New Rules for making the 2019 European Elections more transparent

Proposed by the Commission, new rules on European political parties, aim to improve transparency and predictability for citizens, and to make sure that taxpayer money is not abused.

To involve Commissioners more in the election campaign, the Commission has also changed its Code of Conduct to allow them to stand as candidates without having to immediately give up their seat in the Commission. The Commission is also proposing a number of practical steps to help make the process for the next European elections in 2019 more transparent for citizens, so that they can go to the polls with a clear idea of how the various political groups see the direction of Europe’s future and who should lead the Commission.

IMPROVING VOTER TURNOUT

Turnout in European elections has been falling for years. Only in 2014 was this trend stalled. Low turnout is mainly explained by perceived limited ownership and engagement by EU citizens in EU policies. The 2014 elections turnout was 42%, which is comparable to that in local elections.

Citizens would be more likely to vote in elections if they were more aware of the impact EU policies had in their day-to-day life, and if they could trust that they could have their say on the Union’s most important choices.
INFORMING CITIZENS ABOUT EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTIES

European political parties can receive financial support from the EU budget if they meet certain conditions. They must represent a sufficiently large number of EU Member States and respect the values on which the EU is founded: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minorities.

NEW RULES FOR FUNDING OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTIES

The existing rules have loopholes that need to be addressed ahead of the 2019 European elections.

To make the link between European and national parties clearer for citizens, the Commission has proposed to make EU funding for European political parties dependent on national and regional member parties displaying the political programme and logo of their European affiliation on their websites. Member States and national political parties may even want to go further, and include these in campaign and ballot material.

Citizens must be able to find out the affiliation of national parties at EU level ahead of the 2019 European elections. By increasing transparency, member parties and European political parties become more accountable to citizens.
RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPROVING INFORMATION FOR CITIZENS

The Commission is also recommending additional measures for the 2019 European elections, suggesting that:

- National political parties make known which European political party they are affiliated with;
- National political parties or coalitions make known which lead candidate they support for President of the Commission;
- National political parties prominently display this information in all campaign materials, communications and political broadcasts, including the logo of the European political party;
- MEP candidates make known in the campaign, which political group in the European Parliament they intend to join;

A POLITICAL COMMISSION, BROUGHT CLOSER TO CITIZENS THROUGH THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

In September 2017, President Juncker announced a new Code of Conduct for the Members of the Commission.

One area at the core of these reforms is the political role of the Commissioners. President Juncker wants them to be able to play a more important role in the 2019 European elections.

The new Code of Conduct:
- Allows Commissioners to stand as candidates in the European Parliament elections, without having to take a leave of absence as in the past;
- Allows a Commissioner to stand as a lead candidate for the position of Commission President;
- Makes Commissioners more accountable to European citizens in their daily work;
- Allows Commissioners to hold political (non-managerial) functions in political parties at EU and national level;
- Is in line with the practice in the Member States, where outgoing Governments, Prime Ministers and Ministers continue to hold office until a new Government is formed;
- Still requires Commissioners to withdraw temporarily from the College if they participate in a national election campaign.