Project Schuman2030

Policy Brief

A short overview of the Schuman2030 project.

Abstract:
This Policy Brief gives a short overview on how the European Union was founded and evolved till today, highlighting its evolution but also its democratic deficit. A proposal is made to apply a bottom-up subsidiarity inspired by the direct democracy of Switzerland, bringing democracy at the lower levels reinforcing citizens support. A new allocation of competences is investigated. At the same time the project aims at strengthing the EU competences at the supra-national, cross-border level enabling a tight cooperation between the EU member states and providing the E.U. to act as a strong player world-wide.

Note:
This is Work In progress. As feedback is collected, arguments raised and more data is discovered, we expect the project to evolve. Hence, the working papers will evolve. And in the end, it will be up to national and EU parliaments to implement a concrete framework for 2030.

1. A short introduction on "The EU's Democratic Evolution"

The European Union was originally never designed to be a **democracy** — it was built by nation states to manage peace and prosperity after WWII on then European continent. Its democratic evolution has been slow, contested, and incomplete — but profoundly progressive.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the EU was a **technocratic project**. The European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the European Economic Community (1957) were governed by appointed bodies — no direct elections, no citizen voice. Power resided in national governments through the Council of Ministers.

The **1979 direct elections** to the European Parliament marked the first democratic leap. The **Single European Act (1986)** gave the EP co-decision power. The **Maastricht Treaty (1992)** created EU citizenship and introduced subsidiarity — the principle that decisions should be made closest to citizens.

The **Lisbon Treaty (2009)** was the EU's de facto constitution: it made the EP an equal co-legislator, enshrined the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and created the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) — allowing 1 million citizens to propose legislation. However, it provided the EU with very far reaching competences that were until then the exclusive competence of the member states. Today, we can ask if the Commission and EU president have not bypassed then treaty by exercising their power beyond the boundaries imposed by the treaty.

But crises — the Eurozone collapse, migration, Brexit — exposed the EU's **democratic deficit**: low trust, opaque decision-making, and weak citizen participation. The **Conference on the Future of Europe (2021–2022)** was a response — 1 million+ citizens proposed reforms: transnational electoral lists, binding ECI, EU-wide referendums. But not much changed.

Today, the EU is at a crossroads. **Pro-reform groups** (S&D, Renew, Greens) want to deepen democracy: more EP power, digital participation, citizen assemblies. **Sovereigntists** (Patriots for Europe) want to return power to nations — rejecting "Brussels bureaucracy." Radical reformers (DiEM25) demand a federal Europe with a constitution and elected government.

Public opinion is divided but evolving. **Eurobarometer 2024** shows 51% of citizens believe the EU is "**not democratic enough**" — yet 58% support more EU power in climate policy, and 53% want more EP power. Younger citizens are more supportive of transnational lists and digital democracy.

Comparatively, the EU lags behind the US and Switzerland in **direct democracy and subsidiarity**. The US has strong federalism and separation of powers; Switzerland has frequent referendums and bottom-up subsidiarity. The EU is unique: a union of states, not a superstate — with shared sovereignty, no constitution, and no direct election of its executive.

In conclusion, end of 2025 two main deficiencies characterise the E.U and it functioning. There is a lack of democracy and citizens participation, even if the treaties define it otherwise. Too many competences on al domains are now micro-handled at the level of the Commission largely bypassing the European Parliament, who is still de sure de legislative power but de facto mainly adopt the laws proposed by the Commission, majority against opposition parties.

At the same time the European Union clearly lacks a coherent legal framework at the supra-national level for its defense, security and political as well as economic international position. In these domains, then E.U. can only act as a follower in a NATO context and as a subsidiary of the main economic powers like the U.S. and China.

The future? Transnational lists may be adopted by 2029. The ECI could become binding by 2026**. AI and digital tools are being piloted to enhance transparency, participation, and deliberation — from AI-powered policy explainers to blockchain voting.

Think tanks agree: reform is urgent. Bruegel calls for EP budget power; EPC for transnational lists; DiEM25 for a federal constitution. The challenge is balancing national sovereignty with supranational democracy — without losing legitimacy or unity.

In short: the EU is not a finished product — it's a living project, shaped by crises, citizens, and technology. Its democratic future depends on courage to reform — not just institutions, but how citizens engage with them. The Schuman2030 proposes a reform that addresses many of the current issues by taking lessons from successful countries like Switzerland and even China.

2. Summary for Policymakers:

"Subsidiarity & Direct Democracy Protocol"

A realistic, legally sound new democracy treaty to strengthen EU democracy — inspired by Swiss federalism, adapted for EU scale

Why This Matters

- **51% of EU citizens** believe the EU is "not democratic enough" (Eurobarometer 2024)
- **Trust in EU institutions remains low** — but **support for reform is high**
- **Direct democracy tools** (ECI, referendums) are underused — and non-binding
- **Subsidiarity is weak** — citizens and national parliaments lack real power

This Protocol restores **legitimacy, accountability, and citizen power,** rebuilding the EU's democratic foundations.

Key Reforms

Reform	What it does	Why it works
Subsidiarity Impact Assessments	Mandatory review before any EU law — national parliaments can block if violated	Prevents overreach, Re-empowers states
Binding ECI (500K signatures)	Citizens can force Commission to propose law — if Parliament/Council approve, it becomes law	Real citizen power, not just consultation
EU-Wide Referendums*	Triggered by 1M citizens or 9 member states — binding on treaties, budgets, rights	Legitimizes major decisions
Citizens' Assemblies	1,000 randomly selected citizens deliberate on key policies — advise Parliament	Balances political expertise with public voice
Rotating Commission President	Elected by Parliament for 2 years — rotates among member states	Reduces Brussels' bureaucracy and autocratic perception
Cantonal/member state Autonomy Zones	Member states keep full control over education, health, justice, culture	Respects diversity, reduces friction

Expected Outcomes (by 2030)

Metric	Target
Trust in EU institutions	+15% (from 35% to 50%)
Citizen participation (ECI use)	+300% (from 10 to 30 initiatives/year)
Turnout in European elections	60% (from 51% in 2024)
Subsidiarity violations	-50% (via mandatory assessments)

Feasibility

Factor	Ratings (1-5)	Notes
Legal feasibility	4 / 5	Uses existing treaty amendment procedures
Political feasibility	3 / 5	Sovereigntists may support; federalists may resist deeper decentralization
Technical feasibility	5/5	Digital tools (e-signatures, blockchain voting) already piloted
Overall feasibility	3,5 / 5	Realistic if phased, piloted, and citizen-driven

Implementation Timeline

Phase	Action	Deadline
Phase 1	Adoption by European Convention	2026
Phase 2	Ratification by member states	2027 - 2028
Phase 3	Launch digital ECI & referendum platform	2028
Phase 4	First Citizens' Assembly	2029
Phase 5	First EU-wide referendum	2030

Conclusion

This is not a radical overhaul — it is a **pragmatic evolution, yet it corrects a democratic deficit.**
It gives citizens real power, national parliaments real oversight, and m**ember states real autonomy** — while **preserving the EU's core achievements**. The E.U. as such wil emerge as more competitive player in international politics and economy.
The EU can become a **union of nations — not a superstate** — where **democracy is not delegated — but practiced**.

Next Steps for Policymakers

1. **Submit to the European Parliament** — via Committee on Constitutional Affairs
2. **Present to national parliaments** — for ratification
3. **Pilot the digital ECI and referendum platform** — in 3 member states
4. **Launch the first Citizens' Assembly** — on e.g. environmental issues, AI, defense, …

3. Subsidiarity: a bottom-up competence model

Policy Brief for National Parliaments

Strengthening Subsidiarity — A Tiered Competence Model for Bottom-Up Democracy

To: National Parliamentarians, Committee Chairs, Constitutional Affairs Committees
From: Project Schuman2030
Date: 2025-12-08
Subject: Proposal to Reallocate Competences for a More Democratic, Decentralized European Union yet strengthening the supra-national competences.

Executive Summary

The EU's democratic deficit stems from overreach — not lack of power, but lack of local control. To restore legitimacy, we propose a tiered competence model — inspired by Swiss federalism — that reserves most powers at the member states and local levels, and reserves EU action to areas where it is truly necessary.

This is not a call to dismantle the EU — but to rebuild it as a union of sovereign partners, where decisions are made closest to citizens and member states where they have a direct impact.
Key Recommendations

1. **Adopt a Subsidiarity Filter**
   - Before any EU law:
     - Ask "Can this be done at member state or local level?"
     - If yes, EU does not act.
     - EU competence is restricted to cross border issues and domains

2. **Define Reserved Competences**
   - Member states retain full control over:
     - Education, Health, Justice, Culture, Taxation, Social Welfare, Local Infra-structure, defense, bilateral international politics
     - EU may only set **frameworks** — not detailed rules

3. **EU reserved competences**
   - Coordination across multiple member states
   - Cross border issues like transport, coordinate defense and international relations

4. **Empower Regional/Municipal Governments**
   - Cities and regions decide:
     - Schools, Local Police, Urban Planning, Cultural Events
   - National governments set minimum standards — not detailed rules.

5. **Strengthen National Parliament Review**
   - Introduce "Red Card" procedure:
     - If half of national parliaments object → EU proposal withdrawn.

6. **Pilot Local Autonomy Zones**
   - Let 3–5 member states test full autonomy in education, health, or taxation — report results to EU.

Expected Outcomes

Metric	Target
Trust in EU institutions	+15% (from 35% to 50%)
Citizen participation	+30% in local decision-making
Subsidiarity violations	-50% (via mandatory assessments)
National parliament influence	+40% in EU lawmaking

Feasibility

Factor	Rating (1–5)	Notes
Legal feasibility	4/5	Uses existing treaty amendment procedures
Political feasibility	3/5	Sovereigntists support; federalists may resist
Technical feasibility	5/5	Digital tools enable local decision-making
Overall feasibility	3.5/5	Realistic if phased, piloted, and citizen-driven

Conclusion

This is not a radical reform — it is a **return to the original spirit of the EU**:
- Unity in diversity
- Cooperation, not control
- Bottom-up subsidiarity
- Bringing democracy at the lower levels reinforces citizens support

Let member states be **sovereign partners** — not subordinate units.
Let cities and regions decide their own futures — not Brussels.

Next Steps
1. Adopt this brief in your national parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee
2. Propose a "Subsidiarity Charter" to the European Convention
3. Pilot Local Autonomy Zones in your country
4. Engage citizens — use digital tools to gather input on local competences

4. Competence Allocation

A Bottom-Up Subsidiarity-Based EU

(Tiered Model: EU Level → Member State ("Canton") → Regional/Municipal)
Subsidiarity is the engine of bottom-up democracy. To make it work, we must clearly define which competences belong where — not just in theory, but in practice.
Below is a **structured, tiered allocation of competences** — inspired by Swiss federalism, adapted to EU scale — that enables **true bottom-up governance**:

Principle:
"Decisions are made at the lowest level capable of acting effectively,
unless EU-wide action is necessary"

Tier 1: EU Level — Exclusive Competences

(Only the EU can act — member states have no power here)
These are areas where **only the EU can ensure coherence, fairness, or effectiveness** — often because they cross borders or require uniform rules.

Exclusive Competences (TFEU Article 3)

Area	Why EU-Level Only
Customs Union	Single market requires common external tariffs
Competition Policy	Prevents member states from distorting the single market
Monetary Policy (Eurozone)	Only ECB can manage euro — prevents fragmentation
Common Commercial Policy	Negotiate trade deals as one bloc — not 27 separate actors
EU level defence	Provides an efficient EU level defense organisation, no un-coordinated procurement and command
International politics	Provides strength through operating as a block in case of international matters
Long term planning	Provides guidance in technology, geo-political evolution, etc. beyond the politcial cycles

Note: These are already exclusive under current treaties — no change needed.

Tier 2: EU Level — Shared Competences

(EU and member states can act — but EU prevails if it acts)
These are areas where **EU action is useful**, but **member states can still act** — unless the EU legislates.

Shared Competences (TFEU Article 4)

Area	EU Role	Member State Role
Internal Market	Sets rules for goods, services, capital, people	Implements, enforces, adapts locally
Agriculture & Fisheries	Common policies, subsidies	Manages local implementation
Environment	Sets minimum standards (e.g., CO_2 targets)	Implements, enforces, sets higher standards
Consumer Protection	Sets baseline rules	Can add stricter rules
Transport	Sets cross-border rules (safety, interoperability)	Manages local infrastructure
Energy	Sets security, sustainability goals	Manages grids, pricing, local production
Research & Innovation	Funds EU-wide programs	Manages local R&D, universities
Trans-European Networks	Plans major infrastructure (rail, energy, digital)	Builds, maintains, funds locally
Defense	Member State	Trans-European common defense policy and command structure, requires unanimity
Foreign Policy	Member state - bilateral agreements	Can set Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — but requires unanimity

Tier 3: Member State Level — Reserved Competences

(Member states have full autonomy — EU can only set frameworks)

These are areas where local knowledge, culture, and diversity matter most — and where EU action is only allowed if necessary for the internal market or fundamental rights.

Reserved Competences (Inspired by Swiss Cantons)

Area	Member State Autonomy	EU Role (Only if Necessary)
Political organization	Full control over its internal political and democratic structure	Can set minimum standards for Separation of power, rule of law
Education	Full control over curriculum, funding, language, universities	Can set mutual recognition of diplomas
Healthcare	Full control over hospitals, insurance, public health	Can set minimum standards (e.g., pandemic response)
Justice & Police	Full control over courts, prosecution, prisons	Can set cross-border cooperation rules (e.g., Eurojust)
Culture	Full control over language, arts, heritage, media	Can fund EU-wide cultural programs
Social Welfare	Full control over pensions, unemployment, housing	Can set minimum social rights (e.g., EU Pillar of Social Rights)
Local Infrastructure	Full control over roads, public transport, water, waste	Can set environmental or safety standards
Taxation	Full control over income, corporate, property taxes	Can set minimum rates (e.g., digital tax) or anti-avoidance rules
Housing & Urban Planning	Full control over zoning, building codes, rent control	Can set energy efficiency standards
Defense	Full control over national armed forces, conscription, military doctrine	Can set common defense policy (CSDP), joint procurement, training
Foreign Policy	Full control over bilateral relations, ambassadors, diplomacy	Can set Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — but requires unanimity

This is the core of "bottom-up" democracy — member states as "cantons" with real power.

- Defense and Foreign Policy are reserved to member states — not exclusive to the EU.
- The EU can coordinate (CSDP, CFSP) — but cannot override national decisions.
- This reflects current EU reality — and Swiss-inspired federalism (where cantons have no army, but Switzerland has a federal defense).

Tier 4: Regional / Municipal Level — Local Autonomy

(Within member states — regions, cities, municipalities)
These are areas where **local governments** — not even national governments — should decide.

Local Competences (Inspired by Swiss Municipalities)

Area	Local Autonomy	National / EU Role
Primary & Secondary Education	Curriculum, school management, teacher hiring	National sets minimum standards
Local Police	Patrols, community safety, traffic enforcement	National sets legal framework
Social Assistance	Local welfare, food banks, homeless support	National sets eligibility criteria
Urban Planning	Zoning, building permits, green spaces	National sets environmental rules
Local Transport	Buses, trams, bike lanes	National sets safety standards
Cultural Events	Festivals, libraries, museums	National funds, EU may co-fund

Subsidiarity means: if a city can decide it — let it decide it.

How Defense & Foreign Policy Fit into Subsidiarity

1. Defense

Current EU Framework: Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) — voluntary, inter-governmental
- **Subsidiarity Principle**: Member states retain full control over their armed forces
  - EU can only coordinate joint missions, procurement, training
  - EU can prepare common defense policies and command structure, activated on a need-to basis

Example: France can deploy troops to Africa — EU can't stop it, but can offer logistics or funding

This is already the case — and reflects Swiss model: cantons have no army, but Switzerland has a federal defense.

2. Foreign Policy

- Current EU Framework: Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — requires unanimity
- Subsidiarity Principle: Member states set their own foreign policy — EU can only speak with one voice if all agree
- Example: Hungary can maintain ties with Russia — EU can't force it to cut them

This is already the case — and reflects the Swiss model: cantons have no foreign policy, but Switzerland has a federal one.

How It Works in Practice: The "Subsidiarity Filter"

Before any EU law is proposed:
1. **Step 1**: Can the objective be achieved by member states?

   → If yes → EU does not act.
1. **Step 2**: If not — can it be achieved by regions or municipalities?

   → If yes → EU sets framework only.
1. **Step 3: If not — EU acts, but with minimum intervention.**

   → Only sets what is necessary — leaves room for local adaptation. Key criterium: the issue is cross-border and the member states agree unanimously.

This is the "Swiss model" — decisions at lowest level, EU only when necessary.

Key Insight
Bottom-up democracy does not mean "no EU" — it means "EU only when needed."
The EU's role is to **enable, not replace** — to set frameworks, not dictate details.
Member states are not "cantons" in the Swiss sense — but they can be **sovereign partners** with real autonomy — if we design the system that way.

Defense and foreign policy are not "EU exclusive" — they are "member state reserved" — with EU coordination allowed.
This is not a radical change — it's a **recognition of current reality**.
The EU can **coordinate**, but not **command** — unless member states agree.

Next Steps (Building This Further)

1. Draft a "Subsidiarity Charter" — defining when EU can act
2. Map current EU laws to this tiered model — identify overreach
3. Pilot local autonomy zones — e.g., let cities decide their own environmental policies
4. Create a "Subsidiarity Ombudsman" — to review EU proposals for overreach

5. "EU Long-Term Strategic Framework

Inspired by China, Adapted for Democracy"
A practical, democratic hybrid model to overcome bureaucratic inertia and ideological drift — while preserving EU value

Why This Matters
- China plans 60 years ahead — the EU is stuck in 5-year mandates
- EU directives (e.g., Green Deal) are costly — often without local adaptation
- Bureaucracy slows execution — while provinces in China compete and innovate
- Citizens feel left behind — trust in EU institutions is low (35%)

This proposal **borrows China's strengths** — long-term vision, meritocracy, local competition — **without sacrificing democracy, rule of law, or human rights**

Key Reforms

Reform	What it does	Why it works
Strategic Planning Council	12 meritocratic experts — 10-year terms develop 50-year EU vision	Replaces ideological drift with strategic foresight
EU Innovation Provinces	5–10 regions compete on GDP, innovation, environmental impact — rewarded for success	Turns directives into execution — local adaptation
Reformed Green Deal	Challenge" not "directive" — regions design their own path to reducing environmental impact	Reduces economic cost — increases buy-in

Expected Outcomes (by 2035)

Metric	Target
GDP Growth	+1.5% (from 1.2% to 2.7%)
Unemployment	-1% (from 6.5% to 5.5%)
Innovation Output	+30% (via "Innovation Provinces
Public Trust in EU	+20% (from 35% to 55%
Green Transition Cost	-20% (via local adaptation)

Feasibility

Factor	Rating (1–5)	Notes
Legal feasibility	4 / 5	Requires treaty change — possible via simplified revision
Political feasibility	3 / 5	Sovereigntists may support; federalists may resist deeper decentralization
Technical feasibility	5 / 5	Digital tools enable performance tracking, competition
Overall feasibility	3,5 / 5	Realistic if phased, piloted, and citizen-driven

Conclusion

The EU does not need to become China — but it can learn from China's strengths:
• Long-term planning — not just 5-year mandates
• Meritocratic execution — not just bureaucratic inertia
• Provincial competition — not just top-down directives

The key is to adapt these elements to a democratic, rule-of-law framework — where citizens, not just technocrats, shape the future.
The EU can be both strategic and sovereign — if we design it that way.

Next Steps

1. Submit to European Parliament — via Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs
2. Pilot "Innovation Provinces" — in e.g. Bavaria, Flanders, Île-de-France, …
3. Reform Green Deal — from directive to challenge
4. Introduce 15-year budgeting — via MFF reform

Sources:
1. Euria and Gemini-Pro were used as AI search engines
2. European Parliament, Treaty of Lisbon, Eurobarometer, Pew Research, Swiss Federal Chancellery, U.S. Constitution, historical archives (1950–2025)