



# European Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe

Evaluation Report



# European Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe

## Evaluation Report

Dominik Hierlemann und Christian Huesmann

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# 1. The project:

## Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe

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### Profile: Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe

<b>INITIATOR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The European Commission</li></ul>
<b>HOST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The Economic and Social Committee</li></ul>
<b>ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Kantar, service provider responsible for the organisation of the process and the recruitment of all participants. Working together with:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Missions Publiques, conception and moderation of the event.</li><li>■ The Democratic Society, conception and moderation; working with individual facilitators as well as experts from the European Policy Centre.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>ACADEMIC PARTNER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Bertelsmann Stiftung, advisor; conception and evaluation of the event (04 – 06 May 2018)</li></ul>
<b>TOPIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Preparation of an online questionnaire from the European Commission, made available for all EU citizens on the website of the European Commission.</li><li>■ The subject of the proposed questionnaire is "The future of Europe".</li><li>■ First transnational deliberative citizen participation on this scale</li></ul>
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Integral part of the Commission's active participation in citizen consultations in EU Member States.</li></ul>
<b>AIMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Preparation of twelve open and closed questions that identify the interests of all EU citizens and lead to an online questionnaire.</li><li>■ Implementation of an additional participative element at EU level to give citizens a more concrete idea of what the EU is and does.</li><li>■ Experimenting with a transnational dialogue involving citizens from 27 countries.</li></ul>
<b>TIMELINE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Citizens' Panel and preparation of the questionnaire: 4 – 6 May 2018</li><li>■ Online phase of the questionnaire: 9 May 2018 – 9 May 2019</li></ul>
<b>PROCESS MODULES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Preparatory meeting in Brussels with stakeholders.</li><li>■ Recruitment of randomly selected citizens from 27 EU countries (two to six citizens per country).</li><li>■ Event on European Commission premises on 5 and 6 May to develop the questionnaire.</li><li>■ Online phase of the questionnaire.</li></ul>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ First transnational dialogue with 100 randomly selected citizens from 27 EU Member States.</li><li>■ Online survey on the future of Europe in which all EU citizens can take part.</li></ul>
<b>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <a href="https://ec.europa.eu/consultation/runner/Future-of-Europe?surveylanguage=en">https://ec.europa.eu/consultation/runner/Future-of-Europe?surveylanguage=en</a></li></ul>

## Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe

New forms of democratic participation are gaining ground rapidly. Many EU Member States have reacted to their citizens' increasing demands for participation. There are more and more new ways to participate in political discussions and decision-making on both local and national level. By participating in the European Citizens' Initiative, online consultations by the Commission, or European Citizens' Dialogues, EU citizens can also take an active part in policy-making at the European level.

A wide range of different citizens' consultations began in EU Member States in spring 2018 on the instigation of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, with the support of the other European heads of state and government and the European Commission. With European Parliament elections coming up in May 2019, this has prompted a transnational discussion about the future of the EU.

As part of this debate, the Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe, which was organised by the Commission and took place from 4 – 6 May 2018 (5 May: Europe Day), brought together 100 citizens from all EU27 Member States to discuss the future of Europe. Kantar, a service provider in the field of market research, working together with different organisations in the field of par-

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*“The panellists are made up of 100 people from across Europe, chosen at random in a way that ensures the diversity of the European population – women and men, young and old, from all socio-professional backgrounds and living in urban, rural or semi-urban areas.”*

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ticipation, was assigned with the the organisation and facilitation of the process. For example, participants from all over Europe were selected at random in order to represent the diversity of Europe and its citizens. The Bertelsmann Stiftung acted as an academic partner and was responsible for evaluating the event.

The aim of the Citizens' Panel was to develop 12 questions for an online survey on the future of Europe – created by EU citizens for EU citizens. Open and closed questions were combined in such a way that citizens could complete the questionnaire quickly and easily.

The online survey was launched in all EU languages on 6 May 2018. Initial results are scheduled for discussion by heads of state and government in December 2018. A definitive report will be submitted on 9 May 2019 during the EU27 Summit in Sibiu, Romania.

## PROGRAM

### Day of the Citizens' Panel from 04 – 06 May 2018

#### FRIDAY 4 MAY

Arrival of Panellists and Welcoming Event

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#### SATURDAY 5 MAY

08:45-09:30 Registration and welcome

09:30-12:30 Panel and Working Groups

- Citizens work together to identify the main topics of the questionnaire – first in a plenary situation, than in smaller working groups.
- In addition to their own interests, they take into account the manifold backgrounds of European citizens

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-17:30 Panel and Working Groups

- Citizens prioritise three topics per working group and present them in the plenum
- All citizens vote for 12 topics to be formulated into questions – this is done by Kantar overnight, with the help of one representative of each working group

18:30 Meeting in Hotel Thon lobby and transfer by bus to Leon Restaurant

19:00-21:00 Dinner

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#### SUNDAY 6 MAY

08:15-09:00 Registration and welcome

09:00-13:00 Panel and Working Groups

- Citizens approve or alter the presented questions, first in the Working Groups, then in a plenary session
- All citizens vote for 12 final questions of the questionnaire

Departure of Panellists and end of the event



© European Commission

# Panel citoyen européen European Citizen Panel

**5 – 6 mai/May 2018**

CESE | Bâtiment Jacques Delors | Rue Belliard 99 | Bruxelles



**Comité économique et social européen**  
**European Economic and Social Committee**

## 2. Evaluation: Citizens' Panel from 04 – 06 May 2018

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### MAIN FINDINGS

- **Participants in the first European Citizens' Panel saw it as a great success. More than 85% rated the event as "excellent" to "good".**

This is also a very good rating in comparison with other participation processes, so the event was a complete success in the opinion of the participants. It is worth mentioning that the overall rating of the Citizens' Panel was almost entirely positive irrespective of national borders.

- **More than 85% of participants say that the Citizens' Panel has influenced their view on the EU positively and an overwhelming majority of participants would recommend the event to friends and relatives.**

The success of the event is not least that participants were able to gain a better insight into the EU and its many benefits. In combination with the impressively positive evaluation of the process, the participants have also become ambassadors for successful participation at EU level, and ultimately in the EU itself.

- **Cultural diversity is an asset, language not a major hurdle.**

Evaluation of the discussions and results clearly show that language differences are not automatically an obstacle for successful participation. The fact that the discussions were enriched by the presence of diverse points of view from different countries and cultures was considered particularly praiseworthy by participants.

- **More than 80% of participants were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the results of the event.**

The results achieved by joint efforts are the core element of every participation process. The participants were deeply satisfied with the questions they created, which once again underlines the success of the event.

**GENERAL EVALUATION:** Citizen participation at European level works! More than 85 per cent of citizens gave the Citizens' Panel the rating "very good" or "good".

Our first point of interest was how the participants who responded rate the European Citizens' Panel. We asked the following question: "How do you rate today's event overall? – Very good (1), good (2), satisfactory (3), mediocre (4), or bad (5)." The response was unambiguous: more than 85 per cent of the participants gave the European Citizens' Panel the rating "very good" or "good". Only about 13 per cent of participants gave the event the rating "satisfactory" or "mediocre". Not one participant asked gave the Citizens' Panel the rating "bad". The resultant mean rating is a very good 1.7.

The response regarding the transnational element of the Citizens' Panel was particularly positive. One participant stated that "It was nice to be able to interact with other people from different nationalities." Only a few participants did not find the groups diverse enough.

The composition of the groups was a result of the large amount of translation resources used, which meant that translations into all languages could not be provided for every group. Monitoring also revealed that the ability of participants to understand each other was more important for the success of the event than maximising the diversity of the groups.

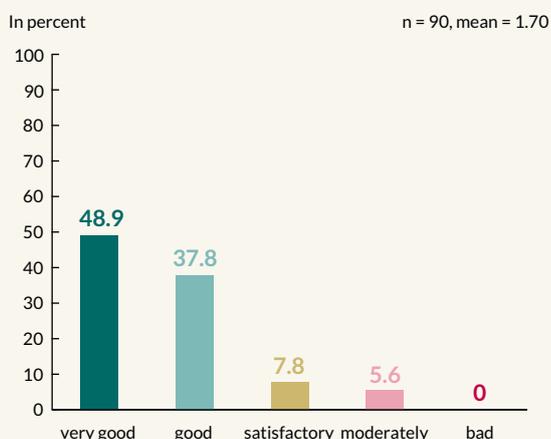
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*"I liked being together with and understanding other European citizens."*

A participant at the event

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#### In general: How do you rate today's event?



Source: Own survey.

BertelsmannStiftung

#### OVERVIEW OF METHODS

The evaluation of the Citizens' Panel in Brussels is based on three core elements. Firstly, there was the standardised questionnaire with an extremely high response rate of 95 per cent. Besides questions about overall satisfaction with the event, the questionnaire also explicitly asked about various organizational elements, the quality of the process and dialogue, and satisfaction with the results achieved.

Then the results of the evaluation of this questionnaire were supplemented with participants' remarks on the open questions "What did you like about the event? What could have been improved? What did you learn?", which were also part of the questionnaire.

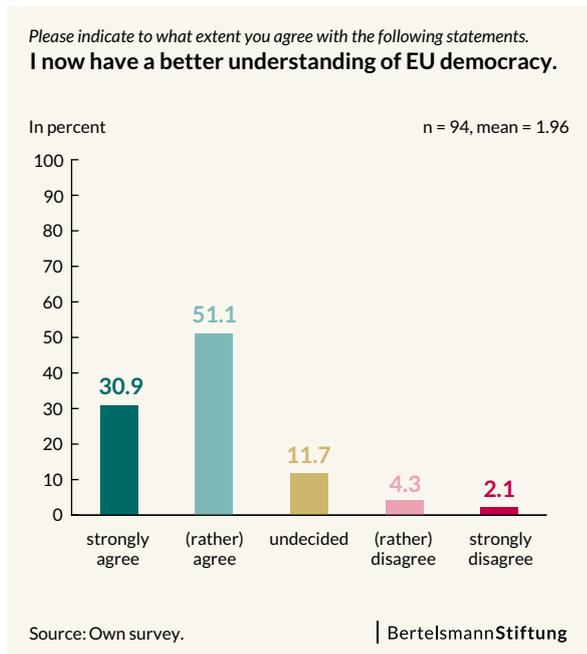
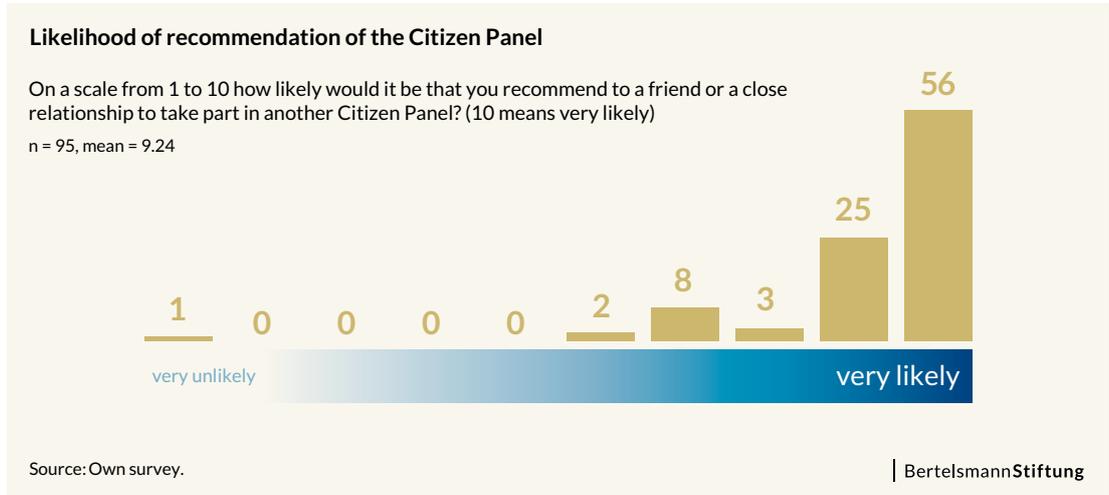
Monitoring was the third element which accompanied the evaluation. Observers from the Bertelsmann Stiftung were present at the event to monitor various criteria related to the quality of organization, process and results.

This report evaluates the European Citizens' Panel which took place from 4 to 6 May 2018 in Brussels.

**OVERALL EVALUATION:** Citizen participation has a positive effect on society! An overwhelming majority of participants would recommend friends and relatives to take part in similar processes.

When participants were asked how likely they were, on a scale of 1 to 10, to recommend participation in a Citizens' Panel to a friend or relative, more than half of those polled answered

with 10 (very likely). All other participants answered with values between 6 and 9 i.e. very high likelihood of recommendation. Only one participant stated that it was highly unlikely (1) that he would recommend taking part in a Citizens' Panel! The conclusion from this is that participants rate the event as a positive experience that they would recommend to their friends and relatives.



*"I'm proud to have participated in this event."*

*"I now understand more about how the EU works."*

*"I will follow the Commission's work with greater engagement now."*

Participants at the event

Another significant successful outcome of the event is that participants were able to gain a better, more positive insight into the EU, its benefits and how it works. In combination with the impressively positive evaluation of the process, the participants have also become ambassadors for successful participation at EU level, and ultimately in the EU itself.

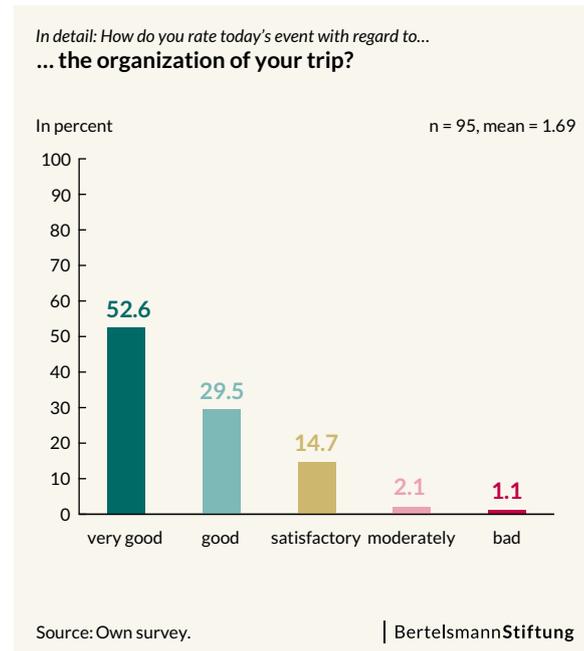
**ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITY:** High marks for the organization of the process – with room for improvement. Overall citizens' rating of organization was good or very good.

Organization of the Citizens' Panel was rated very positively and approvingly. Over 80 per cent of participants rate the organization of travel to the event as “very good” or “good”. Considering that the invitation was at short notice and that some participants had to travel very long distances to get to Brussels, this is an impressive result. The methods used in the workshops were also well received. More than 80 per cent of all participants rated them as at least “good” (2).

Time pressure and high workload were the main reasons cited for criticism. Some participants wished there had been more more information in advance about the process and the EU. It was also noted that the generally tight schedule, for both the preparation and implementation of the event, sometimes created a tense, hectic atmosphere.

**ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITY:** Citizens appreciate marks of esteem – and notice if they are missing.

The extremely positive ratings and the feeling of pride at having attended such an important event can also be attributed to the appreciation expressed by the moderators. There is clear evidence that, as a result of the emphasis placed on the ground-breaking character of this pilot event and the underlining of its significance by inviting a variety of speakers and moderators, the attitude of participants was very positive and committed. In particular, participants praised the use of “Sherpas” and translators, the appreciation shown by the moderators/presenters, and the reception on Friday. On the other hand, they were critical of the absence of translators in individual cases, very condensed working phases and the communal dinner on Saturday. These “soft” factors have a fairly significant effect on participants' satisfaction and the evaluation of events.

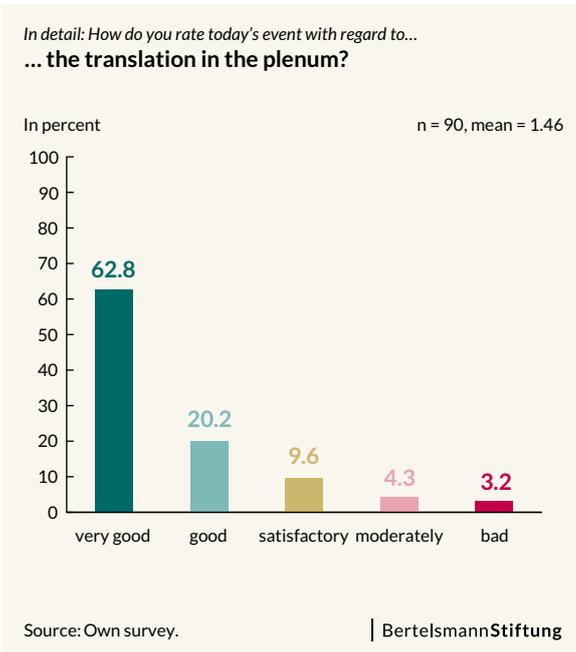



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*“An exceptionally good organization of such a big event.”*

A participant at the event

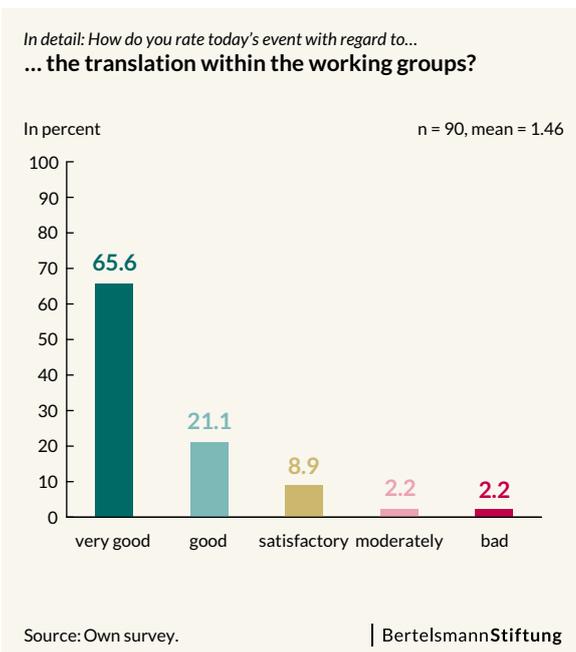
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**ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITY:** Language is key – equal conditions for everyone are essential.

Translation services were an essential part of the event. As citizens from 27 different Member States were present, language barriers had to be overcome. The majority of participants rated translation services in both the plenary sessions and the working groups between 'very good' (1) and 'good' (2).

However, an uneven distribution of translators among participants was apparent in the evaluation of the process. Some participants who had no simultaneous translation or were not sufficiently proficient in English felt left out, and stated openly that they felt disadvantaged. The monitors also noticed that people who spoke little or no English and had no access to simultaneous translation services took a much less active role in group discussions.




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*"It's very convenient and great that translators were present during the discussions."*

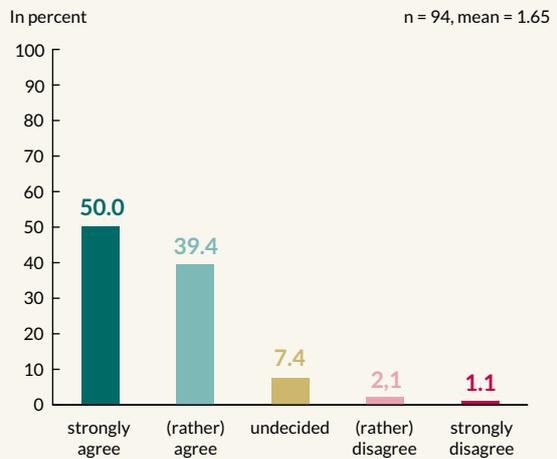
A participant at the event

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**PROCESS QUALITY:** The fair, open and respectful interaction between participants and organizers is a core element of the process. Participants attach particular value to mutual respect and trustful cooperation.

The quality of the overall process was rated very positively. General agreement with the statement that the participants treated each other with respect is especially prominent. More than 95 per cent of all participants “strongly” (1) or “rather” (2) agreed with this statement. This means that the atmosphere of the event was very positive and appreciative, a conclusion matched by what the monitors observed. The evaluation also demonstrates a great willingness to engage in dialogue, as shown by the high level of agreement with the statements that discussions were factual and comprehensible (90 per cent “strongly” (1) or “rather” (2) agreed), and the broad agreement with the statement that participants were prepared to compromise (89 per cent “rather” (2) or “strongly” (1) agreed). This correlates with the monitors’ observation of discussions in the working groups. The conclusion from this is that the discussions were target-oriented. Objective, open communication between participants, and their willingness to compromise, are essential conditions for the achievement of good results.

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.  
**The participants were prepared to compromise.**



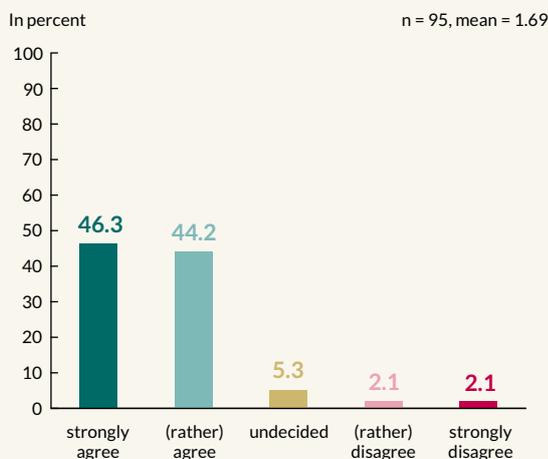
Source: Own survey. | BertelsmannStiftung

*“I liked the good spirit and professionalism.”*

*“Friendship, collegueship, understanding”*

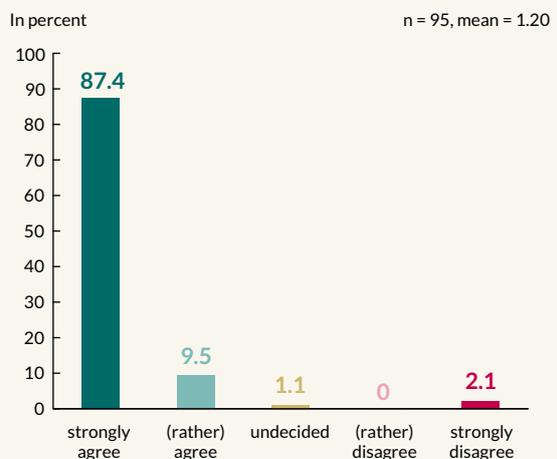
Participants at the event

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.  
**The discussion was factual and comprehensible.**

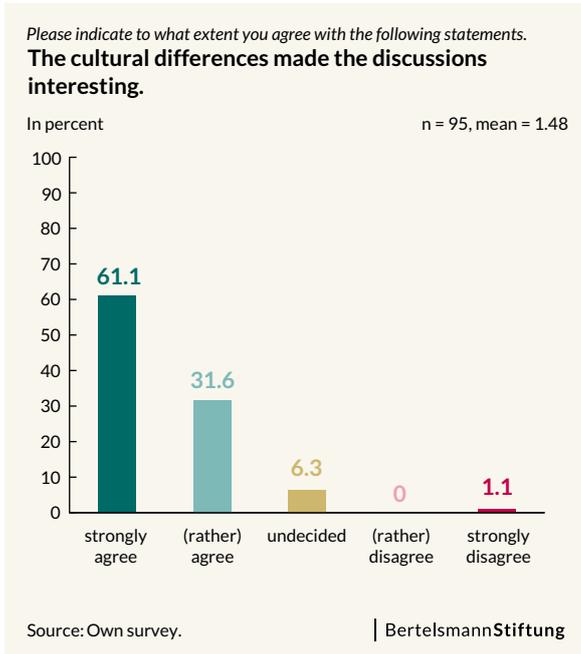


Source: Own survey. | BertelsmannStiftung

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.  
**The participants treated one another respectfully.**



Source: Own survey. | BertelsmannStiftung



**PROCESS QUALITY:** Cultural diversity enriched the discussions

Over 90% of participants saw cultural differences as an enrichment of the discussions. This correlates with objectively observed quality characteristics of the process.

All the discussions observed in both the plenary sessions and the workshops were productive and target-oriented. Cultural differences only became an obstacle when there was insufficient basic support for mutual understanding. This shows the significance of technical or personal resources to promote understanding.

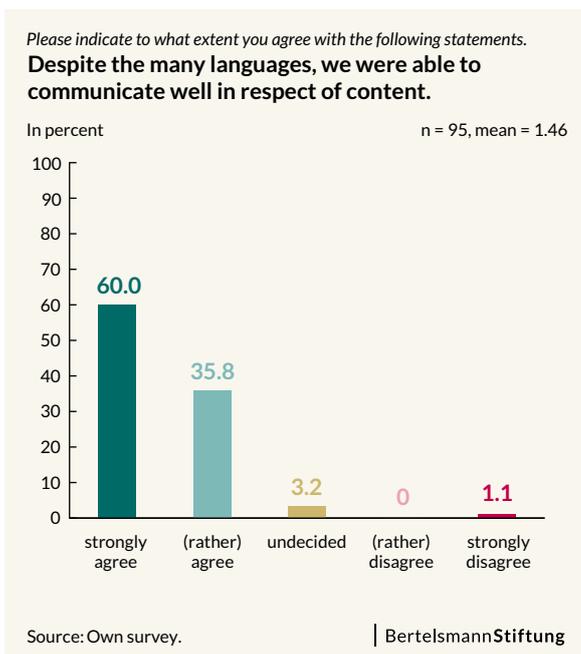
*“I very much enjoyed communicating with the representatives of other countries, to hear their opinions.”*

A participant at the event

**PROCESS QUALITY:** Clear communication and structure are particularly important in cross-lingual processes.

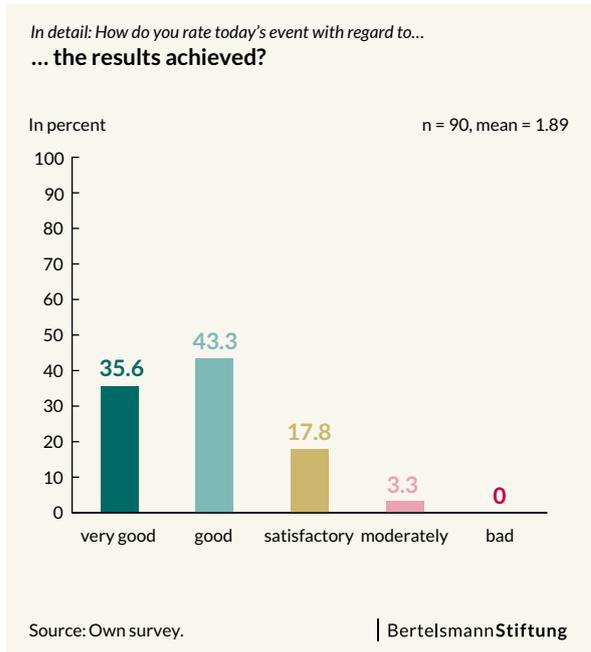
Linguistic differences can potentially lead to complications at transnational events. An overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of participants in the Citizens' Panel in Brussels “strongly” (1) or “rather” (2) agreed with the statement “Despite the many languages, we were able to communicate well with each other”. This means that simultaneous translation in plenary sessions and language assistance in the working groups enabled the communication and exchange of content. Depending on the respective composition of the working group, various solutions were used, all of which were successful. Some groups agreed to use English as their common working language; in other groups, language barriers were overcome with the help of whisper translators or simultaneous translation as used in plenary discussions.

However, it was also evident that any uncertainties about the process and its role were increased by the language barrier, although this was on an individual level rather than country-specific.



**RESULT QUALITY:** The the majority of participants are satisfied with results despite the high input of effort.

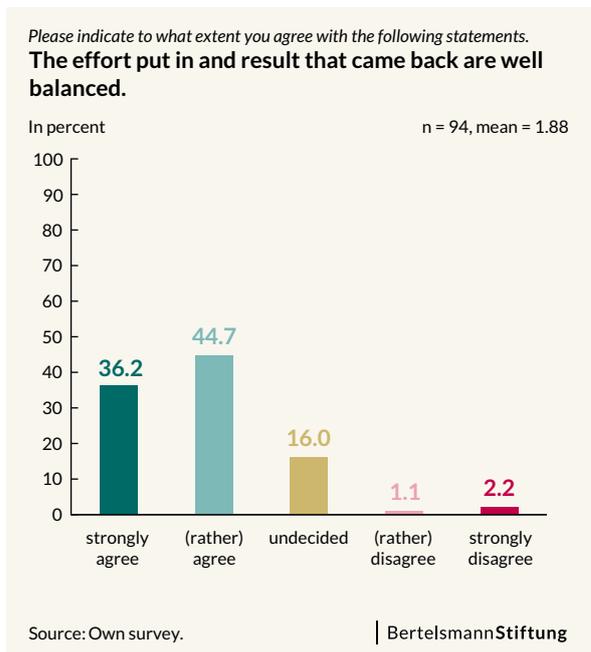
The great majority of participants see the effort and results of the process as proportionate. The citizens consider that their participation has improved the quality of the questionnaire. It is also evident that the questions formulated differ from the conventional questions asked elsewhere, for example in “Eurobarometer”. This highlights the citizens’ influence on the questionnaire and emphasizes the participatory footprint of the process. The set objective – to design a questionnaire “by citizens, for citizens” – has therefore been achieved.

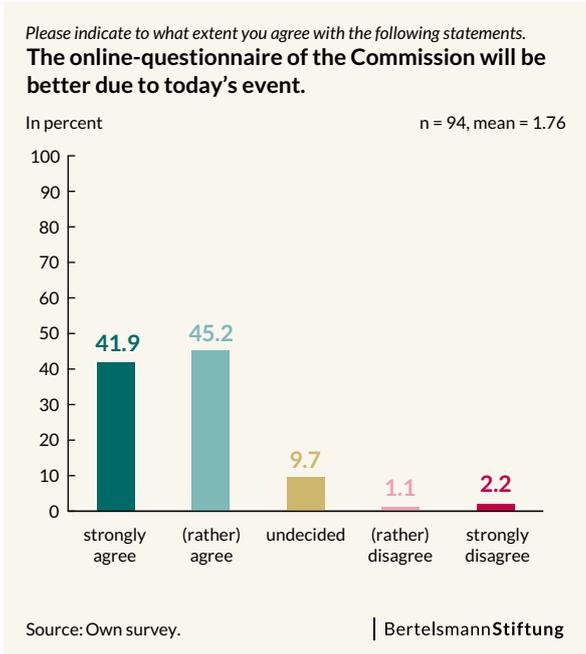


*“To understand how the EU institutions work and the opportunity to share views on issues topical for me.”*

*“I found out more about the cooperation at a high and transnational level.”*

Participants’ responses to the question: “What did I learn?”

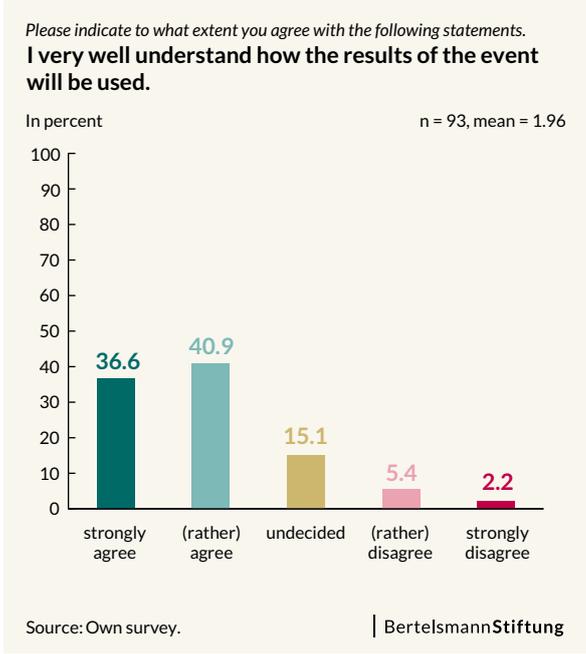




The evaluated responses clearly show that the participants are satisfied with the results achieved. Almost 80 per cent (79 per cent) rated the event as “very good” (1) or “good” (2) with regard to the results achieved. The participants are not only satisfied with the results, but also feel that there is a good balance between results achieved and effort required. Around 80 per cent “strongly” (1) or “rather” (2) agree with this statement. In addition, over 85 per cent of all participants “rather” (2) or “strongly” (1) agree with the statement that the online questionnaire will be better due to the Citizens' Panel event. To summarize these three statements, it can be said that participants were satisfied with the results achieved.

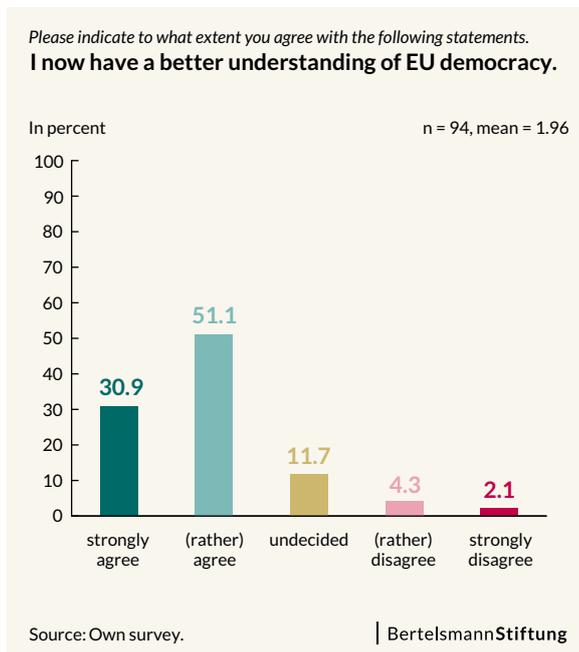
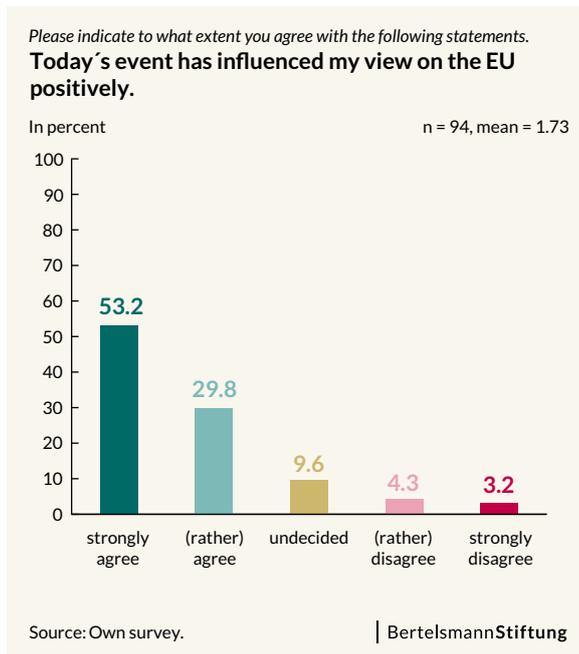
Overall the communication worked: The majority of the participants (around 80%) were aware of how the results of the event would be used later.

However at least some participants would have liked more clarity concerning the aim of the event and what will happen with the results. There is room for improvement.



**RESULT QUALITY:** Citizen participation strengthens the EU's reputation! Over 80% of citizens who attended the event say they now view the EU more positively than before. There is also increased understanding of policymaking processes at EU level.

One particularly positive outcome of the event is its sustained impact. More than 80 per cent of all participants “rather” (2) or “strongly” (1) agreed with the statements “I now have a better understanding of EU democracy” and “Today’s event has influenced my view on the EU positively”. This means that participation in events such as the Citizens’ Panel makes the EU more tangible for its citizens. Firstly, such events generate a better understanding of the European Union and its democratic processes; secondly, they generate trust, because they give citizens an insight into the workings of the EU which were previously unclear. These findings are highly significant for the promotion of long-term confidence and trust in the EU, which is also confirmed by participants’ free-format remarks.



### 3. Five conclusions drawn from the first European Citizens' Panel

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**More participation is needed rather than simply better communication: successful deliberative democracy at EU level.**

The first European Citizens' Panel delivered convincing proof that new forms of dialogue-based democracy can be used successfully at the European level and in EU institutions. The results of the evaluation demonstrate the added benefits of this event for participating citizens and policymakers in Brussels alike. The Citizens' Panel strengthened the citizens' identification with the EU, while European institutions gained meaningful insights into public opinion resulting from the intensive discussions and reflections of a cross-section of European citizens.

On their own, formats such as the Citizens' Panel do not resolve the fundamental problem: giving citizens a greater participative say in European policymaking. However, they are one of many possible ways of preventing the further disconnect of citizens from European politics and policymaking. Basically, it is a matter of shifting the question from "How do we improve the EU's communication (and its success)?" to "Besides the existing forms, how else can we enable citizens to participate more in policymaking?"

**Good expectation management is the key to success – based on more knowledge about participation**

When the participants from all around Europe set off on their journey to Brussels, they had only a very vague idea of what the term European Citizens' Panel meant. This was also the first time that so many citizens selected at random had met in Brussels to formulate new ideas

together and voice their opinions on European politics. Viewed realistically, the expectations of the participating citizens were rather hazy – and very diverse. However, expectations within the EU institutions were equally heterogeneous.

There is still very little experience with deliberative political formats, and movers, shakers and policymakers know too little about participatory instruments that go beyond traditional established forms. This is hardly surprising, and it does not necessarily represent an obstacle to trying out, introducing or even establishing new forms of participation. However, it shows very clearly that more education about new dialogue-based forms is required – not only in political circles, but also among (participating) citizens. A firm knowledge base must be established. Only when a clear expectation management system is in place before and during the process will it be possible to utilise all aspects of a participatory format.

**Innovative forms of participation enhance European democracy and must be embedded in existing institutional arrangements**

As the proverb says, one swallow doesn't make a summer, the same applies to new forms of participation. One Citizens' Panel does not make the European Union more participative and more democratic. However, it is a step in the right direction.

In recent years, a rich variety of new dialogue-based forms of participation have emerged in various democratic states. In a few cases (see Ireland), Citizens' Juries or other forms of

participation were connected directly to existing institutions. Instead of discussing opposing standpoints of representative and direct democracy and falling back on old lines of argument, a lively and diverse democracy can succeed by connecting representative, direct-democracy and other new dialogue-based elements and institutions.

These examples show that new forms of participation for citizens only have a chance of success if they are embedded in existing institutional networks and linked with traditional forms. This also applies for the integration of specific communication strategies. Citizen participation is an addition to traditional forms of democracy and demands additional public relations. For the EU, this means that the development of new participatory forms must not be regarded as an alternative concept to traditional political models. Only when actual political movers, shakers and policymakers recognise the additional benefits of dialogue-based citizen participation and communicate accordingly, it will be possible to exploit its full potential and improve policy-making.

#### Identification of ideal situations for dialogue-based formats required

Citizens' Forums, Citizens' Juries or Citizens' Panels – whatever the exact name given to new citizens' participation formats, they are suitable for use in a wide variety of situations and topics. Especially in recent years, citizen participation has proved itself equally useful and successful in both complex technical matters as well as controversial social and ethical questions. What is successful on the local, regional or national level can also succeed at European level.

Nevertheless, there are numerous additional challenges in Brussels, such as complex EU policymaking decision processes, different political traditions in Member States, heterogeneous cultures of participation, or simply general cultural diversity. The first step is therefore to carefully analyse which situations might offer scope for new forms of citizen participation to benefit the wider political process. Clarity is required regarding the topics and institutions to which

citizen participation may successfully offer new access to shaping political developments.

#### Trust in dialogue-based forms develops through first-hand experience and involvement

Dialogue-based forms of participation require courage both from participants, as they are entering unknown territory, and from politicians, because every participatory process can develop its own dynamics. In the past, courage was often simply a product of necessity in many countries. Citizens become disenchanted with politics, political decisions lead to mass protests, societies become divided. In many cases, new forms of citizen participation were tested and implemented under pressure. Raising awareness – particularly in official circles and government ministries – that these new forms of access work, takes time and patience.

New participation forms and formats will also develop in the EU and its institutions. Changing and improving the participation architecture will be a chance for the EU to make “Europe for citizens” a more tangible term. However, politicians, officials and many representatives of organised civic society will not develop trust in these new forms of dialogue-based participation until they had the opportunity to experience such processes at first hand. Trust is created by one's own experience and involvement – there is no difference between participating citizens and observers from the political elite.

#### Imprint

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Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh, Germany  
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

#### Responsible

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann

#### Authors

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann  
Dr. Christian Huesmann

#### With the help of

Cyrell Otteni

#### Copyediting / Translation

Jessica Thamm, NATIVES GmbH & Co. KG, Bielefeld

#### Photography Credits

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann

#### Graphic Design

Markus Diekmann, Bielefeld

#### Printing

Matthiesen Druck, Bielefeld

### **Address | Contact**

Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
Germany  
Phone +49 5241 81-0

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann  
Senior Expert, Program Future of Democracy  
Phone +49 5241 81-81537  
dominik.hierlemann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)