

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY – NATIONAL RESULTS**

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European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN AUSTRIA**

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Vienna on 17th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Austrian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Austria by Karmasin Motivforschung.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 5

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 5 (professions of head of household: 2 manual workers, 3 non managerial office employees)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: 2 middle management, 1 higher level executive, 1 small business owner)

 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

I.1 SPONTANEOUS ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ In the beginning of the group discussion, all participants were asked to name spontaneous associations with aspects, thoughts, pictures and feelings on the European Union.
 - **Mainly, the European Union is spontaneously associated with general characteristics and its fundamental objectives:**
 - “Union of 28 Member States”*
 - “Freedom of establishment, economic freedom in Europe”*
 - “One fundamental objective is to promote the peaceful coexistence of people”.*
 - “Human rights”*
 - “Democracy”*
 - “Established in 1993”*
 - “Originally formed in 1952 by the Inner Six”*
 - “Equality for all citizens”*
 - “The euro”*
 - “Three presidents who rotate every six months”*
 - Several times, **current candidate countries** were named.
 - “Serbia is the next acceding country”*
 - “So is Montenegro”*
 - “Bosnia and Herzegovina”*
 - “Accession negotiations with Turkey have been going on for years; supposedly Turkey will join the EU soon”.*
 - In few cases, the EU is perceived **negatively** in the context of **lobbying**, more precisely when it comes to the representation of large corporations.
 - **The impression remains that the average citizen has only little chance to be heard or to have their interests become part of the decision-making process.**
 - “Lobbying”*
 - “Theoretically, the EU is a good thing - yet in the current form it rather seems to be a Union for big enterprises”.*
 - “Most of the time, the EU acts in the interests of the industry, not in the interests of the citizens”.*
 - **Another topic** which has come up spontaneously and which has a **rather negative connotation** is **the administrative burden associated with the EU.**
 - “Very bureaucratic”*
 - “Huge bureaucracy”*

- Occasionally, it is perceived as very abstract.
“Partly very abstract”

I.2 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS RELATING TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

❖ **A balanced listing of positive and negative aspects could be observed in this group.** However, at this point it becomes obvious that **the future of the EU with regards to a positive development is object of uncertainties.**

❖ **The following specific aspects were addressed in a positive way:**

- **The abolition of border controls/free movement of people** within the EU which facilitates travelling to other Member States and is associated with ‘freedom’.

“No borders - this makes travelling within the EU very pleasant”.

- **Free movement of goods** leads to an uncomplicated exchange of goods within Europe, thus benefiting all economies in the European Union.

“Not having any customs or trade restrictions anymore results in a major advantage for all of us - you can hardly remember how troublesome these things have been before”.

“Online shopping in Germany or Spain is really not an issue anymore”.

- **The establishment of standards and regulations for all Member States without exception.** The goal is to create consistent quality standards which apply equally to all Member States (in this context the group explicitly mentions the food industry, the environmental sector and hygiene standards).

This can be seen as a personal advantage for consumers as they may assume similar conditions in all of the Member States. Also, such a harmonisation can be considered an advantage for new members in particular.

“The introduction of regulations and comprehensive solutions which have been formulated EU-wide and which have to be implemented on a national level, without individual countries opposing to them, is a positive aspect in my opinion”.

“Yes, this is important, especially in the food industry”.

“It is nice to know that you can rely on finding equal standards throughout all of Europe”.

“This will particularly benefit citizens in the new Member States”.

- **Single currency/the euro**

“I don’t think that the euro is the worst of all currencies. There have been many discussions in the beginning on how strong the euro might become but I think it has developed pretty well”.

- To ensure and stabilise **peace in Europe**

“This is a great success - we have never had such a long period of peace in Europe before”.

“War within the EU is definitely not an issue. I don’t think that any of the 28 Member States would want to wage war against the others”.

❖ **The following specific aspects were addressed in a negative way:**

- **Lobbying**/representation of large corporations or organised interest groups instead of the average citizen.

“I don’t approve of regulations if it’s impossible to track their drafting and if they are based on massive lobbying by organised interest groups”.

“The average citizen is not really involved”.

- **Lack of transparency** in regards of decision-making processes

“In my opinion, citizens are not given sufficient transparency when it comes to decision-making processes”.

“The tricky question is whose interests have had influence on the respective provisions and laws”.

- In few cases, the thought of freedom which comes along with the abolition of border controls, is contrasted with a seemingly noticeable *“crime tourism”*.

“The freedom can be assessed as positive; a negative aspect of open borders however is a criminal tourism which has never existed like this before”.

- Attempts and trends of harmonisation are opposed to **an economic imbalance**, caused by different payments of interests by Member States on the one hand and a strong interlacing of national economic areas on the other hand.

- At this point of the discussion, the participants notice **a certain lack of information, thus perceiving this topic as rather complex and difficult to grasp.**

“The indebted banks in Southern Europe pose a certain problem. If they want to borrow money they have to pay higher interest rates than, say, Germany”.

“There will be an economic imbalance because the terms and conditions will never be equal if they want to invest”.

“I believe it’s the other way around - they go into debt at the same conditions as Germany and borrow money which they will never be able to pay back”.

“Currently, Greece already pays an interest rate of 8% for 10-year government bonds, whereas we pay 2%”.

“The single states are getting interlinked with each other more closely, so the weakening of many banks, especially in the South of Europe, is having an overall impact on the EU which in turn affects the euro exchange rate”.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ The participants use various sources in order to obtain information concerning the EU; the most frequently used media sources are: **Internet, newspaper/magazines, information programmes on television, but also informal discussions with friends, acquaintances and relatives.**
- ❖ The **radio** as source of information is also mentioned in a few cases.
- ❖ **Media coverage as source of information:**
 - Some participants agree that **foreign media** (German media in particular) are **being used more frequently than Austrian media for the gathering of information about the EU** via newspaper/magazine/journal due to their higher quality and quantity regarding the reporting on the European Union.

“In my opinion, EU-related topics are hardly ever covered because our media mainly focuses on the rather boring Austrian politics of the day”.

“I hardly ever consume domestic media sources as they distort our perception of the world due to a rather Austrian-point-of-view-reporting on the EU”.

“In addition, I read German newspapers like the ‘FAZ’ or the ‘Zeit’”.

“I enjoy English media in general, especially in the context of Europe, as they focus on totally different topics than we do”.
 - **Media reports provided on TV, in particular by the Austrian national public service broadcaster ORF**, are partially described as “**disastrous**”, biased and insufficient.
 - Broadcasts on the topic of Europe on **TV channels such as ‘Arte’ and the German public service channels ‘ARD’ and ‘ZDF’** are **preferred** by those who are dissatisfied with the ORF reporting.

“The ORF is a disaster; they simply report what they want”.

“The German media are better in this respect and also more neutral in their reporting, it seems”.

“In my opinion, the Austrian print media are equally bad”.
 - At the same time, the participants express their **general scepticism towards media coverage as they suspect information processed on this kind of basis to be filtered**. Thus, most participants treat media coverage about the European Union with caution, since they criticise a lack of credibility.

“A lot of information is filtered by the media and thus never revealed to the public. Information is partly filtered by the media itself, and partly by certain political organisations which only allow targeted information to be published”.

“The best thing you can do is read newspapers from different countries so as to make up your own mind and to receive information from different perspectives; however, this is also a matter of time”.

“I know from my foreign relations that some topics are presented differently in their country”.
 - The participants use **online editions of newspapers or Google** to gather information about the European Union or to keep up to date with EU-related topics on the Internet.
 - **In a few cases, the official EU website** is used to collect information about current issues or to search for specific information, although the website is being evaluated as very complicated and confusing in its design and structure by those who have visited the site before.

❖ **Conversations with friends, acquaintances and relatives as informal source of information:**

- Most participants state in the discussion that **the EU** is definitely **an important topic** with friends, acquaintances or relatives.
- In some cases, they swap ideas on the EU with people from foreign countries who they know or have met on vacation.

“We talk a lot about EU-related topics with friends and acquaintances”.

“I think it's a good thing to get to know people from other countries in the EU who talk about the situation in their country in a personal conversation”.

- In general, informal discussions are evaluated as more credible as the **interaction** is happening face-to-face which is why, according to the participants, the provided information and opinions can be conveyed more authentically and questioned more easily.
- Some participants consider lack of time and interest of the general public as well as a certain complexity of the topic as rather problematic in relation to the EU.

“It is difficult because most people are not interested in the EU”.

“The individual is just not interested in this abundance of information. I'd rather go for a walk than read about a certain issue on the ORF website for three hours and in the end not get to know the entire story”.

“It is a very complex topic. It's not possible to just sum it up in a few words”.

“If you don't keep up to date all the time and happen to miss out on some information, it is difficult to get back on track. Also, I am sure it's not so easy to transfer information on this topic in a way that everybody really wants to be up to date”.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ Overall, the participants find it rather **difficult to define concrete future challenges for the EU**.

“I don’t know what the future might look like and I believe that many people are extremely anxious at the moment when it comes to the future of the EU”.

“Right now, we can’t tell at all what will happen next”.

- ❖ Currently, the feeling of **the EU mainly focusing on crisis management and crisis management strategies** prevails which leads to the impression that the EU as an institution is having an existential crisis itself.

- ❖ **The future of the EU is questioned to a certain extent**; some express their concern that it seems to be rather difficult for the average citizen to assess the approximate direction and if the EU as such can continue to exist.

“Right now, we can’t give an estimation. The EU is currently concerned with getting a grip on the banking crisis and all of its consequences from 2008 by imposing new measures which haven’t been tried out before”.

“Yes, there is no look into the future at the moment”.

“The actual goals have been postponed since 2008”.

“I don’t think the EU is currently having great plans for the future; right now, they are concerned with anti-crisis measures”.

- ❖ **One reason for the current crisis situation** can be seen in a **merging of national economic areas which carries an economic risk for all Member States** according to the participants of this group discussion, which in turn might jeopardise the stability of the euro and maybe even also the overall project of European integration.

“The steady merging showed us that the idea of a confederation can’t be carried out that easily in practice, and now the EU is trying to fix everything to make it work”.

“Yes, a common economic space does have many positive aspects, yet if individual countries don’t play by the rules, this leads to massive problems. Only two countries complied with the stability guidelines of the euro and now more or less all of the Member States are struggling with the crisis”.

“The certainly reasonable Maastricht criteria were adopted in 2001 or 2002, but nobody adhered to them. I’m sure that the Greek have already known at that time that they wouldn’t be able to accomplish everything; they lied to all of us and now all of the EU is working to tackle the crisis”.

- ❖ **The accession of new Member States is also regarded as rather problematic** in the current situation.

“And yet we still let States like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are deeply in debt, join the EU”.

“The corruption in these countries is also a major problem”.

“They were told to work on their corruption and legal security and we believe them not to be corrupt anymore in two years time and let them join - I don’t think this is the right way”.

❖ **The following issues are mentioned as challenges the European Union has to face in the future:**

- Traditional objectives, such as **an extensive economic or legal harmonisation, a common foreign and security policy as well as the existing economic stability assurance instruments need to be reviewed**, improved and rethought from the point of view of some participants.

“In numerous fields, a uniform legislation hasn’t been established yet, such as financial policy, foreign policy... The question is: do we want to go on further or shouldn’t we rather stabilise what we have”.

“I think so too - I can’t simply go somewhere if I haven’t even reached my previous goal”.

- **The integration of additional countries should be stopped** until the general economic situation in Europe has recovered. The accession of new Member States should be considered carefully as to avoid further economic risks.

„New countries can join the EU in the long term; there is no doubt about that. However, this needs to be discussed and the future development needs to be considered”.

- Also, the European Union is facing the challenge of **maintaining its ground economically**, but also in the fields of **research and innovation, against other powerful economic areas** like China, Russia and the USA.

“I think it’s important that the EU Member States regain their economic stability and can report a decline in unemployment. Right now, the USA and the Asian region develop very well which can’t be said about the EU”.

“We need to increase economic power in the long term in order to be able to keep up”.

„It is important to remain innovative and invest in research so as not to be left behind the other powerful economies”.

- **The majority does not doubt that a united Europe is necessary in order to achieve these goals.**

“We can only do this together”.

“The major global challenges, such as climate change and general prosperity, can only be realised if we work together; many people don’t seem to realise this”.

However, the participants are still very uncertain about the future development of this “united Europe”. In this context, the harmonisation of national goals in favour of common objectives and powerful interest groups is seen as a key obstacle.

“There are quite a few States in the EU that need to be restructured, us included, but the question is: what can the European Union do in this respect since no country likes to be told what to do”.

“And the governments react against such actions; you can see the German and the French governments react against these interventions”.

“The national goals are totally contrary - every State just tries to claim as many right as possible for itself but the „together“ aspect falls by the wayside”.

“That’s still the major problem in the EU - they just don’t seem to be able to reach an internal agreement”.

“And this is not going to change in the foreseeable future”.

“The catching up of other countries results in a loss of prosperity for us, in the EU as well as globally. This can be seen by the fact that we will be paying for Greece for decades, that’s our prosperity, our money. Greece is being financed by the other States and will increase in

strength in a global context. When India and China catch up, they will take something away from us in a sense that they will have more and we will have less. No State would want that because nobody is ready to give up on things”.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ Most participants know **only** little about **the possibilities of active citizenship** available to average citizens in the EU.
- ❖ The following forms of civic participation and means of free expression are named spontaneously:
 - **Referenda** in Europe
 - **Elections** to the European Parliament
 - **Written communication** with the European Parliament and individual Members of the Parliament
 - **NGO petitions**
 - **Protests**
 - **The representation by the Austrian Ministers in the EU** is also regarded as **indirect** form of civic participation by some (*“The ministers are supposed to be our voice, our ambassadors”*)

- ❖ Overall, the participants judge their possibilities to express their opinion on EU matters and actually be heard and to have an influence on the decision-making process in the EU as **rather limited**. They do not feel like they could actually play an active part in the EU policy.

“Civic participation is limited to European Parliament elections, and the European Parliament is not the most powerful of all organisations”.

“Certainly there are ways to participate in the discussion but the question is always: does it actually have an impact on anything”.

- ❖ The participants **wish for a greater involvement of the citizens** in the decision-making processes because they are under the impression that it is mainly the interests of large corporations that are represented and implemented instead of the citizens' interests.

“Only organised interest groups have a chance in the EU; the citizens also need to pool their interests”.

“The problem is that organised interest groups are present in a number of areas in the EU, and in many cases it is not obvious in how far they also represent the citizens' interests”.

“Quite often I have the feeling that the citizens' concerns are not what matters primarily”.

- ❖ The participants agree that certain forms of participation, such as the forwarding of written requests (letters, emails) by individual EU citizens, do not make much sense as this kind of expression of opinion seems rather difficult to handle and unrealistic, given the size of the population within the European Union.

“Of course you can write to the Commission or the Parliament, but given the overall size of Europe, a single person can only do very little to change things”.

“But maybe it's justified that we as average citizens can't just interfere in EU matters. We are just a little part in the whole body...”

- ❖ **The lack of interest of the wider population in politics in general and the EU policies in particular**, as already mentioned in chapter 2, **is considered problematic in the context of civic participation**, as this leads to a non-use of the forms of civic participation offered by the EU.

“If people are not interested in the EU, they simply don't use their options, no matter how many possibilities the EU would offer”.

“I agree that the main problem is disinterest and indifference”.

“It’s just the same situation as in Austria”.

- A few participants admit that they themselves do not always keep up to date. Partly, they are so annoyed with Austrian politics that they simply do not want to bother with the EU policy either.

“As I said before: this is also a matter of time. If I wanted to be properly informed I would have to spend hours with it”.

- ❖ Concrete topics, which should involve citizens and their opinion more often and more directly, are barely mentioned.

- A few participants state that they would like to be informed about planned changes and new legislative initiatives which might have a direct influence on their life.

“I would like to know how far a new law might involve a change or non-change for me and my life”.

- ❖ **The distribution of information on EU topics on the part of the EU is a frequently claim.** The lack of information means that citizens would have to gather their information very actively and independently. Many citizens however do not want to make these efforts due to a lack of time or interest.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- ❖ The participants only named **a few spontaneous ideas** regarding new forms of civic participation:
 - **Ongoing** (online) **surveys** on various topics based on representative samples (the Eurobarometer is not mentioned in this context).

“The Internet is a huge network for people. You could do online surveys on alternatives, objectives etc. with a certain number of people from every social structure per country. This would be a practical way to involve citizens”.
 - **Information and discussion events**, organised by all regional offices **in regional capitals**.

“The regional offices should organise events and discussions on specific topics, distribute information, take ballot cards for ongoing surveys - we could do this in all of the capitals”.

“But also in the state capitals, because events and such in Vienna are of no use for me if I live in Tyrol”.
 - Organisation of **discussions and events** where **people from various European States** can meet and talk about EU-related topics.

“I think going to another country and talking to the people living there will lead to a new way of thinking”.

“There should be events, organised by the EU in corporation with the respective States, which offer people from various countries the chance to get together and exchange views”.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

All presented proposals on civic participation receive a positive evaluation by the participants, yet the level of intensity varies.

The fact that some of these proposals already exist is addressed by one of the participants.

Evaluation of the different proposals on civic participation:

A – An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- ❖ One person of the group reports of rather negative experiences with the information office in Vienna, as she had not been able to reach anyone by telephone.

“It’s useless because nobody picks up the phone. I needed information as I am commuting to a non-EU country but I just couldn’t reach anyone”.

- ❖ **The majority regards the establishment of such an information office as useful and important.**

- ❖ A few participants believe that an office which serves information purposes only is not necessary as most of the information can be found and read **online**. Yet others consider the possibility of personal contact important.

“Questions about the functioning of the EU can simply be looked up somewhere else”.

“Important for older people without Internet access”

“If I need information about the EU and I need it fast, I don’t want to be searching the Internet for hours; I just want to make a call and get all the information I need”.

B – Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ The participants consider **EU reporting in the national media very important**, yet **they wish for neutral, objective, balanced and honest media coverage** - features that most participants still miss in their national media (see chapter 2).

- ❖ Alternatively, some participants can imagine an EU-related column in every daily newspaper.

“How about a separate column in the newspaper with EU-related information only?”

“This way, I would get information about the EU with all the other articles I read every day”.

“Combining such information with a daily routine makes sense to me. This way, you receive information about the EU via a medium that you use every day, like the newspaper ‘Kurier’”.

- ❖ One of the participants can also picture a newspaper or magazine solely filled with EU-specific content for all households in the EU.

C – Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- ❖ **Opinion polls in the whole of Europe** are regarded as **very important and useful**. The participants already mentioned them spontaneously as key instrument in order to get an idea of the mood in the Member States and of the citizens’ opinions on specific questions and topics.

- ❖ One of the participants considers this an interesting way to keep the citizens informed and to stimulate their interest in EU-related topics by means of an ongoing and active participation.

“It would provide a useful opportunity for all citizens to stay up to date if they are invited to take part in surveys on a regular basis”.

- ❖ The majority does not know that this kind of method is already existing with the Eurobarometer and that its results are freely accessible to anyone via the Internet.

- ❖ In this context, a few participants complain about the survey results usually being condensed, making it difficult to gain an overall picture of the survey.

“The statistical results are shortened in most cases which makes it difficult to get an understanding of the questions asked or the samples used...”

“The transparency of results is important”.

“They should always publish a condensed version and the full version including all of the details”.

D – The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- ❖ **The organisation of local events and meetings with national Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians** is regarded as **less interesting**, although some participants think that this kind of event might not be a bad idea.

“To be honest, I’m not interested in it. I wouldn’t want to meet Karas or Swoboda”.

“If they stayed in Vienna for the weekend, they would have panel discussions and press events anyway, which would be sufficient in my opinion”.

“I don’t think many people would seize the chance but offering this kind of opportunity wouldn’t do any harm either, I guess”.

E – Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- ❖ The participants **do not have any spontaneous ideas on what could be meant by this proposal.**

“I could imagine being able to be present at video conferences and listen to them... Is that correct?”

- ❖ The moderator points out that the EU website offers the possibility to participate in so-called ‘consultations’: citizens can access surveys, proposals, reports and strategic proposals by the European Commission and are invited to deliver their opinion. This idea is mainly evaluated as **positive**.

“That’s a good thing”.

“I didn’t know about that but I like it”.

“Yes, that’s definitely interesting”.

- ❖ **At the same time**, they express their **scepticism** on the completeness of the topics and issues on this website; they wonder if the EU only allows consultations on topics that they expect to encounter less resistance from the public or NGOs.

“This is a good thing. I think it would be important to put up draft directives and such, which might not be met with approval by everyone, for discussion. One major point the NGOs criticised was that the ACTA treaty had not been published before its signing. Of course, organised institutions like Amnesty didn’t have the chance to express their point of view this way. It shouldn’t be the case that only simple and non-sensitive issues are put to discussion”.

- ❖ The distribution and opportunity for participation via the Internet is also a point of criticism in a few cases.

“Online consultation for all citizens - that’s not correct. My parents don’t have Internet access, so does this mean they are no citizens?”

“People without Internet access should also be given the opportunity to participate. They could go to the town hall, for example”.

“Elderly people are afraid of the Internet and think they might do everything wrong. They don’t want this. And there are even young people without Internet access in other countries”.

F – Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- ❖ Similar consultations, organised by the national governments, find **less positive reception**, as the participants fear a too strong involvement and influence on information or specific questions in the context of surveys by the nation states.

“Information would have to be provided by the EU because the national governments would only present information they want to reach the public”.

“Yes, this kind of information distribution needs to be politically neutral, that’s very important.”

“That’s why it has to be provided by the EU itself”.

G – An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ **The idea is welcomed by some of the participants.**

“I like the idea of a citizens’ regular poll. Citizens could be selected by certain criteria and have three months to comment on various issues. This makes the amount of comments manageable. The group changes every three months”.

- ❖ **Some participants** however believe that topics and issues regarding the EU might be **too complex** to be discussed within such a framework.

“We are talking about complex problems and issues here. So which role could social media play in this context? To send pictures? Mr Barroso posting some updates? Of course they should use Facebook for image purposes, but listening to citizens’ opinions via social media is not useful in my opinion”.

“This might be difficult with complex topics - if 90% of the people don’t understand what this is about, it’s completely pointless”.

H - Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next spring.

- ❖ **The participants generally welcome a more active organisation of information campaigns** and also deem it necessary. However, they would rather prefer an ongoing communication of information instead of an information provision limited to specific cases.

“We can only approve of it. We’ll see if it’ll get us anywhere”.

“Yes, they should be more active in this respect but it’s also important that they are objective and neutral”.

“The problem is: if the citizens receive loads of information before the elections but hardly anything in between, they might get the impression that they’re dealing with hidden canvassing”.

“I also think that we should be kept informed on a regular basis and in a neutral and objective way. This way, the EU institutions might be given a more positive image”.

- ❖ At this point of the discussion, the participants once again mention the lack of interest of many EU citizens to discuss EU-related political questions and topics.

“Right now, we have the problem that most citizens in the EU are pretty frustrated and dissatisfied and are not very well disposed towards the EU. This leads to a very limited willingness to intensely deal with campaigns”.

- ❖ At the same time, the participants note that **the EU is suffering an acute image problem which might primarily be solved by an increased provision of information.**

“Everyone is having the impression that everything is getting more expensive and that we have to work for the Greeks... So many bad news just seem to happen at the same time”.

“Right now, people feel like they have had enough”.

“And the national policy is using the EU as their scapegoat. ‘It’s all the EU’s fault, not ours’. But increases in prices are not the EU’s responsibility; people would rather have to blame local companies, tax laws, charges and the such, but they simply don’t know enough about it”.

“The competitive environment, caused by the EU, exists but I doubt that they are responsible for rising prices”.

“Especially now, that everybody is so dissatisfied, information campaigns are needed and important; I think we need more of them”.

“Yes, all of these things might have to be communicated more effectively, but the thing with information provision is that it has to appeal to the people. They have to read or watch it, however the topics are quite often rather complex... so it’s difficult”.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

EINLEITUNG, VORSTELLUNG

5 Minuten

- Begrüßung, Vorstellung, Erklärung d. Ablaufs etc.
- Im Wesentlichen wird es um Informationen an Bürger über die EU und wie sich Bürger besser bei EU-Themen beteiligen könnten gehen.
- Vorstellungsrunde: Am Beginn des Interviews würde ich Sie bitten, dass Sie sich kurz vorstellen: Alter, Familienstand, Beruf, Hobbys etc.

1. EINSTIEG – ALLGEMEINES ZUM THEMA EU

10 Minuten

Ich möchte mich heute mit Ihnen über die Europäische Union unterhalten.

- Was kommt Ihnen **spontan** in den Sinn, wenn Sie an die Europäische Union denken? Was verbinden Sie mit der Europäischen Union?
- Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:
 - Welche **Themen** fallen Ihnen gleich einmal ein, wenn Sie an die EU denken?
 - Welche **positiven**, welche **negativen Aspekte** verbinden Sie mit der EU?
 - Anfängliches Interesse und Involvierungsgrad der Teilnehmer an Angelegenheiten, welche die EU betreffen erfragen

2. QUELLEN WISSEN ÜBER & EINSTELLUNG GEGENÜBER DER EU

10 Minuten

- Basis Ihres Wissens und Ihrer Einstellung gegenüber der EU, ausgehend davon was Sie über die EU wissen und denken: Woher kommt Ihr Wissen über die Europäische Union?
- Wie sind Sie zu Ihrem **Wissen über und Ihrer Einstellung gegenüber der EU** gekommen?
- Wodurch wurden Sie sagen, wurden **Einstellungen gegenüber der EU** beeinflusst?
- Welche **Quellen** nutzen Sie, um sich über EU-Themen zu informieren?
- Mit wem tauschen Sie sich über EU-Themen aus?

(Moderator anmerken: hier sind „Quellen“ im weitesten Sinn gemeint, reichend von offiziellen Informationen bis hin zu informelle Gespräche mit Freunden, Verwandten, Bekannten etc.)

- Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:
 - Wie vielfältig sind die genannten Informationsquellen bzw. die eigene Meinung beeinflussende Quellen?
 - Welcher Art sind die Inputs, die das Wissen der Teilnehmer über und deren Einstellung gegenüber der EU beeinflussen?
 - Interesse/Glaubwürdigkeit jedes einzelnen erfragen

3. ZUKÜNFTIGE HERAUSFORDERUNGEN DER EU

15-20 Minuten

Lassen Sie uns nun konkret über die **Zukunft der Europäischen Union** sprechen und über **Fragen**, die Sie in **diesem Zusammenhang** beschäftigen:

- Gibt es **bestimmte Aspekte**, die Sie für **wichtig** erachten bzw. die Sie **gerne wissen würden**, um die **Arbeits- und Funktionsweise der EU** und die **Zielrichtung** der EU **besser zu verstehen**?

Ich meine damit auch Aspekte, die Sie eventuell nicht oder nur schwer über die vorhin genannten Quellen in Erfahrung bringen können?

- Welche Aspekte bzw. Themen sind das konkret, über die Sie gerne Näheres erfahren würden?
- Was hat Sie bisher daran gehindert Näheres über diese Dinge zu erfahren?
- *Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:*
 - Allgemeiner Eindruck zum Wissensstand bzw. dem Verständnis in Zusammenhang mit diesen Themen
 - Wahrnehmung der zentralen Herausforderungen der EU in den nächsten Jahren (**Welchen zentralen Herausforderungen steht die EU Ihrer Meinung nach in den nächsten Jahren gegenüber?**)
 - Inwieweit äußern die Teilnehmer die Notwendigkeit eines höheren Wissensstands und besseren Verständnisses – insbesondere in Bezug auf welche Themen?
 - In welcher Hinsicht sind die aktuell vorliegenden Informationen bezüglich dieser Themen nicht zufrieden stellend?

4. MEINUNGSÄUSSERUNG

10-15 Minuten

Staatsbürger sollten insbesondere in Zusammenhang mit den zukünftigen Entwicklungen und Zielsetzungen der EU die Möglichkeit haben, Ihre Meinung kundzutun und gehört zu werden.

- Auf welche Weise ist das derzeit möglich? Welche **Wege** stehen Ihnen **aktuell** zur Verfügung, **um Ihre Meinung zur zukünftigen Entwicklung der EU kundzutun** und gehört zu werden?
- **Wie einfach** ist es derzeit, die **eigene Meinung zu EU-Themen** und vor allem zur zukünftigen Entwicklung der EU **kundzutun**?
- Mit welchen Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie sich in diesem Zusammenhang konfrontiert? Welche Hindernisse sind hier für Sie bemerkbar?
- Welche Aspekte/Themen sind das zum Beispiel ganz konkret? Zu welchen Aspekten/Themen, die Zukunft der EU betreffend, würden Sie gerne Ihre Meinung äußern und auch gehört werden?
- Was erwarten Sie sich in diesem Zusammenhang?

Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:

- Welche Schwierigkeiten/Problematiken werden geschildert? Bemerkbare Schwierigkeiten/Hindernisse bei dem Versuch seine Meinung kundzutun und gehört zu werden
- Bemerkbare Gründe warum das schwierig ist
- Erwartungen in diesem Zusammenhang

5. SPONTANE IDEEN - MITTEL & WEGE DER MEINUNGSÄUSSERUNG

15 Minuten

Es gibt verschiedene Wege und Mittel, wie wir uns als europäische Bürger Gehör verschaffen können.

Ich möchte Sie dazu anregen, an alle erdenklichen Möglichkeiten diesbezüglich zu denken.

Lassen Sie Ihrer Phantasie freien Lauf und greifen Sie bitte auch jene Ideen auf, von denen wir im Moment noch nicht wissen, wie sie in der Praxis umgesetzt werden können.

- Was stellen Sie sich alles vor? (Spontane Reaktionen)

Moderator: Regen Sie die Kreativität der Gruppe an, indem Sie die Teilnehmer ermutigen, von einer Idee zur anderen zu springen

6. MITTEL ZUR MEINUNGSÄUSSERUNG

25 Minuten

Ich werde Ihnen jetzt ein paar **Vorschläge** vorlegen, **die umgesetzt werden könnten**, um es den Bürgern zu ermöglichen, sich **bei EU-Fragen besser Gehör zu verschaffen**.

Ich werde Sie dann bitten, Ihre **Meinung zu jedem Vorschlag** zu äußern.

Moderator: Sorgen Sie dafür, dass sich die Teilnehmer zu jedem Vorschlag äußern und fragen Sie sie nach dem Grad ihres Interesses an jedem einzelnen dieser Vorschläge.

- A** Ein Informationsdienst über die Funktionsweise der EU und der EU-Politik, bestehend aus einem öffentlich zugänglichen Informationsbüro in jeder größeren Stadt/Großstadt, einer Website und einem Service, das eine schnelle Beantwortung der Fragen per Telefon, Post oder E-Mail anbietet.
- B** Diskussionen in bedeutenden Medien zwischen den Durchschnittsbürgern und den Experten für EU- Fragen über die von der EU vorgegebenen Entwicklungen.
- C** Meinungsumfragen über die EU, die regelmäßig in ganz Europa durchgeführt werden und den Bürgern ermöglichen sollen zu erfahren, was einerseits ihre Landsleute und andererseits die Bürger anderer europäischen Ländern denken.
- D** Die Möglichkeit, mehrmals im Jahr die nationalen Mitglieder des Eu-Parlaments oder andere EU-Politiker in Ihrer Wohnnähe zu treffen.
- E** Beratungen über das Internet, welche die EU-Kommission bei allen großen Entscheidungen organisieren würde und welche für alle Bürger zugänglich wären.
- F** Vergleichbare Beratungen, aber von unserer Regierung ausgehend bzw. organisiert.
- G** Ein interaktives Service, das Internet und soziale Netzwerke einbezieht um Meinungen, Wünsche und Kritikpunkte von einem Stammpool der Bürger bezüglich der Entwicklungen, die EU einschlägt, zu sammeln.
- H** Informationskampagnen sollen viel aktiver als in den vergangenen Jahren entwickelt werden, um die Bürger zu ermutigen, sich an Diskussionen und der kommenden Wahl der Abgeordneten des Europäischen Parlaments im nächsten Frühjahr zu beteiligen.



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN BULGARIA**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Sofia on 10th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Bulgarian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Bulgaria by Alpha Research Ltd.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 5
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 4
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: manual worker at a printing press company, civil servant, primary school teacher, construction worker)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of head of household: construction engineer, economist, chief expert in public sector, associate professor, shop owner)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.
- ❖ During the discussion no substantial differences in opinions were observed regarding the profession, political views or age of respondents. The factor, which outlined more differences in respondents' views was if they have had or not practical experience in any aspect, related to the EU (involvement in EU programs, institutions or civic activities).

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Unlike the tendency of considerable deterioration of the EU image in the last few years (the average score for EU27 2011-2013 goes down to critical 30-31%) positive attitudes in Bulgaria still prevail (a stable score of 56% by Autumn 2012). Moreover, according to standard Eurobarometer surveys Bulgaria remains among the countries with highest levels of trust in the EU overall (60% compared to 33% EU27 in Autumn 2012 Survey).
- Nevertheless, the attitudes towards the EU demonstrated in the discussion conducted in Bulgaria were not so enthusiastic, **drawing rather gloomy image of the Union.**
- Yet, **some features of the positive EU image are still valid**, being envisaged rather as hopes and beliefs than actually experienced positive effects of the Bulgarian EU membership.
- Whether EU is perceived more positively or more negatively seems to be in close relation with the experience/knowledge respondents (do not) have in/about the EU. **The more experience or knowledge the respondents have, the more negative their thoughts about the Union are. However, the majority of the respondents have no practical experience in any aspect related to the EU (no involvement in EU programs, institutions or civic activities).**
- The **main topics** which come out in the discussion are **divergent**, ranging from having moderately positive to strongly negative notions. The nature of topics mentioned vary from the opportunities the EU provides for business, education, travelling, to regulations established and the bureaucratic structures of the Union. Yet, most of the respondents demonstrate rather shallow knowledge and little or no involvement in these issues. It seems that the condition for being more involved in the matter is if one has had a personal experience – either related to job/professional engagements or through experience of relatives or friends.
- **The majority of respondents rarely search information or follow EU related topics.** If so, this happens rather incidentally. However, the lack of regular information search or involvement with EU related issues does not prevent participants from evaluating different features of EU.
- The **positive aspects** of the EU the participants outline are:
 - That it is a union of free democratic countries and therefore **evokes expectations for EU to guarantee the continuation of democratic functioning of all Members** in the future.

“It is a union of democratic countries looking for larger markets. That is why they are united. And which, I hope, will guarantee us a democratic development in the future”
 - That the EU has provided **numerous opportunities** to its member citizens. The most often mentioned one is the **free movement** of goods, capital and persons.
 - Opportunities for **travelling** to other countries or acquiring a better **education abroad**
 - **Infrastructure projects in Bulgaria**, which were subsidized with EU funding
- Apart from the several positive aspects of the EU, the participants strongly emphasize its **negatives**. These negatives are both related to the EU as an institution, as well as the role and participation of Bulgaria as an (un)equal member of the Union and the way other Members perceive the country.

- One of the strongest and most agreed on theses is the self-critical attitude that **Bulgaria is not ready yet to meet all the requirements from the EU**. Moreover, respondents strongly agree that Bulgarian administration suffers from insufficiency of competent professionals who are often responsible for failures in different areas.
- There is a dominant sense that Bulgaria, being one of the poorest Member States, is perceived by the richer as a “second hand” country and this attitude would never change.

“It is where we will never be. Western countries will never accept us as equal to them and we will always be second hand. Just as we perceive Africans, they perceive us. There is no basis for comparison. I don’t know how we can fit in the other EU countries.”

- Another negative notion regarding the EU is the large number of rules and regulations established by the Union. These rules and regulations are often perceived as interference with national policy and internal affairs of the country. Such regulations are considered to be annoying or even obstructive in some aspects as for example SME business development.

“They force you to obey rules which we are not able to. As for the business – if you want to receive funding, you need to assure half of the amount you have applied for. This is unbearable and causes businesses to close.”

- The clumsy **bureaucracy** is seen as an obstruction to overall functioning of the Union. It is especially negatively perceived as regards to implementation of projects funded by the EU. The personal experience with EU projects points that bureaucracy and accounting the projects consume much more time than the actual work. Thus, instead of results-oriented, they turn into accounting-oriented projects. This “vicious circle” devaluates the essential parts of the projects.

“The problem of the EU is the administration itself – complicated structures, very high paid, sometimes doing stupid things”.

“I have serious problems with some of the projects I work on. They are of purely administrative nature – figuratively speaking, the paper work is seven times more than the actual work.”

- Some respondents, especially the ones who have relatives living abroad, state **there are double standards in the EU and some countries are more privileged than others**. One example is with education, which is thought to be underprivileged in Bulgaria compared to other countries.

“It is not the same in all States. My daughter, who is a student in UK, has taken out a loan. She will return it after she has found a job that is well paid. Here in Bulgaria you get a loan and the bank is indifferent of whether you have found a job or not. So it is not the same in all countries.”

- There is a **difference in general attitudes towards the EU among respondents who have had some kind contact with the EU**, no matter whether with administration, sites, etc, **and those who have never had any experience. The more experienced, the more skeptical** the respondents tend to be. And vice versa, those who have no experience seem to be either more optimistic or neutral to the EU.
- The key reasons for those expressing skepticism are the sense of being treated unequally in the Union (in comparison to other EU members) as well as not seeing any substantial results of the membership yet, excluding infrastructure improvements.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- The main sources respondents receive information from are rather similar and lacking diversity. Group participants mostly receive information on the EU from **TV news or internet news sites. The information is rarely intentionally sought** but rather randomly comes along with the rest of the news flow.
- Only two of the respondents report searching information about EU related topics more regularly. This regularity, however, is in tight connection with the professional needs of these respondents. The sources of information used for professional purposes are entirely internet based - either directly on the sites of European institutions, specialized web portals or professional social networks, as internet is considered to be the most reliable source of information.

“I mostly follow up the information I need from media – television, radio stations but always double-check with internet. I usually go to the Europa site. The last time I was furious about the sugar and flushing cisterns volume directives made up by euro clerks – they only allow 3 liter volume of flushing cisterns for toilets”.

- For the rest of the respondents, **though the information from media (mainly TV) and internet news sites is considered to be insufficient, there is no further interest in searching more information about the EU** than what is randomly seen/heard of.
- Some respondents admit they have checked the site of the EU after it was released in Bulgarian but have lost interest soon after that.
- As far as personal life is concerned, some respondents mention they have interest in education topics – mainly as regards to opportunities for their children (among respondents who have children).
- Given the fact that the majority of respondents do not intentionally search information related to the EU, it is hard for them to answer what topics they usually get informed about.
- A trustful and quite influencing respondent’s opinions source of information is hearing or seeing **close experience of friends, relatives and acquaintances**.
- Participants declare they feel very distant from the EU and have **no motivation in obtaining** any kind of **additional information**. What causes the distance is the bureaucratic model of EU functioning, and the sense that institutions cannot be controlled, nor anything depends on their opinion. This position is shared both by respondents in younger and higher age, in both higher and lower social class.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- The visions of the future of the EU **are rather gloomy and pessimistic**. Optimistic features are more moderate and the pessimistic ones dominate. Respondents who are more informed on EU related issues demonstrate higher skepticism about the future of the Union. The following negatively perceived aspects regarding the development of the EU in the coming years are placed at the discussion:

- **Fears of Union dissolution**

The concerns in this respect are mainly related to the lately raised issues whether the UK would remain a member of the Union or not. Some respondents share concerns that Germany is slowly taking this direction as well. Thoughts on this matter lead to the conclusion that **if the most developed countries in the Union leave, it is doomed to decay**. If the countries, which carry the financial burden of the EU leave, the Union will certainly collapse according to respondents who pretend to be better informed about the EU.

- Certain concerns are expressed regarding the development of the **energy policy** of the EU. There are **two main aspects** respondents express concerns about:

- The **dependency of the EU on Russia** as regards to gas supplying.

“They talk about diversification all the time but I don’t see it, especially after they rejected Nabucco pipeline”.

- The **threats to the environment by using conventional energy sources** such as gas, oil and coal, and the need of inventing and implementing alternative sources of energy.

- **Fears of losing national identity.**

In this respect respondents are concerned about keeping the authentic Bulgarian identity in the context of EU’s policies of unification, establishment of common standards and rules. The EU is perceived as sometimes interfering too much with national issues. It is believed that this globalizing process erases small countries’ identities such as Bulgaria and preserves the identities of the developed and privileged ones.

“This is the idea of globalization, to take away national identities – not to have separate national states but a huge state called Europe. The well developed countries will benefit from globalization. The ones like us are easily manipulated all the time”

- In spite of the prevailing fears and concerns among respondents, **still some hopes and expectations to the future of the Union are expressed**. In quite a few situations common EU goals are often mixed or confused with national priorities.

- One of the main goals outlined for the future is related to one of the most criticized aspects of the EU – administration and institutional functioning. Respondents believe that in the next few years one of the main challenges for the EU would be to **cut off budgets for administrative expenses** as well as **decrease the number of employees in administrative structures** of the EU. These economies are perceived as crucial for the EU in order to start working financially more effectively.
- Expectations (based on information from TV) that in the coming years there will be a **unified minimum wage for all Member States**. These are basically expectations of the EU improving the life standard in poorer countries, and in Bulgaria in particular.

This expectation is expressed by respondents in lower – social class, middle age, who in general feel more insecure about their future.

- According to respondents the EU should set high priority to **environment protection**. This is one of the aspects the EU is perceived to have achieved a lot and is respected for its efforts. Environment tends to be a top issue for younger respondents.
 - The image of Bulgarian professionals working in the administration responsible for the European funds is strongly negative. They are perceived as lacking competence and even causing the low absorption of EU funds in Bulgaria. Therefore, participants demonstrate expectations towards Bulgarian administration to improve their competence.
- Most of the respondents simply express critical attitudes towards the core challenges for the EU and its future but declare no further need to learn more on the problem areas discussed.
- What respondents demonstrate most interest in, and admit they would appreciate if they had more information, is **what the EU could do to “help” Bulgaria**, especially with respect to education system, health care, absorption of EU funds, banking system. All these areas are believed (especially by less informed respondents) to be piloted or even regulated by the Union. For example, there are expectations for EU to regulate interest rates in banks in Bulgaria.
- No questions were raised about the judicial system (which has been highly criticized by EU) nor the immigrant flows, which have been a hot topic over the last few months since the increasing number of refugees evoked a sort of internal crisis.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- All respondents feel **they can hardly have their voice heard either by national or EU institutions**. Yet, most of them have never tried to do so. There are doubts in the will of both Bulgarian and European institutions to help citizens and work in their favor. This is one of the considered reasons why they would not even try to express opinion. Other reasons respondents give are that overall **mistrust** “inside” (by inside they mean in Bulgaria) is simply transferred to the “outside” (meaning Europe). Respondents feel a **huge gap between them and European institutions** but cannot tell how this gap could be closed. Predominant sense that **institutions are out of citizens’ control** is present among all participants.

“We should be able to influence the institutions' actions but we cannot figure out how to do it.”

“Well there is no audibility at any level. We can't be heard in Bulgaria, not to mention Europe hearing us.”

- Only one respondent has actual experience in addressing EU institutions – either by writing letters or emails. His attempts however to reach institutions and receive information he needs have all been disappointing. Reason for disappointment is that all the officials have done has been to send him to read on his own directives and regulations. Another disappointment expressed is timing of responses. It is stated that sometimes receiving a reply takes too long, and timing is often of crucial importance for implementation of projects. A delay in response from institutions can be fatal for the project's success.

“The EU reply to letters but this reply may come in three months. And the answers are always evasive. They answer in general but the answer comes from a secretary who tells you that you are generally right, but you have national legislation, so check it. I've sent post letters. They always answer but...”

- Despite the predominant skepticism that citizens can hardly have their voice heard, respondents make some effort to at least name the possibilities to express views. What they bring into mind is online channels from the official sites of the EU, post mail, or direct contact with Bulgarian Members of the European Parliament.
- A possible way to express views or make complaints is considered to be television.
- Thinking on how opinions could be expressed and questions raised, respondents reach to the conclusion that they would like to learn more about **how they can contact local Members of the European Parliament**. A need of more information is claimed on how to reach the Members, whether they represent certain regions, the means of possible communication. Along with the lack of sufficient information, participants criticize the European Members of Parliament that they set a huge gap and all they do is fly from Brussels to Strasbourg, when they are supposed, in their opinion, to listen to peoples' needs and bring their suggestions to the Parliament.

“With their high salaries they are reluctant to look at what is happening here.”

“We are not represented by our Members. They represent themselves. They just account business trips, flights and that is it.”

- With one or two exceptions, respondents in the discussion admit they are not aware of how many representatives from Bulgaria there are in the European Parliament, who they currently are, or what the mechanism of electing them is. Thus, the need of more information on this matter is stated.

- In the discussion an idea of the possibility of recalling members of the Parliament in case they do not do their job emerges. This, in respondents' opinion, would be a proper mechanism for controlling EU Members and would force them to be more careful in their actions.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- It is no surprise that this part of the discussion was unfortunately rather unfruitful. Activating respondents' creativity was quite a challenge and as a result **very few ideas were brought to the discussion. The proposed ways of expressing opinions more or less already exist.** The ideas brought forward are:
- **Personal meetings held in EP Members' offices** in Bulgaria. The idea here is that there would be associates who could give appointments to citizens and hear their suggestions, comments, complaints, etc. This idea meets the resistance of some respondents as they do not believe it would be physically possible to meet so many people over a day.
 - **Online communication** with EU representatives.
 - The third and last idea generated, though confusedly expressed, is **to create some sort of Think Tank** where ideas of citizens are collected, or ideas are generated and widely discussed by citizens. Contra arguments regarding this idea are related to the concerns that establishing an organization of the kind would cost additional expenses to the EU. If so, the idea would not be received well.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- Considering the lack of willingness for civic involvement and the general mistrust in most of the institutions, participants in the discussion have a more or less skeptical approach to all propositions discussed.

A. An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- The spontaneous reaction to this proposition is that such a service is **superfluous** and not necessary at all. The argument for such reaction is that it would be an excessive expense, which would be just another waste of money. If such service would be opened, respondents would definitely insist on knowing what money it was financed with.
- Only one of the respondents could recognize in this proposition an already existing service.
- Concerns are expressed that if the officers are to be Bulgarian they would lack competence and would make it practically useless.
- Whilst respondents react with apathy to the idea of having a web site and service answering questions either by email, telephone or mail, they explicitly reject the opening of offices in bigger cities, considering it useless.

B. Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- This idea is **spontaneously accepted with slight irritation**. The main reason for it is that they have seen different debates on TV, heard of forums but they have not seen any results so far from all media debates and other formats.
- Participants admit they would not be influenced or stimulated to take actions by such a form of debates.
- Yet, they assert that there has to be some form of obtaining information on EU related issues. An example is brought from the past when there have been debates for the Rural Development program.

C. Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- This idea is generally **more positively perceived**. And more thought and comments emerged. The most positive aspect of such a way of citizen involvement is the possibility of **cross country exchange of citizens' views about the EU**. The majority of respondents even had additional propositions on how it could work more effectively, such as:
 - Organizing public media debates on important to-be-taken decisions in order the information to reach as many people as possible, and then conducting a study across Member States.
 - Constructing a web site for every country where online surveys are regularly conducted.

- Despite the overall positive reaction to this proposition, **arguments against it** were still brought forward:
 - The risk of spending too much money
 - Similar polls already existing. Here what is referred to are the forums open for discussions before voting important legal acts.

D. The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- Respondents are quite **sceptical** about such a possibility. They do not trust politicians and therefore do not think this would be an actually working method.

“This is hypocritical. They should not be allowed to take any decision without the approval of the public.”

E. Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- **This idea is also perceived rather reluctantly.**
- It is considered by some respondents to be doubling already existing possibilities and is therefore perceived as unnecessary.
- A few of the participants express an opinion that it should be local Members of the European Parliament whose responsibility it is to consult and inform citizens on the upcoming major decisions to be taken on European level.

F. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- Attitudes towards this proposition are **even more reluctant** and even refused to be commented on.

G. An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- Some respondents recognize such a form of communication and stimulation of involvement as already existing. **No interest or comments** are provoked by this proposition.

H. Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- **Such campaigns are perceived as necessary**, in order to persuade people to participate more actively in the next elections for European Parliament. Given the traditionally low voter turnout on such elections, respondents admit that people need to be activated in one way or another. Moreover, almost all respondents report having very little or no information at all on the election candidates, on what policies they are to take, etc. This is why most of the respondents approve of the idea for active information campaigns. However, most of them confess such a campaign would not encourage them to participate in debates. The outcomes

for them personally would be in acquiring more detailed information on the candidates, the process and purposes of the EP elections.

- In respondents' opinion, the main, if not only the purpose of such campaigns should be to **explain to citizens why these elections are important** and how their lives are reflected. It is admitted that a serious crisis of representativeness exists in Bulgaria and is hard for people to feel represented in the EU.

“I do not feel represented in my own country, and we are talking about Europe – no way.”

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

ОРТЕМ

КАЧЕСТВЕНО ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА ВКЛЮЧВАНЕТО НА ГРАЖДАНИТЕ В ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ

ГАЙД ЗА ГРУПОВА ДИСКУСИЯ

ВЪВЕДЕНИЕ: Питайте всеки участник да се представи с няколко думи, като каже как се казва, с какво се занимава, т.н.

ТЕМА 1 /10 min/

Днес сме се събрали, за да поговорим за Европейския съюз.

Бихте ли ми казали какво първо ви идва наум/което се сещате за ЕС?

- Изчакват се спонтанни реакции

- **Изследвайте/попитайте за:**

- Естеството на спонтанно споменатите теми за ЕС
- Позитивни и негативни аспекти, отнасящи се до ЕС
- Степен на базова заинтересованост и въвлеченост на респондентите в свързаните с ЕС теми/проблеми – следят ли темите, свързани с ЕС, засягат ли ги тези теми, по какъв начин.... Какво ги вълнува

ТЕМА 2 /10 min/

По отношение на това, което знаете и си мислите за ЕС: бихте ли ми казали от къде идва то/от къде произхожда?

От какви източници получавате информация или чувате мнения за ЕС – разберайте „източници“ в най-широк смисъл – от официални информационни източници до неформални разговори с приятели или други хора?

- Изчакват се спонтанни реакции

- **Изследвайте/попитайте за:**

- Степен на разнообразие на споменатите източници
- Какъв е характерът на информацията от всеки източник
- Интерес/ надеждност на всеки източник

ТЕМА 3 /15-20 min/

Нека сега да обсъдим по-подробно бъдещето на ЕС и въпросите, които може да ви възникнат в тази връзка.

Вероятно има определени аспекти, които вие считате за важни, и бихте искали да знаете и разбирате по-добре начинът, по който ЕС работи и посоките, които следва/поема – тъй като е възможно да не получавате достатъчна информация от източниците, които преди малко споменахте.

- **За какво по-конкретно вие лично бихте искали да научите повече?**

- Изчакват се спонтанни реакции

- **Изследвайте/попитайте за:**

- Общото впечатление за степента, в която смятат, че имат добро или недобро разбиране/знание по тези въпроси/проблеми
- Възприятие за основните предизвикателства пред ЕС за идните години
- Изразена от респондентите необходимост от по-добро познаване и разбиране – по какви теми по-конкретно? С какво достъпната в момента информация по тези теми не е задоволителна?

ТЕМА 4 /10-15 min/

Като граждани, би трябвало да имате възможността да изразявате мнението си и гласът ви да бъде чул по въпросите за бъдещото развитие на ЕС – дали да се одобри една или друга посока, по една или друга причина.

- **Какви са начините да го направите?**

- Изчакват се спонтанни реакции

- **Изследвайте/попитайте за:**

- Възприятие за възможности/трудности човек да изразява мнение по теми, свързани с ЕС и мнението му да бъде отразено - по какви начини?
- Схващане за причините това да е трудно
- Конкретни въпроси, по които респондентите биха искали да изразят мнението си като граждани и то да бъде отразено; очаквания в тази посока.

ТЕМА 5 /15 min/

Има различни начини, по които мнението на европейски граждани като нас би могло да бъде взето предвид.

Сега ви предлагам да се опитаме да помислим за възможни начини, каквито се сетите, просто да се отдадем на въображението си, и да дадем каквито идеи ни хрумнат, дори за момента да не сме сигурни/да не знаем как могат да се приложат на практика.

Какви начини си представяме? Какво ви идва наум?

- Изчакват се спонтанни реакции

-Стимулирайте креативността на групата като окуражавате респондентите да „скачат“ от една на друга идея.

ТЕМА 6 /25 min/

Сега ще ви представя няколко различни идеи, чиято цел е да осигурят по-добри възможности мнението на гражданите по темите, свързани с ЕС, да бъде чуто и взето предвид. Моля, да ми кажете какво мислите за всяка една идея:

- Накарайте респондентите да отговарят по всяка позиция поред, и да се аргументират Достъпна ли е, дава ли възможност или не, защо, би ли стимулирала гражданите да вземат по-активно отношение по въпросите на ЕС, за тях работи/ не работи...

A- Информационна служба за функционирането/начинът на работа на ЕС и неговите политики, която се състои от работещи информационни офиси във всеки голям град, уеб сайт, и служители, които бързо отговарят на всякакви въпроси по телефон, поща или имейл.

B- Организиране на дебати в основните медии между граждани и експерти по въпросите на ЕС, на тема поетите от ЕС насоки/пътища

C- Проучвания на общественото мнение за ЕС, които регулярно да се провеждат в цяла Европа, като така дават възможност на гражданите да научат какво мислят по тези теми техните собствени съграждани и гражданите на другите европейски страни

D- Възможността няколко пъти в годината във вашия регион да се провеждат срещи с евродепутати от България или други европейски политици

E- Отворени за всички граждани консултации по интернет, организирани от Европейската комисия по повод на всяко голямо решение, което предстои да се вземе на европейско равнище.

F- Подобни консултации, организирани от нашето правителство.

G – Интерактивна служба, използваща интернет и социалните мрежи да събира мненията на гражданите, техните желаниа или критики по отношение на решенията/политиките на ЕС.

H- Активни информационни кампании с цел да насърчават гражданите да се включват в предстоящите дебати, както и да участват в предстоящите избори за Европейски парламент през следващата пролет.

Благодарим ви за това, че дойдохте и участвахте в нашата дискусия.

Ако след дискусията ви дойдат наум някакви идеи, моля, не се колебайте да ги споделите с нас.

(Оставете актуален имейл адрес, на който респондентите да могат да пишат за целта)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Prague on 19th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Czech section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in the Czech Republic by Mareco, s.r.o.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 5
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 5 (professions of head of household: 3 office employees, manual worker, warehouse worker)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: entrepreneur, IT manager, self-employed plumber, middle level manager)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ The present EU image among the Czech Republic citizens is rather negative, when spontaneously discussing EU **negative associations** and topics concerning especially the following prevail:
 - **Excessive EU bureaucratic apparatus** and from that arising the EU expensiveness and inefficient spending of (financial) resources within the EU
 - **Regulations and directive dictate** – regulations and directives are frequently perceived as useless, sometimes even as stupid, bringing only another burden to citizens and (business) firms within the EU. The regulations often deal with issues that have already been solved better and more efficiently at national levels. There are a lot of regulations and directives there, the situation is frequently confused and the orientation within them is thus difficult.
 - **Identity, tradition and freedom restrictions** of Member States – a feeling of necessity to submit to orders/regulations coming from the EU centre.
 - **Impossibility of making small Member States' voices and interests being heard** and the necessity of submission to the dominant stakeholders' interests
 - The set **rules do not apply to all Member States equally** – the large/significant countries such as Germany, France do not meet the proper requirements/terms over a long period and are not punished; when the EU interests change, the rules are changed (Greece, Ukraine) – the rules are not enforced thoroughly if it is suitable for the EU
 - **Economic instability and uncertainty** due to the Southern States issues – Spain, Greece, Portugal
 - **Joining of economically weak members in the EU** – the fear of deepening economic instability within the EU (Bulgaria, Romania)
 - **Negotiations with Ukraine or Turkey about joining the EU** – these States are perceived as States that do not belong to the EU either economically or culturally
 - **Negative attitude towards the European currency euro** – it is an instable currency, its acceptance/joining means that prices go up. Preserving the national currency is perceived as a safer option.

- ❖ The attitude is not entirely critical though, spontaneously mentioned are also the **EU positives**:
 - **Education freedom** – possibilities to get high-quality education, language knowledge and their mastering
 - **Travel freedom** – the Schengen Area is perceived as a huge asset, great comfort/luxury
 - **Freedom to work anywhere in the EU** – the possibility to work abroad
 - **Shared healthcare system** – the possibility to receive the medical treatment in whichever country within the EU under the standard health insurance
 - **The EU as a whole is a stronger partner when negotiating within international relations** and is able to negotiate better terms than smaller Member States individually
 - **System of grants and programs**– financial support towards regions, specific benefits for citizens (social, economic, infrastructural, ...)

- ❖ **All in all, the negative views of the EU prevail but the attitude is not entirely negative** and the respondents can clearly see also some positive sides/impacts of the EU membership.

- ❖ The level of interest in the EU affairs is not that intensive though, respondents are aware of various developments in the EU, they take their stands on them but those issues are not perceived as too urgent or burning for them personally.

CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ Citizens **are not active** in searching for information about the EU, are not interested in trying to find out more detailed information about the EU, in extending their level of information about the current EU topics or their level of knowledge about the EU generally.
- ❖ But they are exposed to a relatively **high level of information inflow about the EU affairs** from the media. The level of awareness of current issues regarding the EU is relatively high although it comes entirely from the passive information reception.
- ❖ The most common information sources are represented by the **nation-wide media** – television and radio broadcasting, news servers, papers, magazines – mainly the common news coverage/service about the current affairs.
- ❖ **The highest credibility** is attributed to the **public television (ČT)** and **public radio (ČRo)**, the lowest credibility then goes to private entities (televisions and radios) – e. g. the most commonly used media in the Czech Republic - TV Nova, Blesk (the most popular papers with readers in here, a tabloid-aimed one).
- ❖ The economic magazines such as Ekonom, E15 are considered to be reliable sources of information, although the majority of respondents stated they did not read these types of magazines very often.
- ❖ **The official information sources about the EU** – servers, printed materials, databases are **not mentioned** at all.
- ❖ Respondents agree that **negative pieces of information about the EU (problems) are more likely to be communicated via the media** because these media consumers are interested in them the most. The positive pieces of information are not communicated in these types of media very often and thus it is difficult for citizens to reach them, which adds to a building of rather negative perceptions about the EU.
- ❖ **Face-to-face contacts** are also mentioned as a source of information – contacts with friends, families, co-workers. It is about information exchange on current affairs; information is supposed to have been gathered again from the nation-wide media though.
- ❖ Television debates with politicians and experts are passingly mentioned as an information source. But they are not very popular, they are considered to be rather boring.
- ❖ **Information sources about the EU and the EU affairs are concentrated on the nation-wide media oriented on news coverage/service. Citizens are not active in looking up those pieces of information, that's why they do not even try to extend the amount of information sources and to search for new ones.**
- ❖ **Generally lack of information regarding the EU affairs is not perceived. Information about positive aspects of the EU activities are more likely to be absent – what went well, what good the EU activities brought. These kinds of information do not reach citizens via the nation-wide media.**

CHAPTER 3: QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ **Respondents realize that there are important issues connected with the current shape and future of the EU.** They are **aware** of them **but** they are **not too intensively interested** in them though. If the issue does not affect them personally or some of their family members directly, they do not take interest in them in a more profound way and the issues do not trouble them.
- ❖ As the most **significant current issues of the EU** are perceived:
 - Enlargement of the EU with economically weaker countries – deepening of economic instability and uncertainty of the EU
 - The common European currency euro – currency instability. A dissenting approach towards adopting the euro as a sole currency in the Czech Republic.
 - Generally the economic instability of the EU – fear of the economic/financial crisis deepening.
 - Potential downfall of the EU. There is an impression there that some States might want to resign their membership in the EU which means that there is a high level of uncertainty there of what might happen if any of the current member countries left.
 - Waste of financial resources (inefficient management of the EU funds – bureaucracy, corruption) – This problem is related rather to the national level of management than the European one though.
 - Dividing the Member States into groups labelled “better/stronger“ and “worse/weaker“ – an uneven development of the EU and an unequal approach towards individual countries regarding the enforcement of adhering to the terms and the rules
- ❖ Citizens feel there is a **sufficient amount of information** about all the important issues there and whoever wants to get all the information needed they have no problem to find and get them. But people are very little interested in actively searching for them (and so put their concerns to rest). Citizens consider their level of awareness of the EU affairs and its future to be sufficient for their personal lives / for their needs and they feel that if they need more information, they will be able to find them. Citizens expect that they find these types of information in the nation-wide media, on the websites or information sources that deal with the European Union. They do not have real experience in using these specialized sources of information, they only have a hunch they exist and can be found.
- ❖ The not very high level of interest in searching for additional information about key issues in the EU and its aims and plans for the future comes not only from the fact that these issues are not perceived as too burning for citizens themselves but also from the **scepticism that in reality they will not be able to do / change / influence anything regarding those issues.**
- ❖ Citizens would agree to have **more information about positive aspects of the EU** (what the real benefits are, what was built thanks to the EU, what they can achieve thanks to the EU), not just have the ones about what is failing, about problems. These types of information should be communicated actively by the EU (itself) so there would be no need for citizens to look them up by themselves.
- ❖ As an important (and currently missing) source of information is perceived the more active performing and communication done by the **MEPs**. Citizens would welcome the MEPs to be seen more – they should be more active in communicating with citizens, in using the media (TV appearances, articles, regular annual reports, regular appearances/debates) to explain what have happened, what have been approved, what the plans for the future are, what direction the EU will take. They have been currently missing this type of information source and would welcome it as

an important one about the EU working/operating and the directions the EU heads for. It would be a way to get the EU closer to citizens.

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ Respondents do not spontaneously feel the need to express their disapproval or their objections to the current EU affairs and its future headings. They do not consider the EU issues to be so burning and affecting them personally to such extent to have to give their opinions.
- ❖ Generally respondents admit that **it is possible in principle to express their opinion on EU issues** and name various ways to do it. **But the act of expressing an opinion is not considered to be easy**, it demands a lot of effort, enthusiasm and activity from citizens and often a language barrier plays its role. Apart from that respondents do not believe that their laboriously expressed opinions would be heard and would account for something the EU would deal with. That contributes to lack of interest to express opinions, potential dissatisfaction, and reluctance to try to change something.
- ❖ The only way of expressing opinions and the possibility to influence something at the European level the citizen use is their participation in **elections to the European Parliament**. Although after the election they feel the lack of any feedback from the MEPs who were elected and the lack of any information about what they managed to push through based on their election programme the citizens voted for.
- ❖ Another perceived possibility of expressing their opinions is connected with the **election to the European Parliament** and is represented with pre-election meetings held by electoral candidates. Citizens can see a leeway for expressing their opinions here but their trust /beliefs in any appropriate / active response and reaction is minimal.
- ❖ Another expected way of expressing opinions is referenda. Referenda are considered to be a suitable/good form but they are not held very often (neither at a national level). But it is a way to express opinions which can be even heard.
- ❖ A direct letter / E-mail addressed to the MEP are also perceived as a possibility of expressing opinions – though again with a minimal level of trust that their voices will be heard and answered/acted upon accordingly.
- ❖ Generally people consider **expressing their opinions** on the EU affairs or its future heading to be extremely **difficult** and they do not believe their voices to be heard / answered. That's why they do not tend to express their opinions and do not feel the need to do so.
- ❖ Expressing their opinions and the possibility of their voices being heard and answered is **difficult already at a national level** (there is a possibility here to visit their Parliament deputies in their offices, write a letter to them or visit sessions of the Parliament of the Czech Republic), **at a European level** they find it **even more difficult**.

Respondents cannot clearly describe reasons why expressing their opinions should be that difficult - they do not have experience in doing it. Citizens more likely do not know the way to express their opinions effectively so they consider it to be complicated and rather unnecessary.

- ❖ Only at a municipal level citizens can see a possibility to express their opinions and still have beliefs that their voices will be heard. At a municipal level the problems are solved that totally tangibly affect citizens' lives and the willingness to express their opinions is much higher. The direct contact with people who decide at a municipal level is important and therefore their belief in

the fact that their voices will be heard is higher. More respondents admit that they attend their local council sessions.

CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- ❖ **Respondents mentioned some ways to enable them to express their opinions on the EU and EU affairs.** The **most suitable** way would be a **face-to-face meeting in any form that is available and easily accessible**. A face-to-face meeting represents the most suitable form of communication, it is possible to ask all the questions, get everything clear and discuss all. Very easy accessibility of that contact person is the essential condition.

- ❖ **Suggested possibilities of direct contact:**
 - A direct mediator – a person who would visit the European Parliament, would meet citizens and then interpret their opinions directly in the EP
 - A city/town centre office – an information centre in every larger town where people can ask questions, express their opinions and get any feedbacks
 - Open debates with citizens – a MEP, a deputy or an expert have a discussion directly with citizens (in a vicinity of their places of residence so it would be easily accessible)

- ❖ **Other suggestions:**
 - There would be a letterbox at the post office in which people could drop their suggestions and they would be responded accordingly
 - An E-mail alternative of the above-mentioned suggestion

- ❖ **Suggestions of new ways of keeping people informed about the EU (but not for expressing their opinions):**
 - Regular (live) television broadcasts from European parliamentary sessions – people know them from the Czech Parliament but have never seen one from the European one
 - Regular EP reports – once a month – what was approved, pushed through, declined

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- ❖ **A. An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.**
 - **A very positively accepted suggestion** that clearly shows to people where to go, where to turn to in case they have questions or in case they need to express their opinions to a specific EU issue.
 - There is the possibility of face-to-face contact, a possibility of discussion, a possibility to ask detailed questions when needed and a possibility/certainty of a direct and immediate answer. A face-to-face meeting is not so anonymous as a written form of communication so there is a higher level of belief here that everybody can get their answers / find an appropriate response.
 - It is easily accessible for everyone and it does not demand so much activity/effort to try to find a way to express opinions (on paper, via E-mail, personally). It strengthens a feeling of easy accessibility for wide masses of people.
 - It is clearly defined and set where a citizen can turn to – people have not been exactly aware so far where to turn with their questions to. An exhaustive part of finding out where to turn with a given issue to fall off, which is a highly discouraging factor.

- ❖ **B- Debates to be organized in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.**
 - **This concept was accepted rather contradictorily.**
 - Debates tend to be long and boring, citizens more likely ask for quick answers, a quick flow of information.
 - A debate between an average citizen and an expert is not perceived as equal, an expert has always clearly the upper hand, which limits the level of interest in these debates.
 - There is also a distrust here of how the participants/citizens are selected for these types of public debates – a distrust that the invited experts' acquaintances enter these debates, pre-selected people. The objectivity of these debates is thus questioned. Similar types of debates between experts and Czech politicians at a national Czech level are not very popular, which thus discourage citizens to watch/enter similar debates at European level.
 - On the other hand, if citizens believed that the invited participants are chosen objectively, then this would give a real possibility to express their opinions, get important information and find answers to problems that really trouble them. It is a very comfortable way to get information and find answers. It does not demand a high level of pro-activity from citizens.

- ❖ **C- Opinion polls on the EU organized regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.**
 - **A positively accepted concept** – its great benefit is a comparison with what other individual nations agree or disagree about on a specific issue. Also, in such opinion polls large numbers of people participate and the survey then reflects the opinions of a wide spectrum of country citizens.
 - This way of expressing citizens' opinions does not demand any strenuous activity from them – it is very easy, citizens only answer pre-prepared questions when they are addressed

- A part of respondents do not perceive this as a reliable source of information, they do not believe/trust objectivity of such surveys and they are afraid that the results can be easily tampered with.
- And also a long period between a fieldwork and a result presentation is regarded as a discouraging factor for this way to express opinions. Respondents expect that the time lag between fieldwork and result presentation for all countries of the EU might take several months and the issue will not have been hot any more when results come.
- Another negative aspect of this opinion expressing form is a distrust of getting any real response from appropriate authorities. There is a distrust here that an in opinion poll expressed opinion will not be really heard and any appropriate response will come.
- There is also a fear here (even though not very strong) that conducting such surveys within the whole EU might cause and create a kind of “animosity“ among Member States. If a survey shows that citizens of several Member States feel negative because of some other member countries, it can be received negatively and cause or increase “tension“ among individual member countries.
- Opinion polls are rather perceived as a source of interesting and important information than as a tool for finding an appropriate response to an expressed problem.

❖ **D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.**

- **A very positively accepted concept for expressing opinions.** Similar ideas had been repeatedly mentioned earlier in the discussion.
- It brings the EU closer to citizens quite substantially – they can see and meet the MEP face-to-face, can get feedback about parliamentary affairs, about current issues being discussed. Citizens can thus see what their elected deputies do directly and what from their campaign programme they manage to push through. They have not had this possibility so far and because of that they feel the EU distant – citizens cannot see their MEPs and cannot hear a lot about their activities, which only strengthens their distrust that an average citizen stands a chance to express or achieve something at the European level.
A possibility of face-to-face communication represents a very good aspect of the proposition – without any mediators and time lags citizens can get immediately and directly their questions answered by responsible people.
- There is a fear here that such debates will not be held in the vicinity of their places of residence or that it will not be scheduled conveniently (they will not be able to come because of their work). There is again a very strong call here for everything to be accessible in the easiest way and to demand little to none effort from citizens.
- This concept can raise the level of willingness to express their opinions on European issues – it is an easy way that in addition brings the European Union closer to citizens. The majority of this focus group participants expressed their interest in participation in a meeting with their MEPs.
- There is also again distrust here whether in this way expressed opinions get any appropriate reactions at the European level. Whether the MEP will be able to interpret their opinions, will be a skillful mediator and negotiator and will get an appropriate response.

❖ **E- Consultations through the Internet organized by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.**

- **A contradictorily accepted concept for expressing opinions** – on the one hand it is a very comfortable and easy way to express opinions via the Internet, on the other hand it is a very anonymous way. Their trust that their voices will be heard and will bring any appropriate response is limited.

They are afraid that it is a tool that gives people a (misleading) feeling of a totally easy way how to express their opinions but their opinions can be ignored even in an easier way at the same time.

- They are afraid that in a flood of on-line discussion participants it is impossible to easily express or push through their opinions, or to easily reach a consensus or find a solution.

❖ **F- Similar consultations, organized by our national government.**

- Similar consultations organized by the Czech government were immediately and unequivocally **rejected** by the overwhelming majority of respondents. As a result of what has been happening on Czech political scene for the last few months scepticism and negative mood towards Czech political representatives prevail, citizens do not believe that in a situation where the Czech political representatives are not able to manage important issues at national level they would be able to manage issues connected with the EU responsibly and in a performant way.
- Because of this current distrust and frustration about the current political situation in the Czech Republic this concept is declined totally and unequivocally.

❖ **G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.**

- This is a **contradictorily accepted concept** – respondents are very much afraid that the target group that actively uses social networks is very specific – concentrated to young people, and thus this tool is suitable only for a small part of citizens whose opinions are specific
- They are also worried about the demanding character of evaluation of this opinion collection
- Although this way is perceived as a comfortable and easy one, it is not accepted very positively by respondents.

❖ **H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next spring.**

- This proposition is **received negatively** by the overwhelming majority of respondents. The connection with the European elections strongly evokes election campaigns where people expect political candidates to listen, but after they are elected, nothing tends to happen.
- Election campaigns are not perceived to be objective generally, which further inspires distrust of the proposition.

- ❖ Because of the respondents' passivity and their rather low level of interest in expressing their opinions on European issues the only appealing forms of expressing opinions are the ones that do not demand an excessive activity / effort from citizens. The feeling that expressing their opinions is **easy, quick, and not demanding excessive activity** is crucial and can inspire citizens to express their opinions.

Citizens are more likely to express their opinions on topics that affect their and their families' lives directly – so more likely only local issues are in questions – to express their opinions on projects funded by the EU, to take interest in possibilities of their children' education abroad, to a possibility to use medical treatment abroad and the like.

- ❖ Also a possibility of **face-to-face contacts**/meetings when asking questions or expressing opinions is very important for citizens – it gives them a feeling they can get an appropriate response immediately, a feeling their voices are easily and better heard.

And therefore the concept A is evaluated as the most interesting one by this group. It offers a wide range of possibilities to express opinions. But it is really necessary to clearly communicate the effortlessness and easy accessibility of these tools for expressing their opinions or asking questions, so when they need it they immediately know where to turn to.

Another particularly interesting concept is the concept D – direct meetings with the MEPs. In addition it brings the EU nearer to citizens to a substantial degree, enables them to see all what is happening at the EU level and gives them a clear feeling they can really get involved in these affairs.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

KVALITATNÍ PRŮZKUM ZAPOJENÍ OBČANŮ DO EVROPSKÉ UNIE

(Prosinec 2013)

SCÉNÁŘ SKUPINOVÉ DISKUSE

(ÚVOD: Požádejte každého respondenta, ať se ve stručnosti představí. Ať řekne, kdo je a co dělá, apod.)

TÉMA 1

Dnes jsme se tu sešli, abychom si společně pohovořili o Evropské unii.

Mohl/a byste mi prosím říct, co Vás první napadne, když se řekne Evropská unie?

- Spontánní reakce
- Zjišťujte:
 - Povaha témat spontánně zmíněných ve spojitosti s EU
 - Pozitivní a negativní aspekty/stránky spojené s EU
 - Míru počátečního zájmu a zapojení respondentů do problematiky EU

TÉMA 2

Nyní, s ohledem na to, co víte a co si myslíte o EU: odkud to pramení? / z čeho vycházíte?

Z jakých zdrojů čerpáte informace nebo kde slyšíte/berete názory o EU – berme slovo „zdroje“ v tom nejširším smyslu slova od oficiálních informačních kanálů až po neformální rozhovory s přáteli či jinými lidmi, atd.?

- Spontánní reakce
- Zjišťujte:
 - Míru různorodosti zmíněných zdrojů
 - Povahu (informačních) zdrojů každého z nich
 - Zájem / důvěryhodnost každého z nich

TÉMA 3

Pojďme nyní konkrétněji hovořit o budoucnosti EU a otázkách, které si s ohledem na toto téma možná kladete.

Jistě existují určité aspekty či otázky, které považujete za důležité a chtěl/a byste o nich vědět více a lépe porozumět způsobu, jakým EU funguje a jakým směrem se ubírá – protože je možné, že ze zdrojů, které jste zmínil/a dříve nezískáte všechny informace, které byste potřeboval/a.

O kterých problematikách či otázkách byste chtěl/a vědět víc?

- Spontánní reakce

- Zjišťujte:

- Obecně dojmy z toho, do jaké míry dobré (či špatné) znalosti mají o této problematice/těchto otázkách a do jaké míry jim tedy rozumějí
- Vnímání hlavních výzev pro EU v nadcházejících letech
- Vyjádření respondentů o potřebě lepší/větší míře povědomí/znalostí a porozumění – kterých témat se to obzvláště týká? V čem jsou v současné době dostupné informace k těmto tématům nedostatečné?

TÉMA 4

Jako občan byste měl/a mít možnost vyjádřit svůj názor na budoucí směřování EU a Váš hlas/názor by měl být vyslyšen – názor o tom, zda souhlasíte či nesouhlasíte s takovým či jiným směřováním EU, nebo jakýkoli jiný názor...

Jakým způsobem to můžete udělat dnes?

- Spontánní reakce

- Zjišťujte:

- Vnímaná snadnost / obtížnost vyjádřit svůj názor a být vyslyšen/a s ohledem na témata spojená s problematikou EU – jak/čím?
- Důvody, proč je to vnímané jako obtížné
- Konkrétní témata, ke kterým by se respondenti chtěli obzvláště vyjádřit a být vyslyšeni jako občané; očekávání, která mají v tomto ohledu.

TÉMA 5

Lze vymyslet různé způsoby/prostředky, jež by umožnily občanům EU více a lépe vyjadřovat názory a být zároveň i vyslyšeni.

Dovolte mi, abych navrhl/a, že se zkusíme zamyslet nad všemi možnými způsoby/prostředky. Nechme volně rozběhnout naši představivost, nevzdávejme se žádného nápadu, i když v tomto okamžiku nevíme, jakým způsobem by (nápad) mohl být zaveden do praxe. Co si představíme?

- Spontánní reakce

- Podněcujte kreativitu skupiny podporováním respondentů v “přeskakování” z jednoho nápadu na druhý.

TÉMA 6

Nyní Vám ukázu několik návrhů způsobů/prostředků, které by mohly být implementovány jako prostředky, jež by umožnily občanům více a lépe vyjadřovat názory na unijní problematiku a být zároveň i lépe vyslyšeni.

Zeptám se Vás, co si o každém z nich myslíte.

- Přimějte respondenty, aby postupně reagovali na všechny předložené návrhy, ptejte se jich, jak moc je každý z návrhů zaujal a proč

A- Informační služby se zaměřením na fungování EU a její politiku, což by zahrnovalo otevření informačních center v každém velkém městě, webové stránky a službu/podporu, která by rychle zodpověděla jakékoli telefonické, písemné či elektroniky zaslané dotazy.

B- Mediální debaty v celostátních médiích mezi běžnými občany a odborníky na problematiku EU se zaměřením na kroky, které EU podnikla.

C- Pravidelně organizované celoevropské průzkumy veřejného mínění zaměřené na činnost EU, které by umožnily občanům vědět, co si myslí nejen jejich spoluobčané, ale i občané ostatních států EU.

D- Možnost setkat se několikrát do roka se zástupci České republiky v Evropském parlamentu nebo jinými unijními politiky v místě Vašeho bydliště.

E- Internetové konzultace přístupné všem občanům organizované Evropskou komisí pokaždé, když bude třeba učinit zásadní rozhodnutí v EU.

F- Podobné konzultace, ale organizované vládou České republiky.

G- Interaktivní služby, které by využívaly internetu a sociálních sítí a neustále by shromažďovaly názory, přání či kritiku občanů na kroky provedené EU.

H- Informační kampaně, které by se objevovaly mnohem častěji než v minulých letech. Jejich cílem by bylo podněcování občanů k aktivnímu přístupu a zapojování se do debat a k účasti ve volbách do Evropského parlamentu, které se budou konat na jaře 2014.

Znovu poděkujte respondentům, za to, že se dostavili a zúčastnili této diskuze.

Pokud Vás napadne cokoli dalšího s ohledem na tuto diskuzi, neváhejte a dejte nám vědět/kontaktujte nás na adrese

(Sdělte respondentům relevantní e-mailovou adresu, kterou mohou k tomuto účelu využít)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN ESTONIA**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Tallinn on 7th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Estonian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Estonia by SarrPoll.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 5
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: truck driver in a local social centre, ventilation fitter, cook in a canteen, salesperson in a publishing house)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of head of household: project manager in a translation agency, directress of a local post office, leader of a regional Boy Scouts (Young Eagles) section in Estonian Defence League, sales directress of a cosmetic brand in Estonia, freelance consultant in labour law and liquidation of companies)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

Ø Participants were invited to list the **mental associations, images, and perceptions that first came to mind** regarding the European Union (EU).

- Firstly the (far away) **institutional aspect** of EU was mentioned – “*big buildings in Brussels*”, “*Brussels itself*” – shaping an image of a big colossal dehumanised mechanism: ‘them’.
- Secondly, **close to home positive manifestations of EU**: repair of Tallinn- Pärnu motorway with the aid of EU – what ‘they’ have done for ‘us’.
- Thirdly the **link Estonians (‘us’) have with EU (‘them’)** emerged: Estonian Members of European Parliament (MEP), especially the name of one of them Indrek Tarand. It was explained that these are the Estonian MEPs who raise questions, important to Estonians, in EU.
- After, some **negative connotations** surfaced, though they were not widely shared among the participants:
 - o 45 million euro fine for excessive sugar stocks,
 - o possible new fine for Estonia for exceeding milk quota with 5-6% this year,
 - o Baltic farmers protest against inequality of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (an old Soviet-Era tractor was sent to Brussels).
- Finally, **popular topics in the press at the moment**: migration to SEPA starting from 1st of February, cross-border money transfers, and the common currency, euro, that Latvia was to adopt in several weeks after focus group discussion, were mentioned.

Ø It is interesting to note that a **manifest difference between ‘us’, Estonia and Estonians, and ‘them’, EU**, could be observed among the participants of the focus group. This opposition softened in the course of the group discussion, but remained observable until the end, especially among certain participants (mainly lower-middle social class).

Ø When probed further on **positive connotations**, free movement and better quality of life were mentioned:

- **Travelling**: made easier, no visas, no queues to cross borders, medical help abroad, no need to change money.
- **Studying and working abroad**: Even though there are no formal obstacles to go and work and live and study in other European countries, which was perceived as something very positive, several participants stressed that they themselves would not use this opportunity because of their strong connection to Estonia and Estonians. Some participants strongly expressed how living abroad would be out of question for them (mostly lower-middle social class, different ages). One young participant (higher-middle social class) admitted, on the contrary, that she has even searched for a job in Brussels.
- **Feeling as European citizen** when visiting non-European countries: realisation of the difference in quality of life. To be noted that for most of the participants comparison with other countries was the only moment when they felt as European citizens. One young participant felt positively European also through Greece's bailout as it made her feel safe about Estonia's future as well, assuring her that no matter what no member is left alone.
- **Also** cross-border projects and EU grants to repair and construct infrastructure and to boost development were mentioned. These grants help us catch up with the “*normal world*”, explained one middle-aged participant.

Ø When further questioned on more **negative aspects related to EU**, excessive regulations and standardization, Greek problematic and payments to EU were stated:

- **Overregulation** of certain fields to the extent that it is seen as “*foolishness that drives from boredom of deputies in EU*”. Notion that important topics, that really could make a difference, are set to background to deal with nonsense.
- **Standardization** of Member States, unwillingness to take into account cultural, historical and geographical differences while working out new legislations and regulations.
- **Greece and Italy** and countries alike with irresponsible budgetary policies force careful Estonians and Scandinavians to pay more. That doesn't feel just to everybody. Two participants (older, lower-middle social class) considered **Estonia's contribution to ESM too big because it's paid** at the expense of Estonians' well-being.
- **Fear** that even though today we receive from EU more than we give, that will change one day, and **Estonia will have to start to pay much more than it gets**. Several participants didn't see that as a positive thing while several others stayed more optimistic and believed that when that day comes, Estonia will have also the means to help others, less fortunate members, unselfishly.

Ø **The overall image of EU** tended to be rather **positive**, several participants even stating that it has ameliorated during past years. “*I have no negative opinion about EU, in fact my opinion is turning more and more positive*”, declared one young guy (lower-middle social class). One older participant (also lower-middle social class) mentioned that before Estonia became a member of EU, she was against the integration, but now, having become in direct contact with EU (by travelling, media, grants), she has changed her opinion, and is happy Estonia is one of 28 Member States, though still remaining critical about some aspects of it.

Ø In order to sooth the mentioned negative aspects participants explained that the **Estonian government is also to blame in EU's negative image**. Notably for two reasons:

- **Local officials too keen to apply all the EU regulations indisputably, letter by letter**, leaving no room for flexibility. They accused Estonian officials of interpreting directives more severely than needed, visits and observations in old Member States had confirmed that. “*The only ones who comply with all the EU regulations and laws are the Estonians!*” ironically summed it up one young male participant.
- **The government's selection of laws** to adopt is misleading the public opinion about EU work, giving an impression that EU only deals with “*stupid*” regulations and unnecessary topics at the expense of important issues like people and their well-being, diminution of inequalities, poverty, equal salaries for women and men, etc.

Ø Degree of interest and involvement in EU related issues were both rather moderate among the participants.

- **Interest**: participants stated to have no particular interest in EU related issues; they more consume what is given to them through daily news. Info runs through the background; their interest stops at keeping themselves informed of the most current affairs by headlines. They themselves search rarely, rather never, info themselves. It can happen only if there is a necessity, never just for interest.
- **Involvement**: European topics and everyday life seem two completely separate things for them. Some see being **European as opposite to being Estonian**; for others one doesn't exclude the other. As already mentioned above, they mostly feel involvement – feeling European – when comparing themselves with others while travelling, but while at work or living their everyday life they don't

tend to consider themselves Europeans, at least they don't think about it and therefore they don't have great involvement in European issues as well. The only time they feel their involvement in everyday things is when they go to vote.

Two people mentioned, though, that they feel the **involvement** in their everyday life, as one has to deal with European labour law directives at his work and the other interacts daily with various European clients at work. She felt also that as European laws protect her in her everyday life, she is involved.

Others expressed here and throughout the focus group discussion that they **don't feel like their voice matters** "*like a small drop in a wide ocean*", even Estonia's voice, ensemble, was not believed to have much influence and power, therefore their sense of involvement was less important.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

Ø People gathered in the groups were requested to name **sources** from what they get **information about the EU**.

- **Traditional information channels:** television, notably its' news and debate shows, and newspapers and their online versions. Radio was not mentioned.
- **New information channels:** social media, notably Facebook, and comments on online news sites.
- **Informal channels:** family and friends. Latter strongly related to social media as a lot of communication on that level has moved to internet.
- **Other channels:** EU related websites like EPSO and EU homepage, EU legislation system with what one participant is forced to interact daily at work
- **Authorities and opinion leaders:** people who are believed to have deeper knowledge, not just opinions, of EU related topics.

Ø Participants tended to get their **information simultaneously from different sources**, mainly traditional information channels like television (mostly), newspapers and their online websites. Online newspapers and especially their comments seemed to be a very common way to get comparative information: in order to form one's own opinion on a matter, people tended to compare the info, given with the comments added to the news story, with the info of official news.

The degree of diversity of the sources seemed to **depend on age group and social class**

- Older participants seemed to be satisfied with fewer sources (mainly TV and newspapers).
- Higher-middle class workers seemed to use a wider range of sources to get their information and shape their opinion (social media, news sites in different languages).

Ø Having mostly stated, as mentioned above, to have no particular interest in EU related issues, participants, expectedly, couldn't either specify any difference in the nature of information obtained by these channels. They consume what they stumble on (often without further analysis) and follow current top headlines.

Ø Television was stated as **the most trustworthy** and writing press as **the least trustworthy channel**.

- **Television** was the most credible source of information for most (especially aged) participants. Differentiation between national channel ETV and commercial channels (TV3, Kanal2) was made, expressing strong trust towards the former's news and debate shows and little trust towards the latter's mostly entertainment oriented shows and news. It is important to note that ETV is entirely a governmentally funded public channel, that has no right to show any commercials, has a responsibility to develop educational and culture oriented programmes and be socially and culturally responsible.

One participant explained that trust in information obtained by television, also depends on the nature of information: concerning EU one could trust (E)TV news 100% , as one can be sure that the channel has access to good sources on the matter; whereas news concerning the wider world should be consumed with caution, as access to initial sources is less obvious.

To illustrate the trust and influence, one participant explained how he had changed his opinion on the necessity to help Greece to becoming in favour of helping by following debates on the subject on TV and written media.

- **Printed press**, on the other hand, was widely criticized for its politically biased articles and its tendency to create scandals, exaggerate and manipulate with facts in order to sell better; and therefore was seen as the least trustworthy source of information.

Ø One younger participant admitted that she doesn't trust media at all and stressed, with one other young participant, that they can only talk about their opinions on matters concerning EU, they wouldn't call it knowledge what they get from media, as all info is mediated by someone, therefore presented with selection of facts and charged with their own interpretations of the matter; therefore it's false to talk about **knowledge** – **opinions** would be a more proper term.

Ø One could notice a **slight trend in media trust within the focus group**: the younger the participant the more sceptical he/she tended to be towards media in general and the more he/she tended to use different sources for information: social media, cross-border communication, active internet search, friends and family, comparison of info in different languages. Television and newspapers were of secondary rank.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

Ø Concerning the future of EU, participants were invited to **name aspects they wished to know more about**.

Interest in **EU motives in general and their development plans for next 10 years** was expressed. Following questions were posed:

- Where does EU see itself in 10 years? Is it headed towards a unitary state? Will Estonians stay independent?
- How will national budgets be put together? To what extent will EU control Estonian budget in 10 years? Will Estonia be forced to get approval for its budget from EU in the future?

Ø Common agreement in the group was that they don't even think that European officials in Brussels know the answers to these questions, especially considering that new elections are approaching and current trends could consequently radically change. Therefore they **don't even expect to get answers to their questions**, though they would like to.

Ø Further, participants were asked to name **principal challenges EU will have to face in the future**.

- As EU mostly associated to the participants with far-away issues or questionable regulations, the **“real future challenges”** for participants, like unemployment, quality and cost of life, and low salaries, were uniquely considered as national matters, which Estonian government has currently sacrificed in order to please EU and deal with ‘their’ problems. Again, very clear distinction between ‘us’ the Estonian people and ‘them’ the EU.
- When probed further to name major challenges facing EU, it took them long to answer. One participant expressed that in his opinion there are **no major challenges** – the only challenge is to **continue the same way**. Questioned still a bit further, two issues were mentioned:
 - o **Necessity to decide/agree on the essence of EU**: what is the unifying force between the countries? Do we need a unifying European identity? Are we a family or just allies? Do we need EU for protection from Russian military power or fear of Chinese economical power or for something more emotional? How better integrate Member States?
 - o **Greek debt and its' influence on EU**: will they ever pay back? How? When? How will EU force certain mainly South-European countries to adopt austerity and prevent future Greece-like bailouts? How will EU manage to sooth the differences between Scandinavian and South-European countries in these issues?

Ø Participants considered themselves to be **poorly informed** about matters concerning future development plans and current discussion topics. They considered themselves **more** or less **informed** about already voted issues and new legislation, but found themselves on complete dark side concerning future trends and ongoing discussions in European Parliament and European Commission.

Ø **Reasons for such lack of information** were seen both on **internal and on external level**:

- Surprisingly it was **laziness**, not lack of interest in the matter, which was mentioned while interrogated about not searching for such information on its own. Participants found it very important to be informed about current and future trends and politics in EU. They admitted that they are just too lazy to make the effort.

- **The Estonian Republic** was also held responsible as participants considered that it should be the State that distributes such information about EU to its citizens.
- *“Some of such decisions are made in secret meetings, as is common in politics, therefore simple citizens won’t have access to such information”*, was pronounced by one participant, and not argued against by the others.

Ø Participants **didn’t seem to be too concerned about future challenges facing EU because** they didn’t feel any power to change anything and because more urgent/important problems are facing Estonians in the near future. EU difficulties and problems come as secondary. EU is not ‘us’ for participants; therefore ‘our’ (Estonians’) problems are not the same as ‘their’ (EU’) problems, which further means that ‘their’ problems and challenges are less important and don’t worry us very much, especially when ‘our’ problems and challenges are so big at the moment. Still they would like to be more informed about EU (‘their’) future plans and politics as it will also concern Estonians (‘us’) in the end.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

Ø When asked to describe how they feel their voice **can be heard** on matters concerning EU, participants gave spontaneously **two main possibilities**, depending on the nature of the reason to express themselves:

- **Through Estonian MEPs:** If it was an individual problem or a question of personal interest, they would send an email to one of Estonians' MEPs. Indrek Tarand was singled out as somebody they believe would react.
- **Get to the traditional media:** If it was a collective problem or a wish to express one's opinion on how things should be done, they would try to get media attention.

Among some **ways to get media** attention three possibilities were mentioned spontaneously:

- o Public meetings with slogans
- o Open letter to all media channels
- o Opinion article in a newspaper

Other spontaneously mentioned **ways** were:

- One participant found that the only way to have one's voice heard is to have acquaintances working in European Parliament or to "*know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody*" there, as otherwise nobody would take interest and listen to a simple Estonian. One needs **to have connections to make his/her voice heard**.
- Set up one's own **candidature for European Parliament elections**. This option none of the participants would ever choose themselves though.
- When probed, **European Parliament elections** and **Estonian Government officials** also seemed relevant ways to express their opinion.

Ø It is important to note that **participants**, while asked to name ways of expression spontaneously, were **divided in two**:

- **Those who could easily name several ways to express themselves** (mainly younger and of upper-middle social class) if they had the need or if they had something very important to say. They hadn't had anything so important to say so far.
- **Those who thought that there is no point to say anything** (mainly older lower-middle social class) because nobody will be interested in a simple person's opinion and problems. This sentiment of distance and alienation of power and Europe was expressed very strongly by one participant, who didn't even consider that European Parliament elections offer her an opportunity to have her voice heard because of Estonia's small number of MEPs, who have no power to make their voice heard in EU. Estonia is just too small and insignificant for that.

All the participants considered having interesting/important things (on wide European scale) to say as a main reason for one to make an effort to get one's voice heard in Europe. Simpler expressions of opinion, like reason to speak up, came secondary, if at all. Therefore none of the participants had ever felt any special need to make above mentioned efforts to get their voice through concerning some EU matter.

Ø So one could conclude that the four principal reasons for Estonians to stay passive are (according to the results of this focus group):

- **Personal motivation:** related to either lack of interest or feeling of powerlessness.
- **Strong personal censor:** They feel that they haven't had anything so important, "*smart*", and interesting to say.
- **National characteristics:** "*Estonians are too shy*" to express their opinion publicly, which can be confirmed by participants' uneasiness to express their opinion also during this focus group discussion between 9 strangers.
- **Lack of know-how:** Estonians don't master street protest techniques; they don't really know how to effectively organize them. Even though ACTA protests as a positive example was mentioned, participants agreed that Estonians still have a lot to learn about this form of expression.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

Ø When asked to name various **means by which European citizens could have their voice heard**, two observations were made by the participants:

- First was an assumption that one needs to **get masses behind the idea**. One voice will have no impact in Europe.
- Secondly **the way to express has to be a bit crazy and absurd** to draw attention: usual methods like demonstrations and pickets won't work any more efficiently enough **to draw the attention of foreign media**. All participants seemed to have a stubborn assumption that the only way to get one's voice heard is with the help of media, doing it on a big pan-European scale.

Through difficulties participants came up with **some concrete examples**:

- Protest song festivals (reference to Estonian Singing Revolution);
- Setting oneself on fire on the main square: even though that was immediately evaluated as ineffective and was more mentioned as a joke;
- Melting snow with blow-dryers: an absurd crazy thing to do that could get media coverage;
- Facebook groups/events to advocate for one idea and gather interested people around it.

Ø It was believed to be easier to find enough support to one's ideas when **crossing borders** and social media could be of help there. Participants recognized that there isn't enough pan-European thinking right now, but it could be a future trend.

Pan-European support groups and pressure groups to support or advocate against different EU policies, for example on Facebook or other social networking sites, could be a future trend. Estonia itself is too small to advocate on its own and too small – only 1.3 million habitants – to find enough supporters behind one idea. It becomes more obvious why participants feel that to speak out, one must have something very interesting and important to say, because one should be able to assemble majority of Estonian citizens behind one's idea to have a minimal critical mass to get any attention in Europe: 1% of population (13000 supporters) could make no difference, even though very difficult to assembly.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- A– **An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email** would be welcomed by the focus group participants.

Only two participants said that they would have no interest in such services because they have no need and interest to search for such information. On the other hand **two other participants** expressed **high interest** in an information service like that as it could help to save time. **The others thought it necessary and useful** to have such central information service even though they didn't estimate to have high interest to use it right now because one could never know when one will need some information concerning functioning of the EU and EU policies.

- B– **Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU** as one of the means of getting citizens voice better heard met less interest among the participants.

The group was a bit divided: one part (mostly higher-middle class) tended to find it completely useless because, in their opinion, the outcome of such debates would be just noise, discussion would be pointless, and the overall atmosphere would not be professional enough. The other part of the group found it still a bit interesting – in a way that this could help to bring these “highbrowed” experts back to the ground and make them notice the real problems people have.

- C– **Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think** got a very positive reaction by the participants. They thought it to be very positive that also their opinion is regularly asked.

The **necessity to make the results public** was mentioned. Participants were clearly not at all aware that such surveys already exist and that all data is open to public on internet.

- D– **The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with the Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where they live** also received very positive reaction. Especially older participants seemed to appreciate the idea, some even asking: *“strange that this kind of meetings doesn't exist already?”*

It was believed that **this kind of meetings could make people more interested in EU matters** as well because a possibility to talk with somebody direct from the source, who knows and has a power to influence decisions, could attract people.

- E– **Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens** seemed to the participants like a normal course of things – how things should be done.

If they would actually be interested and motivated enough to participate themselves in these consultations was not expressed so clearly but **the interest to have at least this opportunity was high.**

- F– **Similar consultations, organised by their national government** got exactly **the same reaction**, with some participants stating that there the interest and necessity to have such consultations is even more important.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU was also widely praised. Participants saw it as a very good channel to express one's own personal opinion, without the need to gather a critical mass of supporters behind that idea before communicating it.

When probed about their personal interest to use such medium of expression, some were hesitant fearing that maybe they would have nothing intelligent to say. Others seemed more enthusiastic.

Some possible problems concerning interactive services and social networks were brought forward, though:

- How to organize filtering and moderate all that comment flow? Participants were afraid that this kind of interactive channels could quickly become like a wall of public toilet, as online news sites have demonstrated with their commentaries.
- Still not everybody would have access to such medium of expression: people who don't have everyday access to internet and elderly people who don't know how to use computers (very well).

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring was considered very useful and important because people are not aware of all the possibilities right know.

The general idea was that **if people knew how to express their opinion and were better informed about EU politics and affairs, they would also be more interested to actively participate.** Right now most of the information tends to be lost in communication because, as one participant put it: *"everyday life is so rapid and intense that there is not much time left over after completing the tasks. It's easy to miss the small campaigns that appear 2-3 times in media."* Participants found it important to create campaigns to encourage citizens to participate and to raise awareness about the ways to do it.

One suggestion was made:

- To make campaigns also in social media that would activate friend to friend campaigning, as this is less expensive and more effective to raise awareness. Participants mentioned friends and family as an important filtering device for news concerning EU: news that would have otherwise slipped one's attention was brought to his attention through friends and family.

Ø To conclude, in order to make the participants of this group discussion more active EU citizens, one should keep in mind:

- Low level of interest and passive behaviour is reversible; participants expressed a lot of potential interest in EU related matters, when questioned about it.
- EU institutions and their processes should be brought closer to participants, in order to close the gap between 'us' and 'them'.
- More info should be distributed already before decisions are made: the awareness of decisions made in EU was estimated quite good among the participants; what they lacked was knowledge of decisions yet to be made, laws yet to be voted etc.
- Alienation from power, feeling of insignificance on European and local levels is a topic to deal with because participants' lack of interest and passivity was strongly correlated with their sentiment of importance. Feeling that simple people, if massively united, could change the course of things, could

make a huge difference. At the moment several participants didn't even believe that their MEPs could make any difference in EU, not to speak of simple people, united or not.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

KVALITATIIVNE UURING KODANIKE KAASATUSEST EUROOPA LIIDUS

(Detsember 2013)

Vestluse kava

SISSEJUHATUS

Uuringu tutvustus (meetod, vestluse „reeglid“, kestus umbes 1,5 tundi, kaamera, anonüümsus)
Palun tutvustage end mõne sõnaga: kes te olete, kui vana, millega igapäevaselt tegelete jne.

TEEMA 1 – esmased seosed Euroopa Liiduga (10 min)

Me oleme täna tulnud siia selleks, et rääkida pisut Euroopa Liidust. Mis teile Euroopa Liiduga seoses kõige esimesena meenub?

Teemade olemus, mida mainitakse spontaanselt seoses Euroopa Liiduga

- Mis teile täpsemalt meenub?
- Miks teile Euroopa Liit just sellega seostub?

Euroopa Liiduga seotud positiivsed ja negatiivsed aspektid

- Mida te arvate Eesti kuulumisest Euroopa Liitu?
 - o Mis teile Euroopa Liiduga seoses positiivsena meelde tuleb?
 - o Aga mis negatiivsena meelde tuleb?
 - o Kuidas teie suhtumine Euroopa Liitu on pärast Eesti liitumist muutunud?

Osalejate omapoolse huvi ja kaasatuse tase Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimustes

- Kuivõrd te tunnete huvi Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimuste vastu?
- Milliste küsimuste vastu te huvi tunnete? Miks just nende vastu?
- Kuivõrd te tunnete, et olete osa Euroopa Liidust? Millistes olukordades te seda tunnete?
- Kas te olete kuidagi kaasatud Euroopa Liidu tegevusse?
 - o Kui jah, siis kuidas?
 - o Kui ei, siis mis põhjusel?

TEEMA 2 – infoallikad (10 min)

Kui võtta arvesse kõike seda, mida te teate ja arvate Euroopa Liidust, siis kust need teadmised ja arvamused pärinevad? Millistest allikatest te saate informatsiooni või kuulete arvamusi Euroopa Liidu kohta? Palun mõelge sõnale “allikad” kõige laiemas tähenduses, alates ametlikest informatsioonikanalitest ja lõpetades eraviisiliste vestlustega sõprade või teiste inimestega.

KIRJUTADA KÕIK INFOALLIKAD ENDA JAOKS ÜLES.

Mainitud allikate mitmekesisuse tase

- Millised on peamised allikad, kust te Euroopa Liidu kohta infot saate?
- Millistest allikatest te olete veel infot saanud?
- Kas teie teadmised ja arvamused tuginevad üldjuhul ühele konkreetsele allikale või pärinevad paljudest erinevatest allikatest?

Igast allikast saadava informatsiooni laad

- Millist infot te olete sellest allikast saanud? Mis teemasid ja valdkondi see info puudutab?

Huvi ja usaldusväärsus iga allika puhul

- Kui usaldusväärseks te seda infoallikat peate?
- Kui huvitav sellest allikast saadav info teie jaoks on?
- Millisest allikast saab Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimuste kohta kõige usaldusväärsemat infot?
- Aga millisest allikast pärinev info tundub teie jaoks kõige huvitavam?

TEEMA 3 – huvipakkuvad teemad (15-20 min)

Arutlegem nüüd pisut täpsemalt Euroopa Liidu tuleviku üle ja nende küsimuste üle, mis teil võivad antud teemaga seoses tekkida. Ilmselt on olemas teatud teemad, mida te peate oluliseks, mille kohta te sooviksite rohkem teada ja mida te sooviksite paremini mõista seoses sellega, mis moel Euroopa Liit toimib ja millises suunas liigub. Alati aga ei pruugi te saada kogu soovitud informatsiooni nendest allikatest, mida te eelnevalt mainisite.

Millised on need peamised teemad, mille kohta te sooviksite rohkem teada saada?

Üldised muljed, kas teadmised ja arusaamine antud küsimustes on piisavad

- Kuidas teile tundub, kas teil on piisavalt infot Euroopa Liidu toimimise ja arengusuundade kohta?
 0. Kui ei, siis mis põhjusel teil ei ole seda piisavalt?
- Kuivõrd te olete seda infot püüdnud leida?

Euroopa Liidu ees järgnevatel aastatel seisvate suurimate väljakutsete tajumine

- Millised on suurimad väljakutsed, millega Euroopa Liit järgnevatel aastatel silmitsi seisab? Teisisõnu, millised on probleemid, mis tuleb lähiaastatel lahendada?
- Miks te just neid kõige suuremateks väljakutseteks/probleemideks peate?
- Kui hästi te olete neist väljakutsetest informeeritud?

Osalejate mõtted seoses vajadusega paremate teadmiste/arusaamise järele – millistel teemadel täpsemalt? Mis osas ei ole praegu saadaolev informatsioon neil teemadel rahuldav?

- Kui oluline see teie arvates on, et Euroopa Liidu kodanikele oleks kättesaadav info Euroopa Liidu toimimise ja arengusuundade kohta?
- Millised on need teemad, mille kohta praegu ei ole piisavalt infot?
- Mis on praegu kättesaadava info puudujäägid?

TEEMA 4 – võimalus arvamust avaldada (10-15 min)

Kodanikena peaks teil kõigil olema võimalus avaldada oma arvamust Euroopa Liidu tulevaste arengusuundade kohta ning teha neil teemadel oma hääl kuuldavaks – ükskõik, kas selle eesmärgiks on ühe või teise arengusuuna heaks kiitmine, maha laitmine või hoopis mõni muu põhjus.

Kuidas te saate tänasel päeval Euroopa Liidu arengusuundade kohta arvamust avaldada?

Ideede väljendamise ja oma hääle kuuldavaks tegemise tajutav lihtsus/keerulisus Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimustes – mil viisil?; tajutavad põhjused, miks see on keeruline

- Kui lihtne või keeruline hetkel on Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimustes oma ideid väljendada ja oma häält kuuldavaks teha?
 0. Mis põhjusel see on keeruline? Kas leidub veel mingeid asjaolusid, mis arvamuse avaldamist raskendavad?
- Mil viisil on võimalik oma arvamust avaldada? Milliste vahendite või meetoditega veel?
 1. Kui ei mainita, siis küsida eraldi: Euroopa Parlamendi valimised, siinse valitsuse informeerimine, avalikud protestiaktisioonid, arvamusküsitlused jms
- Kuidas tuleb oma arvamust avaldada, et Euroopa Liit seda ka kuulda võtaks? Mis paneb Euroopa Liitu arvestama kodanike arvamusega?
- Milliste küsimuste puhul võetakse kodanikke kõige rohkem kuulda? Ja milliste küsimuste puhul kõige vähem?

Konkreetsed teemad, mille osas osalejad sooviksid eriti oma arvamust avaldada ning kodanikena kuulnud saada; selles osas esinevad ootused

- Millised on peamised Euroopa Liiduga seotud teemad, mille kohta te sooviksite arvamust avaldada?
- Mille põhjal te saate aru, kas teid kui kodanikku on Euroopa Liidus kuulda võetud?

TEEMA 5 – arvamuse avaldamise viisid (15 min)

Kindlasti on võimalik välja mõelda mitmesuguseid viise, vahendeid ja meetodeid, mille abil Euroopa kodanikud, nagu meie, saaksid oma häält kuuldavaks teha. Ma teen ettepaneku, et püüaksime mõelda kõigi selliste võimalike vahendite või meetodite peale. Laseme oma fantaasial lihtsalt vabalt lennata, jätmata kõrvale ühtegi ideed, isegi kui me praegusel hetkel ei tea, kuidas seda oleks võimalik praktikas rakendada.

- Õhuta gruppi olema loominguiline, julgustades osalejaid “hüppama” ühelt mõttelt teisele.
- Milliseid ideid meil tekib? Mida on võimalik veel ette kujutada?
 - o Kuidas seda ideed oleks võimalik veel edasi arendada?
 - o Millised arvamuse avaldamise viisid, meetodid ja vahendid veel mõttesse tulevad?
- Kui te sooviksite Euroopa Liidu poliitikas mingit muudatust, siis kuhu või kelle poole te pöörduksite?

KUI EI OSATA IDEID VÄLJA PAKKUDA, SIIS KÜSIDA:

- Kuidas Eesti riigi tasandil saab oma arvamust avaldada?
- Kas sellised arvamuse avaldamise viisid võiksid toimida ka Euroopa Liidu tasandil?
 0. Kui ei, siis mis põhjusel ei toimiks?

TEEMA 6 – hinnangud erinevatele vahenditele/meetoditele (25 min)

Ma esitan teile nüüd erinevaid ideid, mida on välja pakutud kui vahendeid või meetodeid, mida oleks võimalik kasutusele võtta, et võimaldada kodanikel Euroopa Liiduga seotud küsimustes oma häält paremini kuuldavaks teha. Palun öelge, mida te neist igaühe kohta arvate.

KÜSIDA IGA ETTEPANEKU KOHTA ERALDI:

- Kui suur on teie huvi selle võimaluse kasutamise vastu?
- Mis põhjusel te olete/ei ole sellest huvitatud?

A - Infoteenus Euroopa Liidu toimimise ja Euroopa Liidu poliitikate kohta, mis hõlmab avalikku infobürood kõigis suurtes linnades, veebilehekülge ning kiiresti vastamist neile küsimustele, mis on esitatud telefoni, kirja või e-kirja teel.

B - Suurtes meediakanalites toimuvad arutelud tavaliste kodanike ning Euroopa Liidu ekspertide vahel, mille teemaks on Euroopa Liidu poolt võetud suunad.

C - Regulaarselt kõikjal Euroopas toimuvad Euroopa Liidu teemalised arvamusküsitlused, mis annavad kodanikele võimaluse teada saada nii oma kaasmaalaste kui muude riikide kodanike arvamusi.

D - Mõnel korral aastas pakutav võimalus kohtuda oma kodukoha lähedal oma Euroopa Parlamendi saadikute või teiste Euroopa Liidu poliitikutega.

E - Interneti teel toimuv ja kõigile kodanikele avatud konsulteerimine, mida korraldab Euroopa Komisjon iga kord, kui Euroopa Liidus on tarvis vastu võtta suuri otsuseid.

F - Samalaadne konsulteerimine, mida korraldab Eesti Vabariigi valitsus.

G - Interaktiivne teenus Internetis ja sotsiaalvõrgustikes, mis kogub alaliselt kodanike arvamusi, soove ja kriitikat seoses Euroopa Liidu poolt võetud suundadega.

H - Teavituskampaaniad, mida viiakse läbi palju aktiivsemalt kui viimastel aastatel, selleks, et julgustada kodanikke osalema toimuma hakkavates aruteludes ning võtma osa järgmisel kevadel aset leidvatest Europarlamendi valimistest.

Suur tänu, et tulite arutus osalema. Kui teil tuleb pärast meie vestlust veel uusi ideid, siis andke meile neist kindlasti teada. Ma annan teile Saar Polli visiitkaardi, kus on kirjas meie e-posti aadress.



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN FRANCE**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Lille on 10th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the French section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM. In France, OPTEM worked in cooperation with Inter View Partners, who was responsible for organizing the group discussion.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 2
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: medical secretary, qualified manual worker, government department clerk, computer analyst)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: teacher, engineer, computer department manager, project manager)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

❖ Several notions emerge from the initial stage of the discussion.

➤ **The relevance of building Europe: it is not seriously questioned** by anyone in the group.

Firstly, the respondents are pragmatic and they understand the need for grouping the European countries in front of their competitors and opponents.

“Grouping countries together in order to be stronger vis-à-vis e.g. the Americans, to count in front of the other big countries. France alone would not have enough weight, whereas Europe can make myself be heard”

“We know it is indispensable, we have no choice, in order to form a bloc against China, the USA, etc.”

Moreover, at the same time several respondents claim that the union of European countries also involves shared ideals and values.

“The most positive point is that there are no more wars”

“For me, more than anything else Europe means a mixing of cultures..., each one brings his own stone”

➤ **Awareness of the influence of the European Union on the life of the citizens** – even though its actual impacts – whether positive or negative – are not always clearly identified.

“I know it has an influence on food standards and many other things, construction for example... We do not keep thinking about it, but it does have an influence”

“European legislation is above French laws”

“Influence of European legislation”

“And the single currency”

➤ **The idea of something complex, heavy, and slow to move forward.**

“A fantastic machine, but it needs to be oiled – and it lacks oil at the moment. It is needed, but it is complex indeed...”

“E 111 (The document required for social security health care insurance coverage when travelling in another EU country), is paradoxically very complicated... And I can't even figure out how complicated things are in areas where there are no European measures in force yet... »

“It's not easy considering the economic and cultural differences”

Here several persons - who think notably, but not only, of EU enlargement – express the feeling that the process was too fast – whereas, paradoxically, the same people criticize the slow pace of progress made in various areas.

“They are many possibilities to block the system with the requirement for unanimous decisions, it is bound to fail. We are making very, very slow progress owing to member countries having very different economies. Perhaps the EU was enlarged too quickly, as the expectations are so different from one country to another”

“We have cut corners...”

“It is not utopic, there are things that could be done faster...”

➤ **Decision processes and decision makers being seen as distant and hazy**

“It is hard to figure it out... it is not clear who actually runs it”

“(Regarding the weight of the different countries, of which France, in the decision making process) How is it distributed?

– One does not know, one has the impression of technocrats taking their decisions in isolation”

“Plenty of bureaucracy... They are things impossible to understand...”

“An impression, as external observers, of remote steering”

➤ **Consequently, little involvement on the part of the citizens**

“It is very hazy, we do not have much information, it is far away from us and our everyday life”

“Enlarging, enlarging, enlarging, (but) the peoples have not been consulted...”

In 2005, the French voted against Europe in the referendum... perhaps it was a way of sanctioning the government, but the French were not the only ones, the Dutch did it too... (...). A referendum may be a costly thing to set up, but perhaps they should listen to the peoples...”

“Decisions being taken on behalf of the Europeans, without asking them what they want...”

“We are indeed very seldom consulted on Europe”

Turning back to the many studies that OPTEM has carried out on European issues, we can clearly observe that this criticism of EU bureaucracy and this feeling of distance have grown over the years among the French.

At the same time – although the media actually devote much more space to these issues than in the past, the knowledge and understanding of the European Union remain extremely low.

One particular striking example can be quoted to illustrate this point: a secondary school teacher in the group, who is quite pro-European and is experienced in visiting EU institutions together with groups of pupils every year – yet who speaks of “the two Parliaments, one in Brussels (which turns out to be the Commission...) and the other in Strasbourg...”: there is a lot of confusion, as can be seen in this case with regard to the institutional panorama.

Listening to other respondents, we can observe the existence of small bits and pieces of knowledge on the functioning of the EU and its institutions, yet not well assimilated and disconnected from each other.

“How are they actually organised when they are together? It is very nebulous... lobbyists are very powerful”

“Small countries are less well represented than larger countries...”

“Small countries can block (a decision)...”

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ The discussion participants were invited to say **from what sources they get information or hear opinions on the European Union** – taking sources in a wide sense, including informal conversations with friends and acquaintances as well as more official sources.

- (Not surprisingly) **they begin by mentioning the media** – television, and then radio before the printed press – **although at the same time they make negative or at least reserved comments about them.**

“There must be information somewhere, but not really in the (major) media...”

“Perhaps on more or less specialized channels”

“The media mainly tells you what goes wrong”

- **The Internet as a source or a means of access to information is also quoted – although mainly by respondents who are computer specialists particularly well versed in using the web.**

“There must be quite a lot of information on the web. I heard about software patenting, following the American model... vaguely heard about it on the Internet

But, even if “there must be a lot that is available on the web”, “one must (make an effort to) go and search for it”.

- Beside these two types of channels, **several sources are occasionally mentioned** by different respondents: visits to EU institutions and EU officials (the already mentioned case of a lady teacher, who also mentions student exchanges); travelling abroad, something more common for younger generations than for their elders; work situations in which one respondent was faced with European technical standards (which he criticizes for being less stringent than national norms as a result of “downwards harmonisation”); or occasional informal “pub style” discussions (in the latter case, mostly about the entry of new Member States such as Romania and the arrival of Rom groups of people – a highly controversial topic in France currently).

- ❖ **On the whole, few sources are mentioned, and the information one remembers to have found is very fragmented** – each respondent was struck by one or a few particular aspects of the building of the European Union, EU policies and their implications.

No one in the group seems to have obtained from the sources used any overall view of what the EU is and does.

Another limitation of the information found was suggested by one respondent among the most europhile and the most eager to pay attention to EU related news:

“We know about it when a decision is taken, but we hear nothing before it is... so we just apply it, that's all”

- ❖ **One final observation can be made on this subject: the respondents have in fact the feeling that information on the European Union “exists” or “must exist”.**

“There must be available information...”

“There must be documents to be found...”

But this information is not easily reachable and it does not “get through” to them.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ The group was then invited to discuss the **future of the European Union** and to say what aspects they felt are important and should be better known and understood in that perspective, whether about the functioning of the EU or the directions it takes.

A few major topics gradually emerge (following a more confused initial stage of discussion):

➤ **The future of the Union in economic and social terms.**

The plague of unemployment is the first worry to be expressed, in relation notably with the opening up of borders within Europe and competition from enterprises and workers from other Member States.

The idea can be heard that the European legislation includes flaws which each country tries to take advantage of.

Although the respondents think of negative impacts for France of other countries' competition in the first instance, it should be noted that they do not exclude that the reverse may be true (cf. for instance a discussion about both the good and bad arguments of French and Spanish fishermen who are heard to quarrel regularly).

Prospects for economic recovery are also discussed: in the short term, the issue of moving out of the crisis for France and the stricken countries more generally; in the longer term, the question of investments in scientific and technological research – in what areas will the EU invest?

➤ **Environmental policy.**

The question of the environment is mentioned, as it is known to be crucial for the future of the world as a whole.

Questions are asked about the policy of the Union (it is more or less clearly perceived as advanced compared with other countries in the world), but also about intra-European gaps between Member States who are advanced in this respect and others (new MS...) who are much less so.

“The European commitments on Kyoto, ... The good and the bad pupils within Europe (...)”

“I would like to know if all the countries who belong to Europe today had ratified the environmental treaties”

➤ **Strengthening Europe's unity**

Most of the members of the group visibly hope for a greater European unity, although this may appear paradoxical on the part of respondents who deplore either the intra-European competition or a downwards legislative harmonisation process, or else the presence in the Union of “bad pupils”, i.e. countries who do not play the game next to the member States who do and behave as “good pupils”.

In the above-mentioned domains, the respondents would visibly welcome **more common rules which all Member States accept and observe.**

“The European legislation is too loose”

“Perhaps there should be more controls”

More generally they express **the wish for more unity in all areas, and a genuine European political unity.**

“We should build a European political and military force”

“To start with, if our politicians had more courage, if the European Union spoke with one voice on key problems (...), it should not be so difficult to agree”

“We (the European countries) are always opposing each other! While we are building Europe? (Unfortunately) it will take decades for it to be a beautiful machine (...). This lack of unity is shocking”

The need is expressed **to be informed of any progress possibly made** in that direction, including “evolutions in the treaties”, etc.

➤ **The institutional functioning of the European Union**

We reported above about the **widespread ignorance** among the respondents in this respect.

Who decides? Who leads “Is it a petty European official or the leading politicians?”? How are decisions prepared, taken and applied? – These are among the questions asked by the respondents.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ **When asked how citizens can give their opinion and have their voice heard** “as regards future directions of the European Union”, **the respondents mainly declare that they can vote:**

- **In referenda**, when such consultations are organised.
- **In elections** – several persons know that the next election for the European Parliament is due to take place in 2014.

- ❖ However these means of expression are **far from being fully satisfactory:**

- Referenda do allow everyone to express him/herself, but they have a major drawback (as reminded by several respondents) in that they only offer a “forced” binary choice.
- As regards the European elections, they are marred by a low turnout at the voting stations, by the fact that the outcome is often a “punishment vote” against the government in place, unrelated to the EU issues that should be at stake, and the representatives who are elected are or soon become disconnected from the life of ordinary people anyhow.

“(In the European elections) one should talk about Europe, projects to be launched (so as to prevent the election from turning into a “punishment vote”)”

“Concrete policies, straightforward speech, in order to get basic people interested... Our preoccupations are actually remote for the decision makers”

“Once the election is over, they do not really listen any longer...”

– Not because they do not want to, but they are no longer able to do it, they have lost contact”

- ❖ Here **the group's discourse reflects the growing disillusion versus the politicians' world in France** – including references to elected representatives' absenteeism, the comfortable life which their status allows them to live, or simply their being remote from the average citizen (this applies to national politicians no less than to eurodeputies).

As a result, some respondents are led to imagine (or dream of) **non-political representatives** (or at least not biased in their initiatives by their belonging to this or that party on the left or on the right), **or of independent organisations** to be set up to work on European issues.

“Creating an organisation that would work on the many subjects related to Europe, perhaps on a regional level...”

– Perhaps it could start from circles at a very basic level from which the thoughts expressed would gradually move up...”

- ❖ Only one person in the group mentions another means of expression for citizens i.e. petitioning through the Internet (the already quoted young computer specialist).

“You also have web sites for petitions”

At that stage, the other participants do not add any comments – but this subject will be taken up later again.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

❖ When asked to imagine **new ways by which citizens could make themselves heard**, the respondents come up with **two main ideas**:

➤ **Use of electronic means of communication**, i.e. the Internet, social networks, etc.

Those means would be used not only to get information, but also to voice opinions.

“A dedicated service to which questions, complaints, requests could be addressed, and getting a reply”

This service is spontaneously seen as based primarily on the Internet, but other means could be implemented in addition for “older people who do not have the Internet”, according to one participant.

➤ **Need for proximity in provision of information and debate.**

The non-electronic component of the above-described service could be installed in town halls or in other nearby public places.

Some respondents refer to “local district councils” to meet a few times per year in each area of the city, with elected representatives attending – proximity is believed to help fostering interest, just like in local municipal meetings or in the “neighbours' days”.

“Motivating those who are not motivated and who do not vote”

In the same line of thought, one respondent thinks of setting up “citizens consultations” following the model of public enquiries (“enquêtes d'utilité publique”) before launching urban projects – they would be useful to produce “a first draft” of citizens' demands and propositions.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

Eight propositions were presented to the group.

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

❖ **Reactions to this proposition** – which has some similarities with an idea emerging spontaneously in the preceding discussion theme – **are moderately favourable.**

Reservations are voiced by several respondents:

- It is solely an information site; citizens also wish to be able to express requests or complaints.
- It is likely to be of interest only for “those who are already interested”.
- (Remark made by a respondent with a scientific background who is much used to information search on the Internet) such information can already be found on the Net “if you are curious”.
- Such a system is supposed to be very costly (incidentally, the preceding respondent had questioned the need for non electronic means of access to the information.

It should be noted that the description of the service as presented in this proposition corresponds closely to the Europe Direct services which have existed for many years already – but obviously none of the respondents had ever heard of them.

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

❖ **This proposition does not really appear as new.** It reminds the respondents of television programmes that were broadcasted in a more or less distant past, from “L’heure de vérité” to debates of the same type at the time of the last presidential election: programmes in which they recognize that they “learnt something”.

The proposition is not rejected: it arouses interest because of its interactivity, the participation of rank and file citizens (provided “professional categories are well selected” to ensure a diversity of situations), together with experts deemed to be objective and able to make the debate intelligible to laymen.

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

❖ **Reactions to the third proposition are extremely positive** (the only reservations expressed being the traditional queries about sample representation – but they are few).

- Through the sample representing them, citizens can state what their expectations are.

- Such surveys being organised regularly contributes to their interest.

“A permanent poll... why not?” (n'existe pas dans le texte français)

- Being able to make comparisons with other Europeans from the results in the different EU countries is a crucial element giving added value to such surveys.

“For better (mutual) understanding”

The question is asked, however, how the results will be disseminated: they should be easily accessible, “you must not need to go and search for them”.

The respondents manifestly ignore that surveys of this nature (Eurobarometer) have been organised by the European Commission for several decades (It remains to be seen whether the questions asked would be regarded as interesting by the citizens).

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- ❖ **Relative interest is expressed when this proposition is presented**, although it is not very new according to some respondents (they are in fact thinking of meetings in the constituency of elected representatives who were wearing “several hats”, not necessarily their MEP's hat on those occasions). Certain conditions should be met, however:

- Those meetings should really deal with Europe.
- They should have the systematic character of “reporting sessions” by the politicians concerned, to be held at defined times, announced in advance.

“A little like the yearly evaluation meeting between an employee and his/her superior in business firms”

- Proximity, as stated above (and, it seems from the reactions of those who express themselves on this subject, very close proximity), is a basic requirement. Publicity is also needed to make people aware of these events.

Yet, certain doubts are voiced:

“It already exists, more or less, and we do not attend”

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- ❖ **Reactions to this idea are very positive**, as it responds in principle to the need, already clearly expressed, to be listened to by those in charge – who are currently perceived as remote and disconnected from their fellow citizens' problems.

“It should make our views better taken into consideration”

Some conditions have yet to be met to foster interest:

- The need to publicize the existence of these consultations by local communication (“for example, through the municipality”).
- An obligation to provide feedback on what was done with the results of the consultation.

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- ❖ This proposition differed from the preceding one only in the identity of its initiator: the national government instead of the European Commission.

The group unanimously prefers the consultation to be organised by the Commission, as it is deemed more neutral and more objective.

“Otherwise, if each government made its own cooking with it...”

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ **Interest is expressed much in the same way as for Proposition E.** Reservations and questions concern the “how” organise a permanent multi-purpose consultation of this nature (although one respondent mentions the existence of similar systems on “mayors' Facebook pages”).

“It looks difficult to manage”

“It would too easily give people a say and on so many subjects...” (the problem being the great mass of information and the need for it to be structured)

“But there would be moderators”

“Software”

“Will it be anonymous or not?”

(Most are not in favour of it, as that might make the process drift away from what was intended)

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- ❖ The proposition of information campaigns on the occasion of the European Parliament election brings about **a positive response in principle**, to increase citizens' awareness and encourage them to vote.

The campaigns should be “easily digestible”, “accessible”, “should not require to have had 6 years in university”, “should not be like for the referendum where you had to read 15 pages”, etc.

Besides, the wish comes up again of information on EU challenges that should not have “political labels”.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTEM

ETUDE QUALITATIVE SUR L'IMPLICATION CITOYENNE DANS L'UNION EUROPEENNE

GUIDE DE DISCUSSION

(INTRODUCTION: Demander à chaque participant de se présenter en quelques mots, en disant qui il (elle) est et ce qu'il (elle) fait, etc.

THEME 1

Nous sommes réunis aujourd'hui pour parler de l'Union européenne.

Qu'est-ce qui vous vient à l'esprit tout d'abord à propos de l'Union européenne ?

- Réactions spontanées
- Explorer:
 - Nature des sujets évoqués à propos de l'UE
 - Aspects positifs et aspects négatifs liés à l'UE
 - Degré d'intérêt a priori et d'implication des participants dans les questions relatives à l'UE

THEME 2

Ce que vous savez et ce que vous pensez de l'Union européenne, d'où cela vient-il ?

De quelles sources recevez vous des informations ou des opinions sur l'Union européenne - en prenant le terme "sources" au sens le plus large, allant des sources d'information officielles aux conversations informelles qu'on peut avoir avec des amis ou d'autres personnes... ?

- Réactions spontanées
- Explorer:
 - Degré de diversité des sources mentionnées
 - Nature des apports (d'information) de chacune
 - Intérêt / crédibilité de chacune

THEME 3

Nous allons parler plus particulièrement de l'avenir de l'Union européenne, et des questions que vous pouvez vous poser à ce sujet.

Il y a sans doute des choses qu'il serait important pour vous de mieux connaître et de mieux comprendre sur le fonctionnement et sur les orientations de l'Union européenne, mais pour lesquelles les sources dont vous avez parlé tout à l'heure ne vous donnent pas tout ce que vous voudriez.

Sur quoi notamment souhaiteriez vous en savoir plus ?

- Réactions spontanées
- Explorer:
 - Impressions générales de bonne ou de mauvaise connaissance / compréhension de ces questions
 - Perception des enjeux majeurs pour l'UE dans les années à venir
 - Expressions de besoins de meilleure connaissance et compréhension - sur quels sujets plus précisément ? En quoi les informations dont on peut disposer actuellement sur ces sujets sont elles insatisfaisantes ?

THEME 4

En tant que citoyen, vous devez pouvoir donner votre avis et faire entendre votre voix sur les orientations futures de l'Union européenne - que ce soit pour approuver ou pour contester telle ou telle orientation, ou pour toute autre raison.

Comment pouvez vous le faire aujourd'hui ?

- Réactions spontanées
- Explorer:
 - Facilité / difficulté perçue à s'exprimer et à faire entendre sa voix sur les questions relatives à l'UE - par quels moyens ?
 - Causes perçues de difficulté
 - Sujets sur lesquels on voudrait plus précisément pouvoir donner son avis et être entendu en tant que citoyen; attentes à cet égard.

THEME 5

On peut penser à différents moyens pour les citoyens européens comme nous de faire entendre leur voix.

Nous allons, si vous le voulez bien, essayer de penser à toutes sortes de moyens possibles, en nous laissant aller à notre imagination, et sans nous arrêter pour le moment à la question de savoir comment le réaliser en pratique.

Que pourrait on imaginer ?

- Réactions spontanées
- Stimuler la créativité du groupe en encourageant à "rebondir" d'une idée à une autre

THEME 6

Je vais maintenant vous soumettre différentes idées qui ont été émises, de moyens par lesquels les citoyens pourraient mieux faire entendre leur voix sur les questions concernant l'Union européenne.

Vous me direz ce que vous pensez de chacune.

- Faire réagir successivement à chaque proposition, en faisant expliciter le degré et les raisons d'intérêt

A- Un service d'information sur le fonctionnement et les politiques de l'Union européenne, comportant un bureau d'information ouvert au public dans chaque grande ville, un site Internet, et un service de réponse rapide aux questions posées par téléphone, lettre ou courriel.

B- Des débats dans les grands médias sur les orientations de l'Union européenne, entre des citoyens moyens et des spécialistes de ces questions.

C- L'organisation régulière, dans toute l'Europe, d'enquêtes par sondage sur l'Union européenne, permettant de savoir ce que pensent nos concitoyens aussi bien que les citoyens des autres pays.

D- La possibilité de rencontrer à proximité de chez vous, plusieurs fois dans l'année, vos députés au Parlement européen et d'autres responsables politiques européens.

E- L'organisation par la Commission européenne d'une consultation par Internet ouverte à tous les citoyens à chaque fois qu'une décision importante doit être prise dans l'UE.

F- L'organisation de consultations similaires par notre gouvernement national.

G- Un service interactif, utilisant Internet et les réseaux sociaux, pour recueillir en permanence les avis, les souhaits ou les critiques des citoyens sur les orientations de l'Union européenne.

H- Des campagnes d'information beaucoup plus actives que par le passé pour inciter les citoyens à s'intéresser aux débats qui auront lieu et à participer à la prochaine élection des députés au Parlement européen du printemps prochain.

Merci à nouveau de votre participation.

Si d'autres idées vous viennent à la suite de notre réunion, n'hésitez pas à nous en faire part (Communiquer aux participants une adresse électronique qu'ils pourront utiliser pour ce faire)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN GERMANY**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Cologne on 13th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the German section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM; in Germany, by Echanges Marktforschung in relation with Psyma.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 5

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of respondents/heads of household: office employees (2), salesman, waiter)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of respondents: mid-level managers (2), small business owner (contractor), secretary, office employee – the latter two married to head of household in higher-middle class)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

❖ Spontaneous associations with the European Union made by respondents in the group were of three orders:

- Associations with **the nature of the EU** and its **founding values**: *“A vast community”, “solidarity with the weakest members”, “feeling a community of interest”, “a will to integrate”, “trade exchanges”, “something which must be lasting to bear its fruit, something fragile that must be protected and cherished”, “it is like a kindergarten which must accommodate and federate children from various backgrounds and make them live together on an equal footing”.*
- References made to **institutions** and **institutional processes** that are particularly symbolic, *“The European Central Bank”, “the euro”, “European summits”, “European directives”, “the rules of the game”.*
- More or less positive remarks and opinions on current events, *“membership criteria”, “Rettungsschirm”* (European Stability Mechanism).

On the whole those remarks reflected a degree of **distrust or disappointment**, together with feelings that *“it is no longer what it used to be”.*

❖ The overall impression left by these associations is that of **an ambivalent relation with the European Union, and an often disillusioned attitude**, which the respondents explained by:

- **Negative reports prevailing in the information given by the media** about the EU.
- The problem created by **countries becoming eligible for membership on the basis of hard to define criteria**, which are shown to be ineffective or rigged. Greece is obviously an emblematic illustration of the problem, and so is the rescue plan for the Euro regarded as *“a bottomless pit”.*

“The problem is that a partner is fine only as long as he is honest. But today, as we can see it with Greece, let us call things by their name, what has happened is corruption, taking liberties with the truth”

- **The positive idea of solidarity between members being perverted** and turning into competition for jobs.
- **The fear of uncontrolled migratory flows** (inflows of citizens from Eastern European countries who are attracted by the social benefits prevailing in Western European countries).

“What worries me is borders becoming completely open and all those people arriving thinking that Germany is a heaven. Right now, it is Romania and Bulgaria. The eligibility criteria for membership should absolutely be made more stringent. Otherwise, it will turn out like Greece they will be bankrupt and at some stage the European Union will no longer be able to cope”

Here we find an expression of the German's lasting fear of “having to pay for the others” and running the risk of being drawn into a general bankruptcy in the end:

“At the beginning I felt the European Union was quite fine, it seemed to work, but afterwards you notice that more and more countries are running into debt, that those who still have some money hardly manage to cope and must support the others in addition, so for Germany's sake it's not terrific. All this makes me dubious”

“I wonder if some countries may be obliged to leave the European Union, countries who continue to get into debt. One day, the rescue plan will be empty, the Union will no longer be able to finance anything”

- ❖ **On the positive side**, we will note that **the majority of the participants continue to value the euro highly**, both as a symbol of European identity and for making travel easier. Lastly those who are best informed (aged above 50 years mainly) recall the role played by the Union to establish a long period of **stability and peace**, and they see in the European Union the only possibility to **speak on an equal footing with the emerging powers**, primarily China.

“I am personally in favour of the euro because we benefit by it. Greece is not being given any money, everything returns to us and the most important thing is that you do not wage war on your partners. We have not had wars in Europe for 60 years. Just to achieve that, it was worth it”

“I am favourable to the European Union. I think that in the era of globalisation, at a time when emerging countries like China are more and more powerful, it is essential for the European countries to be united, otherwise they stand no chance”

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ Except for the youngest participant (aged 20) who mentioned school as a source of information on the European Union, **the respondents hardly mentioned any source other than the media:**

- **Television was primarily mentioned.** The respondents spontaneously made a distinction between “**serious**” TV channels (public channels: ARD, ZDF) and **private channels** which were regarded as less credible – although they were watched by most.

Besides being less credible, private channels were thought to be more eurosceptical by certain respondents.

“The problem with the media is that you should watch several channels. If you watch RTL or SAT 1, they are slating the European Union, if you switch over to information channels like NTV or BBC, it is much more objective. They do not only give negative news, they also talk about projects being developed”

- ❖ **The participants were very critical of the quality of information given by these media.**

Criticisms generally apply to:

- Information being too sparse on the functioning and the institutions of the EU, etc. – sometimes it is attributed to a deliberate political will to “evade the issue”.

“I think a better information policy should be designed. The media and the government tend to conceal a lot of things because nowadays the majority of laws are made in Brussels and the governments are scared to confess that they have delegated, that is, lost, their power”

- Lacking information on subjects which suddenly appear in the forefront, such as the membership eligibility criteria together with the Greek question:

“I do not know the eligibility criteria, and the media do not tell us about them. All of a sudden we are wondering what they are. It should be explained to the European citizens”

- A certain tendency of the media to delight only in scandals and excesses:

“There are so many subsidies for things that do not deserve it. In Romania, someone received a subsidy to create a farm with 1.800 cows which existed only in Farmville on Facebook. Now they are going to court on the ground that it was not stipulated that the cows should be real!”

- ❖ The **youngest** participants and those who are very **familiar with using the Internet** mentioned the possibility of **searching information on the website of the European Union** or to order brochures from it; but the majority of the group questioned the interest of this medium for the public at large, and they admitted not to be eager to make the effort themselves.

- ❖ Finally, the **expectations regarding EU related information** as voiced by the respondents are fairly consistent with what we had observed in previous studies:

- **Information that you do not need to go and look for** and that reaches you at your home place.

“Information we should receive twice a year in our letter box. Nobody will say: well, what about ordering a brochure”

- **Information that is presented in an attractive way** or by a friendly character who can play the role of opinion leader for certain population targets:

“The problem is that you must keep informed on a permanent basis, otherwise you forget. As far as I am concerned, my information source is my boyfriend. Because I find it boring on the Internet whereas I can ask my boyfriend stupid questions”

“It should start at school, but in an attractive way. I can see my goddaughter who is 15, she only has Justin Timberlake in mind, I do not think she is interested in politics”

“On Phoenix there is a history programme that I like because it is done in a modern, very lively manner, with testimonies. Something of that kind should be done on the European Union. The history of the EU, nobody knows it. People only know what they hear from one day to the next and in general it is negative”

“They could set up a sort of political talk show, a news programme presented by a well known character; Stephan Raab for example, he was involved in the parliamentary election campaign, he is someone who appeals to young people.

- Or Kaya Yanar for instance, you can be sure that people would remember what he has said”

“They could produce clips, “The EU in 100 seconds”. RTL does it with the Bible, why not with the EU”

“Something which should be both educational and amusing. Like in “Sendung mit der Maus””

- The **means, other than television**, which the respondents thought of for spreading this information were:

- The radio – which you listen to when doing something else, or when driving.

“Many people listen to the radio 24 hours a day, even at the office”

- Internet
- School

Both are regarded as more educational and more objective than the media.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ Questions emerging at this stage on the future of the EU naturally correspond to the preoccupations and doubts which the respondents had spontaneously stated at the beginning of the discussion.

- ❖ **Two issues are considered crucial:**

- **The rescue plan for the euro** (Rettungsschirm – ESM): how it works, how “real” it is (what kind of money are we talking about? Real or virtual money? By whom is it provided?). From there, some respondents were led to discuss the wider question of the EU budget.

“I would like to know how the rescue plan for the euro (ESM) is financed”

“Regarding the European budget, I would be interested to know what the EU does with it. I think there has just been a vote for a budget of 18 billion”

“What would be interesting to me is to know where the money comes from. How can one quote figures if it is virtual money? They show us graphs and we do not even know what it is about!”

- **More transparency** (hence more information) on the “important” topics. The most pressing need for information in the group seemed to be about eligibility criteria for membership. Another question asked in the group was about the banks' power which was assumed to influence political decisions.
- Less importantly, interest was expressed for information on “real people” and their problems, as that tends to be hidden behind the stereotyped speech of national politicians whose motivations are not always clear, and who do not seem to worry very much about the citizens' condition.

“I saw a debate with Maybritt Illner. There was a Greek restaurant owner from Cologne who said that we were not helping Greece with that rescue plan. We do not know what we should think any more! I would like someone to explain to me if it is or not a good thing! Does it really help them?”

“I would like to be informed on the people. Now are they faring? How are we helping them? Not only the country”

“I saw in the media that 50% of young Spanish graduates do not find a job. And then the subject disappeared (from the media). I would like to know what has become of them”

“Personally what I would like to know is how a country like Greece has arrived at the point where it now is? Who is responsible? Some people committed suicide and nobody is interested, at least not the European Union”

- In the same line of thought, some respondents would like to know what the other countries think of Germany, although they are afraid to hear the answer.

*“I would like to know what countries like Greece think of Germany. They must feel rushed.
– Sure! They hate us and they don't conceal it”*

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ Spontaneously, the respondents mentioned the **European elections** as a means of expression to make one's voice heard on future directions of the Union, yet it soon appears that those elections are **little (or not) known**.

“I think the last elections were 2 years ago, so the next ones should be in 3 years.

– We don't really have the impression that the votes matter.

– Anyhow, at the last election, no party suited me and now we have a coalition of 3 parties in the same boat, we don't know in what direction they're going to sail!

– It's the same at European level. Germany sends its MPs, the other countries send their own and then let's see if they can collaborate.

– It will always be difficult. The countries' interests are too different”

Three aggravating circumstances contribute to further reducing the perceived importance of the European elections:

➤ **The low rate of participation in the vote.**

➤ The feeling that the **representatives sent by Germany to Brussels are second-class politicians.**

“The elections would be a good way of getting one's voice heard but, firstly the turnout is very low, and then you have a feeling that the parties send to Brussels the old timers whom nobody wants here any more”

➤ **The absence of referendum in the German legal system.**

“We are not in a direct democracy, so what do we really make decisions about?”

- ❖ As regards the **themes on which the citizens in the group would like to give their opinion**, one finds again those expressed earlier, in particular **enlargement**: a subject by which they feel deeply concerned and rather a source of worry (cf. the Greek experience and the Turkish question).

The **aid provided to countries experiencing difficulties** is another topic on which explanations would be particularly welcome.

“Generally speaking, the people has little decision power in Germany. In other countries, the referendum is widely used”

“We should be able to decide by referendum on enlargements for example”

“The people should be able to decide on questions which really matter to everyone”

- ❖ There is no unanimity however on the issue of referendum. Some respondents (a minority) warn against its dangers:

“Personally, I rather see the danger of a referendum. Let us take Greece again: let us imagine a referendum in which the Germans had refused to help. What would have happened? Perhaps everything would have exploded”

“The priority would be to create a feeling of general interest prevailing above each nation's particular interests”

- ❖ Following the discussion on the pros and cons of elections, the group requested that MEPs should make themselves known and put themselves in charge of part of the information burden.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- ❖ **The participants did not evoke any new way by which the European citizens could make their voice heard, apart from referenda** which are crowned with the prestige of direct democracy **and institutionalized contacts with MEPs** of their constituency (availability for consultation at predetermined times).

“I voted, but I do not know for whom.

– We do not know the others either (laughter!).

– Because we are not really interested. The chancellor we do know!”

- ❖ Here again the idea of a **television programme** having much impact because **well designed**, regularly broadcast **at prime time hours** and presented by **a charismatic personality** emerged spontaneously.

“We could imagine a programme called “News from the EU”. That would be well made, interesting and not broadcasted at 11 pm when you doze off in front of your TV. It should be short and interesting”

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A- An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- **This proposition is among those most favoured by the respondents** – who, incidentally, were completely unaware of the existence of Europe Direct centres. It appears as combining the advantage of expertise, and thus credibility, with that of personalized contact. Some people asked to add to those centres' range of action direct mailing operations (as spontaneously requested earlier).

“It would be super. We would know where to go when looking for information.

– If you don't understand, there is someone to talk to, we would be dealing with specialists.

– And personal contact, I find that is important.

– We would know that there is a centre in the city where we can go when we feel the need to get informed. And when we just pass by, we can pick up a brochure”

B- Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- **Reactions to this proposition were quite controversial.** The participation of average citizens tends to be a positive factor. It is believed that they would ask the “real” questions. But there is a certain inflation of talk shows on television in Germany. And, as regards the interest of such debates, it depends very much on the quality of the participants and their capacity to arouse viewers' interest.

“It's always the same thing. It's like “Hart aber fair”. It depends on the participants, once it is interesting, another time not. And the personality of the moderator also plays a great part”

- Also reminded is the importance of broadcasting at peak viewing hours.

C- Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- **This proposition is the second best liked in the group.**
- The interest it arouses among the respondents is two-fold:
 - The representativity of the results.
 - The possibility to know the opinion of other countries, in comparison with one's own country.
- The credibility of the proposition may be negatively affected, according to a few persons, by the known gaps between pre-election polls and the results of the election.

D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- **This proposition was the least preferred in the group.** The participants visibly acknowledge their own low propensity to go out and follow such debates.

“It is a totally unrealistic idea. It is terribly time and energy consuming to put oneself on the move to go and attend such a debate”

“On the occasion of the recent election, there was a debate in the bar down the street from my home with an SPD deputy. I listened to him for 5 minutes because I was there, but not more. It was terribly boring”

- A minor positive remark is that it would be an occasion to meet one's MEP.

E- Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- **This proposition seemed to be attractive** because of the representativity of the results and the possibility to give one's opinion to the Commission through a relatively direct channel.

- **However, people not using the Internet regularly do not feel concerned.**

*“I am personally not very comfortable with the Internet, I would not go and reply to a survey.
– Yes, but we check our emails everyday, so if you are asked to spend 5 minutes to reply to a survey, it's easy, fast, and afterwards you can have a look at the results”*

- Here again, convenience is a must: an email found in one's box seems preferable to having to search on a website.

We can remark that the respondents tend to interpret the proposition as being a (maybe improved) kind of survey – thus limiting its scope.

F- Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- The respondents did not always differentiate this proposition from the previous one. **To deal with European issues, the Commission may be a little more credible:** the German government is sometimes suspected of raising a barrier between Europe and the citizens in order to conceal certain inadequacies.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- **This idea was widely approved.** What is most attractive is the continuity in the collection of opinions. It would be a forum in which one could express his/her views in an informal way on all subjects deemed interesting enough to generate a reaction or raise a question. One hopes to receive detailed answers.

- Social networks are thought to be a communication tool for the future.

- It seems to be important for the citizens to receive a valid answer to their remarks (no standard reply).

“It is important to choose a modern enough tool to keep being performant in the future. Facebook is highly performant”

“But the answers must be up to the point, no standard replies”

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

➤ **Advertising campaigns** seem to be familiar and **performant tools if they are well designed.** Making the voters more aware seems to be a good way to increase voters' participation.

*“It would be fine to increase the number of voters; the turnout is always miserable.
– It's not surprising if we don't know the date”*

❖ Overall, the most liked propositions were A, C, E, G and H.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTEM

QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION DISCUSSION GUIDE

(INTRODUCTION: Ask each participant to introduce him(her)self with a few words, by saying who he/she is and what he/she does, etc.)

THEME 1

We are here together today to talk about the European Union.

Could you please tell me what first comes to your mind about the EU ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Nature of topics spontaneously mentioned about the EU
 - Positive and negative aspects related to the EU
 - Degree of initial interest and involvement of the respondents in EU related issues

THEME 2

Now, regarding what you know and what you think about the EU: where does that come from?

From what sources do you get information or do you hear opinions about the EU - taking the word "sources" in the widest sense, ranging from official information sources to informal conversations with friends or other people... ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Degree of diversity of the sources mentioned
 - Nature of (information) inputs from each one
 - Interest / credibility of each one

THEME 3

Let us now discuss more specifically the future of the European Union and questions you may ask yourselves in that respect.

There are probably certain aspects which you regard as important and you would like to know and understand better as regards the way the EU works and the directions it takes - as you may not get all the information you would like to get from the sources you have mentioned earlier.

What aspects would you particularly wish to know more about ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - General impressions of having a good or a poor degree of knowledge / understanding of these issues
 - Perception of major challenges for the EU in the coming years
 - Expressions by respondents of a need for better knowledge and understanding - on what subjects more particularly ? In what is the information currently available on these subjects not satisfactory ?

THEME 4

As a citizen, you should be able to give your opinion and to have your voice heard as regards future directions of the European Union - whether to approve or to disapprove such or such a direction, or for any other reason..

How can you do that today ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Perceived ease / difficulty to express oneself and to have one's voice heard on EU related issues - by what means ?
 - Perceived reasons why it is difficult
 - Specific subjects on which respondents would particularly wish to give their opinion and to be listened to as citizens; expectations in that respect.

THEME 5

One may think of various means by which European citizens like us could have their voice heard.

Let me propose to try and think of any possible means, just letting our imagination run, without giving up an idea even if we do not know for the moment how it could be implemented in practice.

What could we imagine ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Stimulate the group's' creativity by encouraging respondents to "jump" from one idea to another

THEME 6

I am now going to submit to you various ideas that have been put forward, of means that could be put in place to allow citizens to have their voice better heard on EU related issues. I will ask you what you think of each one.

- Make the respondents react to each proposition in turn, asking them about their degree of interest for each one and reasons thereof

A- An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

B- Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

C- Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

E- Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

F- Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

Thank you again for coming to participate in this discussion.

If other ideas cross your mind following the discussion, do not hesitate to let us know (Communicate a relevant email address which the respondents can use for that purpose)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN GREECE**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Ireland on 11th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Greek section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Greece by Focus Bari.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 5

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: 1 manual worker, 3 non managerial office employees)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of head of household: 2 middle management employees in the private sector, 1 middle management employee in the public sector, 1 member of a liberal profession, 1 small business owner)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Strong **disillusionment** and **skepticism** is expressed in relation to the EU today
 - The **Greek economic crisis** that followed European and global recession has radically affected perceptions and stances of Greek people towards the EU
 - It is recognized that, due to the crisis in Greece and other Southern-European countries, all nations tend to adopt a **more nationalistic attitude**, letting the “ideal” of a unified Europe aside
 - Moreover, it is evidenced that the EU as an institution **cannot tackle or proactively avoid crisis situations** that strongly affect weaker countries, such as: unemployment, salary cut-downs, deterioration of the quality of living, etc.
 - As a result, respondents feel that the EU **has somehow failed** to respond to its role as a “protection net” for its Member-States
- On a spontaneous level, the following **concerns on the nature and the mechanisms of the EU** are mentioned:
 - A Union based on **inequalities**, intensified due to economic crisis
 - “Decisions are directed by the strongest Member States, we, as the weak ones, have to suffer them, whether we like it or not”*
 - “Heterogeneity is becoming stronger lately... States are after their own interests, not caring for the common good”*
 - **Evident economic gap** – the Euro has affected national economies of weaker Member States in a negative way and on multiple levels
 - “At first, a common currency seemed a positive thing... now we are not sure at all”*
 - “Due to the euro, Greece is in a crisis right now and prices continue to rise”*
 - “How can we speak of a Union, when salaries in Northern Europe are 4 times up the Greek ones?”*
 - **A strong feeling of insecurity** stemming from differences between national interests
 - “Our lives and our future depend on the decisions taken by some Member States, not the EU as a whole”*
 - “Each country sets different priorities: national security, immigration and border protection are essential for us, while they mean nothing for countries like Belgium”*
 - A rather **pessimistic** and **passive attitude** is overall expressed, especially by mid- and older-aged respondents (40+ y.o.)
 - “The European Union is like a dream which is gradually becoming a nightmare”*
 - “There is no common vision for a United Europe anymore”*
- On the other hand, positive aspects of the EU are also recognized, even though, again due to the economic crisis, the benefits are rather “theoretical” and **interesting only when they touch upon individual interests**

- **Freedom to travel, study and work** in any Member State: especially significant for younger-aged respondents (20-34 y.o.)
 - “The Erasmus program... you can spend some studying time abroad”*
 - “No need for visa or even a passport”*
 - “More working opportunities in other European countries”*
 - **Financial support and trading / business opportunities** for Greece through support programmes: especially significant for higher-middle class respondents (esp. entrepreneurs)
 - “Market freedom – you can do business internationally”*
 - “Subsidies to support private businesses and large-scale projects”*
 - “Without EU funding, Greece would not have the infrastructure it has today”*
- Finally, a **legislative and political effort to establish a common set of rules** is recognized as a positive step by some higher-middle class respondents
- Protection of human and children’s rights and the European Court are characteristic examples of “positive” action by the EU
- In sum, the EU is viewed as a financial union that mainly caters for the interests of its strongest Member States, while offering, at the same time, some opportunities to **transcend national frontiers** and access an international “audience” (either market or culture)
- “Even the fact that EU headquarters are set in the Hague, Brussels and Strasbourg carries a symbolism... Madrid, Athens, Sofia are mere followers, not active contributors”*
- While, it is also recognized that **on a national level, opportunities offered were not well-exploited**, thus creating a **feeling of disappointment** both for the EU and the national institutions
- “We are also to blame ourselves... For years we thought of the EU as a milking cow only”*

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- To begin with, low interest in pro-actively learning about the EU, if not somehow **linked to national or personal issues and interests** is expressed
 - All respondents recognize that, unless information is “thrown upon” them, or unless they have specific queries, they **do not tend to look for relevant information**
 - “I frequently visit the site of the European Parliament, due to work... I need to be up to date on new programs and funding but, other than that, I am not interested much”*
 - “We have other things in our mind... We strive to survive nowadays, getting informed on the EU is a luxury”*
- **Main reasons** for this “passive” attitude:
 - The European Union is a **distant, chaotic and bureaucratic institution** and, due to the crisis and the predominance of stronger Member States over the weaker ones (such as Greece), there is no clear reason to get actively involved (unless looking for specific information)
 - **Too many EU institutions, bodies**, etc., each offering **fragmented pieces of information**
 - “You do not know where to start from”*
 - **Too many “filters”** in the final information “output” so far: EU interests, national / Member State interests, media interests – thus, making overall updating non-trustworthy overall
 - An overall feeling that **individual saying is very weak** –up to non-existent
 - **Low understanding of EU’s broader / political role** or individual functions, since its main perceived nature is of financial / funding nature
- Thus, overall knowledge on the EU and what it stand for is based on:
 - Accumulated pieces of information / knowledge **through the years** (for older-age respondents)
 - **Own experiences** through travelling in other European countries or doing business with European organizations (for younger-age and higher-middle class respondents)
 - **Mass media references**, mainly TV political debates among local politicians or reports on EU decisions that affect the country
- Spontaneously, the main source identified as most adequate and appealing is the **internet** (esp. for higher-middle class), directly followed by **TV** (esp. by lower-middle class)
 - The **internet** (esp. official sites of EU institutions) is perceived as the most adequate and reliable source: **trans-national reach and freedom of access** (whoever, whenever, wherever), fit perceptions on the EU. However, a sense of “formality” and bureaucracy is evidenced in EU official sites, which does not allow for stronger involvement; in other words, EU informative sources reflect its distant, non-personalised character and attitude, serving only as a “database” of general information and specific programs

- **TV**, on the other hand, is overall **not well appreciated** nowadays, especially since, in Greece, public-interest TV channels (the traditional “carriers” of EU messages) are at the moment under re-organization and do not broadcast for a few months; privately-owned TV channels, on the other hand, are considered neither credible, nor willing to objectively inform the public on EU-related issues

“The only reason a privately owned TV channel is willing to offer further information on the EU is only if the owner has some tangible benefits out of it ”

- In sum, in a country and society that strongly feels that the EU is a distant, not particularly intriguing institution, **information needs to avoid as many “filters” as possible**
- **Direct, personalized, “interesting” information** which is **easily accessible** is the main objective

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- As already stated, respondents recognize that **the EU “ideal” is jeopardized nowadays by the augment of national interests and trans-national inequalities**
 - A **shift towards common European values** is desired by Greeks, to counter-balance current perceptions and shortcomings (as stated in Chapter 1)
“We have to re-invent what unites us; all we hear about is on what sets us apart”
 - Notions like **“democracy”, “collaboration”, “solidarity”, “justice”** were often mentioned during the discussion, mainly as areas in which the EU-related information should focus
“Once, we believed that a European identity is possible... now I strongly feel that we, as Europeans, have not worked hard enough to reach this goal”
 - However, respondents recognize that **achievement of “balance” is difficult**, since the EU ideal should at no point overshadow national strategies, beliefs and mentalities
“Why should Europe direct me on what is right or wrong... we have our own national representatives”
 - On top, especially higher-middle class respondents recognize that **own passivity and focus on individual interests** (as opposed to common good) has contributed to the current situation
“We also need a mentality change... Each nation and each culture could have contributed more creatively, but we did not. Now, I am afraid it could be too late for all”
- Given the situation today, as **extreme focus on economic relations and interests** among EU Member States has proved inadequate to represent what EU stands for, **two main tendencies** on the future of EU emerge:
 - The **disappointed** ones (mainly older age and lower-middle class respondents) can only be motivated through **financial incentives / support** (to the country and the Greek people) so as for EU to re-establish its credibility in their eyes
“When we were in need, they did not protect us, they just made it harder for us... what kind of Union is this?”
 - The **“conscious”** ones (mainly younger ages and higher-middle class respondents) feel that a **political consensus / union** is essential, on top of the economic one, even though they recognize how difficult this could be
“The natural evolution should be a common constitution and a higher power to the European Parliament instead of the Commission. If we want a unified Europe, we need to have at least a common set of rules”
- In any case, for both tendencies, it seems that **the need for intervention on how the EU is structured nowadays** is needed – an “intervention” similar to the one realized when Member States embraced the common currency
 - To this respect, in terms of what citizens need to “learn” about, the most crucial issue is **where EU is heading**, so as to clear the blurred picture of today: a mid- or long-term plan, related to a new (or renewed) EU vision
 - In other words, they need to **know more on common political decisions / consensus** so as to experience the desired sense of unity

“The problem is that all information we get is about the differences between Member States. There is no common political directive, something that says to the world: “this is what Europe as a whole believes on this issue””

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- Since the EU is regarded as an overall distant and complex institution, for Greek respondents it seems almost “**natural**” and **acceptable** that their voice cannot be heard
 - Up to now, it is perceived that the **EU follows a “top-to-bottom” approach** in relation to information released for the public: **citizens do not need to bother**, since all decisions are on a high political / negotiation level
 - Moreover, since the EU is perceived to have a “**consultative**” rather than an “authoritative” role in comparison to national governments, it is highly understood that **decisions and actions are first filtered on a national level** and, then, final decisions are publicized
 - Given that Greeks are in a state of **parallel disillusionment about national politicians**, as well, these filters are passively taken for granted, however not necessarily accepted **nor positively evaluated**
 - Finally, since it is perceived that **national interests transcend “common” ones**, the media and political representatives **tend to stress differences rather than consensus**

“For instance, on the issues of Syria and Serbia Greece had a stand-alone approach and this was promoted through national media. I never came to listen to actual EU arguments, only their criticism”
- On the other hand, the idea of citizens having direct access to the EU so as to make their voice heard is **positively received**, since:
 - It constitutes a **form of “intervention”** in EU operations as perceived today (in line with what Greek respondents need): a **grass-roots** rather “top-down” approach is quite appreciated, especially since the EU is perceived to having become stagnant
 - It is a step towards a “**Europe of people**” rather than today’s “Europe of economies and interests”: it creates **expectations that the EU is in a transformational process** towards reaching out to its citizens
 - It could **motivate citizens out of their passivity** and make them contribute more creatively; of course, as recognised by respondents themselves, this will be a **gradual, slow process** and citizens will only be convinced if they experience in practice that their voice is heard
- However, a **more “grass-roots” approach is not necessarily activating for all**, since some citizens (especially those more disappointed) tend to “enjoy” their passivity

“I am not optimistic at all. I do not think I can affect top-level decisions by expressing my opinion”
- Main issues mentioned as worth knowing more about (and contributing, as well) are **EU scope and future actions** on:
 - Taxation: mainly due to current discussions on the potential of a common taxation system among EU members
 - The future of EU itself: how EU officials envision it and where this could lead Europe as a whole and individual communities

- Protection of human rights and minority rights
- Protection of the quality of life for its people: especially important for Greece, at a time of crisis
- External relations: EU theses on its relations with China, the US, etc.
- Border protection: how EU safeguards that more “vulnerable” Member States (Italy, Greece) are not fighting against illegal immigration on their own

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- As already stated, “**generally informative**” campaigns or messages are not considered relevant in this moment.
 - It is interesting to notice that, during this “brainstorming” session, **traditional campaigning vehicles** (TV ads, leaflets, etc.) were not mentioned at all
 - Respondents tended to focus on ways that **promote the exchange of opinions and ideas** and have a more **interactive** nature
- Most prominent ideas that emerged during discussion:
 - A **pan-European TV channel**, expressing what European mentality and “future” is about
“Such an institution like the EU should have its own means to inform and interact... they should have their own TV channel”
 - A **representative citizen’s forum**, to collect ideas and evaluate policies
“Like a jury, people from different countries, selected to have different backgrounds that offer their opinion and input on decisions to be taken”
 - A **support group per commissioner, comprised by citizens**, to collect opinions, form a “grass-roots” body and consult in significant issues
“Since I cannot reach the commissioner directly, nor the Members of the European Parliament, such a group can collect my petitions or even ideas and communicate them to the respective bodies... In such a way, they would be obliged to listen to what we have to say, now they are not”
 - An **online voting system**, asking for opinions and stances
“In many cases, Internet voting have made a difference... this could also happen here”
 - A **friendlier, more interactive** internet site (compared to official sited of EU bodies) **of informative character** that offers updates on everything that is new
“Like a news portal, dedicated to the updating on main EU subjects. One can choose which sections interest him and news can come through e-mail or Facebook”
- On top of these propositions, the idea of **pan-European referenda** on “socially significant” issues was also discussed
 - Referenda as a form of direct democracy are of **ambivalent value**, however it seems that in some cases, they can **enhance the European identity** and ensure a sense of “**belonging**”
 - Subjects of interest could initially be mainly “**soft**” issues (not entailing economic decisions or external politics) in which a consensus is necessary
“A referendum on whether Greece should abandon the Eurozone, for example, could be really catastrophic. A referendum on whether homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual ones, however, could make sense”

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- As stated above, given the current situation in Greece and **overall disillusionment** by the EU, **“passive” informative campaigns are not well-appreciated**

Greek respondents ask for **more direct ways** to access the EU and have their voice heard, so as to safeguard that intermediate “filters” (esp. by national authorities) are avoided

- Thus, most positively evaluated propositions include: **A, E, G** which constitute **“direct democracy”** examples, and somehow **ameliorate the distant and impersonal character of the EU**

Negatively evaluated propositions are: **B, D, F** which **entail intermediate “filters”** (mass media organizations, political parties, etc.) and thus are perceived as a tool to **promote individual interests**

- On top of these propositions, the establishment of **referenda** (as described in the previous chapter) and a **direct medium for ongoing provision of information** (e.g. the TV channel) are well-appreciated

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- **Quite positively evaluated**, as an one-stop-shop for information provision by specialized personnel. It has to be noted that **none of the respondents linked it to the “Europe Direct” service**

- Mainly perceived useful for the discovery of **new “opportunities”**: EU funding programs, work positions, etc. However, **not considered adequate** to inform citizens on **broader political or economic decisions** and directives
- Its main **positive** aspects: **personalized** provision of information, **multiple channels** to address different citizens, **de-centralisation** (existence in each major city), creation of **new jobs**

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- **Respondents react rather negatively**, since the proposition has to follow national / local “rules” of the media market and, thus, there is no fruitful ground for its elaboration

- Public interest TV channels are practically **non-existent** in Greece and generally attract **limited viewership**
- Privately owned TV channels are considered **part of the “status quo”**, promoting individual economic or political interests and, thus, **not objective**

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

➤ A rather **ambivalent** proposition; degree of acceptance highly depends on **respondents' profile** (the younger ones being more accepting, overall) and **on the main issues** that such a poll promotes / communicates; from some of the higher-upper class respondents similarities to the Eurobarometer were mentioned

- On the positive side: a **chance to express own opinion** and, at the same time, **compare opinions** with other European citizens; however, to be effective, polls should be handled as a chance to start a discussion on its results through various means

“For such an initiative to be productive, it needs strong advertising so that people are interested and expect the results in anxiety. And it also needs to be analysed on TV or other media”

- On the negative side: **not “exciting” or “intrusive”** enough; participation in a poll is a rather **indirect way** to express own opinion while, at the same time, individuality is lost in the analysis

“Numbers are not enough to express a mentality. I want the freedom to express myself as an individual”

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

➤ A rather **non-interesting** proposition, which resembles a **pre-election campaign** more, rather than a structured tool for exchange of opinions and ideas

- Overall, the European Parliament is **not considered adequate** as a country's EU representatives are believed to represent national interests instead of the EU positions; thus, a discussion on a national level will eventually **confirm local theses**, rather than expand the horizons through a trans-national perspective

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

➤ One of the **most interesting** and **appealing** propositions, of **intrusive** and **interactive** character

- The internet is overall perceived as a **powerful tool** to affect decision-making and make a difference, because of its “open” character and the possibility to exchange views on the subject
- The proposition has a **dual value**: both as a means to **express own opinion** and as a tool to **learn what other citizens believe** on the issue
- The only concern (raised mainly by women and older ages) is **whether one will be actively motivated to participate**; to this respect, a **communication campaign** is deemed necessary, so as for citizens to be intrigued

“We Greeks do not have a participating culture, overall. Only if the subject is interesting and you come across it, through Facebook, from example, will you be urged to contribute”

“It depends on the subject and on how it is presented on the site; if all Europeans citizens participate, it will eventually become chaotic, it needs to be well-structured”

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

➤ The addition of a **national filter is negatively evaluated**

“It will be filtered based on national interests, thus it beats its purpose”

“When localised, there is no value in it any more... The point is to exchange views with other people abroad, not with other Greeks – I already know what Greeks think”

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

➤ The most **free, open and direct** proposition of all, well-appreciated by all respondents

- On the positive side: **easy, simple, effective** contribution, based on tools that citizens use every day; **freedom of expression** is ensured
- On the negative side: the **danger of such tool becoming chaotic** is stressed by the respondents; they stress out the importance of a **flexible but well-defined structure** based on thematic categories and the need to somehow **bridge linguistic differences**

“How will I understand what Germans say? Automatic translations are not good enough and often lead to misunderstandings. And, on top, how will I be able to focus on the subject that really interests me?”

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

➤ The most **“expected” means of communication: indispensable** so as to inform on forth-coming actions and boost interest in the forthcoming elections

- Mass media campaigns on all future actions are considered **necessary**, so as to introduce them to the people and create an initial interest to participate

“This is not a proposition... whatever they do, they first have to let us know it exists!”

- Especially in view of the forthcoming elections and given that Greeks are currently **less interested in participating**, due to economic crisis, it is imperative that campaigns are run, so as to **explain what is at stake nowadays**

“It is part of the game, of course they should run campaigns. Now that Europe is in a critical moment, they need to tell us why we should vote; if they leave this to national authorities, the elections will turn into a local political debate and their meaning will be lost”

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

**ΠΟΙΟΤΙΚΗ ΕΡΕΥΝΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΤΩΝ ΚΑΤΟΙΚΩΝ
ΣΤΗΝ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΝΩΣΗ
(ΔΕΚΕΜΒΡΙΟΣ 2013)**

ΟΔΗΓΟΣ ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗΣ

(ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ: Ζητείται από κάθε συμμετέχοντα να παρουσιάσει τον εαυτό του, της με λίγα λόγια, λέγοντας ποιος, ποια είναι και τι κάνει κ.λπ.)

ΘΕΜΑ 1

Βρεθήκαμε εδώ σήμερα όλοι μαζί για να συζητήσουμε σχετικά με την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση. Θα μπορούσατε παρακαλώ να μου πείτε τι αρχικά σας έρχεται στο μυαλό ακούγοντας Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση;

- Αυθόρμητες αντιδράσεις
- Διερεύνησε:
 - Τη φύση των θεμάτων που αναφέρθηκαν αυθόρμητα σχετικά με την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση
 - Θετικές και αρνητικές απόψεις σχετικές με την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση
 - Το βαθμό του αρχικού ενδιαφέροντος και της εμπλοκής των ερωτώμενων για θέματα σχετικά με την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση

ΘΕΜΑ 2

Τώρα, σχετικά με ότι ξέρετε και με το τι πιστεύετε σχετικά για την Ε. Ε. : Από πού αυτή προέρχεται;

Από ποιες πηγές πληροφόρησης ενημερώνεστε ή ακούτε απόψεις σχετικές με την Ε.Ε. – παίρνοντας τη λέξη «πηγές» με την ευρύτερη έννοια, που κυμαίνονται από επίσημες πηγές πληροφόρησης μέχρι ανεπίσημες συζητήσεις με φίλους ή άλλους ανθρώπους... ;

- Αυθόρμητες αντιδράσεις
- Διερεύνησε:
 - Το βαθμό της διαφοροποίησης των πηγών που αναφέρθηκαν
 - Τη φύση των εισαγόμενων πληροφοριών του καθενός
 - Ενδιαφέρον / Αξιοπιστία του καθενός

ΘΕΜΑ3

Πάμε τώρα να συζητήσουμε πιο συγκεκριμένα για το μέλλον της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης και να κάνετε ερωτήσεις που έχετε κάνει και στον εαυτό σας για αυτό το θέμα.

Υπάρχουν ορισμένες πτυχές που θεωρείτε σημαντικές και θα θέλατε να ξέρετε και να κατανοήσετε καλύτερα όσον αφορά τον τρόπο με τον οποίο η Ε. Ε. δουλεύει και τις οδηγίες που παίρνει – καθώς δεν μπορείτε να πάρετε όλες τις πληροφορίες που θα θέλατε από τις πηγές που αναφέρατε νωρίτερα.

Για ποιες πτυχές θα επιθυμούσατε να μάθετε περισσότερα;

- Αυθόρμητες αντιδράσεις
- Διερεύνησε:
 - Γενικές εντυπώσεις του καλού ή του κακού βαθμού γνώσης/ ικανοποίησης των θεμάτων αυτών.
 - Την αντίληψη των μεγάλων προκλήσεων για την Ε. Ε. τα επόμενα χρόνια.
 - Εκδηλώσεις από τους ερωτηθέντες της ανάγκης για καλύτερη γνώση και κατανόηση- σε ποια αντικείμενα πιο συγκεκριμένα; Σε τι αυτές οι πληροφορίες που διατίθενται σήμερα για τα θέματα αυτά δεν είναι ικανοποιητικές;

ΘΕΜΑ 4

Ως πολίτης, θα πρέπει να είσαι σε θέση να εκφράσεις τη γνώμη σου και να ακουστεί η φωνή σου όσον αφορά τις μελλοντικές κατευθύνσεις της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης – αν θα εγκρίνεις ή θα απορρίψεις τέτοιες ή μια τέτοια κατεύθυνση, ή για οποιοδήποτε άλλο λόγο..
Πώς μπορείτε να το κάνετε αυτό σήμερα;

- Αυθόρμητες αντιδράσεις
- Διερεύνησε:
 - Αντιληπτή ευκολία/ δυσκολία να εκφραστεί κάποιος και να κάνει τη φωνή του να ακουστεί για θέματα σχετικά με την Ε. Ε. – με ποιά μέσα;
 - Αντιληπτοί λόγοι του γιατί είναι δύσκολο.
 - Ειδικά θέματα για τα οποία οι ερωτηθέντες θα θέλουν ιδιαίτερος να εκφράσουν τη γνώμη τους και να ακουστούν ως πολίτες. προσδοκίες από αυτή την άποψη.

ΘΕΜΑ 5

Κάποιος μπορεί να σκεφτεί διάφορα μέσα με τα οποία οι Ευρωπαίοι πολίτες σαν κι εμάς θα μπορούσαν να κάνουν τη φωνή τους να ακουστεί.
Επιτρέψτε μου να προτείνω να προσπαθήσουμε να σκεφτούμε κάθε δυνατό μέσο, απλά αφήνοντας τη φαντασία μας να τρέξει, χωρίς να εγκαταλείψουμε μια ιδέα, ακόμη και αν δεν γνωρίζουμε προς το παρόν πώς θα μπορούσε να εφαρμοστεί στην πράξη.
Τι θα μπορούσαμε να φανταστούμε;

- Αυθόρμητες αντιδράσεις.
- Παρακίνησε τη δημιουργικότητα της ομάδας ενθαρρύνοντας τους ερωτώμενους να «πηδούν» από τη μια ιδέα στην άλλη.

ΘΕΜΑ 6

Τώρα πρόκειται να σας υποβάλλω σε διάφορες ιδέες που έχουν τεθεί νωρίτερα, σχετικά με τα μέσα που θα μπορούσαν να τεθούν σε εφαρμογή με σκοπό να επιτρέψουν στους πολίτες να ακουστεί καλύτερα η φωνή τους για θέματα που αφορούν την Ε. Ε.
Θα σας ρωτήσω τι γνώμη έχετε για το καθένα.

- Κάντε τους ερωτηθέντες να αντιδρούν σε κάθε πρόταση με τη σειρά, ζητώντας τους για την κάθε πρόταση το βαθμό του ενδιαφέροντός τους καθώς και τους λόγους.

A- Μια υπηρεσία πληροφοριών για τη λειτουργία της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης και τις πολιτικές της Ε. Ε. , συμπεριλαμβάνοντας ένα γραφείο πληροφόρησης ανοιχτό για το κοινό σε όλες τις μεγάλες πόλεις, μια ιστοσελίδα και μια υπηρεσία που θα απαντά γρήγορα σε τυχόν ερωτήσεις μέσω τηλεφώνου, ταχυδρομείου ή e- mail.

B- Συζητήσεις που θα οργανώνονται σε μεγάλα μέσα ενημέρωσης μεταξύ του μέσου όρου των πολιτών και των ειδικών για ευρωπαϊκά θέματα σχετικά με τις κατευθύνσεις που λαμβάνονται από την Ε. Ε.

Γ- Δημοσκοπήσεις για την Ε. Ε., οργανωμένες τακτικά σε όλη την Ευρώπη, επιτρέποντας στους πολίτες να γνωρίζουν τι σκέφτονται τόσο οι συμπατριώτες τους όσο και οι πολίτες των άλλων χωρών.

Δ- Η δυνατότητα, που θα δίνεται αρκετές φορές το χρόνο, να συναντηθούν με τα μέλη του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου σας ή άλλων πολιτικών της Ε. Ε., στη χώρα που ζείτε.

Ε- Διαβουλεύσεις μέσω του διαδικτύου, οργανωμένες από την Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή, για σημαντικές που πρέπει να ληφθούν στην Ε. Ε., ανοιχτές σε όλους τους πολίτες.

Ζ- Παρόμοιες διαβουλεύσεις, που οργανώνονται από την εθνική μας κυβέρνηση.

Η- Μια διαδραστική υπηρεσία που χρησιμοποιεί το Διαδίκτυο και τα κοινωνικά δίκτυα για να συγκεντρώσει σε μόνιμη βάση τις απόψεις των πολιτών, τις επιθυμίες και τις επικρίσεις τους σχετικά με τις κατευθύνσεις που λαμβάνονται από την Ε. Ε.

Θ- Ενημερωτικές εκστρατείες για να αναπτυχθεί πολύ πιο ενεργά απ' ό,τι τα προηγούμενα χρόνια, προκειμένου να ενθαρρύνουν τους πολίτες να συμμετέχουν στις συζητήσεις που πρόκειται να λάβουν χώρα και να λάβουν μέρος στις επερχόμενες εκλογές για τα μέλη του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου την ερχόμενη άνοιξη.

Σας ευχαριστώ και πάλι για την συμμετοχή σας σε αυτή τη συζήτηση.

Εάν περάσουν από το μυαλό σας και άλλες ιδέες μετά τη συζήτηση, μη διστάσετε να μας ενημερώσετε.

(Επικοινωνήστε μια σχετική διεύθυνση ηλεκτρονικού ταχυδρομείου που οι ερωτηθέντες θα μπορούν να χρησιμοποιήσουν για αυτό το σκοπό.)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN HUNGARY**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Budapest on 16th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Hungarian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Hungary by Psyma Hungary.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 2
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: window manufacturer worker, school catering manager, insurance agent, small entrepreneur)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: physician (GP), architect, electric engineer, interpreter)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1: INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

The **initial reactions** regarding the European Union are **very diverse**, not only at a group level, but also on the level of individuals. In addition to mentioning a positive aspect about the EU, the respondents also made some negative comment right away. Or the other way around: a negative opinion was immediately followed by a positive one.

„It is a necessary evil, as it offers some freedom and some restrictions at the same time.”

„It involves a higher level of freedom but it also implies restrictions.”

The spontaneous reactions regarding the EU can be grouped around **three main topics** in the course of the discussion:

➤ **The EU as an economic formation**

When evaluating the EU as an economic formation, the spontaneous reactions, on the whole, showed **a negative trend**.

The respondents not only evaluated the events/experiences of the past 10 years. The presumed or real grievances originate from the 1990s, the period of political and economic restructuring in Hungary. These two dimensions, these two lines of events (change of regime/entry into the EU) and their consequences are often merged together.

Many people claim that the result of the change of regime and the entry into the EU is that the **Hungarian economy is now controlled by foreign interests**, and, parallel with this, **Hungarian companies and traditional Hungarian industries** (agriculture, sugar industry etc.) are **gradually disappearing**. They feel that this was mainly favourable for foreign companies (market acquisition, purchasing Hungarian companies etc.). These negative opinions are added by the impacts of the economic crisis in the recent years, which the interviewees – directly or indirectly – connect to the EU, as well.

The first spontaneous reactions on the EU mainly focus on economic issues: how advantageous is the EU membership for Hungary in economic terms? How much do we pay into the common fund, and how much do we get back, what is the balance? If someone feels that the balance is positive, the EU-related attitude is also positive:

„I think the incoming and outgoing payments are more or less balanced, or we are slightly on the positive side. There are huge investments going on in the country. Wherever you go in Hungary, you can see what subsidies were used, and these are quite significant amounts. I never saw these posters before. You can see them at so many places now that I don't think these could have been achieved without our membership.”

If, however, someone feels that the balance is not positive, it will heavily influence their negative opinion on the EU:

„I don't believe in miracles. I cannot imagine that 2-3 big and strong countries would act as Santa Claus and go to Eastern Europe to support the poor. What do they take out of the country in exchange for the support they offer? Now that we have no agriculture, we do not have any industry, banking system etc. either.”

Negative feelings come from the fact that the use of EU subsidies is fixed, and **it is not always for Hungary to decide how to spend funds**, and how much:

„We pay some money, and we get some amounts back, but certain funds are granted for specific purposes, e.g. agricultural, industrial support etc., so we cannot freely decide on them.”

„There is a big box where they collect money from each country, and then they allocate amounts from that big box. However, the allocations and developments are not determined by the specific countries, but by the whole community. The targets are pre-determined. If we look at it from this aspect, we can feel that we get a huge opportunity. This is promoted on all posters because of transparency. And there is another side: they do not point out what areas are not developed. Some fields that are not EU priorities but would be important for Hungary are not developed.”

Some interviewees claim that the EU wants to have too much dominance, and this may violate the sovereignty of the member countries: *„There is a nice term: the subsidiarity principle. The former rule was that everything had to be settled at the lowest level. This was promoted by the EU. Now they tend to have a say in more and more things – legislation etc. - from above, sometimes even violently. In fact, it shouldn't be the EU's job to decide on the internal regulations of any country.”*

However, the respondents have the feeling that currently more EU investments and developments are in progress in Hungary than in the previous years. More funds are available, and more cash can be drawn. On the other hand, some other people claim that this is just the “outside” because these investments are now communicated to the citizens much more strongly and efficiently than earlier:

„When it comes to any development, they must display a big board saying exactly how much money is allocated and what for purpose. The way these are made public is really a kind of marketing.”

„Maybe this is a programme-closing period, maybe the available funds have to be spent. Perhaps this is why it is promoted stronger than before.”

➤ **The termination of country borders**

The pulled down country borders were mentioned **mainly in a positive context** upon the discussion.

The merely formal existence of borders gives a wide feeling of freedom to people: they can go anywhere, at any time, either as tourists or employees:

„The right of free movement and stay is definitely a positive feature”.

At the beginning, the open borders were favourable for tourism. Today, however, the opportunity to study/work abroad is more dominant. Upon the discussion almost everyone claimed to have a relative, acquaintance etc. who already lives/works abroad. The opportunity to seek jobs is definitely a positive feature on the individual level. At the same time, it also carries a negative message because some people leave Hungary because they cannot make a living here.

The pulled down borders also have a symbolic, historical aspect. The EU membership and the formal borders make it easier to digest the Trianon cataclysm, which is a problem for some of the Hungarian population (in the wake of the Trianon decision after the first world war, large areas populated by Hungarians were cut away from Hungary). This problem may become relieved as the terminated borders:

„Seem to have brought history to some kind of a balance”.

➤ **Hungary is part of a political/value community**

Being a part of an organisation **mainly** has a **positive message**, as well. People hold the opinion that Hungary – partly because it is a small country and also due to its historical traditions – always has to belong to a federation. An advantage of the EU membership is, contrary to the former alliances, that this is a voluntary membership, and it is in harmony with Hungary's traditions and values:

„Belonging to a community. At last, we can feel European. In fact, the country always joined some organisation, either this way or that way, but perhaps this is a good direction”.

„This membership is much more voluntary than any other former blocs. Hungary has always wanted to belong to the Western part”.

The respondents feel that their knowledge of EU issues is not at a very high level. In their opinion, there are **several reasons** for this:

➤ **Lack of basic factual knowledge, lack of education**

The members of the middle-aged and older generations became members of the EU in such a manner that they did not know too much about this institution. Therefore, it is many times difficult for them to understand how this institutional system is set up and how it is operating. It is somewhat easier for young people as they were born into this, and they are living in this system, however, some people find it a serious problem that EU-related subjects and courses have not been integrated in the school system so far, although this could provide youngsters with more information on this topic.

➤ **Lack of interest**

The respondents are mainly passive recipients of the news and they are no active players in the communication space, they do not regard themselves as people who actively gather EU-related information. For them, home politics are much more important than EU-related issues.

➤ **Information-related problems**

The politics-ridden media filters, selects and interprets the news and information, and the interviewees claim that this does not make it easier to see clearly and to form an unbiased picture.

CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

The information channels are relatively diverse. Internet portals represent the primary information source. Even within the Internet there is a wide range of sources: various news portals in Hungarian and in foreign languages, as well as specific and thematic homepages made by the EU (also available in Hungarian).

Various TV and radio programmes (news) were also mentioned often by the respondents as sources of information.

As against this, the weight of written and printed press is lower. Fewer people purchase and read it today.

Personal/family communication appears as a particular source. As many people have relatives and acquaintances living and working abroad, they get first hand information about what people in other countries think about EU-related questions.

There are **serious doubts about the completeness and the authenticity of the information received** – primarily in the case of the electronic and printed press. Basically no one has trust in objective information, people think that the information is filtered and selected. As the EU is a political organisation, everyone tries to evaluate events from their own political perspective, therefore, *„it will never be possible for me to read unbiased press”*. The same news item is presented and interpreted in the left-wing or right-wing press sometimes totally differently.

The respondents believe that the media is strongly intertwined with politics. The interviewees can clearly see which political side the top media players support. If they are in favour of the spirit of the given media, they can accept the information that it conveys, if not, they are less inclined to accept the information.

It is hard to find authentic and reliable information sources, and this is also due to the fact that there is a general crisis in Hungary in terms of confidence, and it affects the whole of the political, economic and social institutional system: *„No one trusts anyone.”*

CHAPTER 3: QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

On the whole, **the level of EU-related knowledge is not too high, and the interest level is also mediocre**. The not too much information that is available to the interviewees basically meets the people's information needs.

There are **few topics and issues about the EU that are really interesting to people**.

During the discussion only one topic came up where the respondents feel that **a lot of information is missing**. As the EU-related opinions of the interviewees are basically determined by the **financial balance**: how much the country pays and gets back, the participants would like to gather more information about that. People would like to see full and accurate financial statements with concrete figures and data to show how much is, and was spent, and on what? How much financial profit does Hungary gain from the EU membership, as well as what direct and indirect financial losses Hungary has to face due to the EU membership?

„What I'm really interested in is the balance. Once someone should put it on the table to show how much money is taken out by multinational companies, by banks, what profit is lost, and – compared to this – how much subsidy funds come in. I would be very interested in this, as this would actually help me to decide if I like it or not.”

„Many multinational companies may take their profits out of the country. But they do leave some money here, as well. They are given tax exemptions but they also create “x” number of jobs. This is a line of figures that can be displayed. On the other side, we also have to see how much money we, Hungarians, leave in, and take out from various parts of the world, or the EU, through our companies and subsidiaries.”

This is closely related to the demand that people would like to see clearly what is exactly in the background of the EU's financial subsidies, and what the support is aimed at:

„I would like to see the scheme of support because I think we have stepped back. I think the EU is more or less at fault in this respect. We used to have milk and sugar industry, and these have totally disappeared from the provincial areas.”

The respondents claim to know almost nothing about the EU's financial operations: what is spent on what, and from what: *„We should have a clearer insight because there are some grey spots. Most of us can only see a grey spot here. No one can see clearly, including me.”* Some feel that this kind of disinformation can even be intentional. It is not by accident that nobody knows anything about these concrete, financial data.

People are mainly interested in these financial statements, accounts and comparisons.

As the respondents primarily define the EU as an economic formation, they also approach the **future challenges** to the EU along this line. Although the future challenges that the EU is facing are diverse, the interviewees can **mainly** spot problems of **financial/economic nature**:

➤ **Challenge in terms of economic power**

The respondents find it questionable how the economic unity of the EU and the euro zone can be preserved amidst the current economic circumstances. The financial and stability-related problems that are becoming permanent in some Member States (e.g. Greece, Cyprus) weaken the EU, and perhaps these problems cannot be financed in the long run. If that happens, a weak and fragmented European economy cannot keep pace with the large economic powers, mainly with China and, in the second place, with the USA.

➤ **Modern-age migration**

It was frequently mentioned with regard to the future how the EU should handle (whether it should permit or prohibit) the more and more powerful immigration waves. These movements can be seen at two levels:

- **Movements within the EU**

More and more citizens of various Member States seek jobs abroad, in another EU Member State, which can cause a lot of problems for the emitting country (labour force migration) as well as for the recipient country (e.g. the load-bearing capacity of social provision systems). This recipient role is not yet very important in the case of Hungary, but the emitter role can already be seen, more and more people find jobs abroad, and some people say that this emitter role will lead to negative impacts in the long run.

- **Movements from outside the EU**

Europe is becoming a more and more attractive target for people from the third world, which also leads to many conflicts inside the EU (humanitarian disasters, cultural differences etc.). This is not yet a relevant problem for Hungary, but it may be a problem in the long run.

➤ **Unemployed young people**

The high unemployment rate of young people is a general problem all over Europe, which is also one of the triggers of labour migration inside the EU. The EU has to come up with some solution.

➤ **Demographic problems**

Another general problem is the aging European societies, the lower birth rate and the related, potential economic difficulties (e.g. financing pension systems in the future).

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

In the course of the discussion, the respondents mentioned **several ways of articulating citizen opinions** when we asked how citizens can/could voice their opinions about EU issues. A common feature of these spontaneously mentioned ways of opinion-forming is that the interviewees consider them mainly as a **theoretical** scheme. They know that they are available but they have not really used them. Partly because there are not many EU issues where they want to voice their opinions, but a more important aspect is that they think nothing would happen, and if they used the opportunity to use this tool, it would not lead to any result.

However, this kind of **disappointment** is **not only related to European politics**. The same scepticism can also be observed if we look at Hungarian political matters and see how citizens voice their opinions about them.

➤ **Members of the EU Parliament**

Keeping contacts with the parliamentary members is a frequently mentioned channel. This, however, is only a theoretical possibility as there is no live contact between the citizens and the MPs. The respondents do not really know what matters the Hungarian MPs represent in the EU, what's more, they do not even know who represents them in Brussels.

„When someone went out there, we could hear for some time what they did there, but now we get less information. It would be really good to know who did what on our behalf.”

However, people do not expect too much from them. They claim that the MPs follow the interests of their political parties and not the opinion of the people who voted for them. The MPs are very far away from the citizens who elected them.

It is disturbing for many people that the MPs cannot be called to accounts. The only thing that can be done about this is that we don't vote for them 4 years later, but this tool is too weak:

„We elect them, but then they don't give a shit. I don't feel that I am important to those who we voted for. So I don't think it is important to vote. But this should not be the proper way in democracy, where it would be important to know that my vote carries some value.”

➤ **Written enquiries**

The respondents also mentioned frequently the opportunity to write letters or emails to the competent EU authorities, EU officials and politicians. This is expressly offered by Internet websites to all interested parties. However, people seriously doubt whether anything would happen after such enquiries and whether anyone would react to them:

„If I had an idea that something should be done differently, and I would write a letter and send it by mail, I wonder if it would really reach anybody.”

➤ **Media**

Since the respondents do not regard individual actions (contacting MPs, writing letters) to be effective (MPs are not accessible, they do not reply letters), some find it a solution to turn their opinion or problem into a media case, which can no longer be simply ignored:

„I definitely need a tool to grab their attention. So I have to make myself heard, e.g. in a TV program”.

„If I really want to highlight something, I would contact the media. A TV channel, where I could try to draw the attention in form of a report”.

„It should go into the news. Then the politician will have to deal with it.”

➤ **Spontaneous initiatives**

As against individual actions, the respondents think it is a stronger weapon if citizens cooperate and join forces to voice their opinion. This is technically easy to do in the internet and Facebook age.

➤ **International forums for legal recourse**

It is a specific form of opinion and interest representation to turn to an international court if someone's rights are violated and this cannot be settled within the country borders. This opportunity is relatively known among the respondents because these cases are mentioned quite frequently in the media.

➤ **Demonstrations**

One interviewee would even take more radical tools: *„I go to protest in front of the G8, just as it is done by a few people.”*

CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

The group members approached this issue creatively. The basic idea was invented by 1-2 respondents, but later everyone tried to make a contribution and to somewhat polish the idea. They liked the final product so much that they said may be worth requesting a patent for it. It is true though that some participants said these kinds of solutions may already exist in the west, but we don't know about them: *„I can imagine that what we write down here as a utopia is already used e.g. in Sweden”*.

The substance of their idea is **an Internet-based online system** that could be used by anyone in principle. This would be a central forum offering a multitude of topics. It would basically cover all possible and current EU topics. There would be main topics, within this: sub-menus and sub-topics to choose from. For each topic, they would either set up continuously modified questionnaires that would be translated into each language and the citizens could fill it in if they are interested in the given topic, or they would simply provide a customer service address for the given topic and everyone could send their opinions or proposals in email.

The interested parties could log in with an email address and they could mark the topic that they are interested in. Thus the system would always inform them that they can voice their opinions or they can fill in a questionnaire in a given topic.

There was a dispute among the participants as to whether opinions could be voiced obligatorily with a name, or also in an anonymous manner. The system should be able to handle both options.

„I would form an opinion about anything only if I give my name to it. I guess it is not fair to tell something without a name.”

„I think it is more and more important in Hungary that this can be made anonymously. Maybe I would not want them to know the email address from where I sent my opinion.”

„It would be important to make sure that they won't throw dirt at me if I give my name. This is essential! An absolute guarantee would be required for this.”

Sending in the completed questionnaires or the emails is the first step in the system operation. The second step is acknowledgement: the system verifies that the questionnaire/email filled in/written by the respondent was received by the system. Moreover, the respondents would also expect regular information on the progress of the case that they addressed: where and to whom it is sent, how it is processed, what is the result etc. This kind of acknowledgment is very important to the respondents as this is where they can see the biggest problem with the operation of the currently available instruments.

The online system could even be extended with personal customer service spots so that opinions cannot only be voiced online. All interested parties could simply walk into an EU point where they can say what they want. The opinion would be registered and forwarded into the administrative process. The interested parties could also check the case progress at this stage, the number of submittals made in similar matters etc.

As this would be an IT system, it could easily sum up the results. (It is important to ensure that the system cannot be hacked, and it should be verifiable that everyone's opinion can be featured only once). If it comes to voting, the majority opinion can be displayed quickly. The operation of this kind of system would ensure that *„EU matters would be decided based on a continuous referendum flow”*.

If the system only received proposals and opinions, their summary could show whether the number of people voicing their opinion reaches a threshold value (e.g. 1,000,000 people), and if yes, the EU would have to deal with the given question in the merits.

„If the case reaches a certain level or a certain number of contacts, it would be obligatory to make it public in some form, on TV, at courts, in the Parliament etc., depending on what the matter is about.”

„In fact, I don't know if this really exists, i.e. that a case must be examined above a critical level. Who knows? Maybe it is prescribed somewhere in the EU, but we don't know about it.”

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

The research tested 8 specific opportunities to form opinions on each one. Their acceptance was very diverse within the group.

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

This is **the most popular of the surveyed options**. Partly also because the respondents think that this is the closest to the method that they spontaneously created and found ideal (see Chapter 5).

The interviewees basically accepted all of its elements positively. They regard it as a complex system, which not only offers an online platform but also enables personal administration. Most people are mainly attracted by the possibility of online administration, but many are also in favour of the option of making personal contacts:

„For an average citizen it is good to meet a living person there, to whom they can tell what they want. It is already comforting to know that someone listens to you.”

However, the success of the system can basically be determined by how effectively this opportunity is communicated towards the citizens:

„I would use it, but – on the one hand – do they tell me which forum to go to? Where can I write and what, and what can I find and where?”

Using the services of information offices would also be influenced by the opening hours – it is important that they should be open as long as possible.

Some interviewees remembered that such information offices and customer service points used to operate earlier:

„When we joined the EU, there used to be such “Europe Point” offices, then they were gone.”

It is a general opinion that if these offices were opened, they should be available everywhere:

„Each local municipality should have a small, separated office where I can submit my proposals or letters.”

„Each district or village should have a place that I can go to.”

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

The respondents accepted this option less positively. Primarily because they feel that these debates can be manipulative: who will be invited as a debate partner, who will be the moderator, how unbiased s/he would be, would there be an organised (selected) audience or not etc. These manipulative elements could be fully excluded only if independent experts can be invited to the debates. Such a discussion would be somewhat interesting to people, but it is a question whether it can be organised at all.

The “debate” genre of the discussion is also disturbing for the majority. Knowing the Hungarian culture of debates, they think that it would not produce the desired result. These would be autotelic discussions, turning into crazy debates, without any palpable result. Few people start out from the fact that a debate offers the chance to: *„See something from a different aspect. If I think about something, I usually don't think of any other aspect. So this would be the advantage of such a debate”*.

The respondents have not heard too much about such type of debates in Hungary, but some of them have seen this in foreign TV channels. Most of them associate this programme type to afternoon talk shows running on commercial channels in Hungary (e.g. Mónica show), which cover a certain topic and civilians are invited to talk about current but quite informal topics in front of an audience in a studio. The participants had no favourable opinion about these shows, and this also had a negative impact on the opinions about the tested debates.

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

This option was not very attractive to the respondents, either. One or two people would like it but not the majority. Namely because if it comes to this type of questionnaire-based opinion poll, people would like to see a scheme where everyone would get a role, *“just like in a referendum”*. However, public opinion research is conducted on smaller samples, and small is the chance for someone to get involved as a respondent: *„This is interesting only if they ask as many people as possible.”* If it was online research, those who have no internet would be squeezed out of the research. If it was about personal interviews, maybe they would prefer towns but not villages etc.: *„It is not for sure that they can hear opinions from all social groups.”*

There was one person in the group who had already taken part in such an EU opinion poll. He had a clearly positive opinion about this method.

Beside the many rejections, there was someone who regarded it as an advantage of this method that passive citizens can also be accessed in this manner:

„If they contact me, it may be easier to voice an opinion about something, compared to having to do something or go somewhere in order to say what I think, e.g. going to an office, sending a letter.”

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

Maybe this is **the proposition that divides the respondents the most.** It is interesting to see that this option is mainly rejected by the interviewees who come from the lower social class, but those from the higher class like this opportunity more. The form itself, i.e. meeting an MP is relatively feasible for the participants, mainly starting out from the Hungarian conditions, and on the analogy of how one can get in touch with the representatives working in the Hungarian parliament or at local municipalities.

However, there was a problem upon the discussion about interpreting meetings with politicians: does this meeting cover a face-to-face talk (in the form of a consultation hour) or a public get-together that is attended by many people (like a residential forum). Both ways can have advantages and drawbacks. People are sceptical about the effectiveness of the former because this may turn out to be a protocol meeting *„with polite smiling”*. The latter was criticised because communication would be hard to control:

„It leads to a scandal, which makes no sense. They all want to tell about their problems, and then they start a fight.”

All in all, people highlighted two advantages of this option. The most positive feature is the opportunity of personal contact:

„If it is personal, it may be easier for people to tell about their thoughts and opinions.”

The other good point is that representatives can be more or less controlled in this manner, and later they can be called to account about what they said and whether they kept their promises.

But not everybody thinks that way. Some hold the view that such meetings would only be informal, and what is put forward there would mean no consequences at all for the representatives. Another drawback of this scheme is that it requires a high level of activity from the people, so relatively few people would use it. Many people would not attend such meetings for various reasons: due to the lack of time, or because they do not like the representative, etc.

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

From among the 8 tested tools, the respondents accepted this **most positively** in addition to option “A”, partly also because this opportunity is very close to the system that they find ideal (see Chapter 5).

Many participants said that this scheme is like public opinion research, with the difference that – in principle – everyone can take part in this. They hold the view that a great advantage of the system is that it can reach masses of participants. It is true though that, according to some interviewees, the online platform is exclusive and some people (the elderly, those living in villages) may not be able to use it. Aspects of comfort also emerge as advantages of the system: the online questionnaires/forms could be filled in anywhere, and at any time:

„It is not attached to a specific time of the day, like a consultation. I can fill it in at 2 a.m. if I feel like it”.

It is a basic expectation towards the system operation that the citizens should be notified that their answers are received and processed, and they get feedback on the results.

However, a few problems incurred in connection with system operability. For example, how are people informed about the launch of internet consultations (who informs them, when and how). Some think that this is probably preceded by a registration process and the interested parties are notified at a given email address about participation in the consultation. This may also give motivation:

„If I get an email, I feel they are interested in my opinion, so I take the chance when it comes.”

It is, however, a disadvantage due to the obligatory registration that the system cannot be used anonymously.

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

As the system is basically the same as the former one, we received the **same opinions** as before. But the respondents were **slightly more critical**. When it comes to discussing EU issues, they regard it unnecessary to involve a further participant because:

- *„This can slow down the processes.”*

- *„There is another chance that information may get lost.”*

- *„Maybe the government would pose the question a bit differently, maybe they would try to control my answer.”*

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

This solution was given the **most criticism**. Although many people like the online platform, they do not support this tool in this form and in this topic. They feel that appearance in the social media would result in such a huge quantity of data and opinions that would be impossible for the EU to cover, analyse and interpret.

„Who's going to read them?“ Some would use search engines for key words, but it would also consume huge power sources. *„It is probably feasible in technical terms, because we know how many people have been tapped recently.“*

Both the quantity as well as the quality of the information is formidable because the respondents claimed that a lot of unnecessary information is also supplied in such an internal-type communication. After a few comments, the whole thing gets too personal, and it will only generate conflicts:

„There would plenty of personal remarks, sometimes in a simply unprintable tone, and one could not filter out the essential thoughts“.

Some people also held the view that such a system cannot work anonymously, and they would prefer anonymous ways of communication.

On the whole, the respondents believe that this would not produce the proper results: *„It would be counter-productive“*. The discussions among people would become limitless after a while, and the participants would get bored of talking.

The interviewees claimed that running such a system would not produce the required results, and - as sarcastically mentioned - the maximum “profit” for those who make comments in the system would be *„to let some steam off“*. *„It would be like an EU rage room where people can smash their anger away.“*

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

The respondents did **not** accept this opportunity **positively** because this is only a one-way communication, and they cannot make their voice heard directly in this form:

„It is like the government's current cost reduction campaign on posters, TV and everywhere. It is already there, and I cannot influence it any more.“

The respondents defined this merely as a propaganda and advertising tool. They can more or less accept this tool if the issue is handled only as an information campaign, where the purpose is to inform the citizens: *„this can also be used well“*, but there are some problems with this method.

These campaigns may not reach their targets amidst the numerous advertising campaigns. It is difficult to launch and maintain real eye-catching campaigns, and the topic itself – i.e. the EU - is not so attractive to people either. In addition to this, cost effectiveness aspects were also mentioned: *„This costs a lot of money“*. Contacting people by their names may be a more effective tool than classical advertising (TV commercials, outdoor posters):

„The online method or notifications registered to names could draw my attention better than campaigns organised on a monthly basis. There are lots of them. If it goes online, I have a look and decide if I am interested.“

On the whole, the respondents would find information campaigns useful only in some specific cases, when the EU is before or after deciding on some very important issues. For example, the respondents regard the EU parliamentary elections as such an essential topic.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

KVALITATÍV KUTATÁS AZ ÁLLAMPOLGÁROK INVOLVÁLTSAGÁRÓL AZ EURÓPAI

UNIÓVAL KAPCSOLATBAN

INTERJÚVÁZLAT

(BEVEZETÉS: Kérd meg a résztvevőket, hogy mutassák be magukat néhány szóban, mondják el, hogy kik ők, mivel foglalkoznak, stb.)

1. TÉMA

Azért vagyunk most itt együtt, hogy az Európai Unióról beszéljünk.
Meg tudnák mondani, hogy mi jut először az eszükbe az EU-ról?

- Spontán reakciók
- Rákérdezni:
 - Az EU-ról spontán tett említések természete
 - Az EU-val kapcsolatos pozitív és negatív aspektusok
 - Milyen mértékű a válaszadók kezdeti érdeklődése és érintettsége/involváltsága az EU-val kapcsolatos témákban

2. TÉMA

Most, tekintetbe véve mindazt, amit tudnak, gondolnak az EU-ról: mindez honnan jön?
Milyen forrásokból szereznek információkat az EU-ról illetve honnan hallanak róla – a „forrás” szót a legszélesebb értelemben véve, a hivatalos információforrásoktól kezdve a barátokkal vagy más emberekkel való informális beszélgetésekkel bezárólag...?

- Spontán reakciók
- Rákérdezni:
 - Az említett források változatosságának/sokrétűségének mértéke
 - Az egyes forrásokból származó információk természete
 - Az egyes források iránti érdeklődés és a források hitelessége

3. TÉMA

Most beszéljünk még konkrétabban az EU jövőjéről és azokról a kérdésekről, amelyeket talán Önök is feltesznek maguknak ezzel kapcsolatban.

Mivel lehet, hogy nem kapnak meg minden információt, amit szeretnének, a korábban említett forrásokból, ezért lehet, hogy vannak bizonyos dolgok az EU működésével, az EU által követett irányokkal kapcsolatban, amelyeket fontosnak tartanak, amelyekről többet szeretnének tudni, amelyeket jobban szeretnének érteni.

Milyen dolgokról szeretnének leginkább többet tudni?

- Spontán reakciók
- Rákérdezni:
 - Általános benyomások azzal kapcsolatban, hogy nagy vagy kismértékű-e az ezekkel témákkal kapcsolatos tájékozottság és megértési szint
 - Az elkövetkező években az EU előtt álló nagyobb kihívások észlelése, érzékelése
 - A kérdezők kifejezik-e annak szükségességét, hogy több tudásra, nagyobb megértésre volna szükségük – milyen témában leginkább? Az ezekről a témákról jelenleg elérhető információk milyen szempontból nem kielégítőek?

4. TÉMA

Állampolgárként lehetőségük kellene, hogy legyen arra, hogy véleményt mondhassanak és a hangjukat hallathassák az EU jövőbeli irányait illetően – hogy vajon elfogadjanak-e vagy elutasítsanak-e ilyen és olyan irányokat, vagy bármilyen más kérdésben véleményt nyilváníthassanak. Ma ezt Önök hogyan tehetik meg, milyen lehetőségeik vannak erre?

- Spontán reakciók
- Rákérdezni:
 - Hogy érzik, mennyire könnyű/nehéz kifejezni magukat, hallatni a hangjukat az EU-val kapcsolatos kérdésekben – milyen eszközökkel?
 - Hogy érzik, miért nehéz ez, mik ennek az okai
 - Konkrét témák, amelyekkel kapcsolatban a válaszadók különösen szeretnék kifejezni véleményüket és szeretnék, ha meghallgatnák őket, mint állampolgárokat; elvárások ebben a vonatkozásban.

5. TÉMA

Számos eszközre gondolhatunk, amelyek segítségével mi, mint európai állampolgárok, hallathatnánk a hangjukat.

Arra kérem Önöket, hogy próbáljuk meg és gondoljunk most ezekre az eszközökre, bármire, ami lehetséges, csak engedjük szárnyalni a képzeletünket, ne hagyjunk egy gondolatot sem elveszíteni, még ha nem is tudjuk ebben a pillanatban, hogy ezt az ötletet hogyan lehetne a gyakorlatba átültetni.

Miket tudnának elképzelni?

- Spontán reakciók
- Ösztönözd a csoport kreativitását azzal, hogy bátorítod a válaszadókat, hogy „ugorjanak” egyik ötletről a másikra.

6. TÉMA

Most különböző eszközöket mutatok be Önöknek, amelyek alkalmazásával lehetőség nyílik arra, hogy az állampolgárok jobban hallathassák a hangjukat az EU-val kapcsolatos kérdésekben.

Mindegyikről meg fogom kérdezni a véleményüket.

- A kérdezőket egymás után mindegyik javaslatról kérdezed meg. Minden egyes javaslat kapcsán kérdezd meg: mennyire érdekli őket az adott javaslat és miért.

A- Információs szolgáltatás az EU és az EU politikájának működéséről. Ez magába foglal egy információs irodát, amely minden nagyvárosban elérhető a lakosság számára, egy honlapot (website-ot) és egy ügyfélszolgálatot, ahol bármilyen telefonon, levélben, e-mail-ben, stb. érkező kérdésre gyorsan választ adnak.

B- A nagyobb médiákban szervezett viták, amelyek átlagos állampolgárok és EU szakértők között zajlanak az EU által követett irányokról, az EU által tett intézkedésekről.

C- Közvélemény-kutatások az EU-ról, amelyeket rendszeresen bonyolítanak le egész Európában, lehetővé téve az állampolgároknak, hogy megtudják, hogy saját honfitársaik illetve más országok állampolgárai mit gondolnak.

D- Lehetőség arra - amely évente többször is adott volna -, hogy az emberek találkozzanak az európai parlamenti képviselőkkel vagy más EU politikusokkal, a lakóhelyükhöz közel.

E- Az Európai Bizottság által szervezett internetes konzultációk minden olyan alkalommal, amikor nagyobb döntéseket kell hozni az EU-ban, nyitott minden állampolgár számára.

F- Ehhez hasonló konzultációk, amelyeket az adott országok kormánya szervez.

G- Egy interaktív szolgáltatás, amely az internetet és a közösségi hálózatokat használva állandó jelleggel gyűjti a polgárok véleményét, kívánságait vagy kritikáit az EU irányvonaláról.

H- Információs kampányok, melyeket sokkal gyakrabban szerveznének, mint az elmúlt években, azért, hogy bátorítsák az állampolgárokat, hogy vegyenek részt az elkövetkező vitákban illetve, hogy vegyenek részt a jövő tavasszal esedékes Európai Parlamenti választásokon.

Köszönöm még egyszer, hogy részt vettek a beszélgetésünkön.

Ha a beszélgetést követően eszükbe jutna még valami a témánkkal kapcsolatban, kérem, jelezzék nekünk. (Adjon meg egy e-mail címet, amelyet a résztvevők ebből a szempontból használhatnak.)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN IRELAND**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

February 2014

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Ireland on 11th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Irish section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Ireland by Behaviour & Attitudes.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: Civil Defence, Taxi Driver, Carpenter, Service Technician)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: Finance Executive, Service Engineer, Sales Merchandiser, Medical Sales Representative)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

When initially asked their thoughts on the European Union terms such as; Money, the Troika, Bureaucracy and Big Brother are voiced.

Overall initial spontaneous reactions towards the European Union are however quite positive.

- **The protective character of the European Union** is a common trend throughout the group, as many now look towards the European Union as a guardian type influence which is there to offer back up and support in times of need – especially financial.

During the group the European Union was referred to as a ‘Big Brother’ type character. However, this was quite a loaded term as respondents referred to it in both a positive and negative manner. At one level respondents are quite happy to think that there is an overarching power looking over us, but on the other hand there is a fear of handing over too much power and giving away too much control of Irish affairs to an external institution.

- **Solidarity and unification with other Member States** is another positive factor which has emerged from the European Union. This has been enforced through the single currency, which is viewed as a factor of integration and aids the **freedom of movement** between Member States. However, some concern is also voiced questioning if Ireland would have been better off with our own currency. Nevertheless, at overall level the single currency is viewed as a positive implementation of the EU.

- **Freedom of movement** between Member States is also viewed as a positive in terms of business opportunities (Irish exports), travel and increased opportunities for the country’s youth.

“I don’t look at it like they are watching us, I think of the good things. I think we can travel more freely and work in different countries. Now my kids have the freedom to go and work and start in another country”

- **Financial support provided to Ireland** is also positively discussed, mainly in reference to structural funds and the country’s infrastructure which was developed during the 90s with the help of EU grants and funding; building of new roads, Luas etc. Farming and other EU grants and cheap finance being made available were also positively referenced.

- **Improved mortgage options** is also referenced, as ECB tracker mortgages have become available and provide better rates than variable mortgages thanks to the European Central Bank.

- **Improvements in the judicial system** is also mentioned as the European Court of Justice is referenced as a backup mechanism for when faith is lost in one’s own country’s judicial system.

“When it goes to the European Courts you feel confident that the right decision will be made”

- **The European Convention of Human Rights** is spontaneously mentioned as another positive aspect of the European Union.

Some negative aspects of the European Union were also voiced, however these are viewed as secondary to the positives. The negative aspects mentioned include the following:

- **Loss of individualism or control of internal affairs.** While respondents are positive about the protective character of the European Union, some concerns are expressed about the ‘Big Brother’ effect and handing over too much control of Irish affairs.

“It was nearly like if they had told us to start jumping I would say we would have to do it. It was literally yes, what they said went but I know they were helping us out”

- **Germany is viewed as a controlling power over Europe’s finances.** This notion is reinforced with Ireland’s budget being discussed in Germany’s parliament before it was released in Dáil Eireann.

“You heard that thing about our budget being discussed in their parliament (Germany) before it was even presented. That just shows you how powerless Ireland is”.

“Truth be told it was probably always the case anyway. Because they (Germany) were the paymasters, like it or lump it. You mightn’t like it, but you know”.

- **Too much bureaucracy and too many irrelevant regulations.** Issues revolving around legislation and European regulations are felt to be irrelevant to Ireland on occasion. Regulations regarding the EU Habitats Directive (cutting of bogs), the waste of funds used in the CAP initiative, predominantly the ‘Butter Mountains’, and the waste of produce due to the Commissions regulation on ‘bendy bananas’.

“Some of it seems silly. You tend to think of it as only affecting us, not thinking that there are 26 other member countries, so it’s applying to everyone. But sometimes it just feels silly. There’s a huge amount of waste because of what they say should be standard you know”.

- **Questioning of the euro currency.** Although at an overall level many are happy with Ireland’s inclusion in the single currency some are curious as to whether Ireland would have been better off with our own currency. Partly in support of this, some are curious as to why the British did not join the single currency.

- **Continued voting until the desired outcome is achieved.** Some irritation was evident in regards to European Citizens being asked to vote on an issue or referendum several times until the desired ‘yes’ vote is achieved i.e. the Nice Treaty.

“If you reject a treaty then you can do the treaty again and then pass it you know.”

“We said ‘no’, what are you asking us again for”.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

Mainstream media is noted as being the main source used when looking for information relating to the European Union; mainly TV news, radio, national newspapers and internet news websites, as well as internet search engines.

- General opinion exists that the European Union is **dominant in national media** and all important events are adequately covered.

“It’s so dominant in the national media now you know. There is big coverage on RTE and the Irish Times, when it was saying about the elections and stuff like that, and what it means for us etc. You see Western European countries about the recession in Europe as well so it’s constantly in your face”

- **Word of mouth** is also identified as an information source, and in some cases a prompt to searching for more information online.

Discussions on the EU with family and friends however tended to centre around children’s education and what they are learning at school with regards to the EU.

“She (daughter) was learning all about the countries in the European Union and that, I would often press on the Internet to find out more about it”

- There is some minor concern regarding the objectivity of the information presented in the mainstream media however, as respondents reference politicians using the media as a form of ‘propaganda’ and ‘spin’ to suit their political agenda.

“All the news channels always have information on it you know and they will talk about the situation for Merkel and her problems there and how she had to sell the idea to her people first. So if we didn’t know about that they’ll tell you. Now some of that could be propaganda as well, that’s another way of looking at the thing, because they are politicians at the end of the day”.

“There would be a certain amount of spin depending on who’s reporting on it. It suits a certain agenda it’s going to be put out there with a certain tilt to it to suit that, whoever is giving it out you know”.

Despite this slight hesitancy over the objectivity of some mainstream media reports, respondents do believe that the information presented in mainstream media is **accurate and creditable**. When any doubt does exist however many believe that there are plenty of other online websites which can be used to gather more information and identify the true nature of the report.

“If you have any doubt in your head too, there is always other avenues that you can start exploring anyway you know”.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE EU

Overall there appears to be a lack of knowledge of the EU’s institutional systems. Awareness of the separate EU institutions does exist, but there is low awareness of the differences between the various EU institutions.

- Confusion exists between the roles and responsibilities of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council. Respondents are aware of the different institutions due to having seen or heard about them through mainstream media, or recall having voted in an election or referendum previously, but little is known about the individual offices.

“It’s confusing between the European Parliament and the European Commission and something else, what is what”.

- Some awareness of Ireland’s presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first six months of 2013 is evident. Respondents are also aware that the Presidency works on a 6 month rotation bases. However, there is low awareness of what Ireland achieved during its Presidency.
- Confusion and some irritation exist over the movement of the European Parliament between Brussels and Strasbourg. Some perceive this to be in an effort to please the French. There is an understanding however that it would be difficult to find a permanent location, which would please all Member States.

“It’s just they are playing to the sensitivities of the French, shifting off to Strasbourg every couple of weeks”

“... but then if it did get a permanent seat everyone would be saying why did they pick there?”

MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR THE EU IN THE YEARS AHEAD

Respondents show a high level of understanding that there are major challenges for the EU ahead, with banking issues, employment and debt from struggling nations such as Portugal, Greece and Spain being the main issues referenced.

- There is a perception that Ireland’s financial difficulties are ‘small fish’ in comparison to the financial strain which Portugal, Greece and Spain put on the EU. Therefore, there is some anxiety around the debt of these nations and the possibility that should their financial difficulties continue, or should they fall back into recession, that they will take down the other EU countries with them.

“I think that debt of the nations, Portugal, Greece, Spain, when I see countries as big as Spain, Italy, if they were to go under God knows what would happen here. There was talk before, we were talking about a retrospective deal on banking debt and stuff for bailing out Anglo, but they (the EU) weren’t concentrating on us at all. They were looking at the bigger countries within the European Union”.

- There is some feeling that the EU should take more control over member countries' banks. Following the need for the Irish bailout a high level of distrust in the Government's ability to control the country's finances exists. Therefore, there is almost unanimous agreement that the EU should have more control over the running of member countries' banks, preferably through increasing the role and responsibility of the European Central Bank, or at the very least develop a set of guidelines by which banks should be run - especially in the area of interest rates.

"One European Central Bank, like in the States"

"I think that once the EU make a rule it should be across the board"

"... but I mean they will say you work by that plan but if you need to go up or down that is your own business"

- Lack of employment throughout Europe is also an area which may present challenge for the EU and the demise of young people's hope for the future, due to their negative employment prospects.

"I see a lot of friends here and friends in Spain, France and Italy and there is a similar trend happening over there that is happening here. Which is a lot of younger people are going back to live with their parents, because the parents are the only ones who have the money as the kids can't get a job. Now when the hope goes with people you are in serious trouble."

- There is still a fear that the recession may return, but optimism is prevalent as many believe that the EU now has a plan in place to make sure that it doesn't get as bad again.

"I would love to know what they've got planned for us in years to come, like you know. In a few years' time, if we are all supposed to be on the up now, the few quid is coming in, what have they planned for us, like if we get another recession"

DESIRE TO BE BETTER INFORMED ON EU RELATED MATTERS

Overall, respondents did express the wish to be better informed on matters related to the EU. However, when this is examined further in fact respondents' true area of interest is in EU matters which directly affect them. Issues which solely affect other Member States are of little to no interest to them.

"You only really tend to pay attention to the things that will affect us on a national level. I think that tends to get coverage in our national press you know"

Specific areas which they would like to know more about include:

- EU Structures and the differences between the various EU Institutions
- How financial budgets are divided up between countries
- What EU citizens are entitled to vote for
- And details on what grants / funding is available to them

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

Despite various contact points being referenced for the EU an overarching belief exists that it would be difficult to express oneself and to have one's voice heard by the European Union.

➤ **Spontaneously mentioned methods of contacting the European Union in order to have their voices heard include:**

- Contacting local TDs, MEP's
- Emailing the European Union's website.
- Visiting the EU Commission office, at Molesworth Street in Dublin
- Trying to contact Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, the current European Commissioner for Research Innovation and Science, directly.

However, there is a strong belief that should you try and use these contact points to contact the European Union you will not receive a reply, or any response is likely to be delayed, unless close to the timing of an election. This view is mainly influenced by previous experiences with local County Councilors and their lack of, or slow, response to queries.

"If you email your TD here, if there is a topical issue you will get like an automated response type of thing that goes out to everyone. So it'll just be the same you know"

"... Wait until election time and then they'll try to help you."

➤ There is however expectation that being a member of a lobby group would enable you to get your voice heard more readily.

"You're never going to get your voice heard on a sole level, you need to be involved in, or be part of, a lobby group"

➤ In order to get your request heard there is also a belief that all other avenues would need to be exhausted within your own country before the EU will take you seriously.

"I think you would have to be seen to exhaust all the avenues of resource in this country before you start..."

In reference to reasons why many believe it would be difficult to contact the EU and to have their voices heard, some believe the EU did not want to be viewed so much as a 'Big Brother' type figure, but more an adviser to member countries and therefore wants countries to sort out their own issues internally before they will step in.

"They probably have to be very conscious they don't seem to be 'Big Brother', that is what people's image of them is. I mean you are Irish, you know, sort your problems out first, if you can't than come to us. But we set the rules so if you aren't playing by the rules come back to us"

Additionally, there is a general belief that the European Union is only interested in dealing with 'bigger picture' issues, such as equal pay for women, the right to die etc.

A number of other specific issues that might prompt a desire to contact the European Union were also mentioned:

- People who had no debt previously now paying back the country's deficit.
- People with a disability losing their medical cards.

However, there is also a belief that it takes too long for EU legislation to be implemented. Examples given were:

- Poolbeg Incinerator
- 48 hour working directive.

Nevertheless, it is appreciated that this is more to do with National Government than the EU.

“Everything that is implemented is always 10 years behind. They wait right up to the cutoff point and then they start. Unfortunately that trickles back down to us when there is a cost, because we were so long implementing EU policy.”

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

Respondents' suggestions for new ways in which to get their voices heard include a number of suggestions; these mainly include the main communication channels previously mentioned including email, visiting the EU office, contacting local MEPs.

Respondents did however have a number of suggestions on how the public's knowledge of the EU could be improved. These include:

- **Improved communication with local MEPs.** Many cite the need for improved information on the issues being discussed and legislation being implemented by the European Union. It is felt that local MEPs could do more to keep the public informed, either through public meetings/roadshows or by placing articles in national newspapers. During these public meetings/roadshows the public would also get the opportunity to put their issue/query to MEPs.

- **Promotion of the EU in schools.** Although it is acknowledged that the structures and responsibilities of the EU is taught in schools it is believed that more could be done in this area to make the youth feel more connected to the EU and feel more European.

“They will be more European than we will.”

- **Detailed information regarding the EU's rationale behind new legislation.** There is some feeling that more could be done by the EU to help explain their reasoning for introducing certain legislation, such as the EU's conservation law on turf cutting.

“We see these you can't cut your turf and that is coming from the EU, what is the reasoning and reckoning behind that, why are they doing that”

- **Detailed information on the EU's website.** Easily digestible information on what is being discussed, or considered, by the EU on the EU website.

“Have some link on the website that says what happened this week; you can click on it yourself if you really want.”

- **Telephone Helpline.** A telephone helpline which the public can call when looking for help, or advice, on EU related matters. There is a preference for talking to a person rather than having call answered by an answering machine.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

During the group respondents were presented with eight propositions which detail ideas on how EU citizens could have their voice heard by the EU. Some of these propositions relate only to better information for citizens, whereas others go further aiming to encourage more involvement in the EU by citizens.

Some of these propositions already exist, however it is clear that none of the respondents in the Irish discussion group are aware of the existence of any of these communication channels.

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

(RANKED 5th)

- This proposition already exists in the form of the Europe Direct Service. However, there is **little enthusiasm for the proposition** and it is ranked fifth in terms of preference.

The rationale for this proposition failing to resonate with respondents was due to it being considered similar to the service currently being offered by the Citizens Information Centre. Therefore, it is suggested that the training up of Citizens Advice staff on EU matters and directing queries towards them, rather than establishing another office, would be more cost effective.

“The people who are already working in citizens advice offices, train them up on it ... expand someone within the Government or some civil service role already”.

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

(RANKED 6th)

- Debates of this kind have been conducted by various TV channels, however in a slightly different form. **Amongst the Irish respondents there is little interest in attending debates** and as a result this proposition was ranked sixth in terms of preference. Nevertheless, some state that they would be interested in watching/listening to debates if on TV or radio.

It is thought that the issues being debated would need to be topical and discuss how the issues would affect Irish citizens on a day-to-day basis. The debate would also avail of an opportunity for the EU to put across their reasoning for new legislation which is not being well received, such as the European Habitats Directive which prohibits turf cutting.

There is also the suggestion that the Chairperson of the debate would need to explain the issues in a simple and easily digestible manner as viewers/listeners may get confused.

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

(RANKED 8th)

- This proposition currently exists in the form of the Euro barometer survey. However, it is **the least favourable of all the propositions** and is ranked eighth.

Political opinion polls are a regular feature in Sunday newspapers, however as results tend to be up and down on a weekly basis respondents appear to have little belief in them and therefore do not feel that there would be much interest in taking part in, or reading about, polls which relate to the EU.

“You see them in the Sunday papers and all, Labour are up and Labour are down. They are up this week and down the next week”.

We have found from previous research however that this is a natural reaction to opinion polls of this kind as the information contained in particular opinion polls is more beneficial at a corporate/organisational level than to ordinary people, who find that in some cases too much effort is required to understand the results.

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

(RANKED 1st)

- This was the **most favourable proposition** and generated a high level of interest from respondents.

Their reasoning for this high ranking is due to a general perception that by meeting with people face to face, MEPs and other EU politicians would be more accountable to the citizens who they represent.

Meeting with MEPs and EU politicians would also present citizens with an opportunity to discuss their issues and queries with the EU representative directly. It is also thought that as the meetings would happen several times a year representatives would be more likely to respond rapidly to queries as they would have to meet with them again.

“It makes them accountable to people and there will be a certain amount of people who will want to go.”

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

(RANKED 4th)

- This is the **fourth favourable of the propositions**. There is some feeling that by conducting the consultation online older people, or people who are not computer literate, will be excluded.

“You’re excluding a huge proportion of society who aren’t on the Internet”

There is also a perception that responses to queries would be ‘PR’ type answers and written by government employees, rather than “EU members”.

Some also felt that it would be more difficult to believe that the responses given to queries are genuine as there is no face-to-face contact.

“Someone talking to you is more genuine, it’s more effective I think”.

There is some feeling that politics students and people who prefer using email to communicate would find the online discussion enjoyable and interesting.

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

(RANKED 7th)

- This proposition received **little positive feedback** and is ranked seventh out of the eight propositions.

There is a clear preference for the consultations to be run by the European Commission over National Government, due to a lack of trust in the National Government. It is felt however that in the case of wanting to understand new legislation or a referendum, the information would be better coming from an independent body, such as the Referendum Commission, or from a European based Citizens Advice Bureau, as these would be viewed to be more objective.

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

(RANKED 3rd)

- This was **the third favourite proposition**. It is felt that social media would provide a sounding board and generate debate.

As this method allows for everyone to view other comments it is also seen to provide an opportunity to educate everyone rather than queries being answered on a one-to-one basis.

It is also felt that this method of communicating would attract more young people to be interested in the EU, although it was acknowledged that online communication can exclude older people.

There is a suggestion for the service to be offered through a discussion board as this would enable anonymity to those making comments.

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

(RANKED 2nd)

- This is **the second most preferable proposition**. Respondents are in unanimous agreement that there is traditionally a low turnout for European Elections. Therefore, they are highly favorable towards any attempt to increase public interest and improve voting rates.

It is also felt that more information on how EU matters directly affect Irish citizens needs to be made available.

There is some suggestion for this proposition to be tied in along with the meetings with EU members proposition (D).

“Yes, you definitely need more on that, because I mean the turnout for those European Elections all over Europe, not just here, is tiny you know”.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTEM

QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

DISCUSSION GUIDE

(INTRODUCTION: Ask each participant to introduce him(her)self with a few words, by saying who he(she) is and what he(she) does, etc.)

THEME 1

We are here together today to talk about the European Union.
Could you please tell me what first comes to your mind about the EU ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Nature of topics spontaneously mentioned about the EU
 - Positive and negative aspects related to the EU
 - Degree of initial interest and involvement of the respondents in EU related issues

THEME 2

Now, regarding what you know and what you think about the EU: where does that come from ?

From what sources do you get information or do you hear opinions about the EU - taking the word "sources" in the widest sense, ranging from official information sources to informal conversations with friends or other people... ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Degree of diversity of the sources mentioned
 - Nature of (information) inputs from each one
 - Interest / credibility of each one

THEME 3

Let us now discuss more specifically the future of the European Union and questions you may ask yourselves in that respect.

There are probably certain aspects which you regard as important and you would like to know and understand better as regards the way the EU works and the directions it takes - as you may not get all the information you would like to get from the sources you have mentioned earlier.

What aspects would you particularly wish to know more about ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - General impressions of having a good or a poor degree of knowledge / understanding of these issues
 - Perception of major challenges for the EU in the coming years
 - Expressions by respondents of a need for better knowledge and understanding - on what subjects more particularly ? In what is the information currently available on these subjects not satisfactory ?

THEME 4

As a citizen, you should be able to give your opinion and to have your voice heard as regards future directions of the European Union - whether to approve or to disapprove such or such a direction, or for any other reason..

How can you do that today ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Perceived ease / difficulty to express oneself and to have one's voice heard on EU related issues - by what means ?
 - Perceived reasons why it is difficult
 - Specific subjects on which respondents would particularly wish to give their opinion and to be listened to as citizens; expectations in that respect.

THEME 5

One may think of various means by which European citizens like us could have their voice heard.

Let me propose to try and think of any possible means, just letting our imagination run, without giving up an idea even if we do not know for the moment how it could be implemented in practice.

What could we imagine ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Stimulate the group's' creativity by encouraging respondents to "jump" from one idea to another

THEME 6

I am now going to submit to you various ideas that have been put forward, of means that could be put in place to allow citizens to have their voice better heard on EU related issues. I will ask you what you think of each one.

- Make the respondents react to each proposition in turn, asking them about their degree of interest for each one and reasons thereof

A- An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

B- Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

C- Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

E- Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

F- Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

Thank you again for coming to participate in this discussion.

If other ideas cross your mind following the discussion, do not hesitate to let us know (Communicate a relevant email address which the respondents can use for that purpose)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN ITALY**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Milan on 16 December 2013 on the subject of Citizens' involvement in the European Union.

It is the Italian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.

In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Italy by Periscope.

This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.

The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:

- Women: 3
- Men: 4

- 20-34 years: 2
- 35-49 years: 3
- 50-60 years: 2

- Lower-middle social class: 3 (professions of head of household: office employees, manual workers)
- Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: mid-management, high-level executives, liberal professions small business owners)
- The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

❖ **The spontaneous evocations about the European Union reveal the bad mood of anxiety, pessimism and concerns about Italy.** The EU itself is perceived as one of the most relevant **causes** of the economic and financial troubles affecting Italy; the media feed in this sense this attitude of distrust and distress towards Europe. Referring to the European Union the main feeling of Italians is rancorous, cynical, discouraged and recriminatory; Italian people ask themselves why did Europe destroyed Italy to such an extent, whereas Italians never ask themselves what could they do for Europe.

At the same time, but just marginally and only by a younger target, a sine-qua-non vision of the European Union emerges as an opportunity for mental and cultural opening.

➤ When thinking to the European Union the **main spontaneous associations** are of criticism

- **Economic Crisis caused by the European Union:** besides the unresolved Italian economic situation of the past, the following factors caused by the EU's choices contributed to dramatic aggravation of the social inequalities and of the economic situation in Italy

- **Unfavourable Lira/€uro exchange:** supporting this theory a comparison with Germany is brought forward whereby the 1:1 exchange rate was extremely favourable in respect to Italy, which had suffered a 1:2.

“Before the European Union Germany was not so strong. Germany became strong due to bad EU choices. Some countries, such as Germany were given more power than others”

“Euro thwarted the countries with the weakest exchange. The Union helps at making up the debt, but this means an increase in taxation”

- **Excessive Taxation:** for the individuals and also – as stated by the entrepreneur target – mostly for the enterprises which in respect to the pre-euro situation suffer the impossibility to make investments, to invest on the future, to hire young people

“Euro and taxes: everything Italy does is controlled by a superior governing entity”

- **Economic difference among Associated Countries:** everybody can see the macroscopic difference in welfare, especially Germany vs. Greece and Italy.

“They did not get a good solution by putting these countries all together, they only emphasized pre-existent differences, there are two-speed Europes, Germany runs at a doped speed and other countries such as Italy go slowly”

- **Favouritism of the Bank system** beyond any reasonable ethics: the choice to rescue banks doomed to failure owing to a bad management implied an affection on citizens, generating poverty.

- **Economic benefits for some countries,** which took advantage for the entry in the European Union to the detriment of others: some less important countries compared to Italy are now superior or equipollent to it.

“Money: they state the subsidies, they lay down the law”.

The economic crisis became pressing and unbearable, for this reason the perception of the European Union with regard to the economic situation worsened over time and Italians feel a sentiment of injustice because Italy is forced to pay twice: both the debt of the entry in the Euro system and the one of the current economic crisis. The role of the European Parliament is not clear, the Union did not pay attention to the citizens' real problems. Italians ask themselves if the rules had been well-tuned on different countries or if there is a precise plan to keep this unfair economic gap among member countries.

- **Community as aggregation of cultures and peoples too different between one another:** the inspiring concept of Europe is losing the meaning over time. As a matter of fact distances between countries are getting bigger from the cultural point of view as well as the membership aims.
 - **There lacks a European identity:** Italian citizens feel little European, little close to the other European citizens and little involved in the European events. The European problems are not known at all or perceived as distant. Negative effects on Italy are the only perceivable experience of belonging to Europe.
 - **There lacks the exploitation of the different national cultures within the European Community:** Italians feel swallowed up with no national identity, represented without any strength, members in Europe with no identification. Europe is a big container of different entities.

“I don't see any will to personalize the various countries, we, Italians, are artists and this quality is not enhanced; we have a culture envied by the whole world. I go to France and see Italian pieces of art at best, whereas here in Italy all falls down to pieces. I don't identify myself with Europe at all.”
 - **The European law creates disparities** and does not fit with all European citizens, for their historical, cultural and motivational differences; the European law paradoxically enhances gaps among peoples and countries.
 - Frequent quotes of the Greek default opposite to the German success,
 - Frequent quotes of economic gaps between Northern and Southern countries.

Compared to the enthusiasms of the past, the current perception of Europe is definitely worse for the emotional detachment and for the lack of meaning. Initiatives and campaigns for the “construction of the Europeans” are missing.

“The European Union was a beautiful project carried out in an awful way”.

- Regarding the European Union there also emerge – from the younger target – **positive thoughts and associations**

- **Nobility and ethics of the Union concept**
 - Equality among individuals as far as respect of rules is concerned
 - Safeguarding of citizens' rights
 - Community of political and economic aims
 - Mutual subsistence
 - Stimulus for disadvantaged countries to grow, thanks to the entry in the EU

- **Practical utility** of the Community

- Strengthening of **diplomatic relations** with other hyper-Powers.

“EU was created after the second world war with the goal of keeping the peace among countries, it has a community of political and economic aims”

- **More bargaining power**, possibility to close high-level businesses at favourable conditions for the member countries
- **Keeping the peace**, absence of internal wars.

“The EU’s primary function is proved by the fact that we have no longer had wars, without the European Community something would probably have taken place”

- **European projects to favour the integration** among people and to allow young people to open their mental and cultural boundaries, for instance and most of all the ERASMUS project
- **Advantage in one currency**: possibility of aided commercial exchanges among member countries, advantages in travels, immediate comprehension of the purchase prices in all the countries of the Euro zone.

Despite the thought that the practical utility of the European Union is the privilege of a few, namely the big economic Powers or few lucky citizens, Italians have the idea that something positive had been to involve the citizens in the sense of belonging to the European Union.

At the moment the prevailing image of the European Union for the Italian citizens is negative and little reassuring. There lacks the trust in Europe not only or not much in the capacity of the Union to find the solution to future problems, but mostly because Europe itself looks to be the main cause of the current economic trouble.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ Media are the most relevant source of information on the events regarding the EU; there is no awareness about an Institutional Authority for communication on European matters. Italian citizens are passive about the subject: they do not actively look for information. The European matters are not fully covered by media. Media give great relevance to the bad economic situation, which contributes to the negative perception of Europe. Because of little coverage of Europe in the media, it is therefore not possible to get a clear opinion of it.

➤ Official Media

- **TV**

- Television news
- TV talks
- Reportage

- **Press, online and offline**

- More official: Ansa.it
- More oriented:
 - Politically: Repubblica.it (left) ilGiornale.it (right) Corriere.it (centre-left)
 - Economically: Isole24ore.com (paper of Confindustria)

- **Radio**

- Rai Radio 1 “Radio Anch’io”

The user of these sources is of a passive kind, he just listens to the incoming news. The media output, though interesting, is considered as non-objective, filtered by politic influences, therefore not very credible, sometimes little clear and understandable.

➤ School and University, specialized documents

- International Law and Institutional Essays
- Guide to the Law
- Institutional Essays
- Code for the workers’ net
- Italian Consultancy

Italian citizens using these sources are at **professional or academic** level, they are people well informed and sensitive to the European events, participative, proactive towards Europe and capable to express positive opinions and thoughts in countertendency.

➤ **Web sites**

- europa.eu
- curia.europa.eu

The institutional sites of the European Community are consulted by the most participative and evolved citizens; they provide practical information and look structured for a merely functional consultation.

On the contrary, it lacks or does not easily handle that part of economic consultation that may result in a practical benefit for oneself or one's business.

“I was interested by the existing public consultations, it is not difficult to access the info, but it is difficult to translate them into one's own economic reality; we find ourselves forced to suffer the decisions taken”

➤ **Authoritative roles**

- Professional accountant (entrepreneur target)

➤ **Non-official sources**

- **Internet**, especially for specific questions
 - Free Encyclopaedias (Wikipedia)
 - Search engines (Google) Specific sites and specific searches
 - Specific sites (Europa.eu, Euronews.it)
 - Social Network (Facebook)

Any subject regarding the European Community is searched by using typical search engines and comparing more online sources; the access to contents of various kind does not eliminate the problem of credibility of the information. An authoritative and reliable source of reference for the up-to-date news is missing.

➤ Courses for obtaining European subsidies (Verona)

➤ Foreign Press (El País, Le Monde, the Guardian, Bild) which is considered more reliable than the Italian one, little censored and more critical.

“The foreign press talks a lot about the European Union matters, on the contrary the Italian papers do not deal with them at all”.

The echoes of the European Union's activities do not result in a coordinate, continuative, clear and trustworthy information. Even if openly interested, Italians feel badly covered and not sufficiently aware of the European events. All media bring forth confused, marginal, politically oriented and therefore little credible or impartial piece of news.

At the same time, there emerges the problem that the facts are explained just at a **macro-European level** and not in their implications at the **micro-Italian** level. To translate the effects of the information, interpreting them on the Italian reality is not easy and in this sense, the information bodies are shrinking.

“It is complicated also for the insiders, I tried to understand how do the European subsidies work, on the television they all fill their mouth by talking about European Union, but things are quite unclear”.

The Italian hope for a better attention by media on the European matters, that is they expect to be informed proactively and easily. In practice, it should not be the citizen hunting for information, but the Europe bodies who do their best to inform clearly and exhaustively, with reflexions also on large national media.

“It should not be up to me to go and inquire, but they themselves should send me the information based on my business sector”.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTION REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ As a confirmation of the poor knowledge of the subject and of the roles, the Italian citizens show an only limited understanding of the themes specifically concerning the European Union. In any case the main themes on which they would like to have more information by the EU are the following

➤ **Economic situation and opportunities for financing**

- Business financing
- Economic trends, by and large and for Italy in the common market specifically
- Expense control at European level
- Opportunity to continue with Euro as a single currency
- Understanding if it is worth to be in Europe and reasons supporting this.

The economic situation and the financing of enterprises are the subjects that most worry Italian citizens. The simple observation that the economic situation before the common market was more prosperous and that the future development forecasts are for a further and constant worsening leads the Italians to cling to any possible small opening.

“We are blocked by the fiscal drain, the firms close down because we have a fiscal drain of 60%, I would like to understand how EU could help us”

“From the political talks I hear that the entry in Europe gave us only disadvantages, I would like to understand what on the contrary represented an advantage to us and in which sense we would do better than 20 years ago”

“I would like to hear somebody proving that the aim of this project had not been that of upsetting the economic balances, as it eventually happened”

➤ **Rights of the European Citizens**

- Knowledge of the rights
- Resolution of bureaucratic problems
- Protection in case of denial of one's rights

As a community regulated by rights and duties, Italian citizens entrust in a natural way the European Union with an over-national power and in this sense they ask themselves how the European Union might help them defending and applying their rights.

“I would like to have information on our rights in the European Community, I don't know my rights as an Italian, let's imagine what could they be as an European”

“I would like to have indications and guidelines on how to grow up as a people, how to take out our Italian blames”

“I would like to know better what they offer I illustrate what I sell to people coming into my store”

- **Management and assignments in the European Institutions**
 - Need to clarify the functioning of the “Europe machine”
 - Election modalities (whom, when, criteria used)
 - Job description and responsibility of elected people at personal level
- **Management and control of immigration**
 - Barriers at entry
 - Control and security
 - Identification of the role responsibility and consequent penalties
 - Knowledge of the involvement in the problem of all Member States.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ **Regarding the possibility to express one's own opinion as citizens about future decisions and projects that the Union is going to implement, the Italian citizens feel astonished and completely unprepared.** Considering that **one's own voice is not taken into consideration at a level of national politics** by a government system which is deaf to the needs of the middle-low classes, **even more so** it looks **paradoxical** to make one's voice heard at European level. Since the Italian members of the European Parliament do not include high level statesmen, on the contrary the European Parliament looks like the parking lot for the less prepared or less clever politicians, it looks evident that the representatives of Italians in Europe do not look capable to safeguard their people, claim the space that the country deserves, and let themselves be overcome by other newly-entered States. In the light of this structural weakness, one cannot understand why and how a normal individual-citizen should be taken into consideration.
- ❖ From an operative standpoint **one would not even know where to start from**, which rights could be claimed, what one could talk about, up to which point one could make his efforts, what type of medium one could use, where to find the information upon which to build one's application, and so on. In practice, one knows nothing: how, where, what, why, when, who, to whom, with which rights and duties.
- ❖ Then the group questions the possibility that one's own opinions be actually taken in consideration and discussed. If as it looks Europe does not communicate with Italians and represents a reason for the worsening of the Italian economic crisis, one cannot understand why the executioner should show attention or be interested to the needs of the victim.
- ❖ To the sum of the over mentioned factors one should add **a good measure of Italian laziness** basically conveyed by a general lack of interest for all matters which are not directly about one's own backyard and by the sound cynicism of those who do not want to lose their time in hopeless matters. To defend the Italian rights in Europe and to make them aware of the action carried out, eventually asking for a citizens' plenary interpellation, should be a task of the purposely-elected politicians. Italian citizens acknowledge their fault, they realize they neither commit themselves to collect information nor to take part to the decision process and in the light of this passivity they recognize that other countries – possibly stimulated and motivated in a different way – are less superficial and therefore able to obtain more favourable decisions.
- ❖ At the same time it should be reported – by the most evolved targets – **a marginal awareness regarding**.
 - **The systems of public consultations**, by which it is possible to send through the web any type of suggestion (student respondent).
 - **Possibility of exchanging information with the EU through the offices of companies** (respondent working for multinational companies).
- ❖ **The subjects on which citizens would like to express their opinions are of economic, political and social nature.**
 - **Immigration.**
 - Emergence
 - Management

- Possible exploitation of the immigration

➤ **Management of the Social Security and Retirement Pension System**

- Possibility that the insurance policies be managed by the EU: people are getting older and the Italian Retirement System is seriously compromised. The respondents are sensitive to the issue and would like to be questioned for future measures

- ❖ When directly questioned about the possibility to be taken into consideration by the EU on future decisions, the Italian citizens state their availability to be responsive provided they be given **a practical, simple, accessible and secure means to express their opinion.**

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTION OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- ❖ The means for learning about the information and for expressing opinions, concerns and doubts about the EU decisions are
 - **Website dedicated to the reception of opinions and news from the Italian citizens**
 - Efficient channel: continuous exchange
 - Easily usable: accessible, intuitive, easy, friendly
 - Not only giving a feedback on the citizens' messages, but also providing their collection, organisation and forwarding to the European Parliament
 - **Public Offices: Counters at the Communes' or Provinces' Offices**
 - Consultants prepared to hear not only the opinions, but also the problems and to inform in case of information gaps.
 - Personalization of the relationship in a structure offering more security and credibility about the problem's comprehension, as well as confidence, in particular for the most mature and less Internet-oriented target which feels the need to communicate with the "European Offices"
 - **Meet EU politicians**
 - Possibility to meet the EU politicians and not their delegates, that is somebody who have a say and an effective power to change things
 - "I would like to have some Merkel or the alike come and get in contact with the people and their problems"*
- ❖ In front of the enthusiasm generated by the possibility for the citizen to express his opinion with the assurance to be listened, there emerge the disenchantment on the fact that as it happens in Italy other more influent and convincing powers such as the lobbies may actually block developments of popular interest.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A. **An information service on the functioning of Europe and of the European policies, including an information office open to the public, located in the most important towns, a web site and a service of quick answering to any question arriving over the phone or online.**

- It is regarded as **a good starting point**, a good way to start and get information with various possibilities of consultation, well-articulated in the possibility of web and face-to-face contacts and in harmony with what had been formulated at an imaginative level.
- Given the merits of the initiative, the service should be created from scratch, with the risk of crashing against the typical Italian inefficiencies.

“The problem is: who would make it go? The idea is good, but it would clash with the Italian problems, at the counters there would be inefficient people, as in all public offices”

“A cry in the desert, it serves no purpose”

B. **Debates organized in the most important media between citizens and experts on European issues and directives.**

- The word **debate** sets off **imageries of inefficiencies and approximations**, leading to a no-facts situation, namely only words
- Certainly the discussion is necessary because it allows the construction of a critical and knowledgeable idea, thanks to different contributions, but:
 - It is to be accompanied by practical services, thus it does not leave by itself
 - It is to be finely adjusted from all viewpoints: subject, location, presenter, relevant roles, debate communication, people admitted to it
 - It is to be prepared in its contents because it presupposes a cultured public

“The problem is that most Italians would not know what they are talking about, they should first be exposed to the basics”

C. **Opinions and thoughts on the European elections, regularly organized in all of Europe, which would allow the citizens to become aware of what Italians and other countries' citizens think about the matter.**

- **The idea immediately sounds as abstract, tortuous**: exactly because Italians think of drawing from the European Union and not of giving to it, they do not understand in which way the citizens of another country could possibly favour the Italians, on the contrary they think it would create some kind of hindrance. The Italian citizens are not interested in knowing what the other European citizens may think, they feel stranger about facts regarding the other countries; therefore, no confrontation would interest them. The other European citizens look more protected, hence less needy.

- The idea does not bring evident benefits, on the contrary it sounds as a loss of time and energies

“Why we as Italian citizens should be interested in what the other European citizens think, and why should we take an interest in the problems of the others, we are not even interested in our Italian neighbour, let’s imagine people from other countries”

D. The possibility to meet, several times in a year, the Italian European Parliament Members or other politicians of the European Union or of the neighbour countries.

- At spontaneous level the prefigured idea proves to be **quite positive** for:
 - The possibility to rise one’s voice and to present one’s ideas to the most qualified and relevant European Parliament Members
 - A scheduled program allowing the citizen to build an idea and elaborate it in the course of the time

“They could do the week of meeting with the Parliament Member, question time style”

- The involvement of neighbour countries which share similar situations from a cultural or geopolitical standpoint
- The proposition needs a wide media support, especially regarding the outcome of the citizens’ consultations, as a litmus paper of the efficacy of the tool and as a flywheel of attention for others citizens.

“There should be a TV talk, to give authoritativeness. Doing it behind closed doors would be nonsense”

E. Consultation on Internet organized by the European Commission and open to all citizens every time the European Commission takes important decisions.

- **A positive idea to communicate with the European Union** (for some respondents it already exists) to be further promoted:
 - Necessary to increase the service’s awareness and potential
 - Opportunity of promotion on other media, with no delays such as technical times for translations

“It already exists, though for particular situations and limited to some sectors. They should make more advertising”

“The official language is French, then the communications are being translated into English, to have the directives in other languages one has to wait for a very long time”

F. Similar consultations organized by our National Government.

- The idea is perceived **in a negative way** due to the strong existing mistrust towards the national politics, therefore an organization coordinated by the European Union looks more solid, credible, feasible and genuine.

“In this way I would not have a direct access to the European Union, but I would be filtered by our Government”

G. An online interactive service through the main social networks, allowing a constant collection of the viewpoints, wishes and criticisms of the European citizens.

- **The interactivity is much appreciated**, because it is a direct and fast tool allowing an immediate access to the information and, with no censure in one’s feedback, it would allow to make petitions and collections of digital signatures, granting an official character to one’s own opinion.

“Internet cannot be controlled or filtered by anyone, therefore it can be considered as definitely positive to give voice to one’s own convictions without being controlled”

- The service needs to be recorded, organized and analysed, in a way that the intervention of the citizens turn into concrete actions, to be followed-up in terms of communication.

H. Development of information campaigns in a more active ways in respect to previous years, aimed at encouraging citizens to be involved in debates and to take part to the elections of the European Parliament Members in the next spring.

- The information campaigns prove to be of **basic importance**, to the extent of representing a sine-qua-non in building the European identity. Only through an action of sensitization, it is possible to budge the consciences of the Italian citizens and involve them actively in the sentiment of belonging and in the journey to the achievement of responsibility towards Europe.
- The sensitization process goes through the acknowledgement of the responsibilities and advantages in being European and the feeling of staying in a community

“It is fundamental to come closer to the citizens and to create the European conscience”

- ❖ Among the concepts under consideration H and D in combination are those which better develop the wish to feel actively involved at European level

- **Concept H** first, because it offers the possibility to be informed on the basic news as well as on the more complex ones, and because it allows to involve the citizens in a concrete way.
- **Concept D** because it fulfils the need for confrontation, allowing citizens to directly meet those who will eventually take the decisions, giving rise to a constructive dialogue, with direct questions and concrete answers.

- ❖ Other ideas worth of consideration are also

- **Concept A** because it allows to have reactions on a daily basis, thanks to the web site and to its practicality and flexibility

➤ **Concept B** for the fact that the debates allow the citizen to form one's own personal idea.

Europe as an Institution must directly meet the citizens, explaining them with clarity rights, duties, and norms and functioning of the "Europe machine". Actually, the citizen in the need of information finds himself in front of a wall made up by the incapacity for the research, language problems and bad organization of the information material. The possibility of actively intervening by raising one's own voice is simply unimaginable.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTEM

**QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

GUIDA DI DISCUSSIONE

Spiegare che è una ricerca esplorativa, cerchiamo di costruire idee.

Ciascuno si presenta: nome, età, professione.

Argomento 1.

Siamo qui per parlare dell'Unione Europea.

Potete gentilmente dirmi quale è la prima cosa che vi viene in mente quando pensate all'Unione Europea ?

- Reazioni spontanee

- Indagare su:

- la natura e la tipologia delle risposte spontanee riguardo alla UE
- aspetti positive e negative relativamente alla EU
- grado di interesse iniziale e coinvolgimento dei rispondenti relativamente all'argomento.

(10 MINUTI)

Argomento 2.

Ora relativamente a cosa sapete e a cosa pensate sull'UE: da dove nascono queste conoscenze/convinzioni?

Da quali fonti ottenete informazioni o venite a conoscenza di opinioni e pareri sull'UE e sugli eventi inerenti alla UE – considerando 'fonti' nel senso ampio del termine, quali sono quelle ufficiali e quelli non ufficiali (es. conversazioni con amici o altre persone) a cui fate riferimento?

- Reazioni spontanee

- Esplorare:

- Grado di diversità delle fonti menzionate
- La natura dell'informazione e la provenienza
- Interesse e credibilità di ciascuna.

(10 MINUTI)

Argomento 3.

Parliamo adesso più specificatamente sul futuro dell'EU e sulle domande che vi ponete in relazione a tema.

Ci sono certamente degli aspetti che ritenete importanti in relazione ai quali voi vorreste avere maggiori informazioni e comprendere in maniera più adeguata, aspetti che riguardano il funzionamento dell'EU – facendo riferimento alle fonti citate precedentemente.

Su quali aspetti vorresti avere maggiori informazioni e conoscenze?

- Reazioni spontanee

- Indagare:

- Impressioni generali sul livello/grado di conoscenza/comprendimento di questi temi.
- Percezione sulle principali sfide e problematiche che affronterà l'EU nei prossimi anni.
- Espressioni dei partecipanti sul bisogno di avere maggiori conoscenze – su quali temi in particolare? Attualmente in cosa le informazioni disponibili (su argomento di interesse) non sono soddisfacenti?

(15 MINUTI)

Argomento 4.

In quanto cittadini dell'EU, voi dovrete esprimere la vostra opinione e far sentire il vostro parere in relazione alle future decisioni dell'EU – sia che riguardi approvazioni o disapprovazioni su determinate decisioni o progetti che l'EU intende intraprendere

Come potete fare questo oggi?

- Reazioni spontanee

-Indagare:

- Percezione sulla facilità/difficoltà sulla possibilità di esprimersi e di far sentire la propria opinione relativamente ai problema e questioni sull'EU – cosa si intende ?
- Percezione sul perché sia difficile
- Specifiche materie e questioni sui quali i partecipanti hanno particolare interesse nell'esprimere le loro opinion ed interesse ad essere ascoltati.

(15 MINUTI)

Argomento 5.

Parliamo ora dei vari modi attraverso i quali un cittadino Europeo potrebbe esprimere la propria opinione e far sentire la sua voce. A Provate ad immaginare a come potrebbe essere possibile, usate la vostra immaginazione senza scartare nessuna idea anche se sembra improbabile e non avete idea di come potrebbe essere realizzata.

A cosa pensate, cosa vi viene in mente?

- Reazioni spontanee
- Stimolare la creatività del gruppo incoraggiando i respondent a saltare da un'idea ad un'altra e ad usare la loro immaginazione.

(15 MINUTI)

Argomento 6.

Adesso sottoporro alla vostra attenzione alcune idee e modi su come voi cittadini europei potreste esprimere le vostre opinioni in relazione ad questioni relative l'EU.

Vi chiederò di raccontarmi cosa ne pensate di ciascuna idea.

- Lasciare che ciascun intervistato esprima la propria opinione a turno, chiedendo il grado di interesse su ognuna delle seguenti affermazioni.
- ❖ Un servizio informazioni sul funzionamento dell'Europa e delle politiche europee, includendo un ufficio informazioni aperto al pubblico situato nelle principali città, un sito web, ed un servizio di risposta rapida a qualunque domanda sia telefonica che on-line.
- ❖ Dibattiti organizzati nei principali media tra i cittadini ed esperti su questioni e direttive europee.
- ❖ Opinioni e pareri sulle elezioni europee organizzate regolarmente in tutta Europa, che permetta ai cittadini di sapere cosa ne pensano i loro concittadini e i cittadini degli altri paesi europei.
- ❖ La possibilità di incontrare, più volte all'anno, i Membri del Parlamento europeo italiani o altri politici EU o dei paesi vicini all'Italia.
- ❖ Consultazioni in internet organizzate dalla Commissione Europea e aperte a tutti i cittadini ogni volta che la commissione europea prende delle decisioni importanti.
- ❖ Consultazioni simili organizzate dal nostro governo nazionale.
- ❖ Un servizio interattivo online e attraverso i principali social networks che consente di raccogliere in modo costante il punto di vista, i desideri e le criticità da parte dei cittadini europei.
- ❖ Sviluppo di campagne informative in modo più attivo rispetto agli anni passati, finalizzate a incoraggiare i cittadini ad essere coinvolti in dibattiti e a prendere parte alle future elezioni dei Membri del Parlamento Europeo la prossima primavera.

(25 MINUTI)

Grazie ancora per aver partecipato alla discussione.

Nel caso dovrete avere ulteriori idee o opinion al riguardo non esitate a contattarci.

(lasciare un indirizzo email ai partecipanti al quale possono inviare eventuali idee ed opinioni).



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN LATVIA**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of group discussions held in Riga on 3rd January 2014 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Latvian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Latvia by Latvian Facts.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the sample of respondents was as follows (two group discussions were organized in Riga at the initiative of Latvian Facts):
 - Women: 8
 - Men: 8

 - 20-34 years: 6
 - 35-49 years: 6
 - 50-60 years: 4

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: warehouse worker; mechanical tool service worker; clerk in bank; secretary/clerk in university; machinist; IT administrator; office clerk; civil servant)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: entrepreneur; owner of a farm; head of store in shopping-mall; biologist; attorney/counsellor; scientist-chemist; craftswoman; real-estate specialist)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1: INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

During the discussions, there was **a consensus that the participation of Latvia in the European Union in general should be evaluated positively**. There are more benefits for Latvia than the possible losses. The participation of Latvia in the EU is needed since there is no any other better way for the country's development.

At the same time, the emotional attitude towards the EU was rather reserved – the European Union is not too friendly, it is rather estranged, every country fights for its own interests there.

Spontaneous associations with the EU were rather poor, formal (euro, flag of the EU, Brussels, and Latvian deputies at the EP), and few positive associations.

“EU – something distant and incomprehensible, to what I also belong.”

The **positive aspects** regarding the participation of Latvia in the EU:

- **EU funding for development of Latvian infrastructures, allocation and absorption of the EU funds.** During the discussions the dominating opinion was that participation in the EU is financially advantageous to Latvia. Latvia receives financially more than it gives. The allocation of the EU funds was assessed as the main benefit for Latvia from participation in the EU. Different EU funded projects are around us in our daily life – roads, sports/ culture houses in the countryside, support projects for businesses, subsidies in agriculture, etc.

“Although we are rather sceptical regarding different EU-related issues, one thing is indisputable – Latvia has received large financial resources from the EU.”

“They (West European citizens) pay more into the total EU treasury than we do.”

Of course, there are many drawbacks in the allocation of EU funds in Latvia – it could be better, more efficient. To a large extent it is related with the too bureaucratic and inefficient administration of the absorption of the EU funds in Latvia, and also the extremely high requirements posed by the EU to the project applicants – they are not always compatible with the Latvian situation.

“To be eligible for the resources of EU funds, a company in Latvia should have a very large turnover. I have a company in the printing and publishing sphere and for us to be able to apply for participation in any EU project, we have to do it together with other companies of the sector. That threshold (requirements) is too high for the Latvian situation, we do not have here such huge polygraphy companies. They are corresponding to the market situation in Latvia. Obviously, the same requirements apply to both Latvia and the large EU Member States, but that's not right.”

- **Introduction of EU norms, regulations** in different spheres of life, especially, economic activities. Not always these are in the interests of Latvia (under the pressure of the EU, Latvia liquidated its sugar production sector, restricted coastal fisheries), yet nevertheless in the majority of cases it is good. Uniform standards create a feeling of safety that Latvia meets the international standards in different spheres, for instance, environmental protection, consumer rights protection, manufacturing, etc.

“EU regulations are as a safety guarantee that our government will not make anything wrong. EU is like a big brother which looks after the “small brother” – Latvia.”

- **Free labour market**
- **Possibility of free movement**
- In general, positive assessment was given also to **Latvia joining the euro zone** as of 2014.
- **Participation in the EU, single market, single currency causes trust in Latvia**, both in tourism (tourists come here feeling safer) and business sector.

The **negative aspects/drawbacks** of Latvia’s participation in the EU:

- **Inequality of countries in the European Union.** Currently this is the main aspect creating negative attitudes towards the EU. There is feeling of injustice — the old EU Member States are in more privileged status than the new Member States, like Latvia. During the discussions, Latvia was juxtaposed to the Southern European countries which can afford not to observe the financial discipline, live beyond their means and receive undeservedly large financial support from the EU. Usually in this context the respondents spoke about Greece. The respondents are of the opinion that Greece in the crisis situation is not facing such stringent conditions as it was in the case of Latvia, they do not have to observe austerity measures.

“We had to survive austerity measures, yet they just receive money to retain their previous living standards. If we were in the situation of Greece, they would not nurse us like them.”

“I feel like the lower layer in the European Union.”

- **Huge bureaucracy of the EU.**
- **Outflow of inhabitants from Latvia (to work somewhere else in the EU), deterioration of the demographic situation.** Respondents admitted that this is an inevitable process, since in the economy of Latvia salaries cannot compete with the West European countries. Most probably, it would have been even worse if there was not a free labour market.

CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

The most significant sources of information on the EU in one's daily life are **mass media – Internet, TV, to a lesser extent also radio and printed press**. Usually the information on the EU is received from the news – from Internet portals (most popular in Latvia – www.delfi; www.apollo; www.tvnet) or TV.

Respondents are of the opinion that it is possible to divide sources of information in **three large groups**:

- **Mass media** – providers of general information. These sources of information are comparatively less reliable. Respondents are of the opinion that the information in the mass media is often biased, unilateral – complimentary and uncritical with regard to the EU, respondents see there also strivings to smooth out the existing problems in the EU. There is a lack of analytical information, with a critical approach telling how different EU countries solve different issues, what the possible risks in the future and their solutions are.
- **Specialised sources of information** – mostly, home pages of different institutions, sectors on Internet. These are more reliable sources of information since they are specialised – provide official and specific information on their sector.
- **Relatives, friends, acquaintances, own experience**. Also reliable sources of information, for instance, on work or labour opportunities in the EU.

In general, respondents are interested in the information about the EU. Latvia is a EU Member State and everything that happens there, to a smaller or larger extent affects also inhabitants of Latvia.

Respondents spontaneously told about the **lack of information** on issues related with the EU. They found it hard to name any specific issue about which they lack information on the EU. During the discussions, the following wishes were expressed:

- There is interest about **visions of the EU's future** – how is the Union planning to develop during the next 5 years, what changes to expect? The nation should be ready for these changes.
- Respondents would be interested **to receive answers to awkward questions**, for instance, why Latvia receives lower area payments in agriculture than, for instance, Greece, and, especially, why will they be lower also after 5 years? And when will they be equalised? Respondents are of the opinion that the official information sources on the EU do not provide answers to these questions.
- Large interest about **comparative information** – what are indicators of Latvia in different positions compared to other EU Member States. Comparative information is always interesting and useful.
- Information about the **EU's finances**, what the money flow is. What is the current situation and what is planned for the next period of 5 years? What changes are anticipated and why?

“It would be interesting to understand, for instance, whether the Belgians pay to us or we pay to them. And how large is this payment.”

CHAPTER 3: QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

When discussing the future of the EU, the following points of view were dominating:

- **The European Union will still exist in the future, it will not collapse.** The development of the EU will be evolutionary, slow, without large shocks or rapid, unexpected changes.
- **Gradual integration of the Member States will take place** within the framework of the EU. The EU Member States will become independent, with their own state administration institutions and legislation, yet there will be spheres/directions which will be regulated in a centralised way. The EU will become a more federative union. New binding decisions will be passed. First of all it will affect the sphere of the economy. There will be spheres which every Member State will solve independently, for instance, the social issues.

„A more centralised EU is even desirable, that was proven by the economic crisis.”

In the future the EU will face the **following challenges**:

- **Stabilizing the EU's economy, its improvement, overcoming stagnation.** The management of the EU finances. Protection of the EU internal market. One of the most significant EU challenges since economically the EU Member States' different regions are very different, it is important to achieve economic development everywhere, to balance interests of all the countries without causing insults.
„There exist worries that with time we here would have like it is now in London where there are districts of the city where nobody speaks English. For Latvia this would be fatal.”
- **Solution of the immigration problems.** How to solve the problem of migrants arriving to the EU from the poorest and politically instable regions of Asia and Africa? Respondents consider these people as people with a different culture, mentality, and low education level who are not ready to integrate into the EU and its labour market. Therefore the EU should have in place a considerably stricter immigration policy. For the time being Latvia is not affected by this problem since Latvia is a comparatively poor EU Member State and also the climate conditions are more severe, yet in the future this could become topical.
- **Demographic situation, solution of Europe's ageing problem.** Topical for Latvia, taking into account the outflow of able-bodied inhabitants to other, richer European countries.
- **Retaining the national identity.** Topical for Latvia, this problem is related with the abovementioned issues of demography and immigration.

- **Further possible expansion of the EU.** Currently Europe participates in discussions about the possible joining of Turkey to the EU, and the opinions of the different political forces differ very much. Also during the discussions, there were opposite opinions. More often the opinion was expressed that the culture, identity, and mentality of Turkey differs from European very much, therefore its accession to the EU should not be supported. Respondents who would support the accession of Turkey to the EU, argued by saying that this step would stimulate economic development of the stagnating EU, and also would help solving the demographic problem of ageing Europe. In a more distant future there is a possibility for the EU to expand towards the East – in the former territory of the USSR – to Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia. This could cause problems in the relations with Russia and that would become a challenge for the EU.
- **Decentralisation risks for the EU cannot be excluded.** For instance, as a consequence of the current crisis, any of the economically leading countries could decide that it does not wish to support the poorer regions of Europe and leave the EU (for instance, the UK). The EU can be torn apart by economic crises, the different development and welfare level of European regions, the rise of nationalism (that can be predicted as a result of crisis).

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

Participants of the group discussions were **rather sceptical as to the possibility for average citizens to influence the decision-making processes in the EU. Yet, there are possibilities** to try doing this in case one really has such a wish.

The possible ways to express one's opinion:

- **Formal way** – applying to the EU institutions by writing letters, e-mails, to look for a possibility to meet Latvian EP deputies. It is possible to organize a meeting with an EP deputy (such an experience was mentioned), one just has to have initiative. The advantage is the fact that the official institutions have an obligation to provide official answers. Thus, a person will be heard and he will receive an answer.
- To look for other similarly thinking people, to involve oneself in NGOs, to organise petitions to support one's idea.

“If you are alone, of course, nobody would listen to you, yet if there would be a letter with 50 000 – 100 000 signatures, they will take that into account and possibly the expected result would be achieved.”

- **Extreme activities/campaigns to draw the attention of the public, of media and the responsible institutions.** This is a very efficient way to inform the largest part of the society about the issue/problem. Extreme activities draw attention of media and they ensure the necessary publicity. In the optimum case, before implementing extreme activities, one should try the legal way (see above), so that afterwards one could say that the opinion was not heard in a normal way thus we had to do something extreme to be heard.

“The legal way is often the most inefficient way. Extreme actions more promptly and efficiently draw public attention to issues that might be legal yet incorrect.”

During the discussions, samples were mentioned when considerable results have been achieved under the pressure of one group of the community or a group of professionals. For instance, farmers' protests against the unequal EU subsidies, protests of teachers, etc. Of course, the gain is just a small part from what was asked yet some results can be achieved.

To be heard in the EU currently is less topical than to be heard in Latvia. Respondents mentioned that currently topicalities of Latvia and not those of the EU are of priority to them. Also regarding the issues related with the EU, the largest fights are locally in Latvia, for instance, regarding the allocation of the EU funds.

The majority of respondents found it hard to discuss the question asked since they have had no need or wish to solve any issue at the EU level. An opinion dominated that the society in Latvia is **passive** in this respect, people are **sceptical** regarding possibilities to influence any decision-making processes.

“We don't want to do anything ourselves, that is the entire problem. We do not communicate even with local municipality structures, deputies, not speaking about the EU institutions.”

Situations when there would be a necessity to make any problem topical at the EU level, are rare. The issue should be such that it is topical not only for people in Latvia but also in other countries, for instance, the new EU Member States, the East European region, etc.

CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

During the discussions, **the following proposals that could help to improve communication between the EU institutions and ordinary citizens** were expressed spontaneously:

- **Special homepage** created for this purpose on Internet. It could be a uniform portal in which people from all the EU Member States could express themselves in their native language. Structurally divided by sectors. Not to allow anonymous comments because in the opposite situation this page would become senseless. If one wishes to express his/her opinion, he has to register, disclose his name. It is desirable that the responsible EU institutions would answer the questions. Citizens' discussions could be organised in this portal in different EU Member States. It would be important to carefully think over the technical solution of such a home page, so that it would be well organised, easy-to use. Problems could be caused by the use of the many languages, yet if there will not be a possibility to express oneself in the native language, there will not be interest to do it.
- **Series of TV broadcasts**, telebridge that would be telecast (with translation) in all the EU Member States. Each country is given one hour for its activities. One day – one country, second day – another, etc. The whole of Europe would be able to see it. This would lead to understanding what are the problems that worry, for instance, people in Germany, what – in Italy, etc. The responsible EU institutions or officials answer the citizens' questions during the live broadcast. Similarly as it is done in Russia when Putin answers the inhabitants' questions from different regions of Russia. Of course, without censoring the unpleasant, painful questions. In each country there should be special rooms with cameras where inhabitants can ask questions of interest for them, express their views on topical issues.
- **A specially created institution** (with a home page on Internet) **for claims and recommendations** of the EU citizens. This could be something similar to the Ombudsman's office.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A- An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email;

- Such a service is necessary in every country and should be assessed positively.
- The most important is that this service should be able to provide quality consultations on different specific EU-related topics, not only mere information pointing to the respective article in legislation or references on addresses and telephone numbers. A person should be able to receive answer to his question “What should I do?”, for instance, when preparing a project for absorption of the EU funds. Providing answer should be mandatory to this service.

“I would definitely use such an opportunity if, for instance, I would like to go to work to another EU Member State for some 3 months. Then I would need a consultation on what I need to know in this country, for instance, about taxes or other issues.”

“I would like this service to be a guide, like a tourist information centre, which could provide professional advice what to do in every situation, what would be correct, what the risks are, etc.”

- Something similar already exists – the Europe Union House. The respondents had heard about the fact that there is a EU House in Riga, yet only some of them knew where it is and only two respondents have been there to do something in relation with the EU.

B- Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- That would be interesting (more – to be in the audience, not a participant). It is desirable to organise broadcasts for specific problems, to invite experts from the EU, the responsible officials and inhabitants who would like to discuss these issues. The success of such a broadcast to large extent depends on its format and the work of its moderator journalists.

“That would really be interesting if the problems would be analysed in a broader context, at the EU level not only at the national level.”

C- Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- **Interest** on what the citizens of other Member States think about the EU topicalities, **is high**. The respondents said that they would be happy to see such results. It is advisable that these results of public opinion polls are published in popular news portals, not only in the specialised Internet sites. Such information would cause trust, respondents are of the opinion that it is objective.

D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- The participants were of the opinion that the link **between the electors and the EP deputies should exist**. The EP deputies should have a duty to meet their electors regularly, to listen to their views and answer their questions. Respondents did not know whether it was possible now. Most probably, it is possible if a person shows initiative. It would be necessary to organise this issue so that the office hours and meeting venues of the deputies would be published on Internet, as well as the possibility to make an appointment. So that the person would be able to register and see that he is, for instance, sixth in the line. Of course, there should be a selection filter not to waste the time of the EP deputy. And there should be an application with a theme, idea, desirable that the person has a group of followers. It would be advisable to have a possibility to meet the EP deputies on weekends since on working days many people have to work.

E- Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- **Theoretically this would be useful, interesting yet in reality much depends on the offered technical solution**. One part of respondents was sceptical towards the possible implementation of this idea. Citizens would be willing to express themselves in their native languages, and they are many. How can it be done, structured, moderated? The discussion of questions could be very time consuming. Anonymous comments should not be allowed otherwise considerable proposals would “sink” in the anonymous comments. People, who would like to express themselves, should confirm their identity. If a possibility is given to ask questions in this Internet site, it should be ensured that providing an answer is mandatory.

F- Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- Respondents’ opinions were **similar to the previous mentioned proposal**. Without anonymous comments, feedback should be ensured, namely, answers to the questions should be published in this site.
- In one discussion the participants mentioned that there already exists a possibility to participate in the public discussion of laws. There are sites on Internet where one can do that. Nevertheless, none has done it and also they did not know where and how to do this.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- **This could be interesting yet respondents doubt whether that would be useful.** This site could serve as a place where to “let off steam”, yet it would not be a place to collect valuable ideas. Of course, the idea is to be supported and one could try to implement it. It would be important to structure the Internet site by different themes, to make it easy to use. Also now, in home pages of many different institutions there are forums where visitors can express their ideas, ask questions. With time these forums become overcrowded, chaotic, many themes are repeated, are doubled, it is impossible to orientate oneself in these and people loose interest to express them there.
- There exist worries that only politically correct problems will be published in this interactive Internet site. But discussions on different topical, painful themes will not be allowed, for instance, turning against too large inflow of immigrants into Europe or dislike towards activities of sexual minorities and their propaganda.

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- Debates of politicians before the elections should be organized. It is a **necessity** and people have got used to it. **Nevertheless**, in general it is a **short-term** event that does not attract to continuous communication activities in a longer-term.

Respondents are of the opinion that all the propositions presented in the survey are to be assessed **positively**, any activity organised will do some good. In case of Internet sites and TV discussions, their execution is of great importance: how interesting the way of presenting the issue would be. The more successful the solution, the more people will have interest to use these offers.

During the discussions, **the most necessary and most interesting propositions** for the respondents appeared to be the following:

- **A-** An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email;
- **D-** The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.
- **C-** Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

KVALITATĪVS PĒTĪJUMS PAR PILSONU IESAISTĪBU EIROPAS SAVIENĪBĀ

(IEVADS: Lūdziet katru dalībnieku īsi stādīties priekšā, pasakot, kas viņš vai viņa ir, ar ko nodarbojas, utt.)

1. TĒMA

Mēs šeit esam, lai parunātu par Eiropas Savienību.

Vai Jūs varat pateikt man, kas pirmais ienāk prātā par ES?

- Spontānās reakcijas

- Iztaujājiet:

- Par ES spontāni minēto tematu būtība

- Pozitīvie un negatīvie ar ES saistītie aspekti

- Respondentu sākotnējās intereses un dalības pakāpe ar ES saistītās lietās

2. TĒMA

Tagad par to, ko Jūs zināt un domājat par ES. No kurienes tas nāk?

No kādiem avotiem iegūstat informāciju vai dzirdat viedokļus par ES, visplašākajā vārda “avoti” izpratnē, no oficiālajiem informācijas avotiem līdz neformālām sarunām ar draugiem vai citiem cilvēkiem?

- Spontānās reakcijas

- Iztaujājiet:

- Minēto avotu dažādības pakāpe

- Ienākošās informācijas veids no katra avota

- Katra avota uzticamība un intereses pakāpe

3. TĒMA

Apspriedīsim konkrētāk Eiropas Savienības nākotni un jautājumus, kas Jums tajā sakarā varētu būt.

Droši vien, ir kaut kādi aspekti, ko Jūs uzskatāt par svarīgiem un par kuriem gribētos zināt un saprast vairāk, lai labāk izprastu ES darbību un attīstības virzienu, jo iespējams, ka no Jūsu iepriekšminētajiem avotiem iegūstat ne visu informāciju, ko gribētos.

Par kādiem aspektiem Jūs īpaši gribētu zināt vairāk ?

- Spontānās reakcijas

- Iztaujājiet:

- Kopējie iespaidi par to, vai ir laba vai slikta izpratne par šiem jautājumiem.

- Uztvere par galvenajiem ES izaicinājumiem tuvākajos gados

- Kā respondenti izsaka vajadzību par labākām zināšanām vai izpratni, par kādiem tematiem

īpaši? Kādos veidos pieejamā informācija par šīm tēmām nav apmierinoša?

4. TĒMA

Kā pilsonim, Jums jābūt iespējai izteikt savu viedokli un tikt uzklausītam attiecībā uz ES attīstības nākotni, lai atbalstītu vai neatbalstītu kādu konkrētu attīstības virzienu, vai jebkura cita iemesla dēļ.

Kā Jūs šodien to varat darīt ?

- Spontānās reakcijas
- Iztaujājiet:
 - Uztvere par to, cik viegli vai grūti ir izteikties un tikt uzklausītam ar ES saistītos jautājumos, un kā to var panākt.
 - Uztvere par to, kādas ir grūtības.
 - Konkrēti temati, par ko respondenti it īpaši gribētu izteikties un tikt uzklausīti, ko viņi šajā sakarā sagaida.

5. TĒMA

Var iedomāties vairākus veidu, kā tādi Eiropas pilsoņi kā mēs varētu tikt uzklausīti. Es gribētu ieteikt iedomāties jebkādos iespējamus veidus, brīvi lietojot iztēli, neatsakoties no idejas, pat ja nav skaidrs, kā to varētu praktiski realizēt. Ko mēs varētu iedomāties ?

- Spontānās reakcijas
- Veiciniet grupas radošumu, iedrošinot respondentus “pārlēkt” no vienas idejas uz otru.

6. TĒMA

Tagad es Jums pastāstīšu dažādas ieteiktās idejas par veidiem, kādos pilsoņi varētu labāk tikt uzklausīti par ar ES saistītiem jautājumiem. Es Jums gribētu jautāt, kādas ir Jūsu domas par katru no tiem.

- Lūdziet respondentus reaģēt uz katru priekšlikumu pēc kārtas, pajautājot par viņu interesi par šo priekšlikumu un iemesliem, kāpēc tas ir vai nav interesants.

A – Informācijas serviss par ES darbību un ES politiku, ko veido sabiedrībai atvērti informācijas biroji katrā lielā pilsētā, Interneta vietne, un serviss, kas ātri atbild uz jebkādiem jautājumiem pa telefonu, pastu un e-pastu.

B – Lielākajos mediju līdzekļos organizētas debates par ES attīstību starp pilsoņiem un ES jautājumu ekspertiem

C – Regulāras aptaujas par ES visā Eiropā, lai pilsoņi varētu zināt gan savas valsts, gan citu valstu pilsoņu viedokļus.

D – Iespēja vairākas reizes gadā tikties ar saviem Eiroparlamenta deputātiem vai citiem ES politiķiem, kas ir tuvu Jūsu dzīvesvietai.

E – Visiem pilsoņiem atvērtas konsultācijas Internetā, ko organizētu Eiropas Komisija katru reizi, kad ES jāpieņem nozīmīgi lēmumi.

F – Līdzīgas konsultācijas, ko organizētu valsts valdība.

G – Interaktīvs Internetā un sociālajos tīklos pieejams serviss, kas pastāvīgi uzkrāj pilsoņu viedokļus, vēlmes un kritiku par ES attīstības virzienu.

H – Informācijas kampaņas, ko attīstītu daudz aktīvāk nekā iepriekš, lai aicinātu pilsoņus pašiem iesaistīties esošajās debatēs un piedalīties Eiroparlamenta vēlēšanās nākošajā pavasarī.

Paldies Jums vēlreiz, ka atnācāt piedalīties šajā diskusijā !

Ja pēc diskusijas Jums ienāks prātā vēl citas idejas, droši dodiet mums ziņu.

(Norādiet e-pasta adresi, ko respondenti varētu izmantot šādai saziņai)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN MALTA**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Mriehel, Malta on 11th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Maltese section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Malta by MISCO International Limited.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: sales representative, technician; production planner; loader)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: credit controller, accountant, managing nurse, business owner (contractor))
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

➤ Nature of topics spontaneously mentioned about the EU

- The European Union was mainly linked with **two themes**:
 - **Bureaucracy and Politics** - paperwork, documents, agreements between a group of countries, information and institutions
 - **Society and Culture** - different countries, cultures, languages, movement of people, products and services, travelling, communication between people from different countries, education and opportunities – especially related to education

➤ Positive and negative aspects related to the EU

- **Positive:**
 - Protection of human rights;
 - New rights which did not exist before Malta became an EU Member State;
 - Different opinions;
 - Work opportunities and experience;
 - Easier to live abroad;
 - Freedom of movement;
 - Educational opportunities – *“More students are able to travel abroad to study”*
 - Progress;
 - Funding in general and also funding which contributed to the increase in local research.
- **Negative:**
 - Bureaucracy; being compelled to apply laws which are more suited for bigger countries than Malta – *“Laws are not tailor made”*; lack of flexibility;
 - Distance between decision makers and citizens – *“Citizens are not heard”*;
 - Perceived lack of support on the issue of immigration - *“It is not enough that other Member States and the EU sympathise with Malta regarding the issue of immigration, if we are a union of different countries, then we should be there for one another even during hard times, the EU should provide more help to Malta in relation to illegal immigration”*;
 - Politics - *“The EU is a political ball”*; *“I think that the perceived negative aspects of the EU are influenced by local politics and their media influence, as different political parties portray a different image of the EU, therefore it is sometimes difficult to get a clear understanding of what is actually happening in the EU”*;
 - Ambiguity regarding the way EU funding is being used; extra funding which is being misused; a more tailor made approach in regard to funding – *“Member States spend their funds just because they do not want to lose the money... each Member State should be able to reallocate the funds to different sectors to ensure that the money is well spent”*;
 - Mismanagement of how the EU spends its money - *“For example, someone was telling me that those working in the EU have to take their medical test in Brussels – which costs way more than taking the test locally”*;
 - Feeling that it is unfair that certain countries in the EU are more powerful and influential than others (participant was referring to the six founding States) – *“All Member States should have an equal stake in all EU related decisions”*

- European standards were perceived as being both a negative and positive attribute of the European Union. Such ‘standards’ were considered as being beneficial as Member States are ‘obliged’ to implement and maintain these standards – a number of participants felt that before Malta’s accession in the EU such standards were not consistently reinforced. On the other hand, the participants also mentioned that EU standards were not tailor made and that Malta had to adopt certain standards that were not applicable to the Maltese context.

➤ **Degree of initial interest and involvement of the respondents in EU related issues**

- **Degree of interest in EU related issues varied according to whether the ‘issue’ would personally affect the participants** – for example, the participants were interested in issues related to their line of work. Furthermore, the participants were also interested in EU related issues that affect Malta and the general standard of living – these included health and safety, environment and education related issues.
- In order to gauge the participants level of interest in general EU related issues the participants were asked to indicate their level of interest using a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 indicated that they had ‘no interest at all’ and 10 indicated that they were ‘very interested’. Most participants gave a rating of 5 or 6, with the exception of two respondents who gave a rating of 7.
- The participants’ **involvement in EU related issues** was **also linked with their work**. More specifically to projects funded by the EU and standard procedures / regulations which affected their line of work. On the other hand, the participants’ involvement in other non-work related issues was usually just following media reports on what was happening in certain issues which were interesting to them on a personal level.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

➤ Degree of diversity of the sources mentioned

- Most participants mentioned **different media sources including Internet, television and newspapers**. Most participants would generally read particular reports of interest they encountered while browsing the Internet. However, some participants also mentioned that they use the Internet to find specific information regarding EU related queries they might have.
- Others mentioned their **work or studies** as a source of information – for example those participants who worked in the government sector mentioned that they received emails on a regular basis regarding EU updates. One participant also mentioned that friends and relatives living in other EU Member States were considered a source of information. Another source mentioned were **information stands** organised by MEUSAC (Malta – EU Steering & Action Committee).
- When asked to specify from which sources they had built their idea of the EU, the participants mentioned that their knowledge was also based on **direct effects and consequences they had personally experienced**.

➤ Nature of (information) inputs from each one

- **Official EU website** - The participants mentioned that while official EU websites were a good source of information they sometimes find it difficult to ‘filter’ through the information and feel ‘lost’. Furthermore, the participants felt that official EU websites were not ‘user friendly’ and use terminology which is difficult for the ‘person in the street’ to understand.
- Overall **the participants were usually interested in finding general information about EU regulations and procedures which affect them personally**, social and consumer rights, information related to working / studying in another EU Member State and particular issues of interest such as hunting, immigration and abortion.

➤ Interest / credibility of each one

- **The participants doubted whether media sources were always credible** and felt that although media reports usually have a certain degree of validity such reports also tended to “Twist the facts” or “Play on words”.
- On the other hand, the participants also mentioned that they were **not always sure whether documents found on official EU websites were the most recent**. The participants mentioned that they usually confirm the validity of the information they find on the Internet by calling an official EU organisation or related government sector by phone.
- Overall the participants used **multiple sources of information** to ensure that the information they find is updated and valid. Furthermore, multiple sources of information enable the participants’ to learn about the different facets and perceptions related to the issue in question.
- When asked to specify which source of information they considered to be the most reliable and credible, the participants mentioned **face-to-face and telephone conversations and email correspondence** with official EU representatives or government organisations. Email correspondence was considered as being more reliable as the information was written down and official recorded.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- When asked to specify which EU aspects they would like to know more about, most participants mentioned **financial issues, such as providing monetary support to Member States which are in or emerging from the financial crisis**. The participants were concerned regarding how the EU was going to continue to financially support Member States in need in the future. Participants also mentioned that they were concerned regarding the way the current financial crisis (and any other future financial crisis) was going to affect the euro currency and how this could directly affect them.
- The participants were also worried about **the economic and social state of these Member States** (participants mentioned Greece and Spain). Besides the financial aspect, the participants also mentioned the high level of unemployment in these countries and how this was affecting the citizens' standard of living. Furthermore, the participants were also concerned about the imposed EU sanctions (such as the decrease in pensions) on these countries. The participants were concerned regarding how Member States in financial difficulty can affect the EU as a whole and felt that in the future the EU system may be "threatened" if the number of Member States in difficulty increases.
- On the other hand, the participants also mentioned that they were **concerned about the current EU scepticism** (participants mentioned the United Kingdom) and how this could affect the EU's future – "*What if countries start pulling out of the system? What will happen then?*". The participants were particularly concerned regarding the bigger and powerful countries such as Germany and how the EU system would survive if one of these countries decides to leave the EU in the future.
- When asked regarding the **major challenges for the EU in the coming years**, the participants mentioned **environmental issues, illegal immigration, rise in crime rates** (some participants mentioned that they were concerned about the crime rates linked to Eastern Europe countries such as Bulgaria), "**lack of feeling of belonging**" and **link to criminality and increased social stratification** – the rise of the lower class and "extinction" of the middle class.
- Another major challenge mentioned was the **control and security of EU borders and the future of the free market** – some participants were concerned that the free trading between the different Member States may strain the local business and economy of particular Member States.
- The participants felt that their sources of information regarding the future of the EU were not reliable as these were mainly based on media reports influenced by local politics. Furthermore **all participants agreed that the problems of the EU are mostly "hidden" from the general public and that they only know "half the picture"**.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- **The participants feel that their ‘voice’ is not heard**, neither on a local nor EU level. For example, a number of participants mentioned that despite local protests regarding the excessive development of land in Malta and the increase in the number of apartment buildings, the government still “forged ahead” and rural zones are still being turned into urban zones. The fact that the participants felt that the local government would still, “Go ahead with its’ own plans despite public protestation” was frustrating, disheartening and discouraged the public from taking a stand or participating in debates. The perceived lack of action from the local government creates a sense of passiveness among the public who feel that giving their opinion is futile.
- **In contrast, the participants also mentioned that the Maltese were “too laid back” to give their opinion** and that even though “they grumble a lot they do not take a lot of action” and were too hesitant to complain. Furthermore, the participants added that due to Malta’s size “everybody knows everybody” therefore, they find it difficult to express certain opinions because they fear that they will be judged. One participant mentioned that the Maltese population shared a sense of “learned helplessness” which contributed to the lack of open public expression.
- On a EU level, some participants felt that **Malta has such a “small part in the overall decision making”** that their opinion is “useless”. Furthermore, the participants felt that because Malta only has six MEPs the representation and influence of Malta in the EU was weak. This feeling contributed to their belief that their ‘voice’ was unlikely to be heard on a EU level.
- On the other hand, the participants also mentioned that **they were not sure “from where to start” if they had to share their opinion and through which channels they could reach the EU**. The participants felt that the EU structure was not flexible enough to be close to the citizens and that bureaucracy was another hurdle that limited their opportunity to express their opinions. For example, the participants mentioned that bureaucracy also strains communication between different organizations in the EU; therefore, communication with the public becomes even more difficult.
- The participants mentioned that **petitions, contact points with the EU and MEPs** were a good source to express their opinion, however, they were still skeptical as to whether their views are actually represented in the EU.
- When asked regarding which **issues** they would **particularly** like to give their opinion on and be listened to as citizens, the participants mentioned illegal immigration, environmental issues, economic issues such as funding and the future of Europe.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- When asked to think about various means by which European citizens like could have their voice heard, the participants mentioned **direct email correspondence with the EU** (*“To avoid going through local channels to reach Brussels”*); online polls; online forums which should act as a guide for the EU regarding which issues are of a concern to European citizens; the actual **follow up of complaints and suggestions** (especially on a local level); **creation of workshops** to discuss particular issues and concerns which should yield visible results and action plans on a local level.
- The participants emphasized that creating new means of communication was not enough and that **proposals, suggestions, complaints and opinions of the citizens should be followed up** and citizens should be given an official explanation regarding how their concerns were being tackled.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- The participants were asked to indicate to what extent they were interested in a number of listed means that could be put in place to allow citizens to have their voice better heard on EU related issues. Participants were asked to use a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 indicated that the proposition was ‘not interesting at all’ and 10 indicated that it was ‘very interesting’. The scores given by each participant and the average score for each statement are listed in the table below.

Proposition	Participants								Average
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	
A	7	10	10	8	3	9	5	10	7.75
B	5	9	4	6	1	5	7	9	5.75
C	9	10	10	8	10	7	10	9	9.13
D	9	10	2	6	1	10	3	4	5.63
E	6	10	10	8	7	10	5	9	8.13
F	3	8	4	6	1	10	5	7	5.5
G	9	10	10	8	8	9	10	9	9.13
H	6	10	2	5	1	8	6	9	5.88

- **The most popular propositions were the following; ‘An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.’ (G=9.13) and ‘Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.’ (C=9.13).**
- The interactive service (G) and opinion polls (C) were considered as being good means to communicate with the EU as these provided a direct link with the EU. Online communication and services were considered as being the most convenient tools. However, the participants were also concerned regarding the security and control of online services, for example, “how would the EU be able to recognize whether the opinion provided in a forum was of an actual EU citizen and not an American?”. Another concern was regarding which language would be used online – the participants were concerned that those who do not speak English would be at a disadvantage.
- Overall, opinion polls were perceived as being the most positive and objective means of communication. Opinion polls were considered as being a reliable source of information where the general public is given a chance to express their voice Furthermore, opinion polls were considered as being able to provide fast information regarding what the EU citizens think, want and need.
- **The least popular proposition was ‘Similar consultations, organised by our national government.’ (F=5.5).**
- Participants were aware that **information services (A) and consultations organized by the local government (F) already exist**. These services were **criticised as being too bureaucratic**. The participants were also concerned regarding the involvement of the local government as they associated the government with “lack of action” / “slow progress” and more bureaucracy. Moreover, the participants were worried that any service or means provided through the local government would become a ‘political issue’. The local government was generally considered as not being trustworthy.

- **Media debates (B)** were considered as being **futile** as “these types of debates do not usually result in any action”. One participant suggested that the EU should have its’ own media channel for those citizens who are interested in such debates.
- **Regular meetings with MEPs (D)** were considered as being **interesting if the MEPs keep regular contact with the citizens** throughout the year rather than just visiting prior to the elections as part of their campaign. Furthermore, the participants felt that MEPs should prove to the citizens that they are “actually working on their behalf and representing Malta in the European parliament”. The general perception of MEPs was that they are overpaid, take the role for the money, consider the citizens as just votes and do not work enough in the interest of Malta.
- **Consultations organised by the European Commission (E)** were considered as being a **good and innovative opportunity** for the citizens to express their voice, however, the participants were concerned regarding the logistics of the proposition.
- **Information campaigns (H)** are by no means new, hence a low rating – although of course increasing citizen participation in the election is desirable.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

**QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**
(November 2013)

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION: Ask each participant to introduce themselves – name, age, marital status, and job.
Confidentiality / purpose of recording / no good or bad opinions

THEME 1

- Illum ħa nkunu qed nitkellmu fuq l-Unjoni Ewropea.
- Tistgħu tgħiduli x'jigi l-ewwel f'moħħkom meta nsemmi l-UE?
- x'aspetti positivi u negattivi tassoċjaw mal-UE?
- Kemm tgħidu li intom interessati f'issues relatati mal-UE? *Use a 1 to 10 scale*
- Kemm tgħidu li intom involuti f'issues relatati mal-UE? *Use a 1 to 10 scale*

- Probe:

- *Nature of topics spontaneously mentioned about the EU*
- **Positive and negative** aspects related to the EU
- Degree of **initial interest and involvement** of the respondents **in EU related issues**

THEME 2

- Issa, rigward dak li tafu u taħsbu dwar l-UE: minn fejn gew dawn il-ħsibijiet / ideat li għandkhom dwar l-UE?
- Minn liema sorsi jgħibu informazzjoni jew tisimgħu opinjonijiet dwar l-UE?

L-kelma "sorsi" ħuduha f'sens wiesa', jgħifieri s-sorsi jistgħu jvarjaw minn sorsi ta' informazzjoni uffiċjali għal konversazzjonijiet informali ma' ħbieb jew nies oħra...
- X'tip ta informazzjoni tiegħu minn dawn is-sorsi li semmejtu? *Probe for each source mentioned*
- Kemm tqisu dawn is-sorsi li semmejtu kredibbli? *Probe for each source mentioned*

- Probe:

- *Degree of diversity of the sources mentioned*
- *Nature of (information) inputs from each one*
- *Interest / credibility of each one*

THEME 3

Issa ejjew niddiskutu b'mod aktar speċifiku l-futur tal-Unjoni Ewropea u mistoqsijiet li jsaqsu lilkom infuskom f'dan ir-rigward.

Probabbilment hemm ċerti aspetti li intom tqisu bħala importanti u tixtiequ li tkunu tafu u tifhmu aħjar fir-rigward tal-mod kif taħdem l-UE u l-direzzjonijiet li tiegħu – għax jista' jkun li ma għibux l-informazzjoni kollha li tixtiequ mis-sorsi tagħkhom li semmejtu qabel.

- Dwar liema aspetti partikolari tixtiequ li tkunu taf aktar? Liema suġġetti?
 - U l-informazzjoni li hawn bħalissa dwar dawn l-aspetti / suġġetti li semmejtu għaliex mhux sodisfaċenti?
 - Kemm tħossu li tafu dwar il-futur tal-UE?
 - X'challenges / sfidi taħsbu li ha tiffaċċja l-UE fis-snin li għejjin?
- **Probe:**
- *General impressions of having a good or a poor degree of knowledge / understanding of these issues*
 - *Perception of major challenges for the EU in the coming years*
 - *Expressions by respondents of a need for better knowledge and understanding - on what subjects more particularly? In what is the information currently available on these subjects not satisfactory?*

THEME 4

Bħala ċittadin, għandek tkun tista' tagħti l-opinjoni tiegħek u issemma leħnek dwar id-direzzjonijiet futuri ta' l-Unjoni Ewropea – per eżempju jekk tapprova jew ma tapprovax dawn id-direzzjonijiet, liema direzzjoniji tapprova u liema le eċċ.

- Kif tistgħu tagħmlu dan illum? Bl-liema mezzi / bl-liema mod?
 - Kemm taħsbu li hija faċli jew diffiċli li tagħti l-opinjoni tiegħek u issemma leħnek / li tgħid dak li trid dwar issues / kwistjonijiet relatati mal-UE?
 - Għaliex taħsbu li hija faċli / diffiċli?
 - Fuq liema suġġetti / issues speċifiki tixtiequ li tagħtu l-opinjoni tagħkhom bħala ċittadini?
 - X'tistennew li jsir / jigri f'dan ir-rigward?
- **Probe:**
- *Perceived ease / difficulty to express oneself and to have one's voice heard on EU related issues - by what means?*
 - *Perceived reasons why it is difficult*
 - *Specific subjects on which respondents would particularly wish to give their opinion and to be listened to as citizens; expectations in that respect.*

THEME 5

Wieħed jista' jaħseb f'numru ta' mezzi differenti li permezz tagħhom iċ-ċittadini Ewropej bħalna jistgħu isemmgħu l-vuċi tagħhom.

Ejja nippruvaw naħsbu f'kwalunkwe mezz possibbli, ħallu l-immaginazzjoni tiġri bikhom u tabbandunaw ebda idea anke jekk ma tafux kif tista' tiġi implimentata fil-prattika bħalissa.

- X'tistgħu timmaginaw? Liema mezzi? Kif?

- Stimulate the group's' creativity by encouraging respondents to "jump" from one idea to another

THEME 6

Issa ħa nsemmilkhom diversi ideat li ġew proposti dwar mezzi li jistgħu jiġu stabbiliti biex jippermettu liċ-ċittadini jsemmgħu leħinhom aħjar dwar kwistjonijiet relatati mal-UE. **SHOWCARD**

Għiduli x'taħsbu dwar kull wieħed minn dawn l-ideat li ħa nsemmi...

*- Make the respondents react to each proposition in turn, asking them about their **degree of interest for each one and reasons thereof***

- A- Servizz ta' informazzjoni dwar il-mod kif tifunzjona l-UE u dwar il-policies tal-UE, fejn ikun hemm ufficċju ta' informazzjoni miftuħa għall-pubbliku f'kull belt kbira, website, u servizz ta' telefon, posta jew email fejn tkun tista' iġib risposta ta' malajr dwar kwalunkwe ħaga.
- B- Dibattiti organizzati fil-midja ewlenija bejn ċittadini u esperti fuq kwistjonijiet tal-UE u deċiżjonijiet meħuda mill-UE.
- C- Stharrig / ricerka dwar l-UE (opinion polls) organizzati regolarment fil-Ewropa kollha, li jippermettu liċ-ċittadini li jkunu jafu dwar x'jaħsbu ċittadini oħra mill-pajjiż tagħhom u ċ-ċittadini minn pajjiżi oħra tal-UE.
- D- Li tingħata l-possibbiltà diversi drabi fis-sena, li tiltaqa mal-Membri tal-Parlament Ewropew jew politici oħra tal-UE fil-vicinanza ta' fejn tgħix.
- E- Konsultazzjonijiet miftuħa għaċ-ċittadini kollha permezz tal-internet, organizzati mill-Kummissjoni Ewropea kull darba li tkun ħa tittieħed xi deċiżjonijiet kbira fl-UE.
- F- Konsultazzjonijiet simili, organizzati mill-gvern nazzjonali tagħna.
- G- Servizz interattiv bl-użu ta' l-Internet u netwerks soċjali (Facebook, Twitter eċċ) biex jingabar informazzjoni b'mod regolari dwar l-opinjonijiet, xewqat u kritika miċ-ċittadini fuq direzzjonijiet meħuda mill-UE.
- H- Kampanji ta' informazzjoni li ħa jiġu żviluppata b'mod aktar attiv mis-snin li għaddew, sabiex jinkoraġġixxu liċ-ċittadini biex jinvolvu ruħhom f'dibattiti li jkunu ser isiru u li jieħdu sehem fl-elezzjoni li ġejja tal-Membri tal-Parlament Ewropew fir-Rebbiegħa li jmiss.

THANK & CLOSE



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN POLAND**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Warsaw on 18th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Polish section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Poland by BSM.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (Professions of household head: office employees)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (Professions of household head: shop owners (2), high level executive, middle-management)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The basic and foreground picture of the EU can be described as a **common space** with the ideas of **freedom, openness with no boundaries, development, opportunities, diversity, tolerance and modernity**.
- In the background of this picture there is a **second set of associations related to European funding programmes**: investments in infrastructure, education (Erasmus programme) and support of agriculture.
- **Economic issues definitely predominate** over political ones in thinking about the EU. Thoughts of the respondents focus around economic exchange and development, growth and levelling the standards of life of the "old" EU countries. Political themes initially are mentioned only occasionally and relate to successful role of Germany in building a peaceful and secure European community.
- Obviously, **all those associations are positive**. Acceptance of Poland in the EU is very high among the Polish society, and reaches 81% according to the latest survey (Polish Public Opinion Research Center Survey, November 2013).

Negative aspects of the EU include **unification of national cultures, excessive European bureaucracy, too high costs** of implementing European funding programmes and educational programmes (Erasmus) being **not sufficiently effective**.

"All countries lose their individual character, because we all belong to this community and try to be the same. Or at least we aim at the same ideals. And previously it was all divided into different countries. Everybody cherished his own... so if we are to talk about disadvantages as well, then there is this unification going on. No doubt about it. I am far from being nationalistic, but it is a little like that."

- Another issue is the particularly strong relationship of Poland and Poles with some European countries, such as Germany or the UK. The majority of respondents consider the EU to be beneficial for Poland in this respect, helping it to improve its image and position. On the other hand, being in the EU can also result in increased tension between Poland and those countries because of competition for jobs leading and to strengthening negative stereotypes.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- To some extent, Polish people receive **information about the EU indirectly**, while they receive information about other issues. That's why the most commonly mentioned sources of information about the EU are: **TV news** (including negative attitudes toward TV in general) and the **Internet news portals**.
- **Social media**, such as Facebook, play an increasingly important role in delivering and spreading political information in general (including the EU related information). In this channel, the key are news spread around by "friends", who are interested in some form of politics. Obviously, this is not systematic EU knowledge, they are rather light-mood stories and interpretations of politicians' behaviour and conduct.

"Speaking about friends. I also meant the Internet. Linking to news is popular among young people now. It's good to send a link from time to time. Send to your good friends. Or make an intelligent comment. So I mean Facebook. And it also includes the EU."

"My friend, who is a journalist, posts some news on Facebook, and all his friends read it, see what's going on and comment."

- **EU web sites** are also **occasionally** used, especially when looking for information on EU funding programmes.
- The respondents also mention TV programmes devoted to EU funding programmes implemented and available in Poland and display boards at construction sites or buildings informing about the EU participation as a (co)funder.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- **The key European challenge for the future is energy policy.** It has many dimensions.
 - Safety -the EU policy should aim at providing energy security for all member countries. Russia's activity is considered a threat to that, because the European countries depend to a large extent on its gas and oil.
 - Sovereignty - limiting CO2 emission is considered a threat to the economical development of Poland. It may result in constraining Polish energy industry, which is based on coal leading to increased energy prices and Poland becoming more dependent on other economies.
 - Shale gas regulations - restrictions may yield shale gas production unprofitable in Poland. This issue is also related by the respondents with security and sovereignty of Poland.
 - Ecology - in the aspect of solutions for supporting renewal energy sources, better monitoring of gas emission and energy management.

- Another important challenge for the EU is **Ukraine and the EU activities to support its integration with Europe.** It is important not only for Ukraine to choose its own way, but also for Europe in the context of protecting the EU against influence of Russia, trying to restore the Soviet bloc.

"The problem with Russia is that they are so much against the EU. And I think they see us as not wanting to make close relations with them. Because we declared to be on the European side. And we care more about the integration with the Western countries than with the East. And then they have exactly the same problem with Ukraine. Either you are their friend or else their enemy.

 - *They treat us as their colony.*
 - *Yes.*
 - *Russia is quite dangerous.*
 - *It has always been so, and it will stay that way."*

- **Other issues** mentioned as important for the future of the EU include:
 - The difference of power exerted by Euro countries compared to the rest of the EU on the EU financial policy (two sets of countries with different speed rates of development in the EU).
 - Good relationships with the USA. Unlike single European countries, the EU as a whole can be a good partner for the USA. It can make the global cooperation work better.

- The respondents generally agree that information on the EU present in the media is sufficient. The need for this information is generally defined as moderate. The respondents think that in case of increased need for it, they would easily find it. The challenge might be however to find objective and trustworthy information and to distinguish it from politically biased information influenced by various political groups.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- The most often quoted way of expressing citizens' views for the respondents was the **voting on joining the EU** by Poland and the **European Parliament elections**. The majority of respondents feel satisfied having had the two opportunities to express their views.
- It is important to emphasize that while discussing expression of views, **the respondents think rather about the subjects related to Poland and not about the general European issues** (e.g. functioning of the EU institutions or common European goals). Taking this into consideration, the perspective of the Polish citizen and the Polish citizen in the European Union is very close. Given the former perspective, participating in the national Polish elections or local government elections are for the respondents the way of expressing their citizen views in general.
- Occasionally mentioned are meetings with deputies or expressing opinions in the Internet during government consultations of proposed laws (including the EU regulations).
- For instance, introducing the euro in Poland was the subject discussed with deputy during a meeting.
- The respondents agree that **their needs for expressing their views are modest** and their activities occasional and irregular.

"Poles are too passive. I am trying to be active. But I think Poles are passive about it, because they express their views only in the march during the Independence Day. And this is just once a year.

- There are a few **reasons for being passive** according to the respondents:
 - Expressing views is ineffective (it is futile, because the politicians do not listen)
 - People are not interested in public matters (they do not have time, are not interested in other peoples' opinions)
 - People remember communist times and the martial law in Poland and are afraid to openly express their views, especially in the form of street demonstrations.

"I don't really think people feel it would be effective. Whether they do it or not, it doesn't make a difference. The general opinion is that they will do whatever they want. But it will end some day. It will end. It is also temporary when I feel like a rebel and then I think - I won't go, I won't say anything because it is useless."

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- Spontaneous ideas included **organizing discussion forums**: both in the Internet and in public, similar to ancient Greece, at a square or by the Polish Parliament.

"Discussion Centre close to the Parliament would be good. Because an ordinary Pole has not enough opportunity to express views. So I am not really sure if the Polish members of the EU Parliament really know what Mr Smith is thinking."

- Other ideas included a **telephone helpline**, a **www site**, a **special TV program**, **meetings of the MEPs with local communities**. The EU funding programmes for local communities are especially interesting for the respondents.
- Generally speaking the respondents showed lack of belief while speaking of new ways of expressing views.

"Can we be more involved? Of course, you can go and express your views. The question is about the reaction. Will our case be passed to somebody who has the power to decide? Or will we just be talking to bureaucrats, who would just listen?"

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

➤ The proposal is similar to the ones produced by the respondents themselves. The majority of them are **aware** of the services **already**. **Information** on those services **should be spread wider** so that the services can be better used for exploiting the funding programmes for the benefit of local communities.

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

➤ The **idea was attractive** - the respondents liked the idea of ordinary citizens participating in a lively discussion expressing what the public thinks. The form of an open discussion should guarantee the program will not be dull, as frequently happens with TV interviews with various experts (talking heads).

➤ The respondents are **yet doubtful** if casting the speakers for such programmes would guarantee inviting persons with different opinions and at the same time persons, who would express the voice of a major group. They are also uncertain if it would be possible to maintain the discussion at a right emotional level but not ending up with an argument at the same time.

➤ The respondents are also unclear as to how much such discussions would influence political decisions - they think that the politicians would learn about peoples' views but nothing more.

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

➤ **A widely recognized and accepted form of activity**, known mainly from the time of joining the EU by Poland.

➤ Discussions were indicated as a better form for gathering peoples' opinions. The point is not to ask questions (such as in polls) which do not cover important areas for the people and expect their answer. On the contrary, it is crucial to see what people think about an issue which is important for them. This is the reason why the respondents are doubtful whether polls will include themes important for the public.

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

➤ The respondents know and are aware of meetings with Polish MEPs, but can hardly give any examples. When they realize this fact, the respondents conclude that Polish MEPs are not interested in local matters. Then, the respondents start to think, MEPs should be more active, be closer to people.

➤ **What is attractive** in this proposition are the words: "in the vicinity of where you live". It suggests **closeness** of subjects and areas covered.

➤ The words "other EU politicians" is interpreted as MEPs from other EU countries. It seems interesting for the respondents for the reason of taking a look at the EU and Polish issues from a perspective which is different than Polish. Moreover, other, non-Polish politicians, who do not fight for Polish votes are expected to tell the truth, present the issues as they really are, and not to manipulate it to be re-elected. On the other hand, the respondents doubt that politicians from other countries would be able to devote time to travel to Poland.

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- This proposition is met with **serious reservation**. The predominating view is that the European Commission is too high in the institutional hierarchy to be ready to consult matters with simple UE citizens. The respondents suspect that such consultations would rather aim at evaluating solutions, not at modifying them.
- Some respondents approve this proposition, especially those, who have had participated in some other consultations before. It is important that consultation requests be personal, addressed to the person himself/herself.

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- This proposition evaluated in comparison to E meets with **an even worse response** due to the negative opinion on the Polish government and politicians. Of the two, E seems better.

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- This idea is **especially accepted by young users of social networks**.
- The key issue is that the Facebook profile should be sufficiently attractive to get a lot of "likes" and by that be able to reach many users.
- Posts informing about new content would be delivered to users automatically, without any need for their action. In addition, anonymity as compared to public meetings would increase honesty and self-confidence of users.

"Interactive service is modern. It would reach more people. Meetings with MEPs would gather 200 or 300 people, and here it can reach maybe several thousand users. So for sure a piece of information would reach them every day. Like it or not, you would see it.

Plus you can express your opinion in every moment. And meetings have their time. Here giving your personal view - simply we are more courageous."

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- **The respondents generally agree such a campaign should be carried out.**
- It is important for the respondents to know the future MEPs and what they stand for well.

Summary of propositions

- The way the respondents evaluate and perceive the propositions demonstrates their consumerism rather than the citizen approach. Attractive for the respondents are passive elements, those giving them positive feedback, things that are already well known and accepted by them. Given this attitude, none of the propositions is, is really very attractive for them, given that all of them address the respondents as citizens. None of them really can break through passiveness of the respondents, stimulate their citizen attitude. Some of the propositions are evaluated positively because they are similar to marketing communication known to them from the commercial world.

- **Proposition G is the most attractive** because:

- It fits well with the daily activities of social network users. Obviously it is crucial that the EU profile be attractive both visually and emotionally, be more entertaining than responsible or based on the sense of duty. Under this condition one can expect activity of users. The EU profile would require some sort of distance to the EU institutions and procedures, would have to be based on energy and attractiveness of criticism of some MEPs towards the EU, and in this way explain and prove the reason for the EU regulations - both existing and future ones.

- It resembles consumers' behaviour of looking for best deals. Therefore, people who look for advantages from the EU funding programmes may be attracted. The key issue here is to arrange information on different funding programmes in the way that a user could identify the suitable programmes easily. This can be done for example by making targeted profiles, such as: Are you a woman 50+ looking for training for new job opportunities?
- **Proposition H is also attractive**, because it is interpreted as a similar one to well known social or politic/election commercial campaigns. The key issue in this proposition, and in other propositions too (especially Proposition E), is that it provides a sense of being a personal communication. (Ideally it would be addressed personally). It should be emphasized that this proposition is attractive because it delivers interesting information, not because it invites people to participate in a discussion. In this sense it does not challenge respondents' passiveness.
- **Proposition B is considered interesting**, because the concept of a debate is considered to be something like a political or social TV show. The attractiveness of this kind of show depends on delivering high positive emotions for the viewers. In debates like that a suitable balance of rational and emotional elements should be maintained.
- Another perspective of looking at the propositions is emerging, being neither consumer nor citizen. It can be observed, when the respondents positively evaluate meetings with MEPs in **D** or presence of people from other European countries in **B**. It is a perspective of a person interested in other people, of **sharing experience, and exchanging values between cultures and nations**. It directly refers to the way the EU is perceived - as a place of freedom, inner openness and commonness.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

WPROWADZENIE

PREZENTACJA - uczestników kim są, co robią

<p>Theme 1: 10 min</p> <p>UE - wiedza, bliskość spontanicznie</p>	<p>Zaprosiliśmy dziś Państwa aby porozmawiać o Unii Europejskiej. Zanim zaczniemy rozmawiać poproszę was aby każdy napisał pierwsze skojarzenia ,myśli jakie przychodzą mu do głowy gdy myśli słyszy Unia Europejska.</p> <p>Powiedzcie o swoich zapiskach. M: Dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• natury tych skojarzeń (np osobiste, polityczne, medialne, zawodowe itd)• pozytywne vs. negatywne• stopnia zainteresowania, wiedzy o sprawach UE
<p>Theme 2: 10 min</p> <p>UE - źródła informacji, wiedzy</p>	<p>Teraz chciałabym poprosić was o zastanowienie się nad tym skąd bierze się to co wiecie, myślicie o Unii Europejskiej.</p> <p>Jak to jest w u każdego z nas?</p> <p>....</p> <p>Zróbmy teraz taką listę wszystkich źródeł miejsc skąd bierze się wiedza lub można tam usłyszeć jakieś opinie o UE - zbierzmy wszystkie takie źródła od tych co wydają się najbardziej poważne i takie zwykłe wydające się niepoważne (<i>M: Eksploruj od oficjalnych dokumentów do rozmów żartów z znajomymi</i>).</p> <p>M: Dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Różnorodności aspektów źródeł - np z telewizji - jaki program, jaki dziennikarz, internet jaki portal publicysta itp, kolega - jaki cechy osobiste, społeczne zawodowe itp• Natury - istoty tego źródła - co stanowi o tym, że jest ono:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ atrakcyjne, ważne○ wiarygodne

<p>Theme 3: 15-20 min</p> <p>Przyszłość UE a wiedza</p>	<p>Porozmawiajmy teraz bardziej szczegółowo o przyszłości Unii Europejskiej, pytań jakie mogą się w tej kwestii pojawiać.</p> <p>Zapewne są tu takie kwestie, które uważacie za ważne i mniej ważne.</p> <p>Przyjrzyjmy się im bliżej pod kątem dostępnej wam wiedzy, informacji o tym jak działa UE i jakie przyjmuje kierunki działań. Jakich brakuje wam tu informacji ?</p> <p>W jakim stopniu te wymienione wcześniej źródła są niewystarczające aby odpowiedzieć na te pytania o przyszłość UE?</p> <p>M: Dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oceny zakresu własnej wiedzy na te tematy • postrzegania głównych wyzwań dla UE w nadchodzących latach • wielkości potrzeby posiadania większej wiedzy (w odniesieniu do których kwestii szczególnie) - w czym obecna wiedza o tych kwestiach jest niesatysfakcjonująca, za mała
<p>Theme 4: 10-15 min</p> <p>Korzystanie z prawa głosu o UE</p>	<p>Pełnimy w naszym życiu wiele różnych ról - mamy rodziny, wykonujemy swoje zawody, mamy swoje sposoby spędzania czasu wolnego, jesteśmy konsumentami różnych produktów i usług, jesteśmy też obywatelami mającymi swoje prawa. Jednym z nich jest prawo głosu, wypowiedzenia swoich opinii i bycia usłyszonym w różnych kwestiach dotyczących również przyszłości UE.</p> <p>I to niezależnie od tego czy zgadzamy się czy też nie zgadzamy się z konkretnym rozwiązaniem czy kierunkiem w którym podąża UE.</p> <p>W jaki sposób mieliście czy macie okazję to robić dotychczas?</p> <p>M: Dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stopnia trudności wyrażenia swoich opinii i bycia usłyszonym w kwestiach związanych z UE - w odniesieniu do różnych sposobów? • Z jakich powodów wydaje się to trudne? • jakie są kwestie, problemy na temat których chcieliby się wypowiedzieć i być wysłuchanym jako obywatele - jakie są tu oczekiwania?
<p>Theme 5: 15 min</p> <p>Burza mózgów - sposoby ekspresji opinii o UE</p>	<p>Jak się wydaje istnieją czy mogłyby istnieć różne sposoby, narzędzia możliwości poprzez które głos, opinia obywateli UE takich jak my mogłaby zostać usłyszana.</p> <p>Spróbujmy sobie pomyśleć, powyobrazić jakie są i mogłyby być takie właśnie sposoby.</p> <p>Mamy tu zupełną swobodę - nawet najbardziej dziwny, fantastyczny czy na pierwszy rzut oka niezbyt mądry pomysł jest warty zapisania. Nie przejmujemy się jakie będą praktyczne trudności z jego wprowadzeniem. Liczy się tylko to co przychodzi nam do głowy. Uwaga to taka burza mózgów. <i>M: Zapisuje wszystkie pomysły</i></p>

Theme 6: 25 min Test pomysłów A-H Interesujący Ranking	Teraz chciałabym przedstawić wam kilka takich pomysłów na to w jaki sposób uczynić to, aby głos obywateli w sprawach dotyczących UE był lepiej słyszany. Oto pierwszy pomysł. Co o nim sądzicie? W jakim stopniu wydaje się wam interesujący - z jakich powodów? (M: Pytaj każdego po kolei Powtarzaj dla kolejnych pomysłów)
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A - Serwis informacyjny, gdzie udzielano by informacji na temat funkcjonowania UE i prowadzonych przez UE polityk. W każdym większym mieście otwarte byłyby biura, gdzie można by osobiście uzyskać informacje, byłaby strona www oraz serwis niezwłocznie odpowiadający na pytania zadawane telefonicznie, drogą pocztową lub mailem.

B- Debaty organizowane w głównych mediach w których brałoby udział zwykli obywatele i unijni eksperci, gdzie dyskutowano by nad rozwiązaniami planowanymi przez UE

C - Badania opinii publicznej na temat UE przeprowadzane regularnie w całej Europie, pozwalające obywatelom na dowiedzenie się myśla ich rodacy oraz obywatele innych krajów.

D- Możliwość spotkania się kilka razy w roku z naszymi europosłami lub z innymi politykami unijnymi, w najbliższej okolicy naszego miejsca zamieszkania.

E - Konsultacje przez Internet organizowane przez Komisję Europejską zawsze wtedy, gdy podejmowane są w UE kluczowe decyzje, otwarte dla wszystkich obywateli.

F- Konsultacje przez Internet organizowane przez polski rząd zawsze wtedy, gdy podejmowane są w UE kluczowe decyzje, otwarte dla wszystkich obywateli.

G - Interaktywny serwis w działający w Internecie, na portalach społecznościowych stale i na bieżąco zbierający opinie, życzenia i głosy krytyczne odnośnie rozwiązań podejmowanych w przez UE.

H- Kampanie informacyjne, które będą przeprowadzone w sposób bardziej aktywny niż w poprzednich latach. Ich celem będzie zachęcenie obywateli do zaangażowania się w debaty, które będą miały miejsce podczas kampanii wyborczej do Parlamentu Europejskiego, na wiosnę przyszłego roku.

Dziękuję za udział w dyskusji. Jeśli coś jeszcze pojawiło się podczas naszego spotkania o co nie zapytałam, a chcielibyście powiedzieć to proszę teraz albo później proszę wysłać na nasz adres mailowy.



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN ROMANIA**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Bucharest on 12th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Romanian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Romania by Data Media Ltd.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: dental technician, car driver, office worker, bookkeeper)
 - Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: sales manager-middle management in the private sector, artistic manager-middle management in the private sector, university lecturer, architect – self employed)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ **Spontaneously, participants evoked different aspects** with respect to the EU: “**brotherhood**” (2), “**unity in diversity**”, “**progress**”, “**freedom of movement**”, “**community**”, “**consensus**” and “**United States of Europe**”.
- ❖ Afterwards, each participant explicitly said what first comes to their mind about the EU:
 - Brotherhood – through the Union we are stronger.
“We have the possibility of learning from others’ experience – some nations have more experience than others; there is mutual help.”
 - Unity in diversity – there are very different nations, who grew up together.
“These countries understood that the best thing they have in common is being diverse, but that they share a continent and have some values that bring them together.”
 - Progress – developing the relationships between States, and reaching a higher degree of development.
“I would like the EU to be the most beautiful place on Earth...”
 - Freedom of movement – to move freely around Europe and have equal rights with the other European citizens.
 - Community – we are not “Romanians” or “French” or “Germans” anymore, we are Europeans.
“I, personally, did not necessarily start to feel that, but you can still see an evolution in comparison to how it was before.”
“I have the feeling that I am a citizen of the European Union as I am a citizen of Romania.”
 - Consensus – together, we can find solutions to common problems.
“The founders realized that fighting wont work anymore, so we have to unite and do something together.”
 - United States of Europe – “Europe’s attempt to do what America did”. Regarding this aspect, mentioned by one participant, there were opposite opinions. Thus, several participants subscribed to the idea that “this European project is unique in the world” – it is different from the United States of America, because it entails bringing together very distinct nations.
“For example, I don’t think there is a big difference between Alabama and Missouri, but there is a huge difference between Germany and France.”
- ❖ There was an emphasis on the state of European cultures, **the preservation of Member States’ specific traditions and national identities**.
 - Cultural diversity can be preserved. For example, you can have a development/improvement of “Romanianism through Europeanism” or/and of “Europeanism through Romanianism”.
“During so many hundreds of years of common history, peoples of Europe still developed different cultures. Through consensus, we can conceive systems that will maintain this diversity of cultures.”
 - European traditions can arise, due to living together within this European community.

“Only in that way traditions can be preserved, showing that you cannot have France without Spain, for example...”

“Through the European Union, a single community is being formed out of several communities, and subsequently more widespread traditions can arise.”

❖ **Although most of the aspects discussed were positive, some participants also mentioned negative aspects related to the EU.**

- The fact that some Member States might exit the EU.
- The waste or misuse of European funds
- The euro-scepticism of Romanians has increased a bit, mainly because the expected advantages “are not seen”

“Romanians were the most eager to join the European Union. I don’t know if now we feel otherwise, but I believe that there is a little more scepticism.”

“There is some reluctance – many wonder how they benefited from our joining the European Union. The expected advantages of that are not seen.”

- Three participants believe that Romanians do not even deserve the advantages brought by being part of the EU, because “we don’t bring a significant contribution”. The others do not agree with that, arguing the opposite, with an emphasis on the contribution made by the Romanians who work abroad to the culture and the GDP of other European countries. Someone points out that Romanians are being helped by the EU, but that help gets “stuck in the middle” due to corruption.

“We haven’t contributed enough to gain the advantages offered by EU.”

“Our contribution is real – from ‘strawberry gatherers’ working in Spain to the bright minds who leave to study in England or France and remain there; they are trained in Romania, on our money, and they bring a contribution to their culture...”

“...Or those who go directly there for a job, and they bring a contribution to their GDP.”

- Regarding Romania (sometimes unfairly) as “a poor brother within the Union”, who has to do “the dirty job”, or as “the black sheep of Europe”.

“[...] I am not a nationalist, but I see certain things and I don’t feel it is fair for us to be regarded as a poor brother within the Union. It is a problem here, to consider Romania, sometimes unfairly, the black sheep of Europe... That is how they are treating us, at least at the present moment.”

“The last to come does not really have equal rights... Romania is like the most recent employee in a firm – he will do the dirty work...”

- The Rom issue is not only Romania’s responsibility – why everybody points to Romania when talking about Roms?

“Something that bothered me is a matter regarding the Rom people. It is being said that the Roms left Romania and populated the streets of Europe. [...]. If you study the statistics, they also went [in the West] from countries like Poland or former Yugoslavia; more of them left from Hungary.”

❖ **The degree of interest and involvement of participants in EU-related issues is fairly high.**

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- ❖ The various sources mentioned by participants are, in order of frequency: **Internet, television** (particularly Romanian channels), **school/university, family** and **conversations at the workplace**. Sources such as newspapers, radio and public conferences are more rarely mentioned.

“As sources – the Internet and my folks back home, who talk [about these things].”

“I prefer the Internet, where the information flows... You only have to look for it.”

“The most important one is television, mainly Romanian TV stations.”

“I choose TV as a source. At the office, we talk whenever some important news comes up. Newspapers – rarely, mainly when using the metro. I also listen to the radio, to the news from the national radio station.”

- ❖ **On the Internet**, they access specialised sites, like the one of the European Union or “pro-EU” websites, but also generalist sites, like *Wikipedia*. Some participants say they prefer analyses to raw, undebated information.

“The Internet – there is the European Union’s website, which I visit. I also had a unit at the university on the EU. You also have Wikipedia, where you can find out general things.”

“For me, the Internet is crucial, mainly websites that post analyses; an analysis – this is what I like to read. I like to read an educated opinion and I usually read pro-EU websites, for this is my stance as well, I am pro-EU.”

- ❖ **On TV**, they watch programmes that deliver different and distinct opinions and make analytical comparisons.

“I like to hear different opinions, but then I filter them. I do realize whether they are well-intended or not.”

- ❖ For most of them, **the Internet has the highest credibility**. Some participants point out that, for them, “television is not credible”, because it distorts information.

“Internet is crucial, especially for those who want to pick out the information they receive. With television, you get what they give you.”

“I prefer the Internet, because television does not offer me credible information anymore. I cannot say that I use certain sites – the information is just there, and you only have to look for it.”

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ Anticipating subsequent topics, several participants deplore **the poor degree of knowledge of the issues regarding the future of the EU**. At this point, several criticisms are made against the communication process from the EU toward national audiences.

“Nobody knows for sure how the EU will be in the future. We can identify some objectives, such as enlargement, but I don’t know anything more than that.”

- There is no transparency: the decisions taken by the EU are made public only in part or not at all.

“I am firmly convinced that we don’t have access to all the information we need to form an opinion.”

- There is the impression that decisions taken at the EU level are those of a small, privileged group.

“I think that a handful of people know precisely what is going to happen.”

- The vast majority of participants prove to be concerned with the future of the EU, expressing the wish to be aware with issues regarding the EU’s future.

“I think this would be a very important step forward – to be aware of absolutely all decisions and that, if possible, my opinion as a citizen be taken into consideration.”

“[...] We have to be kept informed more. We only find out about things when the decision has already been made.”

- ❖ The participants’ opinions concerning **the major challenges for the EU** in the coming years are focused on the following topics:

- Generally speaking, **the development of the EU will go as it did so far**; the EU will enlarge or/and diminish. But there will not be “an exit *en masse*”; for example, Germany will not exit the EU, not even Greece; maybe Great Britain...

“The future of the European Union is clear. It will be like it has been so far... I think it will stick to this format – two-three countries may join, two-three may exit...”

“Germany is a very powerful country, and the Germans are not willing to exit the European Union.”

“I don’t think that Greece wants to exit either. There will be something going on in England – I know they are having a big referendum in two years or three; they have always been different. There are other countries that stay out – Switzerland, Norway.”

- A challenge to the EU would be that **some Member States**, like Germany, **could become very powerful** and wish to impose their will, while others, like Greece or Spain, would become dependent. In that case, brotherhood breaks apart.

“It seems to me that the main danger is that some countries become very powerful. It can be clearly seen that Germany supports, financially speaking, countries like Greece or Spain. Practically, the Greeks are Germany’s slaves. All their debt comes from there.”

- **More equal opportunities**: not only economic opportunities, but also cultural and educational opportunities – for example, to go and study in another European country.

In this respect, several participants highlight the importance of mutual help, of the European funds allocated to each Member State.

“I don’t think that a country should be assessed only from an economic point of view. Quality of life has many components, and they are not only material ones.”

“I wish there was a relative standardisation of opportunities, I wish it was much easier than now to go and study in another country.”

“I hope for a more balanced relation between income and living costs; a standardisation of lifestyles and incomes.”

“I think that the support given by the EU to all of its members is an exceptional thing in the history of Europe. It seems to be an opportunity that anyone, any group, should benefit from. I have heard of these funds and I tried to think of a historical precedent – I have not found one.”

“For me, the only difference brought by being in the Union is that there are funds we can access.”

➤ For most participants, **the economic challenges**, especially the energetic issues, are more important.

- People talk about the economic crisis affecting Member States and the competitiveness of the European economy at the global level.

“...The economic problem, especially given that many Member States are seriously shaken as a result of the crisis.”

“I think that the challenges to the European Union are economic – whether it will manage to remain competitive against countries such as China or Brazil”

- Regarding the energy issue, it is believed that some countries are more interested than others in this issue – Germany, for instance, seeks a collaboration with Russia; Romania treats this problem in a superficial manner.

“And the energy issue is also important. As far as I can see, Germany has an energy policy very much orientated toward Russia. I know the Germans prefer a tight relation with Russia and want to play a role with regard to energy, which is not our case.”

“Romania has a different line... Maybe it is not interested – see the story with Nabucco or Southstream.”

➤ **Foreign policy** is seen as a weakness of the EU. In the future, it should be vitalised.

“The major disadvantage of the EU is its foreign policy; Europeans are known to be weak, they argue against one another – see the case of Syria or Libya... In Libya, it was about nations operating separately, not together, as the European Union. I would like the EU to have a unique global stand.”

➤ **The EU does not have yet a strong leader**, like Obama is in the US. And it is necessary for the EU to develop. One participant does not agree, saying that “too much *personality* at the centre is bad”, and that the USA does not represent the ideal model for the EU.

“In general, you need leadership for every new thing you want to develop, and I don’t see a leader here. America has Obama... We might have it, but it is anonymous. If you ask me to indicate one single representative name at the top of the EU, I don’t know what to answer.”

“If we would have a leader like Obama, then we would be the United States of Europe, and I don’t think that this is the ideal.[...] To much ‘personality’ at the centre is not good either, for then you lose something. It is a difficult project. The problem is that there is no solution to that.”

- The topic of **cultural diversity** is brought again into discussion and some participants express their fear that globalisation might lead to European nations losing their cultural identities and traditions.

But, as with the discussions from the first topic, contrary opinions are formulated. The general conclusion is that diversity needs to be preserved.

“I still believe that one of the most important problems that the EU needs to address is the preservation of traditions. This globalisation may threat diversity. [...] I would regard diversity as the main priority and then the economic problem.”

“Diversity must be maintained. I am Romanian – that is fundamental. But, at the same time, I cannot do without the others. It is pointless if I live in Romania and don’t travel or study in another country. I need them in order to know what I am doing, what I am thinking, but at the same time I don’t want to leave my country. That is how I think it should be.”

“Globalisation does not mean losing identity. It is only a union of forces and a faster spreading of technologies, of development. This does not mean that we are destroying culture and traditions. On the contrary: we need to support them. But we are having an exchange: we give what we have and they do the same. We are creating a mix for the benefit of all.”

“I think that traditions might be destroyed, I think we are on the verge of destroying them. Maybe we should not have such a large opening toward other things.”

“Of course, diversity must be preserved, we have to avoid standardisation.”

- ❖ Regarding **Romania’s position within the EU**, several critical opinions, often self-critical, are emitted of Romania’s shortcomings on its path of integration.

- The misuse or waste of European funds

“I think that the EU seeks to secure equality of opportunities and the distribution of European funds. The fact that we succeed or not in accessing them, as the Germans or Poles do, is questionable. It depends on the practical spirit of each country.”

“Regarding European funds – we receive them, but we have to be capable of managing them, and the bureaucracy does not help. It depends on who gets these funds, because there have been many grants and the money just vanished.”

“The only problems we have are those we ourselves created. We are not capable of managing European funds, we are not capable of being a transparent country – corruption is massive. It is pointless that they are giving us funds if these funds don’t go where they should. I am not sure that this is the problem of the EU. It is our problem.”

- There is no national project – “we don’t know what to do with the membership to the EU”, “we are too indolent”.

“We wanted to join the EU and then we realised that we don’t really know what to do with this. We have to determine our priorities, to know what we are going to do with this membership and then make the best out of it.”

“We are more indolent, we wait for others to fix the problem.”

- How does the EU help Romania? Regarding this aspect, there are contradictory positions – either we are not helped at all or not enough, either we are, but we do not know how to take advantage of this help.

“We are not being helped either, we are being used only as a market for foreign products.”

“That is what I expect from the EU, to help us, to support us in reaching their level.”

“The industry has been ruined and there are no jobs. It is difficult now to reach a GDP similar to that of Western countries. We don’t get any help from the outside. But I don’t think that this is necessarily the solution, to get foreign help – we have to find that help within ourselves.”

“I don’t think that we are not being helped; we should not be that melodramatic, because we are being helped, but I feel like the support gets lost somewhere on the way and I don’t figure out where exactly.”

- We can talk of complexes of inferiority on the part of Romanians, which sometimes are unjustified.

“I think we are too small.”

“It is also about the feelings of inferiority we have at a national level. I think that very many Romanians say ‘that’s how we Romanians are’. I know many Romanians who are very nice and I would not change them for other Europeans.”

“The way we are now being perceived in the EU and we are taking part in this Union depends on what we can do at the present moment. We can make progress.”

- ❖ Almost all participants express **the need for better knowledge and understanding of the issues regarding the EU**. More particularly, they are interested in subjects that concern Romania.

The information currently available on these subjects is not satisfactory. Generally, it is believed that there is a problem with European communication, namely the information coming from Brussels “is lost or distorted somewhere on the way”. MEPs from Romania do not do their job with respect to communication either.

“I would like to find out more about the decisions regarding our country. I did not find out too much so far.”

“I would like the EU to be less impersonal, but I don’t know if that is possible. I would like it to have a better communication platform, so that Europeans get to know very well what we are aiming for. The ideals of the EU should be more present and more transparent – to reach the people.”

“From my point of view, we are poorly represented in the European Parliament. We don’t have the experts we need – we did not choose them properly. They are our representatives there, who could keep us informed.”

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ Overall, participants say that there are no means for having one's voice heard with regard to future directions of the EU. The main perceived reasons for why that is difficult or impossible are **the lack of receptiveness of national and European institutions, who discourage personal or collective initiatives**, such as project proposals. Someone has the impression that "our opinion does not matter". There are participants pleading for a EU communication strategy that is "closer to people", "less impersonal". In short, **the European Union has to be accessible**.

"I tried to apply for European funds with a project on Nazism and Fascism, but I was unsuccessful. This seems to me to be an important topic."

"I would like to have a more direct way to access European funds, not to depend on the intermediary bureaucracy. I would like to go directly to the EU for support."

"Our opinion does not count, it does not influence the decisions. How can an opinion influence them? Nothing happens."

"I would want a communication strategy that would be closer to people, through offices and centres, but face-to-face."

- **The vast majority of participants would want to get involved.** They think there are favourable conditions for that: people seem to be willing to become active, given for example the protests from the University Square in Bucharest (against the gold mining project of a Canadian corporation at Rosia Montana, a commune of 16 villages in Transylvania).

"I believe in action and that is why I am trying to do something."

"I don't feel like I have contributed so far by doing something or expressing my opinion, but I would wish to do so and I think I could do it. I could express my opinion loud and clear and, even if I would be on my own at the beginning, things could develop and I could build a community that would be concerned about the same issues. I could get involved in this way."

"I have noticed that this tendency to get involved in how our society functions is increasingly stronger, at least here in Romania. The University Square is full with people who want to defend their point of view..."

"An opinion shared by a whole group does matter. If I say now that I don't want Britain to be part of the EU anymore, maybe nobody will pay attention to me, but if there is ten of us, then someone might hear us, and if we all go out on the street... Maybe nothing will happen right away, but you get to be heard..."

- One participant says that, for now, he does not wish to get in any way involved with European issues, while another one expresses pessimism toward Romania's future in the EU.

"I don't intend to have any kind contribution; I don't wish to get involved now. Maybe in a few years, I shall wish to do that, but now I don't sit and check my e-mail to see what I've received from the EU."

"I don't think that future is too bright for Romania. I am pessimistic."

- ❖ The **specific subjects** on which participants would particularly wish to give their opinion and to be listened to as citizens are **European funds, taxes, scientific research, conservation of the cultural heritage, and agriculture** (particularly the exploitation of agricultural fields). The expectations in that respect entail the personal involvement of people.

"I would be interested in scientific research. There is a fund called European Science Foundation. Unfortunately, they give money only for very ambitious projects, involving many people."

“I would be interested in taxes. Some of them are imposed by the EU, but others are imposed by our authorities and are too high.”

“I would be interested in protecting heritage sites. There are many valuable sites. It is about protecting monuments and restoring their old charm. Some of them are not monuments anymore, but ruins. I would like the EU to create a programme on that issue, because this heritage is part of our Union’s identity.”

“I would like to do something related to agriculture, together with my father, because in my area (Bistrita) there are many unexploited fields. I feel very sorry for those lands.”

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

❖ The participants give a range of suggestions regarding new ways for citizens to get their voice heard:

➤ Promotional movies, documentaries

“They could make some films – promotional films – about the priorities of the European Union and show them in cinemas.”

➤ Advertising and entertainment shows on TV

“Advertising clips or entertainment TV shows on European topics, in order to make these topics more accessible, funnier... And you could have documentaries for the more serious people.”

➤ Territorial offices for European deputies, through which they would keep in touch with their voters and ask for their opinion on the problems that concern them. They also have the duty to inform citizens on what is going on within the EU, to debate problems with them, to be a kind of “buffer between us and the Union”.

“The deputies should have territorial offices where people who live there can come and express their opinion. They have the duty to ask people about their opinions on alimentation, culture, education, industry etc.”

“These European deputies are like a buffer between us and the Union. They should present us the state of affairs, so that we don’t have to read those long and boring documents. Briefly – tell us what projects are being debated and then ask for our opinion.”

➤ A PR department in every region that would simplify the information coming from the EU.

“It would be interesting to have a PR/client service department that would be extended to a local level. We don’t have time to go on the EU’s website and try to decipher all that technical language. I think there should be a department or some kind of entity that would simplify the information.”

➤ Regular opinion polls on what is debated at the EU level.

“There could be polls on what topics are being discussed within the EU.”

➤ A special building with several offices providing information on EU’s vital issues, where competent people would be working.

“It would be nice to have a building comprising all of these. It would be interesting to have all these ideas gathered under one roof.”

“There should be a building where you have offices for all the big issues – agriculture, research etc. –, where you can get rapidly informed and also express your opinion. [...] In short – a building with offices providing quick information about the major current topics and also absorbing people’s opinions, for the European Union has a soul, but not a body.”

“Regarding the idea of offices where you could go (like when you get a meeting with your mayor) and then be guided further on, to other offices – it is not a bad idea, but it has to be personalized, the relation should be personal. In these offices there should be people you can talk to and who are open toward citizens.”

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

- ❖ Participants have been shown, in turn, **8 various ideas** of means that could be put in place to allow citizens to have their voice better heard on EU related issues. They were asked how interested they are in each of them and for what reasons.

Firstly, here is **a top of the 8 suggestions** on the basis of participants' degree of interest.

- (1) **A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.**
- (2) **B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.**
- (3) **H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.**
- (4) **G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.**
- (5) **D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.**
- (6) **C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.**
- (7) **E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.**
- (8) **F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.**

- ❖ Listed below are **the main reasons** for the interest participants expressed towards each suggestion, along with remarks and suggestions.

- **A :** It entails **a direct relation, face to face, direct communication**; a site also has **a forum**; there should be a social network as well; there could be a building in its own right, a more elaborate headquarter;

“I am very interested in this. It concentrates the ideas (so that I don't waste my time reading all the documents), and then it asks for my opinion on the issues that have been discussed.”

“I would go a bit further. I would create a social network where everything would be very transparent and with a FAQ section where I can find or even suggest a topic that interests me.”

“A forum – usually, a site also has a forum. I am considering all that a site entails, including a forum.”

“Not necessarily an office, but a building in its own right. I would find interesting an architecture competition for that. It should be a totally futuristic building and people would know that it is the EU's building.”

“It should be something more welcoming, because all ministries and city halls have now such information offices and almost no-one visits them.”

“There is a question of design, of course. But what interests me is functionality, change of information, direct communication.”

- **B** : A mix between A and B; it is important to be there a special building (that would also have conference halls); an **interactive discussion; citizen involvement** would increase; a more consistent feedback for the EU; there would be the advantage of group discussions; media can also participate and the debates “could be filmed”; **ordinary citizens** be selected; an online video streaming of the debates; a system through which **the EU can monitor these opinions**.

“Besides going to an information office, there could be debates between citizens (like the one we are having now), in the presence of those who are informed about the EU. It shouldn't be like when you just sit into an audience.”

“Fifty people could fit in there and everyone could express his/her opinion. There should be an interactive discussion, on a weekly basis, a kind of Vox Populi, where everyone could speak his/her mind and receive information.”

“Some people would get more involved in EU issues and their feedback would get to the EU institutions in a more consistent fashion than having a hundred people with a hundred questions.”

“In a group discussion, certain problems and solutions would prevail and communication with the EU would become smoother in both ways.”

“There could be very simply a live stream of the debates, besides having televisions filming. YouTube offers something like that and it costs nothing. Everyone can watch it. You don't depend on anyone – the debates are there on the Internet and who wants to can watch them.”

“I find it to be the most productive proposition... Debates may have a crucial role, but it is important how we use them – where they go and how they can change things.”

“If the commissioner for agriculture comes to the debates, then there should be 10-15 people interested in agriculture. Topics should be previously announced, so that people interested in them would show up.”

- **G** : **Communication would be targeted.**

“I think that it is the most important thing, because you have to appeal to people somehow. Right now, people are not that interested in participating... Many don't even vote in the elections.”

“The European Union is for everybody, including old people. If Internet would work for young people, maybe meetings or an info service would be more appropriate for older people.”

- **H** : **No inhibitions when communicating online; there's a need for opinion makers**, like Philip de Franco in the US or Moise Guran in Romania.

“It is very interesting, because usually, unlike a conference which many people attend and where you might not have the courage to ask a question or speak your mind, you have no inhibitions when you are online.”

“...On YouTube there is the channel of a man called Philip De Franco, who talks about the political problems in America and I think it would be useful to have several specific channels, for every region, where an opinion leader would tackle citizens' problems.”

“There are a few opinion leaders, like Moise Guran. He already is an opinion leader. He has a TV show at the public television and a radio show at Europa FM on economic issues.”

- **D : It is a good idea**; the commissioners (who the respondents imagine would be present) should meet with the citizens – they are the specialists; the commissioners should not come here in the “communist” fashion.

“I am not saying they should come that often, but at least twice a year.”

“They should come a few times a year in the vicinity of where we live... I don’t have money to go to Brussels and meet them.”

“But he should not talk with the peasants in the middle of the corn field.”

- **C : they are very useful.**

“Statistics are always welcome.”

- **E : they seem efficient**; a system of video consultations, on key terms.

“They seem efficient to me, for there may be people interested in speaking their mind and so they can post their comments.”

“Consultations mean that he presents you something and expects an answer from you, not necessarily a ‘yes or no’ one.”

- **F : not opinion polls, but consultations on the Internet.**

“Yes, and they have to do the same, to ask for our opinion – consultations via the Internet.”

- ❖ Besides the positive reasons that justify the interest, some participants **also brought some criticisms or expressed doubts regarding several suggestions**. Thus:

- **A : the site is too impersonal**; an office seems unfit, more appropriate is a special department.

“I would develop a community, a site is too impersonal.”

“I would create – but I don’t know where – a special department. Something bigger and more open toward citizens.”

- **B : the ideas expressed during debates should be selected**; the term “brainstorming” should be used instead of “debates”.

“There is no method of selecting between all these ideas and clearly there should be one.”

“I would rename these debates as ‘brainstorming’. This is what we are doing now and I personally discovered here a lot of interesting ideas that I had not even thought about.”

- **D : it is not a good idea**; where would they come – at the televisions, at one of the centres, in the new beautiful building? – and how can they be persuaded to come?

“It is a rather bad idea, because these people are busy and we should let them do their job.”

“If it is somewhere where he [the EU representative] cannot get away easily, like in front of TV cameras, with a lot of people around him, he might not find time for it.”

- **G : not everybody can afford having Internet, not everybody has a computer or access to the Internet.**

“For example, the young people have access to the Internet, but what about the old people? The European Union is for everybody.”

- ❖ At the end, someone is wondering: through these 8 suggestions, is it us, as citizens, who want “our opinions to reach the EU or is the EU trying to reach us”? Because some of them regard “our way of getting involved”, while others seem to regard “the way the centre wants to find out something from us”. In response, other participants say: “it is both”.

This is also the final conclusion of the group discussions: **Communication has to go both ways. This enables citizens to make themselves heard and the Union to answer them.**

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

STUDIUL CALITATIV

« IMPLICAREA CETĂȚENILOR ÎN UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ »

GHID DE DISCUȚII

INTRODUCERE

Bună ziua, sunt Melania Bortun, cercetător la institutul Data Media, care realizează studiul pentru care ne-am întâlnit astăzi.

Înainte de a începe discuția, aș vrea să vă rog pe fiecare dintre dvs. să se prezinte în câteva cuvinte: cine sunteți, dacă trăiți singur(ă) sau în cuplu, dacă aveți copii, care sunt activitățile dvs. profesionale sau altele, și ce studii ați urmat sau urmați în prezent.

TEMA 1

Ne-am întâlnit astăzi pentru a vorbi despre Uniunea Europeană.

Care este primul lucru care vă vine în minte când vine vorba de Uniunea Europeană?

- Reacții spontane
- Se explorează :
 - Natura lucrurilor menționate spontan despre UE;
 - Aspecte pozitive și aspecte negative legate de UE;
 - Exprimarea interesului/atracției sau a dezinteresului/distanțării.

TEMA 2

Acum, în legătură cu lucrurile pe care le știți și le gândiți despre UE: de unde provin ele?

Care sunt sursele din care obțineți informații sau aflați opinii despre UE? – Mă refer la „surse” în cel mai larg sens al cuvântului, de la surse de informare oficiale și până la conversații informale cu prieteni sau cu alte persoane...

- Reacții spontane
- Se explorează :
 - Gradul de diversitate al surselor menționate;
 - Natura aportului (de informații) primit de la fiecare sursă;
 - Cât de interesantă și cât de credibilă este fiecare sursă.

TEMA 3

Haideți să discutăm acum – mai concret – despre **viitorul Uniunii Europene** și despre **întrebările** pe care vi le puneți referitor la viitorul ei.

Există probabil unele aspecte pe care le considerați la fel de importante și pe care ați dori să le cunoașteți sau să le înțelegeți mai bine – aspecte privitoare la modul în care funcționează UE și la direcția în care se îndreaptă – lucruri despre care poate că nu obțineți informații suficiente de la sursele pe care le-ați menționat mai devreme.

Despre ce aspecte ați dori, în mod special, să știți mai multe?

- Reacții spontane
- Se explorează :
 - Impresii generale – o bună sau o slabă cunoaștere/înțelegere a acestor chestiuni;
 - Percepții despre provocările majore cu care se va confrunta UE în următorii ani;
 - Exprimarea de către participanți a nevoii de a cunoaște mai bine și de a înțelege mai bine – ce teme, mai precis? De ce informațiile disponibile momentan despre aceste teme sunt nesatisfăcătoare?

TEMA 4

În calitate de cetățean, fiecare dintre dumneavoastră ar trebui să poată să-și spună părerea și să-și facă auzită opinia cu privire la direcțiile în care se îndreaptă UE – să-și exprime acordul sau dezacordul față o anumită direcție sau să-și exprime orice altă opinie.

Cum credeți că puteți face acest lucru la momentul actual?

- Reacții spontane
- Se explorează :
 - Percepții despre cât de ușor sau cât de dificil este pentru ei să se exprime și să-și facă auzită opinia despre chestiuni legate de UE – prin ce mijloace?;
 - Percepții despre motivele pentru care este dificil
 - Subiecte concrete în legătură cu care participanții ar vrea în mod special să-și exprime opinia și să fie ascultați în calitate de cetățeni. Așteptări în această privință.

TEMA 5

Acum, v-aș propune să ne gândim care ar fi diversele mijloace prin care cetățenii europeni, așa cum suntem noi, și-ar putea face auzită opinia.

Haideți să încercăm să ne gândim la orice mijloc posibil. Să dăm frâu liber imaginației și să ne gândim la orice modalitate posibilă de a ne face auzită opinia – chiar dacă, pentru moment, nu știm cum ar putea fi pusă în practică.

Ce modalități ne-am putea imagina?

- Reacții spontane
- Se stimulează creativitatea grupului, încurajându-i pe participanți să „sară” de la o idee la alta.

TEMA 6

Acum, am să vă arăt câteva idei deja vehiculate – modalități care ar putea fi implementate, pentru a le permite cetățenilor să-și facă auzită mai bine opinia despre chestiuni legate de UE.

Am să vă întreb ce credeți despre fiecare în parte.

- Se discută, succesiv, fiecare propunere în parte. Participanții sunt îndemnați să reacționeze la fiecare, întrebându-i **cât de mult îi interesează și de ce**.

A — Un serviciu de informații despre modul în care funcționează UE și despre politicile UE, incluzând următoarele: un birou de informații deschis publicului în fiecare mare oraș, un sait pe Internet și un serviciu prin care să se răspundă rapid la întrebările cetățenilor adresate prin telefon, prin poștă sau prin email.

B — Dezbateri organizate în *mass-media* între cetățeni obișnuiți și specialiști în chestiuni legate de UE, având ca temă direcțiile în care se îndreaptă UE.

C — Sondaje de opinie despre UE realizate periodic în toată Europa, care să le permită cetățenilor europeni să afle ce cred atât conașionalii lor, cât și cetățenii din alte țări.

D — Întâlniri cu reprezentanții dumneavoastră din Parlamentul European și cu alți responsabili UE, organizate de câteva ori pe an, în apropierea locului unde trăiți.

E — Consultări prin Internet, deschise tuturor cetățenilor, organizate de Comisia Europeană atunci când în cadrul UE urmează să fie luate decizii majore.

F — Consultări similare celor de mai sus, organizate la nivel național de guvernul nostru.

G — Un serviciu interactiv, prin intermediul Internetului și al rețelelor de socializare, pentru a colecta în mod constant din partea cetățenilor păreri, dorințe sau critici privitoare la direcțiile în care se îndreaptă UE.

H — Campanii de informare desfășurate într-un mod mult mai activ decât în anii trecuți, pentru a-i încuraja pe cetățeni să se implice în viitoarele dezbateri și să participe la viitoarele alegeri pentru Parlamentul European, din primăvara anului următor.

Vă mulțumesc din nou pentru participarea la această discuție.

Dacă, după această întâlnire, vă mai vine vreo idee legată de ce am discutat, nu ezitați să ne scrieți – la adresa: office@data-media.ro.



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN SPAIN**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Madrid on 18th December on the subject of Citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Spanish section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Spain by Psyma Ibérica Marketing Research.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 4
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 respondents.
 - Hydraulic technician.
 - Electro-medicine technician.
 - Social worker.
 - Inspector, Madrid municipal housing agency.

 - Higher-middle class: 4 respondents.
 - Emission system engineer, Airbus.
 - Intern, insurance brokerage (head of household is a businessman).
 - Building company owner.
 - Businessman – consulting firm.

 - The respondents were also recruited in order to have diverse political opinions represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ **Scepticism and disappointment are initially prevalent** when discussing the existence of such union across the European Union country members.

“I used to believe in the EU, but after seeing what’s happened, now we’re going through tough times, I think such a union does not exist”.

“We’ll never be able to say EU but global interests instead”.

- ❖ Respondents believe there is a **great degree of inequality and imbalance** across the different member countries.

“Northern European countries have a certain status. We don’t, and we’re virtually the poor relation”.

“Latin and Mediterranean countries seem to be playing in a different league”.

Respondents understand that **power is concentrated in a few countries**.

“In the end, only two countries rule – Germany and France. I have the feeling the remaining countries are like a piñata, to be broken so money pours out”.

“We are nothing in the EU. Whatever Merkel says, that’s what goes”.

- ❖ **Lack of identification with the EU** and how it operates is revealed.

- ❖ **Citizens feel abandoned** by Governments and the EU government.

“To rescue Governments or banks, there is no problem. But to rescue the people...like we didn’t exist”.

“These facets of politicians are not only present at the European level, but also at the local level in every country. It is not caused by the EU, but unfortunately, the tendency is like that”.

- ❖ The **distance from the European institutions** felt by Spanish citizens is claimed to be widespread

- ❖ Respondents highlight that the interests of Spanish citizens are not represented by the members of the European Parliament.

“You have to vote for someone who will defend your interests, whatever their ideology, and someone you can hold accountable, but that is not the way it is”.

“The European Parliament members from the different parties should defend the same projects, everything that is good for our country, and it is not the way it is”.

- ❖ Respondents consider not only that Spain trails behind other European countries regarding economic parameters, but also regarding educational achievement.

“For example, my cousin was studying industrial engineering in London, and they have all the tools, special classrooms, companies that offer them the chance to have a future. Here at the university I’m not that lucky. And you think: I’ll have to go abroad to have a good future”.

- ❖ Respondents believe there are more discussions about EU-related topics mainly due to current pressures.

“We are also more negative because of the situation we’re currently living through. But it is better to open up your eyes, and be aware of what’s happening”.

Advantages:

- ❖ Initially it is not easy to come up with advantages associated with the EU – disappointment is the prevalent feeling. The underlying feeling is however that, despite everything, the **European Union is positive**. The following aspects are mentioned:
 - No borders as the key aspect –this helps increase freedom of movement across the EU.
 - The euro as the shared currency.
 - Cohesion Fund.
 - Bologna Process.
 - Labour mobility.
 - Cultural exchange.

Disadvantages or areas for improvement:

- ❖ Thinking about the negatives, respondents mention the following, some of them often repeated:
 - Financial costs.
 - Distance: far from the citizens.
 - Pressure (experienced by “second rate” countries).
 - Unequal conditions.
 - Power delegation and decision making.

“We had to delegate to some institutions part of our sovereignty, our decision power”.

- Loss of control.

“We’ve been put on a leash, and they take us out for a walk occasionally”.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

❖ The following **sources** are considered **the most relevant and are most frequently used** for information on EU topics (in this order approximately):

- Television.
- The printed media, i.e., newspapers.
- Digital media.
- The Internet.

“There is a website where information is available like in 16 languages, but when you go to the information as such, it is only English, French and German. I think this is awful”.

- The radio.
- Family and friends.

“My partner tells me all about it. I’m not really interested”.

- The work environment.

“In the work canteen we talk about these topics”.

- Specific documentaries/ talk shows on the EU.

❖ **Respondents notice the absence of pro-European media** and believe each media group protects their own economic interests.

“I hear more EU-related news on Channel 1 and 2, more than on the private channels. That’s my feeling”.

“In the paper La Razón, if there is any Government-related EU news, it is always presented slightly better than maybe in El País”.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

❖ **Respondents reveal some interest in finding information on several issues regarding the future of the EU:**

- Economic data and budgets, the economic cost for Spanish citizens.
- The roles of the individuals working in the EU.
- Salaries of EU employees.
- Authority of each country to make decisions on their own regardless of EU decisions.
- Real objectives set by the EU as a whole.
- EU-planned projects to tackle the severe problem of unemployment.
- Benefits that EU membership has delivered to each country, and comparison between the situation of each country pre-EU and currently.
- How prepared are the individuals representing the interests of the citizens.

❖ **Respondents suggest the following recommendations:**

- Transparency.
- No bilateral meetings, e.g., Spanish-Italian summits – respondents consider that the standard EU meetings should suffice.
- Search of shared interests that will not damage other EU country members.

“Solidarity is impossible because we live under a capitalistic system, ruled by self-interest only. A global group is impossible to build because members only come together to protect their own interests. They don’t care whether their interests have an impact on a third country”.

- Developing common legislation.

“There is no common law that binds us together. Every country has their own laws – we have nothing in common other than market”.

- A court of justice that will investigate if the rights and duties of citizens are being preserved or jeopardized.
- Larger investments in citizen travel and exchange so they become familiar with other countries in every sense – culturally, professionally etc.
- Voting for individuals rather than representative parties is considered important.

“You should vote for a member of the European Parliament you could tell, OK, I will vote for you, and then I’ll hold you accountable”.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ Respondents feel there are no suitable ways to have a voice on the future EU rules and regulations.

“We have no access to make decisions on any rules. I don't know how many signatures are required on certain topics”.

- ❖ Respondents believe they have **no influence** on decision-making in Europe or within the Spanish Government.

“It is beyond us. It is not in our hands”

“What saddens me, is that it is all a lie – you have no say in it”.

- ❖ Respondents believe the EU website is not useful or effective.

“I visited the EU site like 8 years ago, and wrote a letter demanding transparency in every sense, and I'm still waiting”

- ❖ Respondents claim there is a **great difference with other countries**. The means of expression in other countries are more active and so are their politicians.

“For example, I have a girlfriend living in Paris, and mobilizations over there are being different. They are paid more attention”.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

❖ Respondents consider **the following ways to get their voice heard** of high interest:

- Citizen's Advice Bureau in every country with active operations.
- Website.
- Unique 24h dedicated communication channel.
- TV shows, and news.
- EU publicity explaining to citizens the best ways to be heard. More continuous information.
- Members of the European Parliament should offer to make part of their workday available to offer solutions to citizen's issues.

“For example, doctors or medical representatives who want to talk to their MEP to be heard on some issue and defend their rights”.

- International cross-cultural meetings on TV programmes...producing a range of conclusions at the end.
- Idea exchange across EU citizens.
- Work exchanges with other countries.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS’ INVOLVEMENT

A. An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- ❖ Respondents consider this proposition is **quite interesting**, and rate it 8.7 points on average on a 10 point scale.
- ❖ Several respondents mention the tool is already available or, at least, something similar.
- ❖ This proposition is very well rated as it offers citizens information and explanations, and it can solve any possible doubts and queries.

“I said “quickly” which means there would be many people to receive all the queries. It may exist already so this could be happening now, but I don’t use it now because I feel abandoned”.

“The channel is not appealing to me if at the end of the line, a machine is answering the telephone”.

“I think it is very good but maybe too ambitious and a bit difficult to maintain both the “quickly”, which is a bit subjective, and the “on the telephone” – it is impossible that the person picking up the telephone will answer all your doubts”.

B. Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 8.25 on average.
- ❖ This proposition is believed to be a **helpful way to unify citizen’s opinions on the EU**.
- ❖ Respondents find it fundamental that the information be communicated in a close, easy way to ensure comprehension.
- ❖ Some however do not believe this proposition will help bring EU laws closer.

“It is ridiculous. In the end, you’ll go to a radio station or a TV channel, and it will all be focused on what they are interested in. I don’t think this will allow citizens to find out about European rules, and why a rule is really going to be implemented”.

- ❖ Respondents say a debate should take place among people with similar experiences. They also value an exchange of opinions between experts and inexperienced citizens.

“I think an exchange of opinions between experienced and inexperienced people is very good. But a debate including people who are not at the same level is totally unrealistic. In the end, it is not a debate – one will clearly swallow the other”.

“Experts may know more about some topics but they are not the owners of the truth, and the ones who know about real everyday situations are us, the citizens”.

- ❖ Respondents suggest organizing talks rather than debates to ensure the average citizen can express their interests, concerns, and objectives directly to an individual who can explain and talk about the situation.

C. Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 6.75 on average.
- ❖ **Some do not support polls**, as they do not consider polls are a very objective tool.
- ❖ **Respondents add it is interesting to survey public opinion but question whether other countries' citizens will have any interest in their opinions.**

“Everything that involves having information from other countries, other citizens, is always positive”.

“It is another channel so people express themselves, and this is fine, but I don't know to what extent I may be interested in what other people may think about it”.

“I don't think that, generally speaking, anybody cares what people in other countries think about anything, and I don't know what value this would have”.

D. The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 8.88 on average. This is the **best rated, most desired option**.

“This is what we want, it is very desirable”.

“It would be terrific”.

“This is what I rated the highest by far”.

- ❖ Some respondents question the possibility of organizing and materializing this initiative.

“Who is not going to like this? I just don't think it is realistic”.

“If anything must be discarded, this would go first – I think it is unfeasible. It is physically impossible. And even if it were not, if you are face to face with a politician, you won't be able to say what you want to say, I think you'd start talking to someone who has very clear ideas and is very articulate, and they would take 2 seconds to tell you 3 sentences which at the time would seem fine to you, only to notice 5 minutes later that you didn't say this or that...”

E. Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 8.12 on average, saying it is **a good way to show interest in the citizens and to listen to their opinions.**
- ❖ Also respondents add it is a more realistic, feasible, inexpensive and simple option they can envision more easily.

“It is feasible, viable, low cost, and the process to screen information can’t be very complicated. Once all these opinions were checked, the majority would win”.

“It looks good to me, it is inexpensive, it could be done and we can optimize the questions. Whether MEPs would then take notice, that is the question”.

“It is an economical option to test citizen’s opinions when making decisions”.

- ❖ Respondents suggest this option should be used to make less relevant decisions as well.

“I think it is very good but I don’t like the fact it is only used to make important decisions”.

F. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 7.62 on average.
- ❖ This initiative receives **two differing types of opinions:**
 - On the one hand, respondents find the option is important as it truly protects the interests of the citizens of the country.

“The involvement of the Government in EU’s decision is critical”.

- Others however believe this tool might bias decisions in favour of the interests of Spanish politicians.

“It is vital we are all together in the same boat in defence of the EU, but coming from the Government, they would be thinking that the money would help them pay their own super-salaries instead of investing”.

- Additionally, respondents feel that consultations led by any specific Government will always have partisan interests, and would lack objectivity.

“Depending who is ruling in the country, if it does not move in the same direction as the EU...that’s bad”.

G. An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 8.5 on average, on the grounds that it is **a very interesting, innovative idea to collect different points of view.**

“It is possible to learn from people, from the exchange of points of view. I’m not a big fan of social media but they may make you think things differently or open up your mind”.

- ❖ Respondents say it is a way of improving access as social media are now the norm, and everybody is using them.

“A lot easier, more accessible, and more convenient for everybody”.

“With a simple Like or Don’t like, you can find out”.

- ❖ Respondents mention that not knowing the profile of the recipients is a disadvantage.

“Everything looks good to me but ultimately you don’t know who will get this”.

- ❖ Respondents believe this option is less ambitious than the first one, and could be included as part of it.

H. Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- ❖ Respondents rate this tool 6.75 on average, as **one more informational campaign.**

“Because after all, a campaign is a campaign, and they are trying to sell us hot air”.

“It is just an informational campaign”.

- ❖ All respondents suspect this initiative may have a hidden agenda.

“Elections, next spring, and informational campaigns – these three phrases worry me. Now they show an interest in making us aware because the elections are coming, right? I feel again cheated”.

“It is a good idea, but that they would remember us because of the elections, is very sad. It should be on a continuing basis. It is laughable and utopic that we could have an influence on MEPs”.

- ❖ Respondents consider public campaigns and involving citizens are fundamental.

“It encourages citizens to get involved. So far we’ve heard and voted without much basis for it”.

“Publicity is fundamental. So is providing information. But it smells of elections.

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTEM

INVESTIGACIÓN CUALITATIVA SOBRE IMPLICACIÓN CIUDADANA EN LA UNIÓN EUROPEA

GUÍA DE DISCUSIÓN

(INTRODUCCIÓN: Pida a cada participante que se presente en pocas palabras, diciendo quién es y a qué se dedica, etc.)

TEMA 1

Hoy vamos a hablar sobre la Unión Europea.

¿Podría decirme qué es lo primero que le viene a la mente si le pregunto por la UE?

- Reacciones espontáneas
- Insistir:
 - Naturaleza de los temas sobre la UE mencionados en espontáneo.
 - Aspectos positivos y negativos relacionados con la UE.
 - Grado de interés e implicación de los participantes en los temas relacionados con la UE.

TEMA 2

¿De dónde obtiene la información que conforma lo que sabe y piensa sobre la UE?

¿Podría nombrar las fuentes de las que obtiene la información o en las que oye opiniones sobre la UE (con el significado más amplio de "fuentes", desde fuentes oficiales a conversaciones informales con amigos, etc.) ?

- Reacciones espontáneas
- Insistir:
 - Grado de variedad de las fuentes nombradas.
 - Naturaleza de la información en cada una.
 - Interés / credibilidad de cada una

TEMA 3

Vamos a centrarnos en el futuro de la Unión Europea y en las preguntas que les puedan surgir a este respecto.

Probablemente haya ciertos aspectos que considera importantes y que le gustaría saber y entender mejor con respecto a la manera en que funciona la UE y las normativas que ponen en marcha (puede que no encuentre toda la información que desea en las fuentes que ha mencionado anteriormente).

¿Sobre qué aspectos desearía recibir más información?

- Reacciones espontáneas
- Insistir:
 - Impresiones generales de tener un alto o bajo grado de conocimiento / comprensión de estos temas.
 - Percepción de los principales retos de la UE para los próximos años.
 - Expresiones de los participantes sobre la necesidad de saber y entender más (¿el qué exactamente?). Pensando en la información disponible en la actualidad sobre estos temas, ¿en qué aspecto no es satisfactoria?

TEMA 4

Como ciudadano, debería poder dar su opinión y hacerse oír con respecto a las futuras normativas de la Unión Europea (ya sea para aprobar o rechazar una normativa, o por otras razones)...

¿Hasta qué punto puede hacerlo hoy en día?

- Reacciones espontáneas
- Insistir:
 - Percepción de facilidad / dificultad al expresarse y hacerse oír en los temas relacionados con la UE
 - ¿A través de qué medios?
 - Percepción de razones por las que es difícil.
 - Temas en los que los participantes desearían dar su opinión y ser escuchados como ciudadanos; expectativas que surgen con esa posibilidad.

TEMA 5

Existen muchos medios a través de los cuales los ciudadanos europeos como nosotros podrían hacerse oír.

Por favor, deje volar su imaginación y piense en cualquier medio, sin descartar ninguna idea aunque no sepa cómo se podría poner en práctica.

¿Qué opciones surgen?

- Reacciones espontáneas
- Estimule la creatividad grupal animando a los participantes para que "salten" de una idea a otra.

TEMA 6

A continuación le voy a enumerar varios medios que han surgido previamente a través de los cuales los ciudadanos podrían hacerse oír más en temas de la UE.

Por favor, dígame qué opina de cada uno.

- Los participantes deben reaccionar a cada propuesta por turnos, pregunte por su grado de interés en cada una y las razones.

A- Servicio de información compuesto por oficinas de información abiertas al público situadas en las grandes ciudades, una página web y un servicio que responda rápidamente a las preguntas formuladas sobre el funcionamiento de la UE y sus políticas por teléfono, correo postal o correo electrónico.

B- Debates entre ciudadanos medios y expertos en temas de la UE organizados en medios de comunicación importantes sobre normativas de la UE.

C- Sondeo de opinión sobre la UE realizado de manera regular en toda Europa, que permita a los ciudadanos saber la opinión de sus compatriotas y de los ciudadanos de otros países.

D- La posibilidad de reunirse varias veces al año con Miembros del Parlamento Europeo u otros políticos de la UE próximos a su domicilio.

E- Consultas por Internet abiertas a todos los ciudadanos y organizadas por la Comisión Europea cuando se deban tomar decisiones importantes en la UE.

F- Consultas similares organizadas por el gobierno de su país.

G- Servicio interactivo permanente, a través de Internet y las redes sociales, que recopile los puntos de vista, deseos o críticas de los ciudadanos sobre las normativas tomadas por la UE.

H- Campañas informativas que se lleven a cabo de manera más activa que en años anteriores y así animar a los ciudadanos para que se impliquen en los debates y en la elección de los Miembros del Parlamento Europeo la primavera próxima.

De nuevo, gracias por participar en esta reunión.

Si le surgieran nuevas ideas tras la reunión, no dude en hacérselas llegar.

(Proporcionar una dirección de correo electrónico a los participantes para que puedan transmitir sus ideas)



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN SWEDEN**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Stockholm on 19th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Swedish section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Sweden by Kommunikera.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 3
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 2
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of respondent/head of household: mental keeper, driver, students)
 - Higher-middle class: 3 (professions of respondent/head of household: IT-engineer, economist, management consultant)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- **The overall spontaneous reactions were positive** to the European Union, regardless of gender or age.
 - The general **cooperation** between so many countries is important in order to agree on various issues of economic concern.
 - Possibility for smaller countries to **influence** European politics.
 - **Work mobility** within the Union is positive, especially for the younger generation.
 - Originally a **peace project** and is still a possible way to keep peace in Europe.

- Comments were then made regarding lack of information as well as some negative aspects of the European Union.
 - A feeling that EU is too bureaucratic and at the same time there are many different lobby groups in Brussels, which might affect the democratic system. Therefore one strong comment made was a **need for transparency** regarding the **decision making process**.
 - Most of the participants did not know who their representatives from Sweden are, something which was said being negative.

- **The more sceptical or even negative comments were made as second thoughts.**
 - The focus on politics regarding agricultural products was said to influence the feeling of EU dealing with unimportant matters such as the size of a cucumber or a strawberry, instead of peace.

- It should be noted that the amount of interest for EU related issues increased during the initial discussion, and all participants in the group took pride in contributing to the conversation.

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

- The **main source** of information was said to be Swedish **media**, **TV news** were mentioned as well as **daily papers** and **news on radio**. One of the participants was born in Poland and mentioned also Polish media as a source of information.
 - The TV channels mentioned were news on Channels 1, 2 and 4 which were all regarded as more informed and reliable than other TV news channels. None mentioned international TV-news channels during this discussion.
 - Dagens Nyheter (largest daily paper in Sweden) was said to be trustworthy as well as Dagens Industri (financial daily paper). The tabloids, i.e the evening press was not seen as trustworthy at all, even though some articles about EU decisions have been published during the years.
 - Regardless of media channel, a claim was that the information is selected by journalists, and therefore most likely biased according to political colour of the individual journalist. Most of them are perceived as left wing, and therefore not neutral, on the contrary; many are even against the European Union as an institution, which reflects their reporting.
 - TV was said to be a better channel for information due to lack of active interest for EU related issues altogether. It is easier to listen to news than to read a daily paper.

- Some of the younger participants also said that some basic facts about EU had been taught in **school**.
 - One of the participants had been a university student of political science and commented that there had been students from Greece very critical of the Euro and how Germany has dealt with the monetary union. Those Greek students seemed in general more involved and actively discussing EU-related issues.

- Interesting to note is that none of the participants said that there is any discussion on EU at their work place or among friends.

- Regarding **content of information** only three different issues were mentioned, all three having been in Swedish news during the past few months, namely for or against the monetary union, Swedish snuff and roaming costs.
 - Discussion regarding the Euro was intense before and during the Swedish vote to be part or not of the **monetary union**. But, the discussion comes alive every time the financial situation is described in the Swedish press. Examples mentioned were Greece and how Germany has put pressure in order to rescue European economy.
 - **Swedish snuff** (snus) is of national pride and therefore causes feelings of provocation when the EU is discussing the probability to prohibit it.

- **Roaming costs for mobiles** were also mentioned as something that lately has been an item in Swedish media. Most welcome decisions about minimizing those costs.

- The participant originating from Poland mentioned that Polish press compared to Swedish press, is transparent and that the discussions leading up to decisions within EU is reported and debated in Polish press.

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- The **decision making process** within the European Union was said to be one issue of both concern and interest, and came up as the first and most spontaneous comment. The fact that this was mentioned by all showed that one worries about the future of EU and whether it is and will continue to be democratic or not.
 - Questions raised had to do with responsibilities and who has insights and makes sure that EU is run democratically. A few said that it is hard to trust the EU democracy as so much is written about the lobbyists in Brussels.
 - The focus regarding democracy came down to a very detailed discussion on which the institutions or bodies are that keep reviewing what the EU institutions do, if they follow the legislation and rules and what the punishments are if not.

- During the discussion some wanted to learn more about **lobbying**, who the various lobbyists are and what questions they are dealing with.
 - Although lobbyists has negative connotations, there seemed to be some fascination for what it means and what can be achieved, parallel to an understanding of how it fits or does not fit the notion of democracy.

- The **rights and obligations** as both Swedish and EU citizen brought questions to the table. Some stated that if EU can become relevant for the individual, the interest will most likely increase among the general Swedish population.

- The practical **functions of all EU institutions** were mentioned as one point of interest, although only by a few of the participants.
 - It was compared with how the Swedish Parliament has a homepage which describes the various committees, work groups and decision making process, etcetera. This homepage was mentioned as an example which could be copied by the EU.

- The great **challenges** in the near future are to make sure that EU remains truly **democratic**, to **make EU relevant** to the EU citizens, something which can be partly achieved by conveying beforehand which decisions are to be made in various areas.

CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- The participants all expressed how hard it seems to be to make one's voice heard towards politicians. This was a statement made towards both politicians in Sweden and in the EU.
There are political **parties and group constellations in the EU which do not exist in Sweden**, something which was mentioned as strange and somewhat confusing. On the other hand, so far very few had taken the initiative to learn more or try to influence in other ways than voting during elections.

- Although there are ways **to influence** it was said to be **difficult** due to the fact that Sweden is a very small country and of less importance compared to countries like France and Germany
 - The upcoming EU election in Sweden in 2014 was mentioned as one way to influence by casting a vote. However, most participants **do not know who the politicians** running for the EU Parliament are.
 - One problem is that the **Swedish politicians**, either in the Swedish parliament or those running for EU usually do not address issues relevant for the citizens and dealt with by EU. The Swedish politicians need to focus more on EU than what the case is of today. Only then is the EU on the agenda and might become of greater interest to follow.
 - It also became clear that even though Sweden has a minister of EU and democracy, Birgitta Ohlson, most participants did not know that she is the minister of EU affairs. When the name was mentioned by one of the group participants, all nodded in recognition.
 - The **EU court** was mentioned as being an institution to which citizens can turn and influence decisions made in Sweden which are seemed to be wrong or opposing EU legislation.
 - Some of the respondents did comment that they are **egoistic** and therefore more concerned about the economic development in Sweden than to influence political agendas within the EU.

- Some of the subjects mentioned as being important to influence, but impossible as a private person were said to be **migration and environmental** issues. Having said this the claim was that even if it is hard to make one's voice heard among politicians, it might be easier to address local issues rather than global ones.

- One way to hopefully be able to influence was said to be by first getting information about Sweden compared to other EU countries regarding subjects such as **agriculture, education, infrastructure and animal protection** and then turn to the EU homepage with comments.
 - The **EU homepage** was said to be a tool for learning and explore for example which decisions have been made during 2013, and how those decisions have affected Sweden. It is interesting however to notice was that

the homepage was mentioned as a source of influence, but not earlier in the discussion as a source of information.

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- One of the first ideas proposed was to use Internet and **direct voting** on specific topics. Comparison was made to Switzerland where many important decisions are made through referendum.
 - By direct voting it was perceived giving the EU Parliament more power and influence than the EU Council by the help of citizens in the various member countries. This as a consequence would increase interest both for the EU and certain specific subjects, as the Parliament is seen as the peoples' representative which the Council is not.

- Another idea was to collect **signed petitions** supporting a specific issue. Having reached a specific number, for example 10 000, the issue would be forwarded to the EU office for further consideration and handling. Important to state is that the participants had no idea that this idea exists in the Lisbon Treaty.
 - The whole idea of direct democracy seemed to the participants to be attractive and a proof of no hidden agendas due to transparency and citizen involvement. Subjects mentioned to be considered via petitions were **peace and security, agriculture and free trade**, as well as in favour or not to bring certain **new Member States** into the EU.

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- Only a few knew that this kind of information service does already exist. One of them had used the service for a school assignment.
- The **web site** is the channel to turn to, rather than the other options; i.e phone, mail or e-mail.
- An information office was said be an unnecessary cost as it was hard to imagine who would turn to that particular office when there are other channels to get information today if needed or wanted.

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- This idea aroused interest among most of the participants, and was said to be more **relevant** and easier to digest than actively having to turn to an information office.
 - Debates about EU have been broadcasted during the years on topics directly concerning the Swedish citizens, such as snuff and now as election to the EU parliament is approaching.

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- This idea was seen as interesting, and had actually also been a spontaneous reaction to what information could be **of interest**.; to compare Sweden with other EU countries.
 - The main reason for interest in the results from opinion polls was that it might provide other perspectives on important issues such as the **decision making process, agriculture and environment**.
- Even more interesting as an idea was to conduct polls on EU within Sweden and to keep it on a national level.
 - Ideas on how Swedes think in various parts of the country and different segments of the population in Sweden regarding for example roads and transport system, agriculture, environment, safety were brought forward as being interesting to learn more about.

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- This idea was **not at all of interest**, as no one would be active or interested enough to spend time for this kind of encounters.

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- This was said to be a **slightly more interesting way to keep oneself updated**. However, few thought they would actually turn to the Internet for consultation.
 - Questions were raised regarding **what is perceived as major decisions** in the EU. Something that might not be regarded as a major decision can be of great importance for Sweden

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- **Consultations altogether did not arouse any interest** and was more seen as time consuming. The participants had also difficulties to see in what way those consultations would help in creating more interest or influencing the EU to become more transparent.

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- This interactive service using both Internet and social networks aroused **great interest**. It was said to be a good start for debates relevant for the citizens. This would also be less demanding to actually become more active, than for example consultations and meetings.

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- Most of the participants could see themselves getting more active in order to vote in the upcoming elections for the EU Parliament. **Information campaigns via various channels** such as TV, Internet, social media, Internet and newspapers, **would be of great help** in order to make the choices between candidates.

**APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

OPTEM

KVALITATIV UNDERSÖKNING OM MEDBORGARES ENGAGEMANG I EUROPEISKA UNIONEN

DISKUSSIONSGUIDE

(INTRODUKTION: Be varje deltagare att presentera sig med några få ord, genom att säga vem man är, sysselsättning etc)

TEMA 1

Vi är här för att samtala om Europeiska Unionen. Vad är det första du tänker på när vi säger EU?

- Spontana reaktioner
- Fördjupa:
 - Typ av ämnen som spontant nämns i samband med EU
 - Positiva och negativa aspekter relaterade till EU
 - Grad av intresse och engagemang bland ip kopplat till EU-relaterade frågor

TEMA 2

Vad kommer din kunskap och dina tankar om EU ifrån?

Från vilka källor får du informationen och dina åsikter om EU – med källor räknas allt från officiell information till informell information genom samtal med vänner och andra personer.

- Spontana reaktioner
- Fördjupa:
 - Grad av variation när det gäller källor som nämns
 - Typ av information som nämns av var och en
 - Intresse och trovärdighet avseende respektive källa

TEMA 3

Låt oss nu diskutera EUs framtid och frågor som du har kring detta

Det finns troligtvis vissa aspekter som du anser är mer betydelsefulla, och vill veta och förstå bättre hur EU arbetar och hur det fungerar – kanske för att du inte får all den information du skulle önska från de källor du tidigare nämnt.

Vilka aspekter skulle du särskilt vilja få mer kunskap om?

- Spontana reaktioner
- Fördjupa:
 - Allmänna intrycket av att ha bra eller dålig kunskap/förståelse för dessa frågor
 - Uppfattning om EUs utmaningar de kommande åren
 - Uttryck som ip använder avseende behov av ökad kunskap och förståelse – vilka ämnen nämns särskilt? På vilket sätt är befintlig information inte tillräcklig?

TEMA 4

Som medborgare skall du kunna uttrycka din åsikt och göra din röst hörd avseende EUs framtida inriktning – oavsett om du håller med eller ej om en viss inriktning. Vilka möjligheter har du idag att göra dig hörd?

- Spontana reaktioner
- Fördjupa:
 - Uppfattning om att det är enkelt/svårt att uttrycka sig och få sin röst hörd. Motivera!
 - Varför uppfattas det vara svårt?
 - Vilka specifika områden skulle man särskilt vilja framföra sin åsikt om och bli lyssnad till som EU-medborgare? Vilka är förväntningarna?

TEMA 5

Det kan finnas olika sätt att göra sin röst hörd.

Låt fantasin flöda om hur det skulle kunna gå till – utan att fundera över om det är genomförbart eller ej. Vad föreställer du dig?

- Spontana reaktioner
- Stimulera gruppens kreativitet genom att uppmuntra var och en att “hoppa” från en idé till en annan.

TEMA 6

Här kommer nu några idéer som framförts för att öka EU-medborgarnas möjligheter att göra sig hörda när det gäller EU-relaterade frågor.

Vad tycker du om var och en av dessa.

(Varje intervjuperson får reagera i tur och ordning, och ange graden av intresse för var och en, samt motivera varför).

A - Informationservice om EU och EU-politik, bestående av ett informationskontor som är öppet för allmänheten varje stor stad, en hemsida, och service dit man kan vända sig för frågor och snabba svar via telefon, brev eller e-mail

B - Debatter som organiseras i de större mediekanalerna mellan medborgare och experter på olika EU-relaterade frågor avseende EUs inriktning

C - Regelbundna opinionsmätningar om EU som genomförs för hela Europa, vilket möjliggör för medborgarna att få kunskap om åsikter bland såväl egna landsmän som hur man tänker i andra länder

D - Att flera gånger per år ges möjlighet att träffa de svenska EU-parlamentarikerna, eller andra EU-politiker i din närhet

E - Konsultationer för alla medborgare via Internet, organiserade av EU-kommissionen inför större EU beslut.

F - Liknande konsultationer organiserade av Sveriges regering

G - En interaktiv service där Internet och sociala media utgör en permanent bas för att samla medborgarnas åsikter, önskemål och kritik avseende EU

H - Informationskampanjer som utvecklas betydligt mer aktivt än tidigare, med syfte att uppmuntra medborgare att involvera sig i debatten inför val av ledamöter till EU-parlamentet våren 2014

Tack för ert deltagande i denna diskussion.

Om du kommer på ytterligare idéer, tveka inte att kontakta oss via vår e-mailadress.



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY
IN THE NETHERLANDS**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

February 2014

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in Amsterdam on 11th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the Dutch section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in the Netherlands by True Research.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 3
 - Men: 5

 - 20-34 years: 2
 - 35-49 years: 4
 - 50-60 years: 2

 - Lower-middle social class: 3 (professions of head of household: singer/disc jockey, maintenance sports park, supervisor daycare)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of head of household: scientist, executive, self-employed developing games, administration, advisor real estate)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

Remark: It has to be mentioned that during recruitment it turned out that many citizens, especially lower classes were not very involved in the European Union and thus reluctant to participate in the study.

This may have led to more positive attitudes than average towards the EU during the discussion.

CHAPTER 1 – INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

➤ Spontaneous reactions

- First spontaneous reactions on the European Union are lukewarm yet positive.
- The European Union is seen as **distant, but necessary** for Europe, trying to solve the problems that are there in every country by combining efforts and working together.
- One sees many advantages of the European Union, but finds it hard to mention all advantages very precisely. This as Europe is seen as distant and complex. The **ways decisions are taken are hardly known**. Furthermore as the Netherlands is considered to be small within the total European Union its influence is seen as limited. Also the fact that not all Member States participate in all parts of the Union is seen as confusing and diminishing the power of the EU.

“Making a union to solve problems.”

“It is difficult to measure what it is really giving us. I would like to see that more clearly.”

“England is not participating.”

“Financially it is really horrible and very complex.”

“It is a crisis, so the financial situation would have been as bad as now without the EU as well.”

- The fact of trying to solve problems by coming to one common solution is also seen as part of the problem. It is said that there are considerable differences between countries, both culturally as well as in terms of economical development, so finding one common accepted solution is almost impossible.

It is felt to be important to **keep the Dutch identity**.

Trying to solve economical problems by making common rules for everyone and having completely free migration and trade is seen as threatening and as risky.

“I have lived in the Netherlands for 14 years now, coming from Surinam, but by working hard I can develop myself and earn a living. Getting people here from other countries is just importing problems.”

“It offers a lot of opportunities, but it is not right doing everything centrally; you might pull strong countries down. And at the same time not make the others better, by the fact that the good people from the less strong countries will leave their country.”

“Countries might want to step out. Germany for example may not want to pay for the weaker countries. I do hope it will not happen, but I am afraid.”

➤ Positive and negative aspects

- Areas where cooperation in Europe is seen as relevant and working relatively well are **security** (“*crime does not stop at the border*”), **education and science** (education recognised in other countries, cross country cooperation, subsidies), **agriculture** (less than in the past all money to just one or two countries).
- Also the **euro** is mentioned. Where some years ago most comments on the euro were more negative, it now seems to be **accepted** and is seen as fact of life.

“I am used to it.”

- Another negative aspect is the removal of the European Parliament from Brussels to Strasbourg and vice versa and the money that is seen as wasted there.

➤ Interest in Europe

- Next to interest in Europe, citizens have **reservations** and find it difficult to judge how much good the EU has brought them.

“You see a lot of developments, but also more regulations and bureaucracy, so I can not say it is all positive, but I can also not say we are better off getting out.”

CHAPTER 2 – SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

➤ Sources mentioned

- Most information about the EU comes from reading **papers** and watching **television**.
- However one feels that it is impossible to know everything about Europe that one would like to know as it is **all too complicated**. Even within the Netherlands it is already impossible to follow what is happening. Only the topics that are in the news at that time are followed. One feels that one should look at different sources (different papers, different TV channels, media from other countries) to get a more or less objective picture of what is going on in Europe. (Comparison of) programmes of different political parties also are felt to be a good source of information on Europe and on the issues that are important in Europe.
- **Most single media are not seen as very trustworthy**. It is also felt that one needs to have information from different sources to really understand what is going on. Information from the EU itself is also seen as less trustworthy as it is somewhat seen as propaganda and as heavily influenced by all the activities of lobbyists in Brussels.
- There is so much information and there are so many rules and regulations that it is difficult to follow and know everything.

“Sometimes I see something from Brussels, but that is mainly when we have to pay or when we get money.”

“To me it is not trustworthy at all. It is especially determined by what lobbyists from companies do. News always shows the positive aspects and not what is really behind it

“I read a French paper every now and then.”

“I read the Volkskrant and NRC and watch also RTL news. That is a good balance. I also get information in my work from the Dutch government.”

“When I go to bed or wake up, I check nu.nl on my mobile.”

“When I am trying to find subsidies for my scientific work it is very hard to find. We need a specialised company to find that for us.”

CHAPTER 3 – QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

➤ Future challenges

- The main future challenges are related to the **economy**; managing the crisis, getting a good financial system, restoring stability and becoming, and being able to operate as, a real economic power in relation to the other blocs in the world.
With respect to the economical challenges one is feeling that this is something that should be left to specialists. It is too complex to fully understand so one has to give trust to the people in Brussels working on it. One has limited interest in getting to know much more of all the details.
However the opinion is shared that the Dutch government under pressure of the EU is working too hard on just saving instead of also investing.
All the information that is provided is either too complex or too difficult to find. There seems not to be clear understandable information that is available for everyone.
- A second main challenge is regulating **migration** within the EU and asylum within Europe. Here higher classes point out that the migration leads to lower standards in the country of origin, while lower classes are more afraid of competition on the labour market. Also regulation of immigration from outside the EU is seen as important.

[**Note:** The importance of these two areas can also be seen in the election of the politician of the year 2013 in the Netherlands. The minister of finance Jeroen Dijsselbloem was elected politician of the year by journalists and came second among the general public. Geert Wilders known for his anti Europe and certainly anti migration attitude was elected politician of the year by the general public]

- Other issues mentioned are a common army/ working together more closely on military issues and the environment.

“It is so big and complex. It is just like large corporations that split up to make it workable again.”

“There is too much pressure on control. More involvement should be created.”

“The message should be different and simplified. I don’t want to hear any longer how bad things are in the Netherlands”

“Migration is the problem in Europe.”

“They should include a good policy on asylum it has to stop at some point, otherwise everyone again tries to go to Lampedusa.”

“Migration is the basis, if all good young people move away, you beat out the whole future. Look at how the elderly live in Romania, now that the youngsters left.”

➤ Information availability

- One feels that there is quite a lot of information available, but that one really has to search for it. Not everything is available in Dutch media and sites from the EU that have been visited are judged as far too complex to find the information one is looking for.

➤ **Getting oneself heard**

- One feels that **as an individual it is almost impossible to have yourself heard in the EU**. The EU as a whole is too big and complex to achieve that. Even within the Netherlands it is felt to be almost impossible to communicate to politicians/ members of parliament. This difficulty is increased by the fact that there is not much news on the EU and that the members of Parliament are unknown. Most citizens never actively tried to have their voice heard in Europe.
The suggestion of someone to mail to a member of the European Parliament was an eye-opener to others. It seemed a good way, however one did not know the members of the Parliament, so would have difficulty finding e-mail addresses.

➤ **Preparedness to be involved**

- Even though it is felt difficult to be heard, all respondents indicate that **they would vote** in the elections for the European Parliament.
It is felt **difficult to know who to choose** for in the European elections. One tends to choose on big items, where in local politics the motivation to choose a particular party are must more based on small issues.

“The influence of one person cannot be measured.”

“I sometimes send emails to members of the Dutch Parliament and always get an answer. That gives me the feeling of being heard.”

“My vote for Europe is what I want for the country, not for Europe as a unity”

“I cannot judge the economy, so I don't use that when deciding. On a professional level I have more knowledge and take that into consideration.”

CHAPTER 5 – PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

➤ Suggestions to get heard

- Most people find it **difficult to come up with suggestions** how they best can be heard. However a number of good suggestions are made:

“Put someone from the street next to every lobbyist.”

“Parties should work together more to be heard better.”

“Hold referenda via the internet.”

“Make people answer one question every morning.”

“Recruit people from the street for different subjects.”

“Put a large group together to have a debate.”

“Develop an online community.”

“Develop a real life game/training.”

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

Evaluation of propositions

A– An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- The proposition is seen as consisting of **different parts**. The first part one distinguishes is an office, which by most citizens is not seen as very useful. One would have to go there for simple questions. Then there is a website, which requires again active searching by citizens and finally there is an answering service via online technology, which is seen as very useful.
- Anyhow one would like to know that the EU will actively respond to questions.

“The group that has concrete questions on the EU is very small, so an office will not be useful.”

“A website seems rather abstract. You really have to search.”

“Asking questions electronically would be handy.”

B– Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- One **doubts** if there would be interest to come to such debates. Furthermore it would have to be not EU experts, but members from the EU (Commission or Parliament) to give it real credibility.

“I think it might be useful.”

“It has to be someone from Europe that comes to the work floor.”

“I doubt if people would come voluntarily. The EU already is very distant. Better if you treat it like an opinion poll.”

C– Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- Opinion polls are seen as **very useful**. One assumes the EU already does polls regularly, but never publishes the results. Seeing the results, also from other countries would give information about the situation in the Netherlands as well as in other Member States.

“Most opinion polls are useful.”

“It shows everyone has his own opinion.”

“Useful for us and for the European Commission.”

“You can learn from each other and from other countries.”

D– The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- The idea is met with some **scepticism**. It is appreciated to meet members of Parliament, so one get to understand how the Parliament operates. However one questions how efficient it is for the members of Parliament. It is good to meet citizens, but will take too much time to visit the whole countries and/or other countries.

“I would like to know how it works from day to day and what the problems are.”

“It will not be very useful for the Members of Parliament.”

“It is only a tiny part of reality that they will see. Online college settings might be better to get in touch with much more people.”

E– Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- The idea as such is seen as **positive**, but it is felt that there will **not be much interest** as the distance on a local or national level already is very big. It is said to be more useful if in the consultation national politicians are involved also.

“Good idea to have a forum on specific subjects, for instance in the area of care.”

“It might be a start to tighten the gap between citizens and politic.”

F– Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- Consultations organised by the Dutch government are seen as they **useful** as they think it will involve Dutch politicians and as the Dutch politicians then will have the opportunity of voicing the opinions of the general public in the EU. Such a consultation would also diminish the gap between citizens and national politics, as a first step in diminishing the distance towards Europe.

“Dutch Members of Parliament that collect information to use in European Parliament and to tell our problems.”

“Too indirect. Better organise a forum with Members of Parliament. You already see those on LinkedIn.”

G– An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- This proposition is **not seen as very new**. It is understand to be web scraping what already commonly is done by large corporations. One obviously expects the EU to already do this. For oneself one does not see it as very beneficial, for the EU it will be.

“This is just searching the web on key words.”

H– Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- Information campaigns are seen as **somewhat old fashioned and abstract**, other media are more useful to really have an interactive communication and giving a clear image.

“No this does not really help me.”

➤ **Overall evaluation**

- Making their top three at the end of the discussion citizens saw web scraping (proposition G) as most useful for the EU as it would feed back also their own information to the EU.
- The other propositions that were evaluated as positive and useful were the information service (A) where questions would be answered online or via email, meetings with members of parliament (D) and consultations by the own government (F)

APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHECKLIST TEN BEHOEVE VAN GROEPEN

Onderzoeksdatum : 11 december 2013

Projectnummer : 13-1103

Locatie : Inview, Amsterdam

1. INTRODUCTIE

3'

- welkom
- doel van het onderzoek: Europa
- 2 of 3 in voorjaar weekend naar Brussel
- individuele mening, geen goede/foute antwoorden e.d.
- uitleg apparatuur en notulist
- introductie:
 - voornaam, leeftijd, beroep, samenstelling van huishouden

2. THEMA 1

10'

Ik wil het vandaag graag hebben over de Europese Unie.

Als we praten over de Europese Unie wat is dan het eerste dat bij jullie opkomt?

- spontane reacties
- vraag door naar:
 - soort van onderwerpen die men spontaan noemt over de EU
 - positieve en negatieve aspecten in relatie tot de EU
 - mate van interesse en betrokkenheid van de respondenten bij onderwerpen die met de EU te maken hebben

3. THEMA 2

10'

Als we nu eens praten over wat jullie weten en denken over de EU: waar komen die kennis en gedachten vandaan? Wat zijn de bronnen waar jullie informatie of meningen vandaan komen – waarbij ik bij bronnen echt bronnen in de breedste zin van het woord bedoel, dus zowel officiële bronnen als informele gesprekken met vrienden of andere mensen

- spontane reacties
- vraag door naar:
 - mate van verscheidenheid van de genoemde bronnen
 - aard van verkregen informatie van elke bron
 - interesse en geloofwaardigheid van elke bron

4. THEMA 3

15'

Als we nu eens wat meer specifiek praten over de toekomst van de Europese Unie en de vragen die jullie jezelf misschien stellen daarover.

Er zijn waarschijnlijk bepaalde aspecten die jullie belangrijk vinden en waarvan jullie meer willen weten en die jullie beter willen begrijpen over hoe de EU werkt en welke richting ze uitgaat aangezien jullie mogelijk niet alle informatie krijgen die jullie willen van de bronnen die jullie eerder hebben genoemd.

Over welke aspecten zouden jullie in het bijzonder meer willen weten?

- spontane reacties:
- vraag door naar;
 - algemene indruk of men denkt dat men een goede of slechte mate van kennis heeft over deze issues
 - beeld van de grootste uitdagingen voor de EU in de komende jaren
 - over welke onderwerpen in het bijzonder zouden jullie meer willen horen en begrijpen
 - in hoeverre en waarin is de informatie over deze onderwerpen die op dit moment beschikbaar is onvoldoende

5. THEMA 4

15'

Als burger heb je natuurlijk het recht om je mening te geven en om gehoord te worden over de toekomstige richting die de EU uit moet gaan – om die richting goed te keuren of af te keuren of voor iedere andere reden.

Hoe kunnen jullie dat vandaag de dag doen?

- spontane reacties
- vraag door:
 - gemeend gemak of moeilijkheid om je mening te geven en om gehoord te worden over EU gerelateerde issues – hoe dan
 - redenen waarom men denkt dat het moeilijk is
 - bepaalde onderwerpen waarover men in het bijzonder zijn mening zou willen geven en zou willen worden gehoord als burger; verwachtingen in dat opzicht

6. THEMA 5

15'

Je kan aan verschillende manieren denken waarop Europese burgers graag gehoord zouden willen worden door de EU. Laten we eens proberen te denken aan alle mogelijke manieren daartoe, laat jullie creativiteit maar de vrije loop, zonder direct al ideeën af te schieten zelfs als we niet weten hoe dat in de praktijk zou moeten worden geïmplementeerd. Wat kunnen jullie je voorstellen

- spontane reacties
- stimuleer de creativiteit van de groep, door de respondenten aan te moedigen om van idee naar idee te springen

7. THEMA 6

25'

Ik laat nu een aantal ideeën horen van mogelijkheden die kunnen worden geïmplementeerd om burgers beter gehoord te laten zijn met betrekking tot onderwerpen die over de EU gaan, die eerder zijn aangedragen. Ik wil graag weten wat jullie van ieder van de mogelijkheden vinden.

Laat de respondenten ieder voor zich reageren op iedere mogelijkheid, vraag naar de mate waarin het interessant is en de redenen daarvoor

- A. Een informatie dienst over het functioneren van de EU en EU beleid, die bestaat uit een kantoor voor het publiek in iedere grote stad, een website en een dienst die snel alle vragen beantwoordt via telefoon, post of email
- B. Debatten over de richting die de EU uitgaat in belangrijke media tussen gewone burgers en experts over EU zaken
- C. Opinie peilingen over de EU die regelmatig in de hele EU worden gehouden, zodat burgers weten wat burgers uit Nederland en uit andere EU landen denken
- D. De mogelijkheid om enkele malen per jaar een ontmoeting te hebben met leden van het Europese Parlement uit Nederland en andere EU landen in de buurt van waar je woont
- E. Raadplegingen via internet die worden georganiseerd door de Europese Commissie wanneer belangrijke besluiten moeten worden genomen in de EU, waaraan alle burgers mee kunnen doen
- F. Soortgelijke raadplegingen, maar dan georganiseerd door de Nederlandse overheid
- G. Een interactieve dienst die internet en sociale netwerken gebruikt, om op een permanente basis de meningen, wensen en punten van kritiek van burgers te verzamelen over de keuzes die door de EU worden gemaakt
- H. Het veel meer actief dan in de afgelopen jaren ontwikkelen van informatiecampagnes, om burgers aan te moedigen om zelf deel te nemen aan debatten die plaats gaan vinden en

om deel te nemen aan de verkiezingen voor leden van het Europese Parlement in het komende voorjaar

8. AFSLUITING

Nogmaals heel erg dank dat jullie aan deze discussie hebben willen meedoen. Als er naar aanleiding van deze discussie nog ideeën of suggesties opkomen, laat het me dan alsjeblieft weten. IK zal dan zorgen dat het op de juiste plaats terecht komt.

Geef mail adres erik@true-research.nl



European Qualitative Network

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU
REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

NOTRE EUROPE – JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ This report presents the results of a group discussion held in London on 18th December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.
- ❖ It is the United Kingdom section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.
- ❖ In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM. In the United Kingdom by AIMR.
- ❖ This study forms a part of a wider Citizenship Project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute on behalf of the European Commission.
- ❖ The composition of the group of respondents was as follows:
 - Women: 5
 - Men: 4

 - 20-34 years: 3
 - 35-49 years: 3
 - 50-60 years: 3

 - Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: stone mason, self employed carpenter, police officer)
 - Higher-middle class: 5 (professions of head of household: teacher, scientist, quantity surveyor, finance director, business manager, office employee)
 - The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.

CHAPTER 1: INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ When invited to voice initial thoughts about the European Union **the following ideas spontaneously emerged:**
 - Brussels
 - Corruption
 - “I’d like to get out of it”*
 - Free movement of people within the EU
 - Immigration into the UK
 - The Euro – widely seen as an unsatisfactory currency and the source of problems within the EU
 - UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) whose key policy is leaving the EU.

- ❖ It should be noted that **all the initial thoughts were implicitly negative** and that no positive ideas about the EU emerged spontaneously.

- ❖ With regard to **free movement of people/immigration**, there was concern about the strain on resources such as housing, education, access to medical care, etc. Furthermore, there were worries that there were/would be no controls on the numbers of immigrants coming to the UK.

- ❖ The reference to **Brussels** signified the widespread belief in UK that the EU was seeking to dictate legislation in the UK. Furthermore there was a widely accepted belief that politicians and bureaucrats in Brussels were lining their own pockets and not governing Europe in an upright and honest fashion.

- ❖ The **Euro** reference recalled the financial instability in the EU and amongst particular countries which made the EU seem less secure/uncertain.

- ❖ The **UKIP** reference highlighted the appeal of this increasingly popular (right of centre) political party whose raison d’être is to get Britain out of Europe. The UKIP stance is that if Britain left the EU then all of the country’s problems would be solved.

- ❖ Invited to identify **positives** of the EU the initial thought was that there “doesn’t seem to be any”. However, one younger, more educated respondent who was an executive in a multi-national observed that the **EU was a massive trade partner of the UK.**
 - “If we come out (of the EU) it will have a massive (adverse) effect...”*

- ❖ This view was challenged by an older UKIP supporter who argued that even if we were out of the EU we could still trade with countries in the EU. He claimed that the loss of trade argument was simply “scare tactics.”

- ❖ **Freedom to travel in Europe** meant not having to show your passport. However this benefit was challenged by those who noted that they **did** have to show their passport when coming back into the UK. Further it was felt that more rigorous passport checks would help to stop rampant immigration by those not entitled to come to the UK.

- ❖ Another positive was that **free movement of labour** allowed people into the country to do jobs that the indigenous population did not want to do.

“Everybody sees it as people (only) coming here to take up benefits but that is not true”.

- ❖ It has to be observed that initial interest in the positives and negatives of the EU was not especially thoughtful or knowledgeable amongst this sample. Rather attitudes to the EU largely reflected unsophisticated and basic attitudes towards “immigration” amongst people who felt that their **English locality** was **being overrun by foreigners** both from the EU and other parts of the world. Interestingly, there was a tendency to conflate EU and non-EU immigration into one common problem.
- ❖ The plan to allow free movement of people from Bulgaria and Romania from 1st January 2014 has stoked up fears of being “swamped” by another wave of uncontrolled immigration because of our EU membership.

“The school I work in is only 10% English speaking. It is only going to get worse...”

CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ON THE EU

❖ **Spontaneously mentioned sources** were:

- National press: Daily Mail, Sun, Mirror, Times etc.
- TV news and documentaries
- Observations from work as teacher, police officer, in business/commerce etc.
- Alleged first hand observation of “immigrants taking everything they can - taking up benefits and driving flash cars.”
- Day to day conversations at work or when out and about etc. – this often reflected items read or seen/heard in the media including stories of:
 - immigrants using NHS facilities;
 - immigrants from EU and rest of world seeking to grab whatever benefits they could;
 - UK citizens/companies obeying EU laws regulations whilst other countries ignored them.

❖ **Invited to identify more credible sources, respondents claimed that none could really be trusted.** In the Press there was ‘spin’ in whatever you read which put forward the political agenda of that particular paper. It was observed that all media had their own agendas in what they wanted to communicate.

“I would like to think the BBC was impartial in its reporting but I’m not sure”.

❖ On balance, however, it was felt that **the Press** was **mainly negative about the EU**. Specifically, it was noted that in the past those who raised objections to immigration used to be regarded as ‘racists’ but now it was mainstream and acceptable for doubts about further immigration and fears of being ‘flooded’ to be expressed.

❖ **Likewise** it was felt that **Radio and TV** including the BBC were **not balanced** in their view of the EU. Rather **the stories featured in the media about the EU tended to throw up negatives:**

- Immigrants grabbing benefits, using up scarce resources;
- EU law intruding on British customs/way of life
- Brussels bureaucracy, etc.

❖ They could not recall any positive stories about the EU and its workings.

“The media story about the EU focuses on its bad points. We don’t get to hear anything good. The bad points make better stories – like the straight bananas one.”

❖ **Politicians** were **mistrusted** as a reliable source of information about the EU or indeed any subject.

“They just open their mouths and talk rubbish. They are all on the gravy train.”

CHAPTER 3: QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE EU

- ❖ **Concerns about the future of the EU** were dominated by **the question of Britain's continued membership.**
- ❖ Some asserted strongly that if a vote were held tomorrow people in the United Kingdom would unquestionably decide to leave. However, a minority felt that the general public's lack of knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of membership made it difficult to make a judgment about the merits of membership.
- ❖ The overall anti-EU stance of the group made respondents **reluctant or unable to come up with questions about the EU's future.**

"We don't know enough to know what the future will be."

- ❖ **When pressed, the following questions emerged:**

- what good things are happening in Europe that will be of benefit to the UK
- what do we get from the EU that benefits us as a nation
- what have we gained as a result of being in the EU.

- ❖ Respondents suspected that there probably was a positive story to tell about the EU, and this prompted requests for the benefits and achievements of EU membership to be publicised more widely and more effectively.

"What have we gained? Bosch washing machines ... That's what we want to know – the benefits need to be more publicised!"

- ❖ Awareness of specific issues relating to Europe's future was typically absent though there were some references to what might happen to the prospects of the euro and the City of London as a financial centre.
- ❖ It was observed that business, especially big business, seemed to be positive about Europe and it was assumed that the Captains of industry and commerce could see the benefits. However, this was qualified by doubts about whether the interests of big business overlap with those of ordinary citizens.

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION OF CITIZENS' VIEWS

- ❖ When asked how citizens can give their opinion and have their voice heard “as regards future directions of the European Union”, the respondents mainly declare that they **can vote**:
- ❖ There was some confusion about means of expressing opinions about the future of EU.
- ❖ Whilst **one or two** asserted that it could in theory be done via **the local MEP** others seemed **uncertain about whether they had an MEP for their area**. All claimed that they had not voted in the previous European Parliament elections. They were surprised to hear that elections for the European Parliament would take place in the Spring of 2014.
- ❖ The fact that respondents did not know the name of their MEP or the nature of his/her constituency was an initial barrier to making contact. Some recalled that they knew who their local Member of Parliament was and had seen him at local events. One respondent had actually been in touch with her local MP. However, **the existence and identity of their MEP largely remained a mystery**.
- ❖ The UKIP supporter saw the next General Election as providing the opportunity for voters to express their pent up disillusion with the EU by voting for UKIP and then getting a referendum on UK membership of the EU.
- ❖ **Issues that they might raise** with their MEP included:
 - more information about levels of **immigration** and whether UK citizens would get the same social benefits if they moved to other EU countries;
 - **reassurance about the EU economy as a whole** and what is being done to make sure that the **financial crisis** does not happen again.
- ❖ It was observed that while politicians were meant to be the voice of the people they did not know what people were thinking. If British politicians were useless at representing their constituent's views then it was unlikely that European politicians would be any better.

CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF NEW WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO GET THEIR VOICE HEARD

- ❖ Ideas for expressing public opinion spontaneously mentioned included:
 - **demonstrations**, although it was felt that this was not really the British way of doing things;
 - **opinion polls**, but this would require publicity to ensure that people understood the importance of participation and to raise the status and credibility of the poll results. Furthermore people would want to see that British public opinion was taken note of in future policy decisions;
 - **EU representatives going out into the community** talking to people and being more approachable. This could be done by local public meetings attended by MEPs and also by websites/internet and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

- ❖ It was observed that more traditional methods of communication (local papers, leaflets and posters) might be required to reach the older generation who were less into social media and the internet.

“I don’t do Twitter and my mother doesn’t even have a computer”.

- ❖ There was an expectation of a **personal touch** with EU representatives available at meetings, etc. to answer questions from the general public.
- ❖ It would be important that any public meetings were **local**. Respondents would not go as far as Central London to attend a meeting. Meetings would also need to be well publicised so that people knew when and where they were happening.
- ❖ A first stage in the process of getting people more in touch with EU/their MEP would be to promote awareness of the names and contact details of MEPs so people knew who to contact and how to reach them.
- ❖ It was noted that since some people, in urban constituencies especially, did not speak English some means of reaching non-English speakers may need to be developed. It was noted that Local Authorities produce information leaflets in a range of different languages.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS FOR IMPROVED CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

A. An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

- ❖ **Initial response to this idea was quite positive.** There was some uncertainty as to whether something like this was not already available.
- ❖ It was envisaged that the central platform might be a website that would enable people to get the information they wanted alongside other elements of the service.
- ❖ Respondents envisaged looking to this service to provide information on what the EU did for people in the UK.
- ❖ **Less positively**, those with more jaundiced views of the EU suspected that the information service would be 'all spin'. Whilst respondents said they wanted objective facts they did not want to be told what they ought to think about the EU.
- ❖ Overall this emerged as the idea with the most widespread appeal.

B. Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ This idea attracted **some interest**.
- ❖ Positively it recalled the TV show, Question Time, on BBC1 where a panel of politicians and public figures took questions on current affairs from a general public audience. TV viewers could see the general public getting involved in that sort of programme both by the questions they asked and their responses to what members of the panel had to say.
- ❖ However, less positively respondents acknowledged that:
 - they would not themselves wish to speak/ask questions;
 - currently they did not know enough to ask questions about the EU and its policies;
 - in one programme there would not be sufficient time to cover all the issues;
 - they would probably be too lazy to go along.
- ❖ Overall this idea was rated first or second by around half the respondents.

C. Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

- ❖ **This idea attracted interest across the group.** It was seen as interesting to know what other countries were thinking about the EU.

- ❖ There was some debate as to whether the EU might not already be doing this kind of polling and if not, then why not. The cynical viewpoint was that the EU was already doing opinion polling but simply not telling citizens the results.
- ❖ Positively, it was envisaged the EU might take note of public opinion as expressed in these polls.
- ❖ This idea was one of the top three preferred ideas of all respondents.

D. The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

- ❖ **Initially this idea had low-key appeal in theory.** However, **on further consideration**, it was pointed out that **the meetings would need to be held at convenient times and in readily accessible places.** In reality respondents suspected that unless particularly motivated they would not bother to attend.
- ❖ Overall support for this idea was limited (only one respondent put it in their top three selections).

E. Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

- ❖ **The idea of allowing everyone to contribute to EU Consultations initially sounded good.**

“Everybody could take part. It would touch base with a lot of people. Everybody is on-line through their phone or at home”.

- ❖ **On second thoughts** however **the practicality of the idea was questioned** and it was characterised as a “fairytale”. Although the idea of gathering opinion widely seemed good it was seen as a bit naive. In practice doubts were raised about how the many and varied inputs could be analysed in order to help and guide EU decision making. The content of Twitter was alluded to as an example of what could be expected.
- ❖ Finally it was suggested that the EU probably already invited participation in its consultations; but did anybody bother to contribute?
- ❖ Overall support for this idea was low. No respondents put it in their top three selections.

F. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

- ❖ **This was marginally preferred to consultations being organised by the EU** (Proposition E). It made them seem more immediately relevant to people in the UK. It was hoped that the UK Government would want to look after their citizens’ interests.
- ❖ It was emphasized that this kind of consultation would only work well if it is easy to log on and give views. People would not go out of their way to participate.
- ❖ Overall support for this idea was low. No respondents put it in their top three selections.

G. An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

- ❖ **This idea fitted in with the group's thinking.** It seemed like an easy to access, straightforward way of getting opinions that would encourage more widespread participation.
- ❖ Its appeal would be enhanced if participants could also get feedback on the range of views being expressed.
- ❖ However support for this idea was limited. No respondent listed it in their top three ideas.

H. Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

- ❖ It came as news to these respondents that the EU was holding elections for its Parliament next Spring. (All the respondents claimed that they did not vote in last European Parliament elections.)
- ❖ **The idea of giving more publicity to these elections made sense** to respondents some of whom saw it as an opportunity to register their dissent with the European Project.
- ❖ Three respondents included this idea in their top three idea section.

“We are very negative about the EU because we don't know much about it. We only know what we are told. If we knew more maybe we would be more positive.”

**APPENDIX
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

DISCUSSION GUIDE

(INTRODUCTION: Ask each participant to introduce him(her)self with a few words, by saying who he/she is and what he/she does, etc.)

THEME 1

We are here together today to talk about the European Union.

Could you please tell me what first comes to your mind about the EU?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Nature of topics spontaneously mentioned about the EU
 - Positive and negative aspects related to the EU
 - Degree of initial interest and involvement of the respondents in EU related issues

THEME 2

Now, regarding what you know and what you think about the EU: where does that come from ?

From what sources do you get information or do you hear opinions about the EU - taking the word "sources" in the widest sense, ranging from official information sources to informal conversations with friends or other people... ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Degree of diversity of the sources mentioned
 - Nature of (information) inputs from each one
 - Interest / credibility of each one

THEME 3

Let us now discuss more specifically the future of the European Union and questions you may ask yourselves in that respect.

There are probably certain aspects which you regard as important and you would like to know and understand better as regards the way the EU works and the directions it takes - as you may not get all the information you would like to get from the sources you have mentioned earlier.

What aspects would you particularly wish to know more about ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - General impressions of having a good or a poor degree of knowledge/understanding of these issues
 - Perception of major challenges for the EU in the coming years
 - Expressions by respondents of a need for better knowledge and understanding - on what subjects more particularly ? In what is the information currently available on these subjects not satisfactory?

THEME 4

As a citizen, you should be able to give your opinion and to have your voice heard as regards future directions of the European Union - whether to approve or to disapprove such or such a direction, or for any other reason..

How can you do that today?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Probe:
 - Perceived ease / difficulty to express oneself and to have one's voice heard on EU related issues - by what means ?
 - Perceived reasons why it is difficult

- Specific subjects on which respondents would particularly wish to give their opinion and to be listened to as citizens; expectations in that respect.

THEME 5

One may think of various means by which European citizens like us could have their voice heard. Let me propose to try and think of any possible means, just letting our imagination run, without giving up an idea even if we do not know for the moment how it could be implemented in practice.

What could we imagine ?

- Spontaneous reactions
- Stimulate the group's' creativity by encouraging respondents to "jump" from one idea to another

THEME 6

I am now going to submit to you various ideas that have being put forward, of means that could be put in place to allow citizens to have their voice better heard on EU related issues.

I will ask you what you think of each one.

- Make the respondents react to each proposition in turn, asking them about their degree of interest for each one and reasons thereof

A- An information service on the functioning of the EU and EU policies, comprising an information office open for the public in every large city, a web site, and a service quickly answering any questions asked by telephone, mail or email.

B- Debates to be organised in major media between average citizens and experts of EU issues on the directions taken by the EU.

C- Opinion polls on the EU organised regularly in the whole of Europe, allowing citizens to know both what their fellow countrymen and what the citizens of the other countries think.

D- The possibility, given several times per year, to meet with your Members of the European Parliament or other EU politicians in the vicinity of where you live.

E- Consultations through the Internet organised by the European Commission whenever major decisions have to be taken in the EU, open to all citizens.

F- Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

G- An interactive service using the Internet and social networks, to collect on a permanent basis citizens' views, wishes or criticisms on directions taken by the EU.

H- Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take part in the coming election of Members of the European Parliament next Spring.

Thank you again for coming to participate in this discussion.

If other ideas cross your mind following the discussion, do not hesitate to let us know (Communicate a relevant email address which the respondents can use for that purpose)