

parliament and citizens increases, the legislatures would align more with the opinions of the privileged social groups. In Poland, this gap is especially larger for cultural issues than for economic stances where convergence is higher. Finally, we assert that, for party members, the inequality of social group opinion congruence is smaller. We test these hypotheses diachronically using surveys of citizens and members of Sejm, the Polish lower chamber of representatives, from 1997 to 2011.

INTERNATIONAL POLICIES AND THE DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS: THEORIES VS PRACTICES

Ana Cláudia CARVALHO CAMPINA

Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, PORTUGAL

This paper argues that contemporary society requires the need of an urgent, but consistent, education for human rights adapted to the real needs of each social group, region, country, and/or at geopolitical characteristics. This is not a new question for International Laws and International Relations as disciplines; after the World Trade Center attacks on 11/09/2001, which led to the reconceptualization of terrorism and human rights protection systems. Education in this sector has been progressively a matter of the political agenda of International Governmental Organizations (whether universal, such as the United Nations, or regional, such as the European Union), of many democratic states and governments, as well as of international associations and movements which aim to promote and defend human rights. Given the evolution of the human rights paradigm and the needs for both legal and effective interpretation of the international and national “legal” violations (known or through undisclosed liabilities), one should look first at the type of identifiable and identified needs. Currently, there are two different perspectives. The first addresses the need to achieve the implementation of those policies already approved and recognized judicially and legally by the (mostly democratic) governments that intend to protect and promote fundamental and human rights. In this case, the need is related to the aim of developing and strengthening the policies or laws, as well as supporting and defending citizens denouncing human rights violations and violence, whether concealed or not, deliberate or not. The second perspective concerns the needs of millions of human beings suffering various types of violence and international law violations, including being murdered and tortured. Some may be legally protected, but there are neither effective human rights mechanisms to defend this legal protection nor the possibility of utilizing this protection. Others are living in non-democratic states, therefore, it is difficult to achieve the political power necessary to create positive change. In this context, education for human rights requires action in two dimensions: (1) political and legal changes (a hard, complex and sometimes utopic mission), and (2) improving the overall knowledge of people about their rights as well as the strategies required to protect themselves, including how to denounce violations and make their problems known. Literature in the field acknowledges that education about human rights is not only one of the most important ways to support the development of democracy in different contexts, and to foster a change in the perception and understanding of what human rights are, but is also critical in the fight against violence, human rights violations and human suffering in

general. This is a complex process involving all actors of international relations, national politics, and citizens at large. For this reason, researching and theorizing about human rights contributes to making both human rights and democracy a reality lived by as many people as possible.

THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE WITHIN DEMOCRACY CONTEXT

Ana Cláudia CARVALHO CAMPINA

Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, PORTUGAL

Manuela MAGALHÃES

Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, PORTUGAL

Dora ALVES

Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, PORTUGAL

Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law are the main European values that supported the construction of the European Union (EU) in the past, as stated in the Schuman Declaration from May 9, 1950, and continue to support the EU in the present through current legal documents from which the President of the European Commission draws its guidelines. Despite these founding values, the EU has been frequently accused of a democratic deficit concerning how its institutions function, access to documents, and gender parity issues. However, being aware of all these questions, the European Union maintains the permanent organization structure to ensure that all citizens are informed and, consequently, to generate the best interinstitutional performance. As one method of encouraging democracy in Europe, the EU develops the strategies to create the conditions for citizen involvement in the decision-making process through legislative initiatives at both the national and European Union levels. This opportunity for citizen involvement is not only a democratic political right, but is also one of the major and most promising prospects for democratic action in the EU. The European citizenship initiative is a right that was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty as a new instrument for participative transnational democracy. It granted permission to one million EU citizens, from a minimum of seven member states, to present legislative proposals relevant to the European Union competence. In this way, the aim is to actively associate citizens with the decisions impacting the European Union and with the initiative process by giving the right to use the legislative initiative. Up to the present, more than six million Europeans have signed citizenship initiatives. Despite the 57 successful initiatives presented, only 36 were registered by the Commission. However, 54 of the 57 initiatives had more than one million of signatures, which indicates a growing involvement of the citizenry. There hasn't yet been an initiative that has successfully become a new legislative proposal, despite, in some cases, the European Commission considering public opinion with regards to specific questions. Nevertheless, this is a future instrument with an important democratic meaning that must be considered. The question is based on the consideration of the EU rules of effective application as a critical component that ineluctably affects daily life. The problem is not always the absence of EU legislation but the efficiency of the law's application, which isn't always accomplished in the most effective manner. Thus, applying EU Law is a challenge that requires focus on the execution in order to serve the general