). The labour movement must take a leading role in tackling voter abstention, as it is one of the major political challenges for Europe’s democracy. The PES presidency takes this issue very seriously in the run up to the EP election in 2019.

Establishing the PES working group
On 20 November 2014 the PES Presidency decided to establish a working group with the aim to explore how we best can fight voter abstention and develop policy recommendations on how to strengthen European democracy by making voting easier and more accessible. The PES Presidency appointed PES Presidency member and current Governing Mayor of Oslo Raymond Johansen, who then served as Secretary General in the Norwegian Labour Party, as chair of the working group.

This working group has gathered facts and input from a broad spectrum. The working group has hosted four open pan-European working group meetings with sister parties, youth branches, research institutions such as FEPS, Audicon, EP Eurobarometer and Kalevi Sorsa Foundation. There has been a broad geographical representation in these meetings as shown by the list of participants (page 42).

The First Meeting: PES Working Group on voter abstention 4th February 2015

| Welcome | by Marije Laffeber, PES Deputy Secretary General |
| Introduction | by working group chair Raymond Johansen, Secretary General, DNA Norway |
| Experiences on compulsory voting | Gilles Doutreleport, PS Belgium and Deputy |
| Director of the Emile Vandervelde Institute | An example of early voting, by Tommy Waidelich, SAP Sweden |
| Discussion on the turnout at 2014 EP Election, | Enzo Amendola, PES Presidency member, PD Italy |
| Katarina Neved'alová, PES Vice-President, SMER-SD Slovakia | Work Plan for the Working Group |

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In this first meeting, participants discussed what concrete actions should be taken to strengthen European democracy. The debate was mostly on the state of play of voting rights and electoral systems’ differences from country to country. They shared national experiences under the umbrella of variations in voter abstention in different voting systems. Belgium shared experiences on compulsory voting; Sweden shared experience on early voting. Slovakia addressed the issue of lowest turnout in the EP14 elections, and Italy shared its experience with the challenge of promoting European elections in a national context of Eurosceptic populist parties.

The main signal from this meeting was the importance of urgent action to make voting easier and more accessible. Several delegates expressed the need to share more experiences internationally though the PES on how to increase turnout, such as the concept of early voting. Early voting (also called pre-poll voting or advance polling) is a process by which voters in a public election can vote prior to the scheduled elections day(s). The goal is to increase voter participation and reduce queues at polling stations on election day(s).

Voters in Sweden and Finland have had this possibility for years. Estonia was the first country in Europe to introduce the possibility to vote electronically. Latvia has early voting. Malta introduced a limited version of early voting for citizens abroad on election day in 2009. Early voting is also possible in Slovenia. In Germany and in Spain, early voting is possible by post (from abroad and before the election day), as it was in Italy for the last constitutional referendum, but only for those registered citizens living abroad. Also in the Netherlands early voting by post is possible, but only for those citizens living abroad. In general, most European countries allow early voting by post, including Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland and Lithuania.

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Second Meeting: PES Working Group on voter abstention 24th April 2015

Introduction by Raymond Johansen, Chair of the working group and Sec.Gen of DNA


Experiences on electronic voting,
- Niesco Dubbelboer, PvdA, Netherlands.
- Henri Kaselo, SDE Estonia
- Merja Jutila, Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, Finland

Fighting youth abstention
- FEPS initiative: The Millennial Dialogue Report, by David Lewis from Audienencet
- Vote at 16, Karl Duffek, SPÖ Austria
To explore how we best can fight voter abstention and define guidelines on how to strengthen European democracy, this second meeting focused on youth abstention and electronic voting, in addition to the main findings on abstainers in the 2014 elections.

Several countries shared their own experience with electronic voting. The Netherlands shared its mixed experience with security issues and stressed the dilemma with privacy if we move voting from public places to people’s homes. Finland focused on the potential to reach young voters though developing electric voting, but stressed the importance of protecting voting data. Estonia shared its experience as the first nation to hold legally binding web based general elections over the Internet with their pilot for the municipal elections in 2005. Estonian election officials declared the election a success. The Estonian parliamentary election also used internet voting, another world first. In the European Parliament elections, 103,151 people voted over the Internet (31.3%).

The main signal from the meeting was that member states must take data protection seriously, and proceed with caution in order not to damage citizens’ trust toward the system. One option is to start gradually with electric voting options with referendums, during local elections and/or voting from abroad, under the right circumstances described in the next chapter (page 39).

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Third meeting (12th September 2016)

**Welcome and introduction** by Raymond Johansen, Chair of the working group and Governing Mayor of Oslo

**Presentation of millennial dialogue** and electoral behaviour by Audiencenet and FEPS?

Discussion on how to reach millennial voters and on their electoral behaviour

Process and initial policy discussion for the final paper

The working group was given a thorough presentation of the FEPS “millennial dialogue” project and electoral behaviour among this generation. The meeting was followed by an open discussion on how to reach millennial voters and on their electoral behaviour.
One of the project’s main findings was that the Millennial generation does not see their priorities included in the political agenda, but has a clear view of what should make a part of it and where common resources should be directed.

Another issue that was debated is that Millennials do not think that contemporary politicians deliver in overall terms; however, they are ready to set new specific criteria of delivery alongside their view of what the programmatic priorities of the politicians should be. These fall into three categories: issue-related ones (e.g. the questions of healthcare or education), intention-related ones (e.g. readiness to listen and work for the younger generation’s agenda) and legitimacy-related ones (e.g. understanding of the democratic mandate they have been given and here through their sense of mission).

The main signal from the working group meeting was the urgency of action needed from the PES member parties to reconnect with the millennial generation. A positive, progressive, future-oriented narrative with relevant policy for this age group is important in order to engage this generation. Parties must govern in such a way that promises are not broken, and it is also important to revise national electoral laws so that voting is easier and more accessible for all voters.

Participants in the third meeting:

- Norwegian Labour
- BPS Bulgaria
- PS France
- SAP Sweden
- Concord Latvia
- Kalevi Sorsa Foundation Finland
- Audience
- FEPS
- S&D Group in the EP
- YES
- PES in the CoR
- PES Secretariat

Fourth meeting (18th November 2016)

Welcome and introduction by Raymond Johansen, Chair of the working group and Governing Mayor of Oslo

Policy discussion on all the seven identifies areas to formulate policy recommendations

Further progress to the final report and call to action

This final meeting also concentrated on the more than 230 million lost voters, and especially on the number that might be as high as 92 million voters (40%) who identified practical obstacles as their reason for not turning out (TNS, 2014, max 3/17 answers). Therefore, the discussion was concentrated on measures to tackle and remove these practical obstacles in order to make voting easier and more accessible.

The main issues discussed and concluded on were:
- Early voting
Access to polling stations
Age limits for voting and standing for election
Voter registration as a precondition
Voting from abroad
Safe electronic systems of voting
Citizens’ awareness

The main signal from this working group meeting was the urgent need to encourage PES member parties to take action in their respective countries in order to make voting easier and more accessible for their citizens. The trust issue as a reason for abstention is very serious and an active response is needed.

Practical reasons for abstention also pose a very serious threat to democracy in Europe, and must be addressed with concrete action to strengthen the ability to participate. All PES member parties are encouraged to explore the policy recommendations from our working group, and consider which of the policies are relevant to purpose as changes in the respective electoral laws to making voting easier and more accessible, and thereby fight voter abstention.

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Field trip to Oslo (8th-9th September 2015)

The PES Working Group on voter abstention arranged a study trip to Oslo, Norway, on 8-9 September in connection with the local and regional elections in Norway on 14 September to further discuss how to fight voter abstention. The focus for the study trip was to elaborate on the effect of early voting and youth participation in elections.

Participants met representatives from the youth organization, visited early voting stations in Oslo, and visited the National Bureau of Statistics to see the effect of early voting on voters’ turnout. Furthermore, they examined different pilot schemes within the electoral system and met with the Agency for Education to see how the Norwegian political system and voter participation is included in the upper secondary school curriculum. On 8 September, the school election results were published and participants took part in the election night.

Brief report from this field trip:
Youth participation: The study group met with Ragnhild Kaski, Secretary General of the Norwegian Labour Youth (AUF), to discuss the political youth organization’s role in the election campaign. AUF plays a vital role in the campaign, as it has responsibility for organizing young people with their own campaigns, but also for organizing school debates in almost every high school in Norway.

The Norwegian School Election Project started in 1980, and was initially arranged by the AUF and the Conservative Youths. The project is open to all high schools in Norway and normally about 80
percent of the schools participate in the elections. They are normally preceded by a debate with politicians from the different youth parties. The election debates are often more ideological and confrontational than ordinary political debates.

The elections were from the start arranged in the same way as traditional elections with ballots and ballot boxes. The results were called in to the project's headquarters. Since 2001, the results have been reported via internet. Since 2003, there have been various pilot projects to let students vote electronically. The project is financed by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Norwegian Social Science Data Service is responsible for arranging the elections. Involving 16 to 18 year olds in the political processes of an election and political party campaigning is meant to raise the political and democratic awareness.

Jørgen Skarstein, from the School Student Union of Norway, presented how young students are taught the Norwegian political system and voter participation in upper secondary schools. Figures of pilot projects show that turnout among these youngsters would be quite high if they had the right to vote. In all 11 municipalities where votes at 16 were tried out in 2011 and in 2015, the turnout was higher compared to the rest of the population. However, there is no evidence of a habit-forming effect.

Over 190 000 youths aged 16 to 18 from all over the country participated in 2015’s mock elections, and this is an important political event in Norway, as over the years mock elections have often predicted trends in the ordinary elections one week later. The Norwegian Labour Party won the Norwegian School elections with an all-time high result of 31.9 percent of the votes.

The PES Working Group on voter abstention arranged a study trip to Oslo, Norway, on the 8-9th September in connection with the local and regional elections in Norway 14th September to further explore and discuss how to fight voter abstention
**Early voting**

In Norway, electors may vote in advance. Early voting inland takes place in the period from 1st of July until to the last Friday before election day (which is the second Monday in September every second year). Municipal authorities are responsible for receiving inland advance votes.

The Electoral Committee decides in which premises it shall be possible to vote in advance, typically town halls, service centres and similar premises. Municipal authorities are also bound to receive advance votes cast at health and social welfare institutions in their areas. It is possible to vote in advance in any municipal authority area in the whole country, meaning electors can vote in another municipal authority area from the one where they live and where they are included in the register of electors. Ballots are sent by post to their home municipal authority.

Electors who are abroad can also cast their ballots at the election. However, they must vote in advance. As a rule, advance votes abroad are given to a returning officer at a Norwegian Foreign Service mission. The Ministry may, according to need, appoint returning officers in other places. Electors who have not been resident in Norway for the last ten years before Election Day must apply for inclusion in the register of electors.

We met with **Johannes Bergh**, Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for Social Research in Norway, to discuss the effect of early voting on voters’ turnout. In recent elections, more and more people have chosen to vote in advance in Norway. At the local elections in 2011, 22.2 percent of the votes were submitted in advance, an increase of 5.5 percentage points compared with the 2007 election and 10.3 percentage points since 2003. The increase in the last election was particularly strong in the ten municipalities that participated in trials of so-called **e-Voting**, the opportunity to vote electronically.

From Johannes Bergh’s studies we can see that the increase in voter’s turnout starting in 2003 also follows the increase in the early votes that have been cast. According to Bergh, this does not necessarily mean that a raise in early votes is linked to a higher turnout in general. Those who vote in advance are often the bedrock of voters, who would have voted anyway. However, it is fair to assume that advanced voting has prevented a fall in turnout in recent years.
Early voting in local elections

Trend showing voters’ use of early voting in the local elections in Norway.

Over the two days the study group also med with Kjersti Stenseng, Secretary General in DNA Norway, Rina Marian Hanssen, Head of the electoral committee in Oslo, Raymond Johansen on the election campaign in Oslo, Wegard Harsvik from the Confederation of Trade Unions and Agenda. In addition we took part on the AUF’s election night.
References for the key findings from FEPS “millennial dialogue”-project


R. Michael Alvarez, T. Hall and A. Trechsel, Internet Voting in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Estonia

Notes


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FEPS Young Academic Network, Call to Europe VI “Millennials and Politics” final conference report, How to re-engage young people into politics and improve the dialogue between Progressives and the Millennial generation?, FEPS, June 2016