

THE MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT PREVENTION ACTIONS - AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIC PILLAR OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Abstract: The European Parliament is a key institution in the institutional architecture of the European Union. The 20 permanent committees of the Parliament, although they report on different areas of activity, through the representatives and members who compose them, have a common goal: examine and manage the legislative process at the level of the Union, guarantee the legitimacy of the electoral process in the EU and beyond borders, as well as advise on the measures that the European Union can take in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Keywords: Management, electoral process, European Parliament, democracy, unity, freedom.

1. Introduction

The EU integration process consists first of all in the transfer of some powers and responsibilities that in the past were exercised by national governments to the institutions of the European Union with decision-making power, practically diminishing in this way the role of national parliaments as budgetary, legislative or control authorities. It can be said that at an economic, social or even at a regional security level, the member states of the European Union have given up their sovereignty to a certain extent.

The European legislation has a supranational quality, and in order to enter into force it is necessary to carry out a thorough evaluation and voting process in the European Parliament, after which the member states apply the rules at regional or national level.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009, indicated for the first time the role and at the same time the importance that national parliaments have in the smooth running of the European Union. National parliaments participate in the evaluation of the Union's policies on freedom, justice or security, having the opportunity to examine in detail those draft laws that concern the principle of subsidiarity. The parliaments of the member countries are the pillars that must put in place the application of EU legislation at the national level.

2. The Role of the European Parliament in the Electoral Procedures

In order to guarantee the legitimacy of the electoral process and to observe how it is carried out

outside the borders of the Union, the European Parliament has created a dedicated group of MEPs, called the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG), which consists of two commissions: the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Development. The group consists of 16 members, working together to ensure that the efforts of fellow parliamentarians are coherent and have the desired effect in their areas of analysis.

The European Parliament's election monitoring missions are set by the DEG, which also adopts an annual work programme.

Even if some member states have agreed to collaborate in certain areas of competence, there are also areas where the principle of subsidiarity generally does not apply, for example within the national security policy, where the states have full decision-making power [1].

Inter-parliamentary collaboration has multiple dimensions and is carried out in numerous ways. Probably the best example of inter-parliamentary collaboration is the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, which has as its composition the spokesmen of the national governments, as well as the spokesperson of the European Parliament, which at the moment is Jaume Duch Guillot. The meeting takes place once a year, and the preparation and realization of the agenda to be discussed by the guests is carried out by the general secretariat of the parliaments.

The most recent Conference of Spokespersons of EU Parliaments took place on 28-29 March 2022 in Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia, with representatives of 24 member states participating. The topics of discussions were: the war in Ukraine, the role of parliaments in the

realization of urgent public policies and the reflection on the European Union, which is seen by them as a guarantor of Europe's stability, security and prosperity [2].

One of the responsibilities and at the same time a key action provided in the founding treaties of the European Union, is that the European Parliament must guarantee and support democracy on a global level. This provision is also enjoyed by the citizens of the member states of the Union, because by improving the world perspectives on democracy, greater stability is achieved at home.

2.1. The Management of the European Parliament Election Observation Missions

In 2021, the European Parliament observed the elections in Honduras, Venezuela, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kosovo, Iraq and the Republic of Moldova. The mission from the Republic of Moldova was aimed at monitoring the parliamentary elections held on July 11, 2021. Given a well-established methodology, the European deputies had the mission to supervise and then draw conclusions related to the electoral process, an important point at which they had to answer was if the elections were organized in accordance with the norms of national and international law. The report drawn up by the deputies was positive, but deviations were also observed: in the Transnistrian region there were numerous articles in the press that presented alleged acts of electoral bribery or the fact that some citizens were transported in an organized manner to the polling stations. Also, according to the reporters, there were cases where certain voters took photos of the ballot. In the previously mentioned cases, the state authorities were notified and specific investigative measures were ordered [3].

In addition to supporting the activity of developing states by monitoring the electoral process, the European Parliament tries to help prevent conflicts before they occur, and where a conflict takes on serious connotations, to support the European Union's intervention activity in guaranteeing peace and democracy in the respective country.

Conflict prevention actions represent an important strategic pillar in the face of the goal of global peace, precisely for this reason, European deputies can contribute to the ideal of universal peace by conducting a dialogue with representatives of foreign parliaments, organizing international events with the aim of preventing armed conflicts or even mediate conflicts between political parties. The European Parliament, through the support programs, assists the activity of parliaments around the borders of the Union, as well as of some states in Latin America, Asia or Africa, with the aim of strengthening and consolidating the operating principles of any citizen representation forum, through actions of monitoring the Government's legislative process, promoting good practices that have been tested

and are functional, as well as even reforming some institutions, when appropriate.

2.2. Analysis of Surveys Conducted Regarding the Activity of the European Parliament

According to a new Eurobarometer study, carried out between November and December 2021, European citizens chose as the most important European value that the European Parliament should consider is the defense of democracy, with 32% of respondents seeing this principle as the most important, followed by the principle of freedom of expression (27%) and the protection of human rights (25%).

Commenting on the results of the study, Roberta Metsola stated that "As the citizens correctly mention, the defense of democracy is the most important European value, above all others. We cannot take democracy for granted, because extremism, authoritarianism and nationalism are dangers that evolve day by day and can negatively influence our European project".

From the same study, it is revealed that citizens want to know more about what is done within the EU institutions, about how the Union budget is managed in detail, as well as about the specific activities carried out by the elected European members of the EU Parliament [4].

Fundamental rights are applied and guaranteed to all people in the European Union, regardless of their ethnic origin. Some freedoms are guaranteed even by the founding treaties of the Union, and include: the right to life, the right to liberty, freedom of thought and expression. Although some rights are as old as the European Union, new rights are emerging on European territory, including the right to the protection of personal data (the GDPR law) or even the prohibition of human cloning (the Oviedo Convention).

3. EU Crisis Management Regarding the Situation in Ukraine

Since the beginning of the invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, according to data from the United Nations, more than 12 million people have been forced to leave their homes, of which 6 million have gone to neighboring countries (Poland, Moldova, Romania) and another 6.5 million were displaced within the country. In the first four weeks start of armed conflict, most of those who sought refuge in the European Union were women and children.

In order to meet this wave of refugees, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have shown close collaboration. The united response, the support of the EU citizens in the reception and accommodation of those fleeing the war represented the

typical response across all member countries in the context [5].

Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, MEPs made considerable efforts to stop the escalation of the conflict. For example, in December 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the increase in the number of Russian troops around Ukraine, considering it an unacceptable challenge to Europe's security. This document prepared a framework for sanctions against Russia if a military conflict were to occur: isolating the country from a financial point of view, removing national banks from the SWIFT system, immediate sanctions for oligarchs, banning the movement of high-ranking officers and leaders of Russia on the territory of the European Union, as well as prohibiting the transit of any aircraft registered under the Russian Federation in the European airspace.

Also in the resolution adopted in December 2021, there is talk of reducing energy dependence on Russia, which, in the light of the statements of the last few days, should happen by the end of the year, and the Nord Stream 2 project, very important for the Russian economy, would be abandoned [6].

Given the scale and fears of an escalation of the conflict, on 16 February, Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, as well as the leaders of the political groups in the EP, adopted a joint statement affirming their support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, which has taken important steps towards joining the European Union and NATO in recent years, and this country's wishes and aspirations for prosperity, democracy, peace and justice cannot be violated because of a country that does not agree with these principles [7].

On February 22, just two days before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation recognized the independence of the two separatist regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk. This was strongly condemned by the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, David McAllister, as well as by numerous other committee chairs of the European Parliament. Recognizing the independence of these two separatist regions is a flagrant violation of international law, moreover, this action casts serious doubt on the identity and credibility of the Russian Federation internationally. Although the situation was tense, the leaders of the Commissions made a last effort towards peace, calling the Russian Federation to the negotiation table for the annulment of the previously announced decision, but at the same time they asked the European Union to urgently prepare an economic assistance plan for Ukraine, to help the population of this state [8].

A few hours after the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine militarily, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola and the leaders of the political groups agreed and announced a special plenary session, which took place on 1 March. MEPs

called for even tougher sanctions on the Russian Federation, as well as urgent economic and humanitarian support for Ukraine, in cooperation with the United Nations. At the same time, the adopted resolution asks the institutions of the European Union to work towards granting the status of a candidate for EU accession to Ukraine. In addition, the content of the resolution mentions the fact that member countries of the EU should provide Ukraine with weapons of defensive nature [9].

On April 1, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, visited the capital of the country under siege, to demonstrate the support and confidence that the European Union has in the resilience of Ukraine, reiterating in this way the fact that the member countries of the Union are with the Ukrainian people. During her visit to the Supreme Rada of Ukraine (Parliament of Ukraine), Roberta Metsola made three promises to the members of this forum: those responsible for the aggression will be held accountable and there will be serious consequences for the economy of the states that decide to help the Russian Federation, the second promised aspect was the fact that the Ukrainian support and aspiration to become a member state of the European Union is still taken into account, moreover, the accession process will be accelerated. Last but not least, Metsola promised that families in Ukraine who are forced to leave their homes because of the war will be protected in the territory of the member states of the Union until they can safely return home.

4. The European Parliament – co-legislator in the field of combating organized crime

4.1. EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025

The statement of the European Commission, published on April 14, 2021 and which was addressed to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions regulated a new strategy aimed at fighting organized crime in the period 2021-2025.

Organized crime is a phenomenon somewhat hidden from the eyes of the ordinary citizen and can be characterized as a network environment, in which cooperation between criminals is systematic, proceeds without obstacles and is carried out with the aim of obtaining material benefits. Members of organized crime groups often try to use their ill-gotten gains by using them in the activities of the licit economy. The use of violence, firearms or even explosives are constantly increasing in the territory of the Union.

Proceeds obtained from the commission of crimes amounted to 1% of the EU's gross domestic product, which amounts to more than 139 billion euros.

The new strategy addresses the deficiencies identified in the previously reported periods, in order to

better protect the citizen and to implement actions in the medium and long term, including: supporting effective investigative activities, through which to quickly dismantle gangs of criminals; improving the collaboration between the law enforcement and courts; bringing investigation procedures into the digital age, and the exchange of information to be carried out without obstacles and in a timely manner, wherever the judicial or police body is in the EU territory; international cooperation; combating money laundering and promoting investigations in the financial field, in order to identify malicious acts.

The European Parliament has highlighted on numerous occasions the fact that criminal groups, organized crime cause significant damage, both economic and in society, thus, they have outlined some firm actions that should be implemented at the Union level to effectively combat these forms of illegal activity [10].

4.2. The European Parliament and Citizens – the Path to Sustainable Development - Conference on the Future of Europe

The European Parliament, together with the European Commission, launched a proposal at the end of 2019, with the aim of defining the reforms necessary in the medium and long term for the harmonious functioning of the European Union, as well as with the aim of reforming or modifying public policies or even community institutions.

The conference included active participation from citizens, with a significant role given to young people, a third of the places allocated to participants were for those between 16 and 25 years of age. There were four workshops, each of which was composed of 200 citizens. The first panel discussed the theme related to improving the economy, promoting social justice, well-paid jobs, quality education, culture, sports and digital transformation. The second panel focused on democracy, the values of the European Union, the rule of law and regional security. The third panel investigated issues related to climate change, environment and health, and the last panel dealt with issuing recommendations regarding the image of the European Union in the world, as well as the migrational phenomenon.

On May 9, 2022, after long debates, which lasted almost a year, a report was issued that includes 49 proposals for the European institutions with decision-making power: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council [11].

We can say that the research carried out in the document was previously confirmed by a Eurobarometer study, carried out between September and October 2021 and presented at the beginning of 2022, also known as the European Year of Youth.

The data of the study demonstrates the interest and awareness of young people in identifying the problems, thus, of the people aged between 15 and 24 interviewed, 91% believe that combating climate change can lead to an improvement in their own health. The European Green Deal enjoys very high support among European citizens, with 88% of them believing that the strategy's objectives, including increasing the use of renewable energy resources or reaching the goal of climate neutrality by 2050, by promoting, for example, non-polluting vehicles or that pollute a little [12].

5. Conclusions

The European Parliament is a basic institution in the institutional architecture of the European Union, and the fact that the deputies are elected by direct vote by the citizens, gives it a legitimacy in making decisions that is really strong and impactful. The 20 committees, which analyze and form reports on such diverse topics, from climate change, to human rights or even regarding the military conflict in Ukraine, prove that the European Parliament is truly the mouthpiece of the European Union in the world.

The evolution of the European Parliament in the institutional architecture of the European Union is impressive, in the last 64 years this institution has evolved from a simple joint assembly, with limited authority, into a powerful legislator with global influence.

The European Parliament has proven to be a reliable partner within the institutional architecture of the European Union, having a very close collaboration with the European Commission and the Council. The European Green Deal is certainly a very good example of this, because thanks to the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament, with feedback from citizens, the European Commission has set much bolder targets in the field of sustainable development in the final strategy, by reducing the emission of gases with greenhouse effect on the territory of the Union, with the aim that by 2050 Europe will become the first climate-neutral continent.

Although attempts to destabilize the unity of member states are more and more frequent, the fundamental values of the European Union are very well anchored in the European reality and spirit, and every time there have been serious attempts to destabilize the alliance, the member states have shown unity.

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