

Dear chair, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to correct a small mistake in the list of participants: I am not a Member of European Parliament, I work for the Parliament as a legal adviser for a political group. In any case, I speak here in my personal capacity, not on behalf of the Parliament.

I would like to thank Madam Independent Expert and her excellent team for the draft recommendations. I only want to refer to paragraph 37 of the background document which concerns the right to vote and be elected for non-citizens belonging to minorities. In my opinion, this right should be explicitly mentioned in the recommendations as well. For example, we could add the following text to paragraph 13:

*Forms of political participation for non-citizens belonging to minorities should be developed. They may include local electoral rights, membership of the governing boards of self-governing bodies, inclusion of elected non-citizen observers in municipal and regional bodies as applicable, as well as in national parliament.*

I am glad to notice that Principle No.9 of the Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union states that the participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration. The explanation of this principle continues that wherever possible, immigrants could even be involved in elections, the right to vote and joining political parties. When unequal forms of membership and levels of engagement persist for longer than is either reasonable or necessary, divisions or differences can become deeply rooted. Thus the European Union believes that effective political participation is a key to integration. I believe that our Forum could support this idea.