



## If citizens have a voice, who's listening?

### Lessons from recent citizen consultation experiments for the European Union

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#### Abstract

Are European Union institutions, as they claim, really listening to citizens thanks to more 'deliberative' consultation tools? The European Commission and the European Parliament in particular have committed themselves to engaging in a dialogue with citizens in recent years. But to what effect?

This paper notes how official policies have adopted language borrowed from the deliberative democracy school of thinking, but denounces the lack of clarity in the role assigned to deliberation with citizens in EU policy-making processes. It also invites EU policy-makers to think more critically about recent and future experiments that present themselves as 'deliberative'. It does so by highlighting areas for improvement in recent initiatives.

Finally, it makes a number of recommendations for the future of dialogue with citizens, suggesting in particular the creation of a European Observatory for Democracy and Opinion, as well as a list of criteria to assess the design and role of such activities, and the concentration of efforts on one high-quality, high-impact initiative per year.

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Special thanks go to Dr. Pepper Culpepper of Harvard University; Jordanka Tomkova, European University Institute; and Dr. Antoine Bevort, CNAM, for their insightful comments. This paper however represents the author's views only.

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# Contents

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Introduction .....	1
1. Goals – What role for transnational citizen consultation? .....	2
1.1 EU institutions want a “permanent dialogue” with citizens, but what for? .....	2
1.2 If citizens now have a voice, the EU still seems hard of hearing.....	5
2. Better hearing aids – how to make EU deliberative democracy more than a talking shop...	13
2.1 What can we reasonably expect for the EU from deliberation?.....	13
2.2 Preliminary criteria to assess transnational deliberative processes for the EU .....	15
2.3 Suggestions to link talk to action .....	17
Conclusions .....	18
References .....	20
Annex 1. Measuring the representativeness of the Tomorrow’s Europe sample .....	21

# IF CITIZENS HAVE A VOICE, WHO'S LISTENING? LESSONS FROM RECENT CITIZEN CONSULTATION EXPERIMENTS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

*EPIN WORKING PAPER NO. 24 / JUNE 2009*

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## Introduction

The history of European integration has long been marred by a feeling of disconnect between citizens and policy-making at the EU level. In the ensuing efforts to overcome this *perceived* democratic deficit, deliberation between citizens about the European Union's future has been presented in recent years as a possible means to 'bridge the gap'. Some argue that popular deliberation about Europe's future cannot legitimate the Union. Andrew Moravcsik in particular has presented this as a "doomed" strategy (Moravcsik, 2006). Others on the contrary have argued in favour of quality transnational deliberation, seeking in particular to identify the shortcomings of traditional as well as innovative approaches to debating, and to outline the features that would improve public debate at the EU level. We have argued that a distinction should be made between populist and deliberative forms of democracy (*Notre Europe* debate, 2006) and that, with appropriate institutional designs, deliberation can lead to a better informed, more reflective, and more involved citizenry.

More fundamentally, in true Habermasian fashion, we believe that a rational, human and democratic society requires the institutionalisation of the potential for rationality that is inherent in the communicative competence that characterises humans. Yet, a wide gap separates the normative principle from actual implementation. Quality deliberation that serves European democracy's everyday needs does not necessarily occur naturally. Metaphorically, citizens do not easily have a voice at the EU level, but ways can be devised to give them one.

*"Representative democracy needs to be supported by deliberative and participatory democracy (...). The European Commission wants transnational consultation of citizens to become a permanent feature of EU democracy"*

Margot Wallström, 8 December 2007

Whatever the theoretical arguments, Europe has in fact sought in recent years to experiment with transnational citizen debates – if not always 'deliberation', the difference is key, as we will see – that differ in three respects from more traditional stakeholder consultation processes:

- They aim to involve not traditional stakeholders, but ordinary **citizens**.
- They vow to **listen**, rather than just communicate to citizens. 'Listening to citizens' has in fact become a central tenet of the Commission's communication strategy since the Commission's "Plan D" was launched in October 2005.
- They seek to create such a discussion **across national borders**.

Several projects run by civil society organisations were funded to this effect by the Commission in 2006, 2007, and 2008, including two initiatives that aimed to generate a structured transnational deliberation of citizens from around the EU in 2007: *Tomorrow's Europe*, a pan-EU deliberative poll; and the *European Citizens Consultations*. Based on this experience, the European Commission recently concluded that the experience was worth pursuing, and launched a new call for proposals (Commission, 2008a). Other initiatives, outside the scope of

Plan D, have claimed similar ambitions. The European Parliament organised two “Citizens’ Agoras” on 8-9 November 2007 and on 12-13 June 2008. More will likely follow.

One can listen, however, but not hear. Has the EU, with these props, developed the ability to listen adequately to citizens’ ‘voice’? More specifically, what this paper seeks to discuss is whether these – as we will see, costly – initiatives have made an impact (Tomkova asks similar questions; see Tomkova, 2009). Have EU policy-makers listened? Have they been of any use? Measured against what criteria? According to what principles and goals?

With the Commission funding new citizen consultation initiatives, as new forms of public opinion polling at the EU level are being discussed within EU institutions, and ahead of the possible implementation some day of the Lisbon Treaty, we feel that it is important to think harder about these matters, in particular by:

1. **Discussing the role transnational citizen consultation should play in EU policy-making and encouraging more critical thinking about the methodologies used, in particular with regard to the representativeness of citizen samples;**
2. **Identifying ways to ensure that quality transnational citizen deliberation finds its place alongside traditional forms of EU policy-making.**

## 1. **Goals – What role for transnational citizen consultation?**

Clearly, in reaction to the ongoing criticism of a purported ‘democratic deficit’, the normative view of EU policy-making has been influenced over recent years by the notion that legitimate lawmaking arises from the public deliberation of the citizenry, in contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, which emphasises voting as the central institution in democracy.

Evidence of this trend can be found in official EU statements, which fail however to clarify what role citizen debates should play (1.1.). In fact, a closer examination of recent initiatives indicates that while EU institutions may in appearance have acknowledged the need to give citizens a ‘voice’, they nonetheless have forgotten to develop adequate listening ‘devices’ (1.2.). This invites a clarification of the role transnational citizen consultation on EU matters should play in EU policy-making (1.3.).

### 1.1 **EU institutions want a “permanent dialogue” with citizens, but what for?**

Following the 2005 referendum and Constitutional treaty debacle, EU institutions – both the Commission and the Parliament – have insisted on the need for a “permanent dialogue” with citizens. But both institutions have failed to clarify what role such dialogue should play in EU policy-making.

#### ***“Dialogue” has emerged as a necessity in Commission and Parliament discourse***

The central objective of the European Commission’s October 2005 Plan D – which stood, somewhat redundantly, for “Democracy, Dialogue and Debate”– was to **“empower citizens to be better informed on the European Union in order to voice their opinions on European affairs”** and **“understand public opinion better.”** It was also to **“widen recognition for the added value that the EU provides”**.<sup>1</sup> To this end, the Commission proposed “to act in three interconnected ways:

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<sup>1</sup> Call for proposals, DG COMM n°A2-1/2008

1. Reinforcing its communication activities by providing clear information, adapted to national, regional and local contexts, and by promoting active European citizenship;
2. Developing a European Public Sphere by reinforcing cross-border communication on European policy and by promoting structures that can strengthen European political debate and its media coverage;
3. Reinforcing partnerships and coordination among the EU institutions, bodies and Member States.”<sup>2</sup>

It announced, in the press release accompanying the launch of Plan D on 13 October 2005: “a framework, through national governments, for a 25 country debate on Europe’s future”. This had an ambitious goal: “Ultimately, this process **should result in a concrete road map for the future of Europe.**” Another ambitious goal, suggesting concrete policy changes emerging from the ensuing initiatives, was that, having listened, “the European Union could act on the concerns expressed by its citizens.”<sup>3</sup>

In the ensuing 2006 White Paper, the Commission talked of “providing the tools and facilities – the forums for debate and the channels of public communication – that will give as many people as possible access to information and the opportunity to make their voices heard” (Commission, 2006).

It also wrote: “The European Commission is therefore proposing a fundamentally new approach – a decisive move away from one-way communication to reinforced dialogue, from an institution-centred to a citizen-centred communication (...).” It again identified lack of a European public sphere as an obstacle. The EU’s information and communication strategy has always had a centralised and institutional dimension, rather than a “public sphere” dimension, all the more so at the European level. There was therefore the recognition that citizen participation should be promoted beyond national borders.

The Commission also stated that its action should be guided by three principles: Inclusion (all citizens should have equal access to information on the EU); Diversity (all actors should have a voice); and Participation (all voices should be heard). These principles represent some of the distinctive features that distinguish deliberation from mere debates.<sup>4</sup> This indicates a conscious effort to make EU policy-making more ‘deliberative’.

Also, the Commission then argued in favour of greater inter-institutional cooperation: “The three main institutions could also consider organising joint open debates that complement Parliamentary debates, taking questions from the public and from journalists”, adding: “The EU

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<sup>2</sup> Impact assessment, [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/wallstrom/pdf/SEC2007\\_1267\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom/pdf/SEC2007_1267_en.pdf), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Call for proposals, DG COMM n°A2-1/2008

<sup>4</sup> As summarised in a previous *Notre Europe* policy paper [*Democratising European Democracy-Options for a quality, inclusive and transnational deliberation*, Policy Paper N°17, 24 Nov. 2005, [www.notre-europe.eu](http://www.notre-europe.eu)], the form EU transnational deliberation should take can be defined by the principles underlying a true democratic collective deliberation. **Democratic collective deliberation**, as distinct from mere discussions or debates, is characterised by four principles (Blondiaux, 2004): 1) *A principle of inclusion*: this more or less covers the three principles highlighted by the Commission (inclusion, diversity, participation); 2) *A principle of publicity or transparency*: this sets deliberation apart from other, less democratic and open forms of deliberation. This principle is also in a sense covered by the three principles put forward by the Commission, and by its desire to generate media coverage through the Plan D events it supported; 3) *A principle of argumentation*; 4) *A transnational perspective*: with regard to the EU, there is a particular desire to ensure transnational, if possible pan-European debates, to contribute to the formation of a European public sphere.

institutions should pursue a more co-ordinated and citizens-oriented approach”, with a corresponding upgrade of the Inter-institutional Group on Information.

As part of Plan D, the Commission provided significant funding for a number of transnational debates. When presenting her paper “Communicating Europe in Partnership”, Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström, responsible for EU communication, stated on 3 October 2007 that the Commission wanted to step up partnerships between EU institutions and member states and broadcasters. She also recognised the need to deepen its relationships with civil society and to build on its experience with various Plan D projects.<sup>5</sup>

The Commission decided to support a new set of projects in 2008 and 2009, in order to help achieve the “overall objective of supporting the ratification process for the Reform Treaty and increasing participation in the 2009 European Parliament elections” (Commission, 2007). Moreover, “innovative methods” of the Plan D projects are set to become part of the Commission’s portfolio of qualitative research tools to investigate the public’s opinion and expectations of the Union. Wishing to make real its objective of “involving citizens in a permanent dialogue”, and of “empowering citizens by giving them access to information so that they may be in a position to hold an informed debate on EU affairs”,<sup>6</sup> the Commission agreed to a new wave of Commission support for civil society projects following the 2007 experiments. The Commission noted that “while the first phase Plan D focused on the ‘debate and dialogue’ part of the process, the next phase of Plan D will take this process one step further and focus on ‘D for democracy’,” thus “further enabling citizens to articulate their wishes directly to decision-makers and making better use of the media in the process”.<sup>7</sup>

Commissioner Wallström rightly, in our view, believes more generally that “we need to get away from the notion of communication as ‘selling’ and move towards one based on participation,” in order for the citizen to evolve from a mere “consumer” to an “engaged public actor.” (Wallström, 2008)

Interestingly, the call for proposals for further Plan D events required a concluding event during which the conclusions arising from previous events will be “presented to European decision-makers to give them the opportunity to react and take into account the concerns of the European electorate.”

The **European Parliament** has also surfed on the dialogue theme. It proposed in 2007 “involving citizens in a permanent dialogue on the European Union's future,” adding: “The European Parliament wants not just to communicate with citizens, but genuinely to listen to them”, through a “concerted and balanced dialogue”. There is something of a beauty contest in this endeavour to be seen as listening to citizens. “Because it is directly elected,” Parliament argues, it “is the European Union institution best qualified to take up the challenge of keeping open the channels of communication with European Union citizens.”<sup>8</sup>

As a result, it organised two-day European Agoras in 2007 and 2008. For the Parliament, President Hans-Gert Pöttering, speaking on 12 June 2008, said: “The Agora harks back to the ancient tradition of the Greek agora. It’s very important for the Parliament to have a citizens’ forum.” According to the programme, “the European Parliament has set ambitious objectives” for the event: “contributing to parliamentary work, facilitating common analysis and promoting

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission, “Communicating Europe in Partnership”, 3 October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> COM(2008)158/4.

<sup>7</sup> Call for proposals.

<sup>8</sup> EP website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=66>, accessed 4 March 2008.

European civil society's proposals to tackle climate change." More such Agoras may be organised if the new members feel they are justified after the election.

### ***Ambition... or confusion?***

'Citizen dialogue' has therefore become an uncontested necessity in the eyes of EU officials. The stated goals – highlighted in bold above – are notable for their diversity and ambition. Their breadth raises doubts as to whether they can all be equally achieved. Classified into the following three categories, they raise further issues:

1. "Citizen-oriented" – Empower citizens; listen to them ("genuinely", insists the Parliament); understand their opinions better; get citizens engaged in EU politics, etc.	<i>Without connection to the policy-making process, this is likely to remain rhetorical.</i>
2. "Self-centered" – Provide the institutions with qualitative information; support the Treaty ratification process; increase participation in 2009 parliamentary elections; widen recognition for the added-value that the EU brings, etc.	<i>These goals have very different implications, requiring different tools. They also contradict the notion of 'genuine listening.'</i>
3. "Action-oriented" – e.g. deliver a "concrete road map for the future of Europe"; "act on the concerns expressed by the citizens".	<i>As we will see from specific cases below, it remains totally unclear how debates may or may not impact EU policy-making.</i>

The need for transnational citizen debates feeding into EU policy-making is officially acknowledged, albeit with goals that perhaps lack focus. What has been achieved in practice so far through initiatives led by civil society and EU institutions?

## **1.2 If citizens now have a voice, the EU still seems hard of hearing**

As far as we are aware, at least **eleven significant events** – transnational citizen debates seeking to contribute to EU policy making – will have been organised by the time of the EP election, compared to none such events before. Transnational citizen debates would thus seem to be popular. What have they achieved? According to Commissioner Wallström: "We were more successful than I expected." (Wallström, 2008) However this statement may be interpreted, we believe that these events deserve a critical review by outside parties.

### ***An overview of recent experiments***

We have identified a number of initiatives, as described below. While this sample includes the most prominent and may not be exhaustive, it nevertheless allows us to identify some of their key characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> There were probably others. Conducting a systematic impact assessment of all of them is a task that goes beyond the limited scope of this paper. We discount the fairly large number of deliberations involving citizens from more than one country organised in the scientific field since the early 1990s, as they do not seek to address policy issues related to the EU. In 1993, for instance, a consensus conference was held on intensive care. In 1994 there was the first European consensus conference on hyperbaric medicine. These processes belong to the field of 'participatory technology assessment'. We also discount initiatives that were held over the internet, such as the "Debate Europe!" forum on the future of Europe

<p><i>RAISE</i> Dec. 2005</p>	<p>The RAISE project (“Raising Citizens and Stakeholders’ Awareness and Use of New Regional and Urban Sustainability Approaches in Europe”) was financed by the Commission (FPR6) on the theme “the city of tomorrow”. It used the consensus conference model and involved 26 citizens, one from each of the then 25 EU member states plus Romania, selected from those who applied to participate on the initiative’s web-site.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.raise-eu.org">www.raise-eu.org</a></p>
<p><i>Meeting of Minds</i> 2005-06</p>	<p>Organised over 2005 and early 2006, “Meeting of Minds – European Citizens’ deliberation on brain science” involved 9 countries, each with a panel of 14 citizens (126 participants in total), and received support from Commission DG Research.<sup>10</sup> Among its stated objectives: “provide tools for decision-making for EU policies” and “help develop new forms of social debate and decision-making processes at European cross-national level.” It also used the consensus conference model.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.meetingmindseurope.org">www.meetingmindseurope.org</a></p>
<p><i>European Citizens Panel on the Future of Rural Europe</i> 2005-07</p>	<p>Starting in 2005, “citizen panels” brought together citizens “from a cross-section of society” and from 10 European regions to discuss the future of rural Europe over 4 weekends in each region, using a methodology close to consensus conferences. The 10 panels met altogether in Brussels in April 2007, when the conclusions were presented to representatives from the Committee of the Regions and the Commission.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.citizenspanel.org">www.citizenspanel.org</a></p>
<p><i>European Citizens Consultation</i> 2007</p>	<p>Initiated by the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation, it received support from the Commission under Plan D. A national debate of several hundred citizens was held in each of the member states before a “citizens’ summit” in Brussels in May 2007, involving 250 participants involved in the previous national debates. The methodology was hybrid.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu">www.european-citizens-consultations.eu</a></p>
<p><i>Tomorrow’s Europe</i> 2007</p>	<p>Initiated by <i>Notre Europe</i>, in partnership with other think tanks and private sector organisations, it received support from the Commission under Plan D. Using the deliberative polling methodology, it brought together in the European Parliament a representative random sample of 362 participants from all member states on 12-14 October 2007. The discussion focused on jobs, pensions and foreign policy.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.tomorrowseurope.eu">www.tomorrowseurope.eu</a></p>

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organised in January 2008, as these forums do not allow face to face deliberation between citizens. They also represent 23 parallel forums, in each of the EU languages, rather than a single forum at EU level.

<sup>10</sup> [www.meetingmindseurope.org](http://www.meetingmindseurope.org)



<p><i>European Agoras 1 &amp; 2</i> Nov.2007, June 2008</p>	<p>Organised by the European Parliament, they each brought together some 400 people from civil society organisations on 8-9 November 2007 and 12-13 June 2008. The first dealt with “the future of Europe: challenges, opportunities and tools presented by the new treaties.” The second was entitled “Agora on climate change: Parliament asks for citizens’ input”. The organisers announced “An open debate with citizens, ahead of the United Nations’ conference in Poznan, at the end of 2008, and the Copenhagen summit in 2009.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.europarl.europa.eu/agora">www.europarl.europa.eu/agora</a></p>
<p><i>The Future of Europe – The Citizens’ agenda</i> Dec. 2007</p>	<p>Organised by the Commission, this event on 7-9 December 2007 brought together approximately 200 participants from all 6 plan D events (whether deliberative or not). No established methodology was used, but 27 “recommendations” were produced.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom/communicating/conference/dialogue/index_en.htm">http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom/communicating/conference/dialogue/index_en.htm</a></p>
<p><i>European Civic Days, 4-6</i> September 2008</p>	<p>Supported by the European Commission as part of the "Europe for citizens" programme, in the context of the French presidency of the EU, this was an attempt to “debate European issues in order to promote a more civic and popular ownership of the European arena.” Particular attention was paid to “the role of associations and NGOs acting as intermediate bodies bringing citizens closer to European institutions.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.civic-forum.fr/event08/">http://www.civic-forum.fr/event08/</a></p>
<p><i>European Citizens Consultations</i> 2008-09</p>	<p>The European Commission, as part of its call for proposals, has asked for proposals for “one or more pan-European projects” similar in appearance to the ECC 2007: debates in the 27 member states, the conclusions synthesised and made public, and a final event where the conclusions will be presented. The budget is 2m€ Contracts were signed in the autumn and national debates had to be completed before the EP elections.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/pdf/grants/debate-europe-call/Debate_Europe_call-1-Central_call_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/pdf/grants/debate-europe-call/Debate_Europe_call-1-Central_call_en.pdf</a></p>
<p><i>Europolis, 2<sup>nd</sup> EU-wide deliberative poll</i> Early 2009</p>	<p>The University of Siena coordinated a wide consortium to organise the 2<sup>nd</sup> EU-wide deliberative poll at the end of May 2009. The deliberative poll brought to Brussels for three days a random sample of about 400 individuals representative of the European population to allow them to discuss, with each other and members of the European Parliament, climate change and immigration issues, to reach more considered opinions about the future of the EU and stimulate participation in the European parliamentary election.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">&gt; <a href="http://www.gips.unisi.it/circap/file_download/86">www.gips.unisi.it/circap/file_download/86</a></p>

### **Benchmarking initiatives**

Even a cursory examination – warranting more in-depth analysis – raises significant concerns. Of course, the following list does not suggest that all was inadequate in these various events. There are useful lessons to be learnt from all. Also, participants often enjoyed taking part in these events. And the shortcomings outlined below are found in participatory processes around the world, argues the French Centre d'Analyse Stratégique, which has come to similar conclusions regarding the ECCs, RAISE, and French initiatives (CAS, 2008). However, without seeking to endorse any particular process or, on the contrary, be overly negative, the following remarks do suggest that **not all methodologies were of equal value** and that **a more thorough assessment is justified for future initiatives**.<sup>11</sup>

- **“Ordinary” citizens?** – All events present themselves as involving “citizens” as opposed to representatives of organisations that are traditionally part of EU debates (except perhaps for the “European Civic Days” addressed both to citizens and civil society organisations).

Three ways to achieve this ambition can be identified. Some used relatively small samples and aimed only to bring together a cross-section of ordinary citizens from different member states (RAISE, Meeting of Minds, rural panels). The Commission and the Parliament adopted *ad hoc* approaches, the Commission inviting participants from events already organised, and the Parliament essentially inviting representatives of civil society. Finally, *Tomorrow's Europe*, Europolis, and the two rounds of ECCs claim to have brought together “representative samples” of EU society as a whole.

Each approach presents its own difficulties. For the first and second groups, one wonders what can be inferred from the opinions of a small handful of largely self-selected citizens for the rest of Europe – in some cases as few as 26 participants. This is equivalent to informed focus group discussions from which can be derived an insight into the matter, but certainly not what Europeans at large think about the issue, contrary to what is suggested.

Also, in both cases, participants are *not* ordinary citizens. In the case of RAISE, they were self-selected citizens who had visited the website. For the Agoras, they were self-selected actors with a stake in the debate. There is here a clear confusion between “citizens” and “representatives from the civil society, from associations, professional organizations, trade unions and think tanks.”<sup>12</sup> While one may praise the broadening circle of civil society representatives involved relative to more traditional EP stakeholder meetings, these are certainly not “ordinary” citizens “from all walks of life.” In the case of Meeting of Minds, many of the participants had a stake, direct or indirect in the issue (a nurse, e.g. a participant whose family member had a brain disorder, etc.).

If, as these initiatives claim, the aim is to understand what “Europeans” think, then it is potentially far more useful to present the opinions of a *representative* sample of the EU population, as a complement to existing quantitative and qualitative EU opinion gauging tools. The key consideration then becomes what “representative” means and how to achieve “representativeness”.

Notwithstanding the limits of what is practically feasible, this is a matter long studied by social scientists, and for which tools have been developed. In this respect, the European Citizens Consultations use the right vocabulary (e.g. ‘random sampling’), but not the right methodologies, as experience to date shows. On the other hand, the deliberative polling

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<sup>11</sup> As the Centre d'Analyse Stratégique argues, rigorous international benchmarking of experiments is required.

<sup>12</sup> Agora pamphlet, 12-13 June 2008.

methodology involves rigorous, tried and tested sampling tools, with the support in both cases so far of Eurobarometer polling firm TNS and its network of agencies in all 27 member states (see Annex 1 for more detailed information).

In sum, the ECC may justifiably claim that the results are important to the participants, but cannot scientifically claim that they are reflective of European public opinion, although the number of people involved – 1,800 – is larger than those brought together by the two deliberative polling projects. As an exercise in which all opinions must be processed into vague and value-based goals, it means little to have a 100% agreement on a goal in which the tradeoffs and alternatives are not adequately considered. Because each of the samples in the vast majority of the National Citizens Consultations is too small to be representative of each country, and because these samples cannot be aggregated, the assembled citizens are not, scientifically speaking, representative of either the whole or the parts. They are people gathered together to discuss important issues with enforced limitations on how deeply they can go into these issues. The results are, in sum, a possible guide to public policy in a qualitative sense, whereas the results of a deliberative poll can provide quantitative analysis similar in quality to traditional polls.

Having said that, and while deliberative polling is the one closest to the claim that ‘ordinary citizens’ are involved, other methodologies may have other strengths that also make them worthy of consideration by policy-makers. Therefore, there may be some benefit to pursuing a diversity of models to better understand these strengths and weaknesses for the European context. Not a mindless diversity without benchmarking though, but a diversity related to the different things one hopes to achieve through participation.

- **Some debating, not always a deliberation** – We have outlined elsewhere how specialists of the issue differentiate a deliberation from a mere debate, in particular by stressing how three barriers to quality deliberation need to be overcome: rational ignorance, phantom opinions, and selectivity of sources, all made worse by national divisions in the context of transnational debates (Boucher, 2005). With this in mind, one can argue that all events provided a venue for debate, but that not all allowed an in-depth exchange of arguments, for some because of a lack of time, for others for lack of a reasoned exchange of opinions.

While the Agoras were organised over two days, some participants complained in the corridors and during the public debates that there was not enough time for discussion, in particular during plenary sessions. In the case of the Commission’s December 2007 event, there was neither enough time, nor a real deliberation. The participants were in fact asked to choose among conclusions that had been prepared for them. Some voiced their frustration with this constraint in the presence of Commissioner Wallström.

A more fundamental concern is the process chosen to elicit participants’ viewpoints. The Agoras, the ECC, the Commission’s citizens’ agenda event and the consensus conferences all sought to reach consensual conclusions or, even, recommendations. In addition to the problems with recruitment outlined above, this inevitably limits the scope of arguments exchanged, leading to strong group polarisation and selection of arguments. A mitigating characteristic however of the events using a consensus conference model (RAISE, rural panels, Meeting of Minds) is that they gave the participants ample time to examine the issues.

The limitation on Deliberative polling is the time spent in debate and the breadth of issues. The former should be increased at least by half a day, the latter reduced to allow an even deeper exchange of arguments. On the other hand, an advantage is that it seeks to expose participants to the full range of political arguments and policy options on a given issue

through balanced briefing material, carefully moderated small group discussions and plenary sessions, with balanced panels of experts and politicians.

A closer look at debating techniques, the use and training – or not – of moderators, the provision or not of interpretation allowing participants to speak their native language, also reveal major qualitative differences.

- **More or less added value for policy-makers, the media and other citizens** – Some of the summarised recommendations and conclusions were so general in nature that they were unlikely to enlighten policy-makers or be of interest to the media, and thus to citizens much beyond the immediate group of participants.

We would strongly question the value of conclusions telling, for instance, EU decision-makers that participants “nearly unanimously ask[ed] for the EU to play a substantial role in virtually all social policy issues, and (...) in eliminating poverty” or that “Many of our panels would like to live in a Europe that is open to the world and cultural differences, and yet coherent and united internally, that is strong and self-confident, speaks with one, strong voice (...).”<sup>13</sup>

Some were very focused, such as RAISE, the rural panels, Meeting of Minds, or focused on a single, albeit broad topic, such as the Agora on climate change or the panels on the future of rural regions.

Others sought to address far too many issues at the same time to yield in-depth discussions and added-value insights, covering in the case of Tomorrow’s Europe economic and social reform, enlargement and the EU’s role in the world. The 2007 ECCs covered the social and economic conditions for Europe’s families, social policies, family policies, education, and health care; the EU’s role in the world; and the environmental and economic impact of Europe’s energy use, including internal and external dimensions of the issue, transport, energy R&D, natural resources, and waste. As anyone can see, not least frustrated participants, discussing such broad and complex topics over little more than two days inevitably limits the scope for an in-depth deliberation.

One wonders whether telling EU decisions makers that participants “*nearly unanimously ask[ed] for the EU to play a substantial role in virtually all social policy issues, and (...) in eliminating poverty*” is worth going to the trouble of organising 27 national events and another in Brussels

- **Limited input into EU policy-making** – All processes presented themselves as a complementary tool for policy-makers, seeking to inform or even influence policy-making. As we have seen, officials are receptive in principle. Our enquiries to EU and national officials indicate that both the Commission and Parliament take the matter seriously and are thinking about how to use this input, but struggling to reach a conclusion.

Indeed, while EU institutions had declared that they would use the results for some of the events (notably Meeting of Minds; Plan D events; European Agora; and Future of Europe), there is little evidence that they were actually fed into on-going policy discussions. For instance, Commissioner Wallström had announced that she would present the conclusions of the ECC and of *Tomorrow’s Europe* to the Council. As far as the officials we spoke to in

<sup>13</sup> The document “European Citizens’ Perspectives on the Future of Europe” is available at [http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ECC\\_Fin\\_Con\\_Media/ECC\\_Fin\\_Con\\_Perspectives\\_FINAL\\_1.pdf](http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ECC_Fin_Con_Media/ECC_Fin_Con_Perspectives_FINAL_1.pdf)

her department and cabinet can remember, this was not done. She did, as announced, pass on the views to the presidents and prime ministers of the 27 EU member states, meeting in Lisbon to sign the new Reform Treaty.<sup>14</sup> Were they noticed by officials present? Representatives from permanent representations we spoke to could not recall.

The rural panels generated some interest. According to a former member of the cabinet of the then President of the Committee of the Regions, neither the administration nor the members of the Committee were initially convinced of the value of the exercise, despite the presence at the launch event of a Committee member (Olivier Bertrand) and of the President, Michel Delebarre, at the closing event. However, the Committee did invite the organisers of the rural panels and took note of the panels' recommendations at a later stage, when the Committee worked on the future of the CAP. According to a Committee official, little note however was taken of the methodology or of the content. "Their contribution was treated as any other contribution from NGOs or other stakeholders," according to a member of the Committee staff. Some regions showed real interest in the initiative, for instance the Rhône Alpes region in France.

In the case of the Agoras, the office of EP Vice-President Gérard Onesta, in charge of the initiative, mailed the conclusions to all MEPs, all participants, all invited organisations, as well as other EU institutions. In the words of Mr. Onesta's office,

These conclusions may perhaps inform reports under examination that focus on the role of civil society. The European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Council are also interested to follow up on the Agora, which could become an interinstitutional civil society consultation tool. Organisations would thus be invited to express themselves on a regular basis on broad topics of relevance to parliamentary work.

In the case of Meeting of Minds, DG Research – which funded the experiment – understood the conclusions as "1) increased funding for research, 2) better transfer of research results and other information towards the general public, 3) participation of lay people in our proposal evaluation panels as experts." In this respect, the DG notes a possible impact on associated policies:

We do have a significant increase in terms of funding of health research from FP6 to FP7. Of course, as many parties are involved in the decision-making process, it is difficult to assess in what respect the recommendations of Meeting of Minds were influential. As to the 2nd issue, external communication has been a major priority in our Directorate over the last years and our new web-site on EUROPA, an initiative such as Life Competence,<sup>15</sup> or the forthcoming issue of a "grand public" brochure clearly reflect this effort. With regard to the 3rd question, and although we occasionally include representatives from patient organisations in our panels of experts, our tendency has been to rely on the scientific expertise of the evaluators, keeping in mind that assessing scientific excellence, quality of the partnership and management of the research project or of the potential impact, all require - in contrast, e.g. to social sciences - an expertise that is hardly available from lay people. However, we have ensured that patients' associations are also represented in our Scientific Advisory Group that provides advice in terms of strategy and priority setting.

<sup>14</sup> Speech marking the conclusion of the Commission's December 2007 event, 8 Dec. 2007, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/804&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.lifecompetence.org/>

Finally, with regard to Plan D events, and, more generally, citizen consultations, the office of Commissioner Wallström informed us that it is “analysing with DG Communication the channels by which information can be reinjected into the definition of proposals by the Commission.” The cabinet adds:

There are tools (for instance DGs regularly receive a report with all the questions put by citizens in their field of action to Europe Direct), but there is not yet a systematic mechanism to report back on what is done with the information. This task is huge. Views on this issue would be very interesting.

Overall, what can be said with confidence is that the organisers presented their conclusions to policy-makers through *ad hoc* events or in written form, as well as through the media. Also, a handful of elected representatives attended some parts of the events, usually the launch or closing event. However, the few present did not always match rhetoric with deeds. While stressing the importance of listening to citizens, Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering and Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso for instance did not stay on to listen to the debates in the June 2008 Agora. While they understandably have extremely busy agendas, this does not send out the right signal.

In conclusion, **evidence that the results actually made an impact on the policy-making process is thin**, as can be seen with other forms of citizen consultation (e.g. Tomkova, 2009). **Perhaps, one could argue, this is how things should be.** These events were meant to take the temperature of public opinion, in a qualitative fashion, not to dictate policy. This however would be misleading. One does not look for a direct link between the debates and policy outcomes. **One would expect at least to find traces of the debates indicating some measure of ‘listening’, i.e. noticing and commenting. For instance, one could expect MEPs, commissioners, ministers or national parliamentarians to refer to the debates in public statements.** While more detailed research might unveil a greater level of interest, we find little evidence of this.

Another legitimate point of view, as expressed by an official of DG Research regarding Meeting of Minds, is that:

the impact of these pilot projects is extremely difficult to evaluate. They do however contribute to focusing politicians and stakeholders’ attention on the democratic dimension of the political process. It would therefore be interesting to evaluate how the perception and culture of these actors regarding the legitimacy and usefulness of these processes has evolved. This would require observing how DG research’s practices evolve over a long period of time, covering FPRD 6 and 7.

An underlying difficulty is that institutions, while welcoming citizen debates in principle, have not clarified how they intend to insert them into the policy-making process, beyond the general and perhaps overly-ambitious goals outlined above. They are committed to listening, but have not clarified how the results would be used once they were presented. This perhaps explains why, when participants in the June 2008 Agora asked how the discussions and conclusions would be used, the questions remained unanswered.

There is also a fundamental disconnect between the debates and the ongoing legislative process. A participant in the second Agora thus noted that the first, on the future of Europe, had taken place after the heads of state and government had decided on a revised treaty, and that the second, on climate change, was taking place after the European Commission had put forward its proposals on the subject and well into the discussion on the matter. Similarly, Plan D events designed to enlighten decision-makers on ‘the future of Europe’ were initially scheduled to take place in 2006. Due to administrative difficulties, they eventually took place in 2007, when matters had considerably moved on.

Finally, most of the above initiatives, even when receiving official support, were typically put together by civic organisations without explicit authority or substantial public influence. Making the connection between such deliberative initiatives and ongoing policy processes was not discussed explicitly between the organisers and those at the receiving end.

- **Inclusiveness, publicity, and media impact** – An answer to the relative lack of attention by decision-makers could be to give the debates visibility in the media. The calculation would be that, if the media covers an event extensively, it will carry more momentum. The media and outside observers were thus invited to each of the debates examined. Some generated significant quality media coverage, for instance the European Citizens Consultations (with press, radio and TV coverage, local, national and European) and *Tomorrow's Europe*. Some had virtually no journalist presence.

Another motivation to invite journalists, but also observers, is to ensure transparency and allow citizens not invited to the events to be able to witness the debates. All written contributions to the Agoras were thus published on the website and translated; all debates were web-streamed. In the case of *Tomorrow's Europe*, a partnership was formed with *Yahoo! Answers* in five different languages to generate an online discussion mirroring the deliberative event. The plenary sessions were also web-streamed.

- **Cost** – The overall cost was significant; a conservative estimate puts the figure at €6m for the four most recent deliberative experiments.<sup>16</sup> While this figure pales relative to the Commission's overall communication budget, it is sufficiently high to invite a rigorous assessment.

This somewhat superficial overview of recent transnational citizen debates will hopefully encourage others to investigate the matter in greater detail. Each aspect would require more systematic investigations. As an illustration of the potential benefits of such an analysis, we look in the next section at one particular key dimension of the events' quality, i.e. efforts to ensure representativeness of participant samples in the case of the European Citizens Consultations and *Tomorrow's Europe*.

## 2. Better hearing aids – how to make EU deliberative democracy more than a talking shop

### 2.1 What can we reasonably expect for the EU from deliberation?

#### *The need for clarity*

Muddled thinking on deliberation is particularly unwelcome in the current context. While official statements strike a sensible chord at a general level, they remain vague and fail to clarify how the dialogue with citizens is meant to be structured, and for what purpose. Failing to define the role ascribed to “deliberation” in EU policy-making processes presents several **risks**.

In particular, we run the risk of not finding the right ‘fit’ with traditional policy-making processes and thereby making Europeans’ ‘voice’ unheard. In turn, we run the risk of discrediting the idea of citizen consultation and worsening the perception of a democratic deficit. Recent enthusiasm for dialogue with citizens is welcome *per se*. However, raising citizens’ expectations by telling them that their voice will be heard can lead to misunderstandings and frustration. What does “being heard by the EU institutions” mean? A

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<sup>16</sup> €4m for the ECC; €1.5m for *Tomorrow's Europe*; several hundred thousand for the EP and Commission events.

simple, perhaps populist interpretation would translate this into “being able to influence the course of the EU’s future and shaping its policies”.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that the **current political context is worrying**, rather than encouraging:

- *Citizens are – still – feeling deprived of a meaningful say over the EU’s future*

Because of the Irish referendum, because the Lisbon Treaty may some day be ratified without referendum and a proper public debate in most member states, and because it saves much of the draft Constitutional Treaty, there is a feeling – warranted or not – that citizens have been denied a say in the process. Yet, the appetite for deliberation is widespread and cuts across lines of class, occupation, gender, nationality and culture.

- *The EU still lacks a deliberative infrastructure*

As argued by James Fishkin, proponent of deliberative democracy:

there is a basic, and recurring problem of public consultation – if we ask elites, we have deliberation without political equality. If we ask the people directly, we can have political equality but usually without deliberation. (Fishkin, 2007).

This is still true at the EU level. **There is as yet no deliberative infrastructure for the EU, or, at best, it is tentative, frail, and sub-optimal**, as argued above.

Furthermore, the new Treaty introduces the European Citizen Initiative (ECI). As French historian Pierre Rosanvallon argued ahead of the French 2005 referendum: “The problem is not whether you are for or against the referendum. What is decisive is the quality of the attendant debate.” This will also be true for future ECI campaigns. In fact, the more direct democracy is injected into the system, the greater the need for quality transnational deliberation. Without a quality debate, populism lies in the shadow of botched citizen “participation” and “consultation”.<sup>17</sup>

- *Yet the EU could suffer prematurely from deliberative frustration and fatigue*

**Multiplying deliberative events to little or even no avail could lead to ‘deliberation fatigue’ on the part of citizens, the media and policy-makers.** This is a pitfall common to all initiatives presented as ‘participatory’ but lacking rigorous methodologies and goals that are stated clearly by policy-makers. It is particularly worrying in the context of the 2009 parliamentary election.

### ***Clarifying the role one ascribes to deliberation is crucial***

Experience from deliberative events around the world shows that quality public deliberation can play a number of different roles (Gastil, Levine, 2005). It can go far beyond “focusing politicians and stakeholders’ attention on the democratic dimension of the political process,” as suggested above by a DG research official.

As Gastil and Levine explain: “The products of deliberations are often excellent. Deliberators may be asked to develop budgets, design rural or urban landscapes, make policy recommendations, pose public questions to politicians, or take voluntary actions in their own communities.” There are many examples on record of deliberations that have had great moral authority or even that made an impact on policies decided and implemented. The authors do

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<sup>17</sup> *Notre Europe* nevertheless favours the organisation of referenda at the EU level (Papadopoulos, 2002).



insist however on the fact that the first precondition of a successful deliberative initiative is “the realistic expectation of influence (that is, a link to decision-makers.)”

The authors also present two strategies to make the connection between deliberative initiatives and policy-making. Inside strategies “require creating relationships with policy-makers or enacting administrative or legal requirements that compel them to incorporate public deliberations into their decisions.” Outside strategies, by contrast, “rely on generating political and social pressures that compel officials to respect the results of public deliberation.” The most successful events, they explain, combine both elements.

### ***Beyond official statements, what role for ‘deliberation’ in Europe?***

Starting from the basics, one should keep in mind that the **objectives** of democratic collective deliberation should be, at least, to:

- Enable as broad and diverse a cross-section of citizens to form and express their opinion, on the strength of accessible and even-handed information;
- Give a voice to minority views, draw out unspoken, indeed subconscious opinions, and ensure that they are taken into account;
- Further a discussion truly focused on the questions in hand and limit, not the politicisation, but the over-simplifying and slanting of the debate;
- Generally encourage the participation of the stakeholders to their surrounding political life – i.e. for the EU to, “promote active European citizenship”;
- Thus promote a more effective government model: bringing up alternative solutions to the problems under scrutiny, facilitate the implementation of the resulting policies, etc.;
- With regard to the EU, contribute to the creation of a European public sphere.

**At the EU level**, an oft-stated objective is also to:

- Increase citizens’ level of knowledge about EU policies;
- Provide added-value information to policy-makers.

Beyond these general objectives one needs to think carefully about the prioritisation of objectives, as different deliberating methodologies may suit certain objectives better than others.

Broadly speaking, methodologies focused on creating consensus and recommendations for policy-makers (e.g. consensus conferences, or citizens’ juries) may prove more appropriate if the intention is to seek a clear-cut recommendation on a technical issue.

Methodologies that seek, on the contrary, to enrich political discussion, to widen its scope, to reveal a fuller picture of the diversity of views existing on a given topic (such as deliberative polling, or deliberative day), may be better suited to topics for which policy-makers do not seek a decision or recommendation from citizens, but a deeper understanding of their preferences.

## **2.2 Preliminary criteria to assess transnational deliberative processes for the EU**

With these general parameters in mind, “how, in practice, can a meaningful and fruitful debate be held in a Community of almost half a billion people?” as the European Parliament asks.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> EP website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=66>, accessed 4 March 2008

The three principles put forward by the Commission (inclusion, diversity, participation) are all good from a normative perspective, but they are unlikely to occur naturally. They require deliberate – no pun intended – institutional infrastructures.

In fact, with a clear understanding of the role assigned to deliberative practices, Europe has a chance to use them to good effect. We put forward the following checklist to provide basic questions to be asked when designing a transnational deliberation related to the EU, and against which to evaluate such deliberations.

### ***Criteria for the deliberation***

- Are the participants representative of the reference population?
- Are the conditions for an egalitarian, free, non-violent and open discussion created?
- Is the deliberation transparent?
- Is an exchange of reasoning actually taking place, with processes calculated to elicit the best arguments as opposed to an exclusively aggregative conception of legitimacy?
- Has distortion been avoided?
- As a result, are opinions evolving? And are there gains in information?

### ***Criteria for the event's impact on a wider audience***<sup>19</sup>

- Does the deliberation have an impact on policy-makers?
- Does the deliberation have the potential to generate significant and popular media coverage that transcends national borders, and allows the articulation of international, European, national and even local interests?
- In this perspective, does it focus on salient policy issues? Does it have a strong human dimension?
- Does it encourage greater political participation?
- Does the information coming out of the deliberation provide added value to policy-makers?
- Have policy-makers clarified how they intend to treat the outcome of the deliberations and take citizens' views into account?
- Does it complement, rather than challenge existing tools and institutions?

Also worth considering is the parallel discussion about how to improve opinion-polling tools used at the EU level. The Commission's February 2006 White Paper on communication policy made several proposals concerning reforms of Eurobarometer polls. A 'stakeholder conference' on "understanding European public opinion" was held in October 2006 on this topic, leading to a number of practical recommendations, including the need to "use more qualitative research". In parallel, the European Parliament has set up its own polling unit. The two debates are interconnected. They are two sides of the 'listening to citizens' mantra.

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<sup>19</sup> Tomkova (2009) also notes the lack of availability of systematic impact criteria on the basis of which the effectiveness of participatory initiatives such as policy consultations or deliberations can be evaluated.

### 2.3 Suggestions to link talk to action

Although the period of 'reflection' has come to an end, and despite our assessment that more rigorous thinking is needed, we argue that reflection and deliberation should be an ongoing process. The fact that, in a few months, the EU institutional framework will be changed, as well as official and political representatives renewed, should not put into question the objective of involving citizens in policy-making better. Also, the limits of citizens' involvement so far should not be a cause for pessimism, but rather a reason to learn from the past and develop better practices.

In line with EPIN's 2005 recommendation of a Citizen Compact, we argue today that transnational deliberation should be further analysed and given a clearly thought-through role in EU policy-making.

A form of **institutionalisation** in this respect is necessary, in the sense that at least the EP, the Commission, and the Council (as readers will have noticed, absent so far from the deliberation 'trend') should join forces and show greater interest, in common. Quality transnational deliberations cannot indeed be conducted without EU institutional support, because of the costs involved, and because without serious involvement and commitment, buy-in is unlikely.

Regarding costs, we should note that quality does not come cheap. However, inter-institutional cooperation would make sense as it would allow a number of costs to be significantly reduced: interpretation, staff, and communication costs in particular, as these costs could presumably be absorbed by EU institutions as a trade-off with other similar activities.<sup>20</sup> For instance, for a deliberative poll, the direct costs for the EU would consist mainly in the poll itself, transport and catering costs (see Tomkova, 2007 for estimates of the costs of EU deliberative democracy).

Inter-institutional cooperation is also consistent with the Commission's desire to foster greater coordination of EU communication through an IIA (inter-institutional agreement): "EU institutions should pursue a more coordinated and citizens-oriented approach." Plan D advocated "strengthening a partnership approach with other EU institutions."

Institutionalisation however should not be conducted only with EU institutions. National parliaments, the EESC and CoR, and civil society organisations should have a role to play. We therefore propose the **establishment of an Observatory for European Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy**:

- As the Commission proposed, an Observatory for European Public Opinion would make sense. As argued by the EP, its scope needs to be broadened (paragraph 41 of EP Herrero report) and cover the information dimension (paragraph 42).
- This body would serve to accumulate knowledge on opinion polling and citizen consultation methodologies, as well as ECI support.
- It could help coordinate and pool resources, as well as expert networks, both at the national and EU level, and with civil society.
- On this basis, it could develop proper assessment criteria and conduct impact assessments of innovative opinion polling methodologies and citizen consultation exercises.
- It could conduct secondary analysis of existing data, as suggested by the Bergamo conference conclusions.

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<sup>20</sup> NB – 2007 EU budget for communication: €201m; fostering European citizenship: €32m, including 21m for "Europe for citizens". EP: Organisation and reception of groups of visitors, Euroscola programme and invitations to opinion multipliers from third countries; 26 618 000; Organisation of seminars, symposia and cultural activities: €1.65m.

Pragmatically, **we also advocate against a proliferation of events**. This will be costly, and will lower citizens', policy-makers' and the media's interest. **Rather than a peppering of limited funds among sub-optimal deliberative events, better to organise one quality event per year**, linked for instance to a European Council meeting, and focused on a salient, controversial issue, fundamental for the EU's future.

There is no dearth of major unresolved issues in the coming months on which the EU will have to take a stance and for which such an approach would make sense: the political priorities of the EU budget; Europe's energy mix and ability to negotiate energy contracts with external partners; ensuring an effective fight against climate change while promoting the competitiveness of Europe's economy; reforming the CAP; renewing the Lisbon strategy; preparing for possible future enlargements, etc.

It is interesting to note that Commissioner Wallström is in favour of such linking:

One possibility would be to link deliberative polling and citizens' consultation exercises with Eurobarometer surveys in the run-up to major European summits. Another possibility would be to organize "citizens' summit" meetings just before, or in parallel with, summit meetings of EU leaders.<sup>21</sup>

For all the reasons that led us to propose and organise a Europe-wide deliberative poll, and in light of its record, we recommend the organisation of **a yearly deliberative poll**, with gradual improvement as experience is gained at the EU level.

Such an event could be designed so as to inform decision-makers about citizens' core and informed preferences, and thus shed light on complex political decisions, without tying their hands. For instance, in relation to climate mitigation, policy-makers may want to know what trade-offs citizens favour in terms of fostering competitiveness of national economies vs. helping developing countries grow on a low-carbon path. Or how much they favour using revenues collected in cap-and-trade systems to ease the burden on the poor vs. investing in developing clean energy sources or adapting to climate change. These are some of the fundamental ethical and political choices at the heart of forthcoming international negotiations on a new global warming treaty, during which officials will discuss complex matters such as Clean Development Mechanisms, border tax adjustments, auctioning of emissions credits and recycling of revenues, etc.

## Conclusions

Behind the easy rhetoric that listening to citizens is important, we conclude with the following key messages:

- Not all events organised so far were of equal quality.
- One should beware of self-congratulation on the part of organisations that have a stake in renewing experiments in transnational citizen debates. Independent third party assessment and guidance from the proposed Observatory for European Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy would help overcome the muddled thinking this potentially creates.
- While many participants and organisers of the events may have derived intrinsic value from the debates organised, the outcomes were in fact somewhat disappointing and the added value for EU policy-making questionable.
- However, in a context of citizen disengagement, the answer is certainly not to drop attempts to organise transnational citizen deliberation. The answer should be to keep trying and to do

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<sup>21</sup> Speech, 8 December 2007.

it better. Careful thought in particular is urgently required on the part of EU institutions to clarify what they want citizen deliberation to achieve, what methodologies can achieve what results, and what criteria should be developed to assess recent and future events.

- Ways could be found to ensure that future events make a useful contribution. A key recommendation is not to spread EU support too thinly, but to ensure inter-institutional support and buy-in, as well as to concentrate the attention of decision-makers, the media and citizens on one quality event per year.

Provided these messages are heard, we strongly believe that quality citizen deliberation can be organised and can usefully complement the EU's existing policy-making toolbox. And that European decision-makers themselves will pay more attention.

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## Annex 1. Measuring the representativeness of the Tomorrow's Europe sample

Tomorrow's Europe was presented as bringing together representative samples of citizens and creating a transnational deliberation. Was this achieved?

As analysed, and summarised in the tables below taken from a forthcoming paper by Prof. James Fishkin and Robert Luskin, differences were few in Tomorrow's Europe between those who showed up for the weekend – 362 in the end – and the original 3,550 who were surveyed.

In terms of geographic distribution (Table 1), the same distribution key as the one used by the European Parliament for MEPs was used. While this is arguably not optimal in terms of exact representativeness, it is a compromise that allows all member states to be represented. This was strictly respected.

On crucial socio-demographic dimensions (Table 2), differences were either insignificant, or statistically significant but relatively small. Somewhat more of the participants were men, single, working full-time, with university education. Somewhat fewer of them were widowed, retired, unemployed or looking for work, or looking after the home. Worth noting, argue Fishkin and Luskin: “To the extent that the better educated start off knowing and having thought more about the issues, this probably makes the observed knowledge gains and attitude changes conservative.”

In terms of attitudes (Table 3), the difference on average between participants and the original sample of 3,550 Europeans was only 4% of what it could possibly have been on each of the 59 attitude questions on economic and foreign policy. So, the difference between participants and non-participants was statistically significant but practically very small.

*Table A.1.1 Representativeness by Country*

	% of sample	% of EU Parliament	% of EU Population	Number of Participants
<b>Austria</b>	3.0%	2.3%	1.7%	11
<b>Belgium</b>	3.0	3.1	2.1	11
<b>Bulgaria</b>	2.5	2.3	1.6	9
<b>Cyprus*</b>	0.8	0.8	0.2	3
<b>Czech</b>	3.3	3.1	2.1	12
<b>Denmark</b>	2.5	1.8	1.1	9
<b>Estonia*</b>	0.8	0.8	0.3	3
<b>Finland</b>	2.2	1.8	1.1	8
<b>France*</b>	11.3	10.0	12.4	41
<b>Germany</b>	13.0	12.6	16.8	47
<b>Great Britain</b>	7.7	10.0	12.3	28
<b>Greece</b>	3.0	3.1	2.3	11
<b>Hungary</b>	3.0	3.1	2.1	11
<b>Ireland</b>	1.7	1.7	0.9	6
<b>Italy</b>	7.7	9.8	12.0	28
<b>Lithuania</b>	1.1	1.7	0.7	4
<b>Luxembourg*</b>	0.6	0.8	0.1	2
<b>Latvia</b>	1.9	1.1	0.5	7
<b>Malta*</b>	0.8	0.6	0.1	3
<b>Netherlands</b>	4.1	3.4	3.3	15

<b>Poland</b>	7.2	6.9	7.8	26
<b>Portugal</b>	3.0	3.1	2.2	11
<b>Romania</b>	4.4	4.3	4.4	16
<b>Spain</b>	5.5	6.9	8.9	20
<b>Sweden</b>	2.5	2.4	1.8	9
<b>Slovenia</b>	1.1	0.9	0.4	4
<b>Slovakia</b>	1.9	1.8	1.1	7

Note: The EU population data and numbers of seats are from EUROPA, <http://europa.eu/>.

Table A.1.2 Demographic Representativeness

	Participants	Nonparticipants	Whole Sample
<b>Gender*</b>			
Male	54.4%	48.3	48.9
Female	45.6	51.7	51.1
<b>Age</b>			
18 - 24 years old	9.9	10.3	10.2
25 - 39 years old	30.7	25.1	25.6
40 - 54 years old	32.9	28.5	29.0
55 - 69 years old	19.9	24.4	23.9
70 years old or older	6.6	11.3	10.8
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single*	26.8	22.1	22.6
Married	49.4	53.9	53.5
Unmarried but living with a partner	7.2	7.2	7.2
Separated or Divorced	11.6	8.6	8.9
Widowed*	4.7	8.0	7.6
<b>Occupation</b>			
Working full-time*	58.3	47.1	48.2
Working part-time	8.8	8.2	8.3
Not working (seeking work)*	1.7	3.9	3.7
On a government training scheme	0.8	0.4	0.5
Retired*	15.5	24.4	23.5
In full-time education*	9.1	5.9	6.2
Looking after the home*	2.2	5.9	5.5
Permanently sick or disabled	1.1	1.5	1.4
Not working (and not seeking work)	0.8	1.4	1.3
Caring for an elderly or disabled person full-time	0.0	0.2	0.2
Other	1.7	1.0	0.1
<b>Education</b>			
Did not finish secondary school*	8.6	19.0	17.9
Finished secondary school*	33.4	45.3	44.1
Some university*	11.9	8.3	8.7
University degree*	31.2	19.3	20.5
Some postgraduate*	4.7	1.9	2.2
Postgraduate degree*	9.9	5.6	6.0
<i>N</i>	362	3188	3550

\* Statistically significant difference (by a two-tailed test at the .05 level) between participants and non-participants.



*Table A.1.3 Attitudinal Representativeness*

Policy Index	Participants	Non-Participants	P-NP	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>General Enlargement</b>	0.667	0.679	-0.016	0.537
<b>Turkey Enlargement</b>	0.556	0.540	0.017	0.435
<b>Ukraine Enlargement</b>	0.690	0.648	0.041	0.034
<b>Euroscepticism</b>	0.404	0.439	-0.035	0.005

## About EPIN

EPIN is a network of European think tanks and policy institutes with members in almost every member state and candidate country of the European Union. It was established in 2002 during the constitutional Convention on the Future of Europe. Then, its principal role was to follow the works of the Convention. More than 30 conferences in member states and candidate countries were organised in the following year.

With the conclusion of the Convention, CEPS and other participating institutes decided to keep the network in operation. EPIN has continued to follow the constitutional process in all its phases: (1) the intergovernmental conference of 2003-2004; (2) the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty; (3) the period of reflection; and (4) the intergovernmental conference of 2007. Currently, EPIN follows (5) the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and – should the treaty enter into force – (6) the implementation of the Treaty.

Since 2005, an EPIN Steering Committee takes the most important decisions. Currently there are six member institutes: CEPS, DIIS (Denmark), ELCANO (Spain), HIIA (Hungary), Notre Europe (France) and SIEPS (Sweden).

### Status quo

Currently there are 31 EPIN members from 27 countries, also from countries outside of the EU. The 'hard core' work of the network is based on the cooperation of about 10 most active institutes. The member institutes are quite diverse in size and structure, but are all characterised by political independence and the absence of any predetermined point of view or political affiliation.

EPIN organises two major conferences in Brussels per year; as well as ad hoc conferences or other activities in member states. The network publishes Working Paper Series and other papers, which primarily focus on institutional reform of the Union. The network follows preparations for the European elections, the EU's communication policy, and the political dynamics after enlargement, as well as EU foreign policy and justice and home affairs.

### Achievements

EPIN is a network that offers its member institutes the opportunity to contribute to the 'European added-value' for researchers, decision-makers and citizens. The network provides a unique platform for researchers and policy analysts to establish personal links, exchange knowledge and collaborate on EU-related issues. Members bring their national perspectives to bear on the issues tackled and through collaboration they contribute to establish a 'European added-value' (e.g. on EU communication, flexible integration). By doing so they strengthen a common European dimension in the national debates on Europe.



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