



New ways to increase citizens' participation in Europe

Cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues
in Frankfurt/Oder, Passau and The Hague

Foreword

The European Union (EU) is in no way self-evident, its democratic legitimacy needs to be continually re-established and created. That is why the EU depends on the support of their citizens, even more than the member states.

European citizens in the 21st Century are self-confident, well-informed and critical. They want to contribute to democracy beyond parties and elections. A sustainable democracy responds to the changes in society and picks up on citizens' changing expectations about participation. New ways and modern forms of direct participation offer the opportunity for citizens to be directly involved in political discussion and decision-making processes. The EU in particular can and must do more, so that a "Europe of the citizens" becomes a political matter of course.

We at the Bertelsmann Stiftung are convinced that citizens don't just have something to say on the day of the election. Each and every individual should be able to participate. Citizens can provide important political momentum together – if they have the opportunity. This is rarely the case in the EU, so far. Compared to some European nation states, there are hardly any dialogical and innovative forms of participation in Brussels.

The EU Commission, in collaboration with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, has developed and implemented three cross-border interactive EU Citizens Dialogues. We have tested new concepts and formats to enable more direct citizen participation in the EU. These transnational EU Citizens Dialogues do more than just help to bring understanding between citizens who come from different Member States. The quality of the discussion between the citizens and the quality of the citizen's suggestions developed here is considerably high. In their exchanges, the European perspective is at least as important to citizens as individual and national views. Thanks to sophisticated interpreting technology, the linguistic diversity is no obstacle to in-depth discussions.

In Europe, we need more transnational EU citizen dialogues, because they are an important element of genuine European citizen participation. Beyond the national framework, the diverse knowledge of different Europeans can be incorporated into the mutual discussions between citizens of several nations. At the same time, social cohesion in Europe is often called into question today. People with different perspectives and opinions still get together far too seldom, they don't converse often enough to understand each other. Transnational EU Citizens Dialogues are a new and more successful form of European discourse.

I hope that the positive experiences of transnational EU citizens' dialogues will encourage institutions across the EU to expand this form of conversation in the future and to fulfil their broader potential: They can also be linked to other opinion-forming and decision-making processes. More dialogue and citizen participation are not contradictory to representative democracy – quite the contrary: They strengthen democracy as a whole. In the European Union, the established and new forms of democratic participation must also work together, complement each other, to strengthen our European democracy.

The time is ripe. The new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has already made it clear in her Political Guidelines that the participation of European citizens in European politics must be strengthened. I am pleased that we can give that a boost with this brochure.



A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by 'D' and 'G'.

Aart De Geus
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,
Bertelsmann Stiftung

The three EU Citizens' Dialogues were conducted by the European Commission
in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

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Contents

Introduction:

EU Citizens' Dialogues enhance the direct exchange
between EU citizens and EU politicians 5

Innovations for more diversity, interaction and understanding 6

**Key points of the three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues:
Participants, topics, programs 9**

EU Citizens' Dialogue on 24 May 2018 in Frankfurt/Oder 10

EU Citizens' Dialogue on 6 December 2018 in Passau 14

EU Citizens' Dialogue on 17 May 2019 in The Hague 18

Evaluation: The Dialogues from the EU citizens' standpoint 22

Results of the three EU Citizens' Dialogues at a glance 26

What Next? Six Ideas for More Citizen Participation in the EU 30

Additional information 34

Imprint 35



Introduction

EU Citizens' Dialogues enhance the direct exchange between EU citizens and EU politicians

The European Union exists through the support of its citizens. Today's citizens want to be more directly involved in policymaking, political discussions and decision-making. To ensure that it remains strong in future, democracy must react to changes in society and address citizens' expectations. New, improved, more comprehensive participation formats will give the EU a chance to make a "Citizens' Europe" a reality. In her "Political Guidelines", the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has pledged to ensure "A greater say for Europeans" and increase the participation of European citizens in European policymaking during her term in office.

Between January 2018 and April 2019, the EU Commission staged more than 1,100 EU Citizens' Dialogues, most of which were in the "classic" format of plenary sessions with questions by individual citizens and answers from EU Commissioners. As a further development of this format, the EU Commission and the Bertelsmann Stiftung carried out three innovative cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues, during which three new features were tested: firstly, citizens were randomly selected from various EU countries to create greater diversity; secondly, interactive methods were used to stimulate the participatory dynamic of the events; and, thirdly, multilingual communication was facilitated by means of special interpreting techniques.

But are cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues with totally diverse citizens from two, three or five European countries, in two, three or four languages, involving profound discussions about complex topics actually even practicable? What is the added value for citizens and policy-makers? We wanted to determine whether the innovative approaches are successful, which factors are decisive, and how they can contribute to the improvement of citizens' participation at EU level, so we evaluated the EU Citizens' Dialogues by conducting a survey of participating citizens before, during and after the Dialogue events.

This publication reflects upon the innovative elements, their challenges and added value for the three EU Citizens' Dialogues under consideration. It presents evaluation results from the citizens' perspective and lessons learned from the experiences gained. It gives recommendations for future EU Citizens' Dialogues and explores the extent to which these approaches can be used to benefit other EU participation formats. The evaluation results encourage proactively approaching citizens and giving citizens a stronger voice in the policymaking process.

The publication is aimed at politicians and members of EU institutions involved in the design and implementation of participation formats for citizens, as well as any other interested stakeholder, researcher or civil society actor.

Innovations for more diversity, interaction and understanding

The EU Commission introduced EU Citizens' Dialogues as a way of involving European citizens in the debate about the future of the European Union and improving understanding between the political elite in Brussels and EU citizens at grassroots level. EU Commissioners and high-ranking Commission representatives were active in all EU Member States. In total, more than 1,100 Dialogues were staged at various European locations between January 2018 and April 2019. Due to their nature as 'open-door events', participants were mostly interested and engaged citizens, mostly with a positive attitude towards the EU.

The basis of an EU Citizens' Dialogue in its "classic" format is individual questions from participants which are answered by EU Commissioners. In the three EU Citizens' Dialogues in Frankfurt/Oder, Passau and The Hague presented here, citizens from several Member States were invited to take part in interactive cross-border Citizens' Dialogues for the first time. The EU Citizens' Dialogue in May 2018 in Frankfurt/Oder was conducted with citizens from Poland and Germany, the event in December 2018 in Passau with citizens from the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany, and the Dialogue in The Hague in May 2019 with citizens from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Ireland and Germany.

A very broad mixture of citizens took part in the Dialogues, and the topics discussed were different at each event. The overarching theme was the future of Europe, as well as European cohesion and involvement. Various political players, such as EU Commissioners and other representatives of the Commission, diplomats, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and regional and local politicians took part in the Dialogue with citizens.

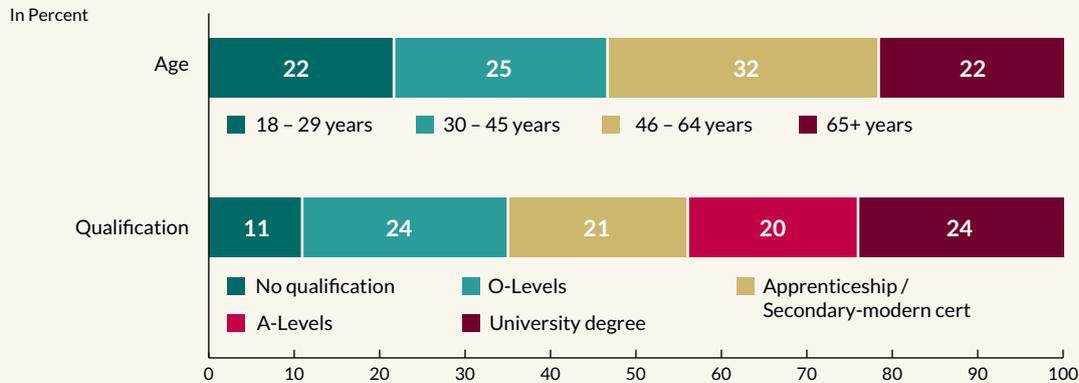
Innovations in detail

In cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the EU Commission organised three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues with a higher level of participation than was usual up till now. EU citizens deliberately chosen from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds were invited. New interactive dialogue settings were tested, while new simultaneous interpreting procedures ensured a good understanding of citizens from other countries in the participant's own language.

1. Random selection of participants from several EU countries for more diversity

The three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues were intended to bring together diverse individuals and groups, young and old, academics and apprentices, Eurosceptics and Europhiles from different EU Member States. To this end, a selection process that would guarantee a diverse mixture of participants was chosen. Prospective participants were selected at random – in Germany, for example, this was done using the official Civil Register – and invited to take part, either by telephone or letter. Among those who were interested in participating, pre-defined criteria and quotas ensured the diverse composition of groups. For example, in the case of the criterion "gender parity" this meant that only women were considered for participation once half of the places were occupied by men and vice-versa.

FIGURE 1 Diverse composition in The Hague by age and educational attainment



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls

BertelsmannStiftung

The selection process for the EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague was particularly challenging because citizens had to be recruited from five different EU countries.

2. Participative, interactive dialogue process for an intensive dialogue between citizens and policymakers

The interactive World Café method was chosen for the three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues. This method ensures that every participant has a say and that an intensive dialogue between citizens takes place. It also guarantees that the topics discussed with the politicians are relevant for all participating citizens, and that the content of dialogue with the politicians is more meaningful. The discussion rounds had the following basic structure:

Discussion between citizens:

- Exchange of experiences, collection of information and ideas
- Reflection and consolidation
- Discussion, prioritization of ideas, creation of concrete proposals and questions to be put to politicians

Discussion between citizens and politicians:

- Discussions with politicians in small groups
- Citizens' concrete proposals discussed with politicians in plenary session

Small groups of not more than ten citizens, the presence of moderators and table rules ensured that the discussions were conducted fairly.

Fact-based communication was supported by information materials and experts.



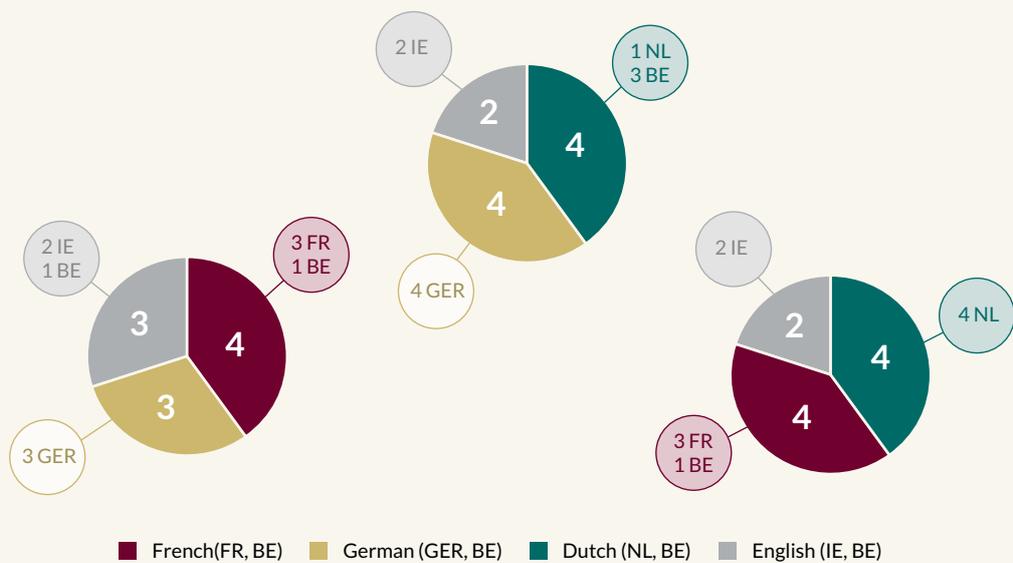
3. New simultaneous interpreting procedure promotes understanding in multilingual citizens' groups

Understanding other citizens had never been a major problem at previous EU Citizens' Dialogue events because participants had always been from the same country. Circumstances were different at the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues.

As participants were invited according to a random selection process, many citizens who did not speak a foreign language took part in the cross-border dialogues. In order to ensure smooth communication between citizens and minimize the risk of language barriers, a new procedure, which allowed citizens to communicate with each other in their respective native languages, was designed.

At the Citizens' Dialogue in Frankfurt/Oder, participants were given tablet computers with a language programme. In Passau and The Hague, there were simultaneous interpreters at every table, so participants could speak to each other in their own respective languages without problems or loss of time. In this way, two simultaneous interpreters ensured that citizens at the tables in The Hague could understand each other in three different languages.

FIGURE 2 Mixed groups in The Hague: Example of composition of discussion tables according to nationality



Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls

BertelsmannStiftung

Key points of the three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues:

Participants, topics, programs

The three cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues differed in their scope, innovation features, procedures, main topics and composition of participants.



EU Citizens' Dialogue
on 17 May 2019 in
The Hague



EU Citizens' Dialogue
on 24 May 2018
in Frankfurt/Oder



EU Citizens' Dialogue
on 6 December 2018
in Passau

EU Citizens' Dialogue on 24 May 2018
in **Frankfurt/Oder**



The topics discussed at the Citizens' Dialogue in Frankfurt/Oder were cohesion in Europe, further development of the EU and citizen participation possibilities. First there were discussions between Polish and German students, who compiled questions and solution proposals that were written down and pinned on boards. The ideas of the students got acquainted then presented to the citizens in a relaxed discussion. Afterwards, there was a large citizen dialogue with the students, the Polish and German citizens and the politicians. The ideas and suggestions were discussed together in the plenum.

KEY POINTS

Topic: Democracy lives by participation

Discussion topics:

What holds Europe together? What direction should European Union development take? In what areas should the EU be more/less proactive? How can and would I like to participate?

Participating citizens:

206 citizens from Poland and Germany, of whom 33 were Polish and 33 German students.

Participating politicians:

Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission and EU Commissioners for Migration, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, Elżbieta Polak, Marshal of Lubusz Voivodeship in Poland) and Stefan Ludwig, Justice Minister and Minister for Consumer Protection and European Affairs of the Federal State of Brandenburg.

PARTICULAR METHODS USED

- ➔ Workshop with students to formulate topics for the subsequent EU Citizens' Dialogue with politicians
- ➔ Trial of translation tools and language apps on smartphones for students to communicate in Polish and German
- ➔ Change of method for dialogue with politicians: small discussion rounds in of German-Polish citizen groups in the plenum vote on citizens' preferences with Sli.do and green/red voting cards



PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

EU Citizens' Dialogue in Frankfurt/Oder "Democracy lives by participation"

Modul 1

Workshop with German and Polish students to prepare EU Citizens' Dialogue

13:30	Arrival and registration of students; lots drawn to assign topics to participants; welcome and introduction
14:15 – 14:45	Discussion participants introduced to each other, language technology tested
14:45 – 15:30	<p>First round of table discussions (students only) on the three topics in mixed German-Polish groups, nine table groups, two changes of table</p> <p>Exchange of experiences, information and collection of ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What holds us together in Europe? ■ In what direction should the European Union develop? In which areas do we need more – or less – Europe? ■ How can and would I like to participate? <p>Ideas collected on cards and pinned on pinboard.</p>
15:30 – 15:50	Ideas clustered on three pinboards and prioritized
15:50 – 16:15	Break
16:15 – 17:15	<p>Second round of table discussions on one topic in mixed groups, nine table groups, each topic discussed by three tables:</p> <p>Discussion and prioritization of ideas, formulation of proposals and questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Which topic is particularly important for us here at this table? ■ Which topic can we agree on? ■ How should the EU promote the topic? ■ What implementation proposals do we have? What question do we want to ask the politicians?
17:15 – 18:00	<p>Plenary discussion among students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Presentation of proposals in plenum ■ Prioritization of proposals by awarding points: Which questions do we want to discuss with politicians in the Citizens' Dialogue?
18:00 – 18:45	Evaluation, preparation of pinboards for the Citizens' Dialogue Infomarket, break

Modul 2

EU Citizens' Dialogue with Polish and German citizens, students and politicians

18:30 – 19:30	Arrival and registration of citizens: Infomarket, students present their results on pinboards; snacks and drinks
19:30 – 19:40	Plenum: Welcome and introduction to the Citizens' Dialogue
20:00 – 21:00	<p>Presentation of results and plenary discussion with politicians:</p> <p>Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission and EU Commissioners for Migration, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, Elżbieta Polak, Marshal of Lubusz Voivodeship, Stefan Ludwig, Justice Minister and Minister for Consumer Protection and European Affairs of the Federal State of Brandenburg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Presentation of two ideas for each of the students' three topics: cohesion in Europe, further development of the EU and citizen participation possibilities ■ Politicians' responses and discussion, statements and questions of individual citizens ■ Opinion poll among the entire citizens' group via digital vote and voting cards, opportunity for citizens to chat quietly among themselves and for small groups of citizens to speak to the politicians in the main hall
21:00 – 21:30	Evaluation and Farewell

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND CITIZENS' PROPOSALS

Results of student "Democracy lives by participation" workshops

COHESION IN EUROPE

What is important for us in future?

- Greater legitimacy of EU institutions through democratization of structures e.g., right of initiative for the EU Parliament, EU-wide parties, European media
- Protection of privacy by preventing data misuse, control over/monitoring of foreign servers
- Despite the differences, working jointly through more education about the EU, changing European Law and expanding supranational responsibility and competency

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EU

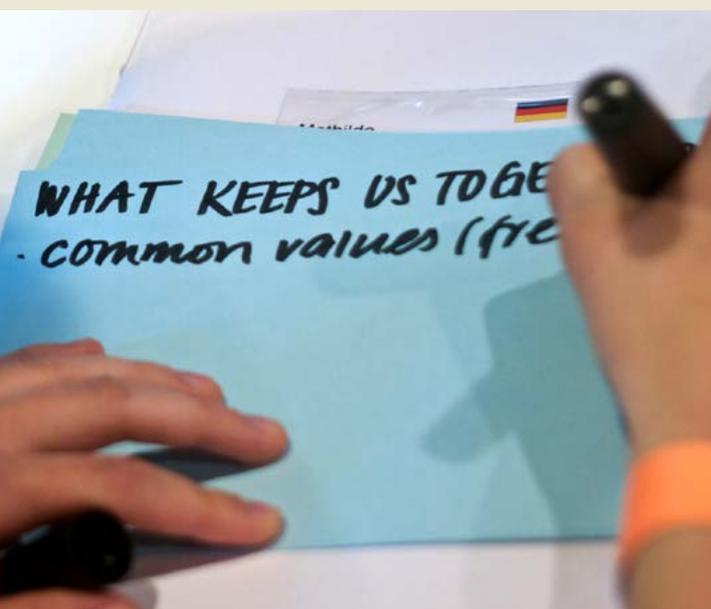
What is important for us in future?

- Maintaining social standards throughout the EU, for example via a common European unemployment benefit fund to which all employees in the EU pay contributions; unemployment benefits will be paid according to the respective nation's average earnings
- Creating a common identity through joint media, discourses on history, project days, expansion of European exchange programs, EU awareness education
- More participation of EU citizens in political decision-making processes

HOW CAN AND WOULD I LIKE TO PARTICIPATE?

What is important for us in future?

- Local communication for European integration via an online platform, more EU Citizens' Dialogues (also in socially deprived regions) and surveys, more media attention for EU topics
- Increasing election turnout by including EU perspectives and EU topics in curricula, discussions at local and district level, increasing citizens' EU awareness and information levels
- Wide-ranging opportunities for citizens to participate in decisions on political decisions affecting their daily lives; introduction of institutionalized dialogue processes with representative groups of citizens



EU Citizens' Dialogue on 6 December 2018 in **Passau**



German, Czech and Austrian citizens chosen at random participated in the Citizens' Dialogue in Passau. After the reception, they met in small table groups and, with the help of interpreters and table moderators, they discussed three topics: border regions, refugee policy and social policy. They formulated proposals and questions about these topics and discussed them with the politicians at the tables. The Citizens' Dialogue finished with a plenary discussion on the proposals and questions with Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr, Secretary-General of the European Commission.

KEY POINTS

Topic: The future of Europe: What holds us together?

Discussion topics:

Cooperation in the border region, European social policy, European refugee policy.

Participating citizens:

114 citizens (approx. 38 citizens each from the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany).

Participating politicians:

Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr, Secretary-General of the European Commission, MEPs, local and regional politicians from the three border regions and the three countries involved.

PARTICULAR METHODS USED

- ➔ Random selection of citizens from the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany
- ➔ Intensive dialogue at 12 tables between citizens from the three countries and in two languages
- ➔ Discussions with politicians at 12 tables and in the plenum
- ➔ Quality of discussions improved by information (factsheets) and presence of topic experts
- ➔ New simultaneous interpreting procedure in two languages at 12 tables, allowing participants to communicate in their own respective native languages



PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

EU Citizens' Dialogue in Passau "What holds us together?"

16:45 – 19:00 Dialogue between citizens of the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany

16:45 – 17:15 Arrival and welcome; registration and introduction

17:15 – 18:05 **First round** of table discussion by citizens in mixed groups:

Exchange of experiences, information and collection of ideas

- As a citizen of my country, how do I experience the situation?
- What challenges do I foresee for tomorrow's Europe?
- What would we like to change?

Factsheets with data about the topic supplement the citizens' personal experiences. Ideas are collected on posters.

18:05 – 18:20 **Second round** of citizens' table discussions. Citizens change to the other tables to discuss their topic and listen to accounts of the discussions so far:

Reflection and consolidation

- What are the citizens at the next table discussing?
- What ideas have citizens developed at the other tables?

18:20 – 19:00 **Third round** of table discussions in mixed groups:

Discussion and prioritization of ideas, formulation of proposals and questions

- Which topic is especially important for us at this table?
- Which topic can we agree on?
- How should the EU promote the topic?
- What proposals for implementation do we have? What do we want to ask the politicians?

19:00 – 19:30 Break

19:30 – 21:00 Citizens' Dialogue with EU experts and politicians

19:30 – 20:00 **Table discussion** between citizens, EU experts and politicians

Presentation of their experiences, ideas and proposals, discussion with the table guest (a representative of the EU Commission or an ambassador)

20:00 – 21:00 **Plenary discussion** with Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr, Secretary-General of the European Commission

- Presentation of four proposals by citizens and questions on the three topics: border region, refugee policy and social policy
- Response from Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr and follow-up discussion
- Opinion poll among the entire group via digital poll and voting cards

21:00 – 21:30 Evaluation and Farewell

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND CITIZENS' PROPOSALS

“The Future of Europe – What holds us together?”

BORDER REGIONS

What is important for us in future?

- Promotion of a cross-border cultural exchange
- Easier mutual recognition of academic and vocational qualifications in other EU countries
- Creation of infrastructure to improve relations in border regions

REFUGEE POLICY

What is important for us in future?

- Fair and even distribution of refugees across the EU
- More active addressing of the causes of flight e.g. stronger promotion of education and human rights, financial aid for refugees' countries of origin, capacity building
- Security of common borders

SOCIAL POLICY

What is important for us in future?

- Improvement of the situation on the job market and in vocational training
- Creation of social justice e.g., abolish wage dumping, newdefinition of minimum wage, regulated access to the labor market
- Development of pilot projects for unemployment assistance and child benefits



EU Citizens' Dialogue on 17 May 2019 in **The Hague**



Citizens selected at random from France, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany took part in the EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague. With the help of table moderators and simultaneous interpreters, the topics Social Europe, Global Europe and Digital Europe were discussed at twelve tables. After a short break, representatives of the European Commission and ambassadors were introduced before they joined the citizens at the tables to discuss the topics that were prepared. The closing plenary discussion with Ann Mettler, Director-General of the European Political Strategy Centre, the European Commission's in-house think-tank, took place after the lunch break.

KEY POINTS

Topic: The future of Europe - Cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue

Discussion topics:
Social Europe, Digital Europe, Global Europe.

Participating citizens:
120 citizens; 24 citizens each from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Ireland and Germany.

Participating politicians:
Ann Mettler, Director-General of the European Political Strategy Centre of the European Commission; diplomats from the five participating countries and representatives of the EU Commission.

PARTICULAR METHODS USED

- ➔ Citizens from five countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Ireland, Germany) selected at random
- ➔ Intensive dialogue between citizens at 12 mixed tables, citizens from (at least) four countries at each table, communication in three languages
- ➔ Discussions with politicians and EU experts at the 12 tables and in the plenum
- ➔ Dialogue with participants from five countries in four languages
- ➔ New simultaneous interpreting procedure in three languages at 12 tables, enabling all participants to communicate in their own native languages



PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague "The Future of Europe: Cross-border EU-Citizens' Dialogue"

08:00	Arrival and registration; welcome and introduction to the Citizens' Dialogue
08:40 – 10:45	Dialogue between citizens from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Ireland
08:40	Presentation and getting acquainted at the tables
08:50	First round of table discussion in mixed groups: Exchange of experiences, information and collection of ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ As a citizen of my country, how do I experience the situation?■ What challenges do I foresee for the Europe of tomorrow?■ What would we like to change? Factsheets with data about the topic supplement citizens' personal experiences. Ideas are collected on posters.
09:30	Second round of table discussion between citizens in national groups: Reflection and consolidation <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What topics are important for citizens of our country, and for citizens of the other countries?■ What do we have in common and what differences are there?
09:50	Third round of table discussion between citizens in mixed groups: Discussion and prioritization of ideas, formulation of proposals and questions <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Which topic is especially important for us at this table?■ Which topic can we agree on?■ How should the EU promote the topic?■ What proposals for implementation do we have? What question do we want to ask the politicians? Proposals and questions are written on posters.
10:45	Break
11:15 – 14:45	Citizens' Dialogue with EU experts and politicians
11:15	New guests are welcomed
11:20	Table discussion between citizens, EU experts and politicians Presentation of their experiences, ideas and proposals, discussion with the table guest – a representative of the EU Commission or an ambassador
12:00	Lunch break
13:00	Plenary discussion with Ann Mettler, Director-General of the European Political Strategy Centre of the European Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Presentation of four citizens' proposals and four questions about the three topics: Social, Digital and Global Europe■ Responses from Ann Mettler and discussion■ Opinion poll among the entire group via digital poll and voting cards
14:45 – 15:00	Evaluation and farewell

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND CITIZENS' PROPOSALS

“The future of Europe: Cross-border EU Citizens’ Dialogue”

SOCIAL EUROPE

What is important for us in future?

- Creation of affordable housing for all classes of society in all EU Member States
- Safeguarding of jobs and improved education
- Reduction of poverty and the discrimination associated with it

DIGITAL EUROPE

What is important for us in future?

- Creation of comprehensive and secure internet access for citizens of all ages in all EU Member States
- Improved data security e.g., creation of directives and regulations, monitoring of free trade, data privacy
- For all internet users: Instruction in media literacy and awareness of personal and consumer rights with regard to data privacy

GLOBAL EUROPE

What is important for us in future?

- Pursuit of a harmonized EU strategy for accepting refugees and mitigating the causes of flight
- Introduction of stricter regulations governing the sale of environmentally harmful products
- Involvement of citizens in political decision-making processes through the continuation and further development of Citizens’ Dialogues



Evaluation:

The Dialogues from the EU citizens' perspective

A total of 440 citizens from Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, France and Germany took part in the three EU Citizens' Dialogues in Frankfurt/Oder, Passau and The Hague. The majority of participants also participated in the evaluation of the event.

EVALUATION METHODS

Participants at all three EU Citizens' Dialogues could fill in questionnaires to give feedback on the respective events. Table moderators and interpreters were also asked for their feedback.

In addition, participants in the Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague were asked before and after the event about what their expectations were from the Citizens' Dialogue and about their attitude towards the EU.

EVALUATION TOOLS

On-the-spot, direct feedback poll from participants:

- Frankfurt/Oder: 126 citizens/students (64 % response rate) and specific poll among 61 students (92 % response rate)
- Passau: 106 citizens (93 % response rate)
- The Hague: 117 citizens (98 % response rate)

Pre- and post-event poll of citizens who took part in the Dialogue in The Hague

- Pre-event poll: Interviews with 120 citizens
- Post-event poll: Interviews with 25 citizens
- Feedback poll table moderators and interpreters



Citizens' feedback on the EU Citizens' Dialogues in Frankfurt/Oder, Passau and The Hague

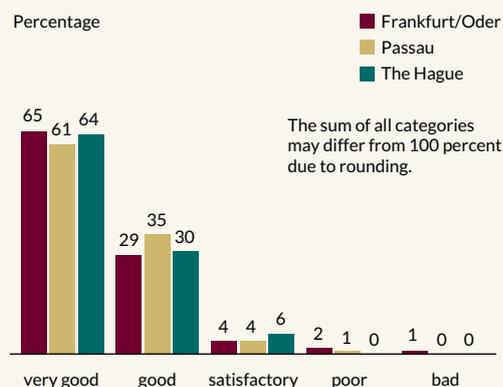
Positive overall rating for the Dialogue events

All three Citizens' Dialogues were extremely well-received by the participants. At least 94 % of those asked rated the event they participated in as "very good" or "good".

Transnational character of the event was a special highlight

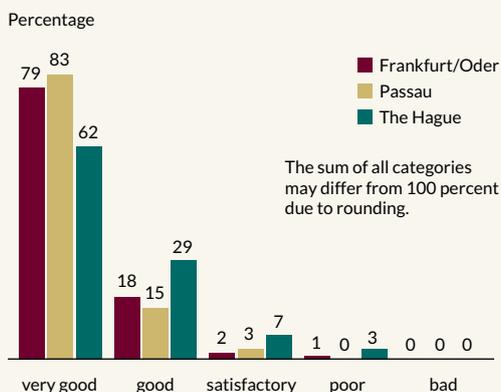
The opportunity to exchange views and converse with citizens from other countries was perceived as rewarding. At all three Citizens' Dialogues, the citizens gave the highest grades for the transnational character of the event.

FIGURE 3 How do you rate the event overall?



Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls | BertelsmannStiftung

FIGURE 4 How do you rate the cross-border character of the event?



Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls | BertelsmannStiftung

“A very good opportunity to speak with people from other countries. A good opportunity to understand what issues the EU is concerned with.” (The Hague)

“I like cross-border events like this. This kind of open dialogue between citizens should continue.” (Frankfurt/Oder)

“Organized with great care, committed, factual, very promising.” (The Hague)

“Events like this should last longer, which would have a positive effect on integration and help people to understand the problems better.” (Frankfurt/Oder)

“Methods were handled perfectly!” (Passau)

“A good mixture of participants. I found the composition of groups at individual tables very good.” (Passau)

“Presentation of the group work, discussion and Q&A session – everything was great.” (Frankfurt/Oder)

Citizens' quotes

“I liked the fact that citizens of all Member States were able to express their attitude towards the EU.” (The Hague)

“We had different nationalities, different backgrounds and points of view.” (The Hague)

“Citizens should be invited from more countries, especially Eastern, Southern and Northern Europe – I missed them.” (The Hague)

“It was wonderful to have a chance to listen to the opinions of citizens from other countries.” (Passau)

“Having mixed groups with participants from three countries was very good.” (Passau)

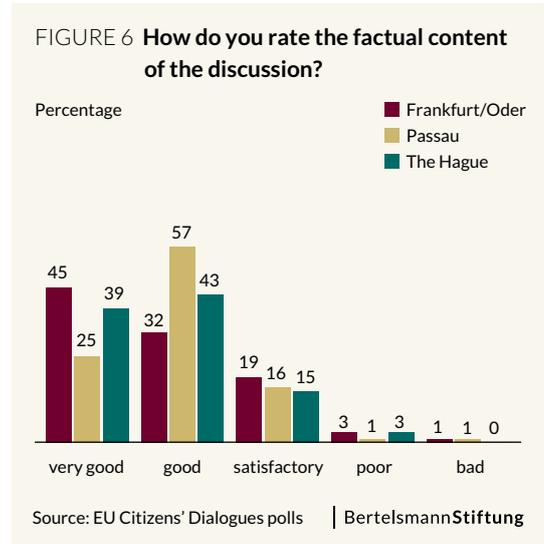
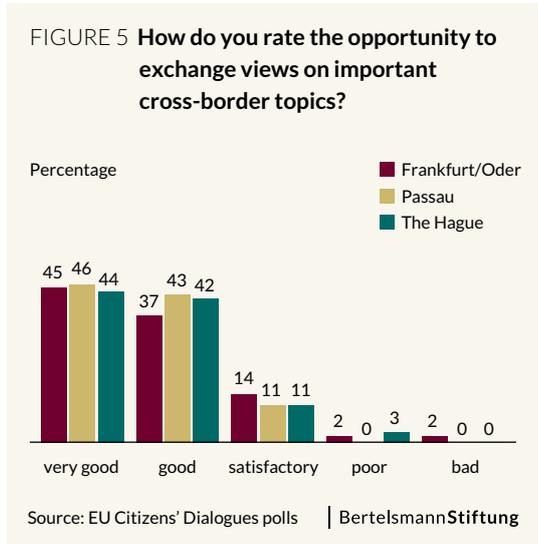
“Poles were in Germany speaking about Europe. Invaluable. Luckily, this is becoming more and more the norm.” (Frankfurt/Oder)

Citizens' quotes

Lively discussions of cross-border topics

Participants actively used of the opportunity to discuss cross-border topics in an European setting. At least 82 % of the respondents, citizens at the three Citizens' Dialogues rated the opportunity "very good" or "good".

Participants in the three Citizens' Dialogues were very positive about the factual content of the discussions. At least 77 % of the citizens said it was "very good" or "good".



"I really appreciated having the chance to express my opinion, to hear the opinions of people from other countries, and to gain a better understanding of the issues facing Europe." (The Hague)

"It was a pity that we had to discuss a predefined topic rather than talking about the topics that interest or affect me personally." (Passau)

"Everyone had a chance to say what they wanted to say, and the topics were very relevant." (The Hague)

"Interesting discussion with interesting people. New ideas for regular citizens." (Passau)

Citizens' quotes

"It was good to meet people from different countries and discuss common topics and issues with them." (The Hague)

"A chance to exchange views with people from other Member States and hear about how they experience the EU." (The Hague)

"Very open and realistic discussion." (The Hague)

"The topics discussed could be specified in more detail. People should be made aware of what the EU can / cannot do." (The Hague)

"That we all had the opportunity to meet, talk about important issues, and get to know each other. I heard other people's different opinions." (Passau)

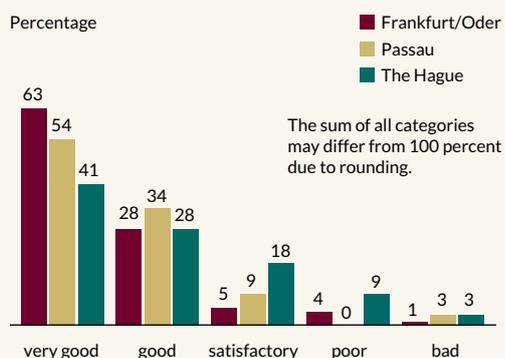
"I am glad I could exchange views with students from other universities." (Frankfurt/Oder)

Citizens' quotes

The willingness of the politicians to engage in dialogue was rated positively, although there are differences between the individual Citizens' Dialogue events

Evaluation of the politicians' willingness to listen differs across the individual Citizens' Dialogue events. While 91 % of citizens in Frankfurt/Oder rated the politicians' willingness to listen "very good" or "good", only 69 % of citizens in The Hague rated it "very good" or "good", with 18% rating it as "satisfactory".

FIGURE 7 How do you rate politicians' willingness to listen to citizens?

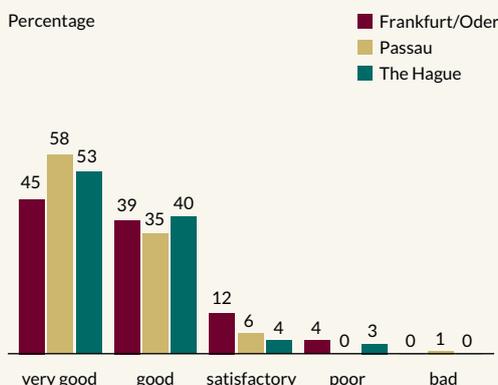


Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls | BertelsmannStiftung

The opportunity to interact and a mix of methods led to a variety of good discussions

84 % of participants evaluated the variety of methods (table discussions, plenum discussions, card votings, online polls) used as "very good" or "good".

FIGURE 8 How do you rate the variety of methods used?



Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls | BertelsmannStiftung

"Possible to talk to politicians, not all were equally open, but most were very open." (The Hague)

„Pluralism, politicians are willing to speak to ordinary citizens, friendly towards participants in the discussion." (Passau)

"Direct communication and the opportunity to speak to each other in person." (Passau)

"Restrict the time allowed for politicians to answer questions, which would create more opportunities for questions from the floor (less self-promotion by politicians)." (Frankfurt/Oder)

"The President [Timmermans] was really superb, the perfect European, a consistent and accomplished speaker." (Frankfurt/Oder)

"The opportunity to speak to various EU politicians." (Frankfurt/Oder)

Citizens' quotes

"Good technical implementation." (The Hague)

"I thought switching groups was very good, because they helped me to hear different opinions and arguments." (Frankfurt/Oder)

"Rhythm and timing were respected, the richness of the discussions with the moderator, the group and the EU representatives." (The Hague)

"The chance to discuss with people from other countries, the organization, the tables with headsets, sound equipment, simultaneous translators, the format, the presence of politicians/representatives of the Commission." (Passau)

"(Methodically) perfect execution!" (Passau)

"This extremely well-structured event and outstanding table moderators were excellent." (Passau)

"A little more time would have been nice. It was all a bit compressed, so one felt slightly rushed." (Passau)

Citizens' quotes

Results of the three EU Citizens' Dialogues at a glance

The extent to which the citizens are satisfied shows that cross-border, interactive Citizens' Dialogue formats are also successful at the European level. The innovations tested during the three Citizens' Dialogues – a random selection process to ensure diversity of participants, interactive dialogue processes between EU citizens and with EU politicians, and new interpreting procedures to help establish understanding between citizens who do not speak each other's language – were rated very positively by participants.

These multilingual and multicultural dialogues contribute particularly well to democracy in the EU, improving understanding between political elites and ordinary EU citizens. They are also a unique way of strengthening citizens' identifica-

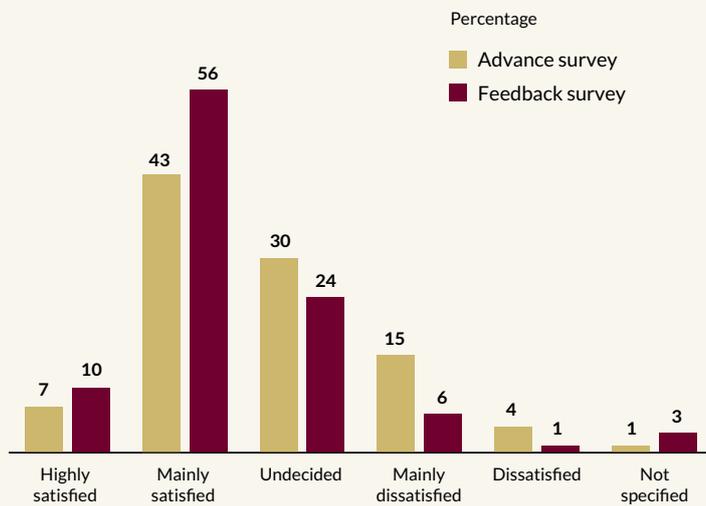
tion with Europe, and therefore enrich European democracy, and provide a modern response to the European citizens' wish for more dialogue and participation.

Cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues have a positive impact on citizens' attitudes towards the EU

After taking part in cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues, citizens are more satisfied with the European Union and EU politicians, as shown by a comparison between attitudes before and after the Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague. In the pre-event survey, a wide range of different – including critical – attitudes towards the European Union and European politicians was apparent. The positive changes of attitude, towards both the European Union and European politicians, are clearly shown in a comparison with the survey carried out after the event.

In the feedback polls of the three EU Citizens' Dialogues, participants report their increased knowledge and better understanding of EU politics and its complex decision-making structures. Many citizens now identify more strongly with the EU and its democratic structures. As a result of the Dialogues, some participants even changed their minds and decided to vote in the 2019 European Election, although they had previously said they were not intending to.

FIGURE 9 How satisfied are you with the European Union?



Results of the survey among participants of the EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague.

Source: EU Citizens' Dialogues polls

| BertelsmannStiftung

Random selection guarantees inclusion and a wide range of different opinions, interests and perspectives

The random selection of participants, in combination with pre-defined diversity criteria, guarantees a good mixture of participants in the EU Citizens' Dialogues. The participant sample reflects the plurality of society with its broad diversity of opinions. The interactive methods used result in dialogues between people with different cultural imprints who bring in a wide variety of experiences, opinions, interests and perspectives.

This selection process enables the involvement of citizens who would not normally participate in democratic processes – people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a low level of formal education or with an EU-critical attitude. The benefits of the process are its capacity for broad, inclusive involvement and its potential suitability to portray a representative sample of the European population.

Participant diversity, interactive methods and discussions on an equal footing improve the quality of the results

“The message I will take with me today is that EU citizens are often smarter than the ministers negotiating in Brussels.” This statement by Prof. Dr. Martin Selmayr, Secretary-General of the European Commission (until 07/2019) the EU Citizens' Dialogue in Passau is representative of the statements by other politicians who took part in the three EU Citizens' Dialogues. In particular, politicians praised the high quality of the discussion with citizens. They learn first-hand knowledge of the real concerns and interests of EU citizens. They gain an insight into in-depth discussions, opinions and proposals from an (almost completely) representative sample of the population, and get new inspiration for their work.

The expertise of citizens regarding political issues is often disputed or denied. It was an amazing revelation – even for many of the politicians involved in the Dialogues – that regular citizens are capable of discussing complex topics and developing qualified proposals. The following factors have a positive effect on the quality of the discussion:



- **The diversity of participating Europeans:** They bring in different experiences, viewpoints and perspectives, thereby enriching the discussion.
- **The interactive method** with its structured processes supervised by professional moderators: The discussions in small groups of citizens allow all participants an equal say; convincing arguments and proposals generally prevail.
- **Factual information and expert knowledge** that citizens draw on and consider in the context of their interactive discussion rounds.
- Not individual personal opinions are discussed with politicians, but **topics** which have been **jointly agreed upon** at the tables and classified as important by all members of the table groups.
- **A discussion setting on an equal footing** with high-ranking politicians, which expresses the recognition and appreciation of citizens by politicians through politics.

Interactive methods ensure that communication not prevent one-sided communication and promote genuine dialogue on an equal footing.

The transnational character of the EU Citizens' Dialogues is real added value

The cross-border character of the EU Citizens' Dialogues is the highlight of the event for the participating citizens, who have demonstrated a high level of great openness and acceptance of people from other European countries. They are willing to listen to each other and learn something new. They particularly appreciate the first-hand information and accounts of experiences given by their European neighbors, the chance to view a topic from a new angle, and the direct exchange of opinion on relevant political challenges. They are fascinated by the good understanding when creating and formulating mutual proposals for solutions.

“Every background experience adds depth to the discussion.”

Quote by a table moderator

The table moderators report that discussions were fair and respectful, it was also possible to discuss controversial topics considerably; compared to groups consisting of citizens from a single nation, transnational groups were more likely to achieve compromise and consensus.

“I noticed that people act more modestly than in discussions held entirely with compatriots.”

Quote by a table moderator

The transnational character of the event contributes in a particular way to the **development of a “European Identity”**, because meeting European citizens from other countries and engaging in joint political dialogues turns Europe a tangible experience for each individual.

Thanks to the new interpreting procedure, interactive methods can now be used in multi-language EU Citizens' Dialogues

The multi-language setting is not an obstacle for interactive EU Citizens' Dialogues. Well-structured discussions and common understanding in small groups where participants speak their native languages are made possible by the special interpreting procedure. Although the procedure is complex, it ensures very good communication. Citizens from three or four countries can communicate with each other at one table.

The interpreting procedure offers advantages and supports structured dialogues: The fact that everyone uses a microphone results in a quiet atmosphere that promotes intense concentration at the tables and in the entire room, which in turn encourages factual discussion.

“The required translation slows the discussion down and demands greater discipline and mutual consideration from all participants – both positive effects.”

Quote by a table moderator

Multi-language, cross-border, interactive EU Citizens' Dialogues are a special democratic highlight, but they have their price. Additional costs are incurred for the special translation technology and the services of simultaneous interpreters.

The process must be carefully designed: Openness, competence and good conditions are essential.

Interactive cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues set very high standards and can only succeed if the quality is right. The multi-language Dialogues requires professional moderators (both at the tables and in the plenary sessions), special interpreting procedures, and a carefully prepared, qualified process design with a clear structure for the discussions. All of this requires good conditions and deliberative competency. Funding requirements are comparable to those of international conferences. These EU Dialogues should only take place when all these conditions can be met.

This includes good expectation management with regard to both the participating citizens and the politicians. However, a spirit of openness and the courage to engage in this new form of dialogue are equally as essential.



What Next? Six Ideas for More Citizen Participation in the EU

Many citizens regard the European Union as undemocratic, elitist and remote. Apart from voting in the European elections that take place every five years, most people do not see any other way to participate – yet they expect more opportunities for public debate and more direct ways of influencing political decision-making. The fact is that, in contrast with many Member States, the EU does not yet have any dialogue-based forms of participation that give citizens a direct say in policymaking. The European Commission and the European Parliament mostly consult advocacy groups and associations. Individual citizens and their interests, ideas and wishes are mostly excluded. The EU relies on the support of its citizens more than the Member States themselves, the European institutions need to take steps to redress the imbalance. The new attitude in Brussels is much more open and displays more interest in innovative forms of dialogue and participation.

The interactive cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues presented in this brochure highlight some of the fundamental questions for the design and creation of a participative European Union that is in touch with its citizens. The following six ideas draw lessons from the experience gained in the Citizens' Dialogues presented and show where there is both a need and a potential for the continued development of an EU participation architecture.

1. Under way: EU Citizens' Dialogues are the first step towards more citizen participation

By introducing EU Citizens' Dialogues, the EU Commission has augmented to its arsenal of methodological dialogue tools. Giving citizens a chance to engage in a direct dialogue with representatives of the EU Commission is a step towards more participation. The interactive, cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues, held in Frankfurt/Oder, Passau and The Hague with randomly selected citizens, go beyond the traditional question & answer format. The random selection process ensures that both politically aware citizens and citizens with little interest in politics are addressed and includes not just pro EU citizens – contrary to expectations – EU-critical citizens.

These Dialogues are fundamental for other participative processes that go into more depth. Interactive methods are a particularly useful way of improving understanding between EU citizens and European policymakers. While citizens learn to understand political processes better, EU politicians get a realistic insight into what ordinary European citizens really care about – and take this inspiration back to Brussels with them. Face-to-face formats are enjoying a renaissance in an age of virtual echo-chambers. However, it is important to continue to develop internet-based dialogues and give all citizens an opportunity to participate in European policy-making.

2. Betting more on Europe means enabling more transnational procedures

The cross-border interactive EU Citizens' Dialogues and the first European Citizens' Panel in Brussels in May 2018, in the context of the European Citizens' Consultations, are steps in the same participative direction. The Panel demonstrated that it is possible to discuss and develop common political ideas with citizens from all Member States - with more than 100 people attending in only a few days.

Transnational dialogues are a new feature in the landscape of European dialogues. They promote better understanding between citizens of various EU Member States. These dialogues allow for a direct exchange between European citizens from different Member States, so Europe becomes a real, tangible experience for participants. Particularly in regions near inner-European borders, more dialogue can enable greater understanding between fellow Europeans, going beyond the institutionalized cooperation between state authorities. Multilingual transnational dialogues play an important role. Cooperation between Europeans is clearly visible in border regions, and citizens can be involved in the creation of cross-border initiatives, such as collaborations between emergency services and hospitals, or schools and universities. Of course, these events offer a multi-national perspective which is highly valuable for discussing fundamental EU policies such as structural funds and their corresponding subsidy policies.

But how can cross-border dialogues and participation formats be upscaled to the European level? How is it possible to facilitate communication between citizens from across Europe speaking in their respective native languages? The multilingual setting of interactive citizen participation formats at EU level is one of the biggest challenges. New solutions - such as online communication in multilingual, transnational mini-groups, language apps, or simple technical solutions to link spoken and written texts - must be developed and implemented for use on a larger scale. Citizen participation via multiple channels must be provided for if the EU is to become truly digital.

3. More participation is possible: the architecture of EU institutions offers numerous opportunities for citizen participation

Citizen participation in European policymaking can take many different forms and cover a wide variety of topics. Deliberative mini-publics are a form which is currently trending in many EU Member States. Under the guidance of experts, citizens are selected at random so as to provide a true representation of the diversity of the overall population to then discuss fundamental political issues over several days, or even weeks. Mini-publics offer an opportunity to improve political decision-making at European level and to increase the legitimacy of EU policymaking. If one looks at Ireland, and its Citizens' Assemblies, or at the Grand Débat in France, it is clear that many things are possible, even on a large scale. The old argument that direct citizen participation is only possible at the local level has been proven wrong.

But how can large numbers of other European citizens become involved in mini-publics? How is it possible to achieve participation of European citizens on a broad footing?

Viewed from the participation standpoint, European policymaking offers numerous opportunities for more and increasingly direct citizen participation. For example, Member States could conduct online consultations on European issues, to increase and strengthen awareness of what the EU is and what it does. The Commission could introduce new online and offline formats to rejuvenate its consultation mechanisms and encourage participation in areas which until now have been strongly oriented towards specific stakeholders. Finally, parliamentary committees could use 'citizens' juries' to obtain a clear picture of public opinion on ethically complex issues. There are many ways in which citizens can participate on any given subject, at many different stages in the policymaking cycle.

4. Consider the end before you begin: integrate innovative participation formats into existing political decision-making processes

There have been numerous participation experiments and trials for more direct citizen participation within individual countries, and at the European level. The direct involvement of citizens goes beyond the traditional notions of civil society and its representation through stakeholder groups. However, one condition of genuine citizen participation is that new participation formats be anchored in existing forms of policy design and development. Rather than discussing different viewpoints regarding representative and direct democracy and becoming bogged down in ideological trench warfare, it is crucial to consider better ways of integrating different forms of representative, direct and deliberative democracy. The example set by Ireland, with its citizens' assemblies interlinked with parliamentary work and referendums, proves that bold innovations can pay off handsomely for democracy as a whole. In 2019, a permanent Citizens' Dialogue and Mini-Publics linked with parliamentary decision-making structures were set up in the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

Democracy in practice has been more diverse and livelier on a European level than the old academic discussion about the EU's democracy deficit may lead us to believe. The development of dialogue-based participation formats and the involvement of ordinary citizens is not an alternative, but a modern, complementary addition to conventional political development. EU Commissioners, national ministers, MEPs and European Commission officials must realise that new citizen participation formats do not merely provide improved EU marketing and communication pure and simple, but a different kind of politics.

5. The quality must be right. Genuine citizen participation requires competencies and resources

If conducted properly, citizen participation can improve the political knowledge base and increase political legitimacy. Conducted badly, it can lead to disillusionment among the participating citizens or even the delegitimization of political decisions. Anyone courageous enough to implement more citizen participation must possess the necessary evaluation competency and be aware of what constitutes good, serious participation. This applies in equal measure to political decision-makers and to those preparing the way for decisions.

However, knowledge about dialogical processes and innovative participation methods in the EU is sketchy. There are still political players who mistrust alternative participation methods because they know nothing about them or misunderstand them. What actually is participative, deliberative democracy? How does it differ from direct democracy? There is already much uncertainty in political circles when it comes to the abstract, theoretical level of discussion. These discrepancies become even more apparent when one looks at the practical reality of participation. Many people are still at a loss about how to involve ordinary citizens more closely in politics and complex issues.

The best way to build competency is to do it yourself. External service providers offer the design and facilitation skills required for the development and implementation of participative processes. However, at the same time, we need politicians and administration officials to develop a feeling and understanding for, and knowledge of, participation practices. Moreover, good participation costs money, and this is especially true in a European context and in view of the huge diversity of European languages – a challenge which must be overcome in order to guarantee good citizen participation. Both implementing innovative online processes and, for instance, ensuring that participants are taken from a random, representative sample of citizens are a costly business. It is therefore essential for politicians to be prepared to provide the necessary budgets and to communicate them openly.

6. Political will (at the very top) is the key.

Only where there is a will, will there also be a way

The way in which European democracy is lived and developed is changing. In fact, there are many positive signs and developments, indicating that the slogan “A Europe of citizens” is becoming more and more a reality. The three EU Citizens’ Dialogues described and analyzed in this brochure prove that the Commission is willing to go beyond conventional, standard forms of dialogue and communication. There has been a serious rethink in the EU institutions. The demands for new forms of participation have found their way into many official EU documents. In the Conference on the Future of Europe, proposed by the new President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, citizens are to participate more directly than ever before. In the long term, EU policymaking will only really become substantially citizen-participative when there is a clear political will among top policymakers in the EU Council and EU Commission. On the other hand, although European citizens may be pleased about new dialogue formats, everything comes down to ensuring that participation formats are sustainable and effective. Citizens will only perceive and identify participation as meaningful when they can feel the political influence it has.

One thing is certain: progress towards genuine citizen participation means nothing less than a culture change. A new culture of participation will take time, but the participative EU Citizens’ Dialogues and positive experiences in the Member States prove that it is worth tackling this change.



Further information

EU Commission: EU Citizens' Dialogues in general

https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/get-involved/citizens-dialogues_en

EU Commission: The three Citizens' Dialogues

Frankfurt/Oder

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Bertelsmann Stiftung: The three Citizens' Dialogues

Frankfurt/Oder

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/EU-Citizens-Dialogue-Frankfurt-Oder

 **Video** www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/Video-EU-Citizens-Dialogue-Frankfurt-Oder

Passau

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/EU-Citizens-Dialogue-Passau

 **Video** www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/Video-EU-Citizens-Dialogue-Passau

The Hague

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Additional information on interactive participation formats and random selection processes

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