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## **A Different Kind of EU Summit: Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague**

**We and the EU Commission issued an invitation to a major event – the EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague, which took place about a week before the European Parliament elections. 120 European citizens, chosen at random from five different EU countries, met to discuss one subject in four languages: Europe. Lively cross-border interest in Europe affairs, and the efforts of numerous interpreters, ensured that the event was not a Babylonian confusion of languages, but a genuinely European dialogue.**

Anyone who happened to be visiting the "Louwman Museum" in The Hague last week and saw the imposing setting, cameras, translation booths and EU flags, and heard the international mixture of languages in the foyer, would probably have thought that an official EU summit was about to take place. However, this was not a meeting of 28 heads of state and government, but of 120 Europeans from five countries who discussed and debated their personal wishes, criticism and their visions for the united Europe of tomorrow. Citizens of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Ireland were invited via a specially designed selection process to ensure that there was a balanced blend of young and old, apprentices and academics, as well as EU-critical and EU-friendly citizens. This special feature of the event was the basis for a lively dialogue in the form of a citizens' summit.

All participants needed to be alert to ensure that discussions took place on an equal footing. Interpreters who sat at the tables with citizens and translated every word into one of the four native languages accompanied the entire event. Everyone had a chance to speak in his or her own language, so a nurse from Antwerp, a student from Münster or a computer specialist from Nantes were able to meet in The Hague and hold lively (and sometimes controversial) discussions without encountering language barriers – just like at a real EU summit.

[PICTURE GALLERY:EU Citizens' Dialogue](#)

## **Cross-Border Talks: A European Dialogue**

The individual questions posed were almost as diverse as the European Union itself: Do we need a European minimum wage? How can the EU combine efficiency and solidarity to control immigration? How should it deal with internet giants such as Facebook or Google, who influence our everyday lives but often evade concrete regulatory measures by internationalizing their corporate structure?

One typical EU problem was voiced repeatedly: many decisions supposed to have come from (and therefore blamed on) "Brussels" are actually made by the EU Member heads of state and government, with a view to their respective national competencies and electorate. Ann Mettler stated that social standards – such as a minimum wage or Europe-wide unemployment benefit, for example – are projects that are well worth considering, but the relevant responsibility for them lies with the national states, who are rarely interested in surrendering sovereignty over such issues.

However, the Director-General emphasized that social standards in Europe were unique in global comparison: "We Europeans only make up six per cent of the world population, but we are responsible for about half of all social spending worldwide", said Mettler. This is, in itself, an unrivalled European success story in terms of living standards which nobody should simply take for granted.

### [VIDEO:EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague](#)

## **Better Education on Dealing with Digital Media**

When asked about the challenges presented by Digital and Global Europe, Ann Mettler spoke out strongly in favor of more investment in education, above all, which would raise young people's awareness of the risks and opportunities of digital media at an early stage: "They must realize the importance of mistrusting and challenging anyone who offers them simple solutions to today's complex problems. They also need the necessary digital know-how to do this", said the Director-General with reference to the dangers of opinion-forming and manipulation on the internet in the run-up to the European elections.

She added that the EU was already streets ahead of all other countries or trade blocs in terms of internet regulation: "The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has created a data privacy gold standard for others to follow", said Ann Mettler, citing this as one of the major benefits of the European Union: "We can make things happen globally by working together."

## **Europe Goes to the Polls: Citizens' Dialogues Provide Understanding and Background Knowledge of the EU**

Even if it was not possible to answer every question in a single day, there was still a very encouraging signal for the European elections at the end of the event: a large majority of participants wants to go the polls in the next few days. Naturally, nobody was expected to reveal which party he or she would be voting for.