

The European Citizens' Consultations

Corina Stratulat
Paul Butcher
Rapporteurs

EVALUATION REPORT



RAPPORTEURS

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FOREWORD

Over the past decades there have been many attempts to test, improve, and sustain citizens' participation in the European Union. With Plan D, Debate Europe, the Europe for Citizens programme and the European Citizens' Initiatives, the European institutions have made intensive, well thought-out efforts to better connect with citizens. In many cases this was merely crisis driven, but sometimes it was the result of a longer-term strategy to reach European citizens.

What all these attempts had in common was that they never really succeeded in achieving their main goal: to get citizens more meaningfully involved in the European Union's decision-making process.

French President Emmanuel Macron's vision of holding a far-reaching consultation with European citizens on the future of Europe, in preparation for more deep-rooted reform of the European Union, breathed new life into the idea of citizens' participation after years of stagnation. As philanthropic organisations that have long been involved in the movement for more and better citizens' participation, the King Baudouin Foundation and the Open Society Foundations welcome this new drive. We are convinced that, by establishing better connections with its citizens and by involving them in developing its policies, the Union will increase both its legitimacy and the quality of its decision-making.

Citizens can be relied upon to contribute to decision-making on even the most serious of matters. However, this is by no means a silver bullet which will solve all the Union's problems: goodwill and readiness to listen to what citizens have to say are not enough to make public participation a success. Again and again, pilot projects on citizens' participation have proven that one must set certain minimum quality standards to avoid making citizens feel that their contributions have been wasted.

This report looks at whether the European Citizens' Consultations 2018 have kept to these minimum standards or if the process needs improvement. Its aim is to help interpret the results of these consultations by examining their context and how they were implemented. It also seeks to enrich the debate about the future of citizens' participation at the EU level. Learning from these consultations will help to improve similar future exercises.

Our hope is that the European Citizens' Consultations will one day be seen as a turning point in the way the Union interacts with its citizens. It is time for the EU to live up to its long-standing promise to better connect with the public. As the President of the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, said in his State of the Union speech in October 2018: "This European mechanism of dialogue with the citizens must become a permanent fixture after the May 2019 European elections. A sudden halt as soon as the elections are over could give rise to even greater frustration".

We would like to express our gratitude to all contributors to the report, including at the national level, for producing this comprehensive analysis and these helpful recommendations.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The European Citizens' Consultations Civil Society Network was launched in April 2018 with the kind support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. Its goal was twofold:

1. To **build a network of civil society organisations (CSOs)** working on, or interested in, the ECCs and their long-term potential, in order to facilitate a steady flow of information about what is happening on the ground in European countries and the risks and opportunities. This network would put civil society organisations in contact with each other and with institutional players throughout the EU, and help them to develop lasting relationships. It would also make it as easy as possible for civil society to support broad-based participation in the ECCs.
2. To ensure that this **CSO network would act as a critical and independent friend of the ECCs**, reflecting on, researching, and evaluating them in order to highlight best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations about how they could be upgraded in the future. It could also be a means of generating new ideas and thinking for the European Parliament elections and the incoming EU leadership, and about how to develop democratic and civic spaces to continue the debate across Europe.



The European Policy Centre (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate.

The **European Politics and Institutions (EPI) Programme** is one of the five thematic programmes of the European Policy Centre. It covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century in a democratic and effective manner.

The programme also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the critical questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions about the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration.

It has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform, and illiberal trends in European democracies.



The
Democratic
Society

The **Democratic Society (Demsoc)** is an independent, non-profit organisation that works for more and better democracy, so that people and institutions have the desire, opportunity, and confidence to participate together.

It works to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively.

Demsoc supports governments, parliaments, and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision-making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. It actively builds spaces, places, and processes to make this happen. Demsoc aims to create new ways of making policy centred on public participation by linking research and practice and experimenting with new methods, tools, and techniques.

Demsoc works on a wide range of projects, across Europe and beyond, from its offices in Brussels, Pisa, Manchester, and Edinburgh.

ABOUT THE RAPPOREURS AND CONTRIBUTORS

RAPPOREURS

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Lena Morozova-Friha is Executive Director of EuropaNova, a Paris-based European think tank. In the past three years, her work has been focused on collective intelligence and democracy. Among other projects, she has been in charge of the implementation of New Pact for Europe and several Citizens' Consultations in France. She is also the French representative of the pan-European project Innovation in Politics Institute Awards.

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Anthony Zacharzewski is President and a founder of The Democratic Society, and part of a global network of democracy and government innovators. He has fourteen years of experience in strategic roles in UK central and local government. He has worked with government at every level from village councils to the European Commission, as well as on projects in Serbia, Ireland, France, and the UK. Anthony is a member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and the Egmont Institute (Belgian Royal Institute for International Relations), and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Executive summary

The European Citizens' Consultations (ECCs) are a new experiment in improving the quality of democracy at the EU level by giving European citizens the possibility to express and exchange their opinions about the Union and its future. The idea, which was inspired by the French President Emmanuel Macron and has been implemented since April 2018, follows two tracks:

1. At the EU level, the European Commission has been hosting an online survey, available in all EU languages, consisting of questions formulated by a Citizens' Panel.
2. At the member state level, national governments have been in charge of organising consultations in their respective countries and synthesising the results.

The outcomes of the online questionnaire and the national syntheses will be discussed at the European Council in December 2018.

To independently monitor and evaluate how the ECCs were organised in practice, the European Citizens' Consultations Civil Society Network was established with the kind support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. It has been working to build a sustainable network of civil society organisations from across the EU which are involved or interested in the process.

This report presents the results of the research and analysis carried out by the Network over the past seven months, as well as a number of recommendations for how to capitalise on the current round of ECCs and how to improve the way they could be executed in the future.

The analysis in this report draws on information from the Network members about their countries' experience with the ECCs, interviews with civil society representatives and government or Commission officials, and desk research. To further illustrate the variation in the way the ECCs were carried out in each country, it also includes detailed examples from six member states: France, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, and Italy.

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A key finding of this report is that the member states have stuck to the flexibility principle which they all demanded in exchange for their participation.

From the name adopted for the national events, the timeframe for holding these meetings, the chosen organisers, format, agenda, and reporting procedure, down to the rationale for joining the ECCs, each country has done its own thing.

A key finding of this report is that the member states have stuck to the flexibility principle which they all demanded in exchange for their participation. From the name adopted for the national events, the timeframe for holding these meetings, the chosen organisers, format, agenda, and reporting procedure, down to the rationale for joining the ECCs, each country has done its own thing.

This freedom has helped to ensure that all the member states felt comfortable enough to play an active role. But it has also led to a situation in which:

1. The ECCs lack a common identity to give them visibility, credibility, meaning, and durability over time.
2. The synthesis of the consultations may fail to produce a coherent message for policymakers to acknowledge and act upon, thereby weakening the ECCs' potential impact.

In parallel, the European Commission's online questionnaire sought to grant consistency and a supranational dimension to the process. Yet this did not materialise, partly because of the low response rate, and partly because most national ECCs preferred not to use it. The somewhat puzzling failure of the Brussels executive to promote the survey in the member states did not help either.

Moreover, the fact that the Commission internally conceptualised its participation in the process as part of its broader effort to discuss the 'Future of Europe' by organising Citizens' Dialogues has added to the confusion about the ECCs. Some member states merely re-branded Citizens' Dialogues as 'ECCs', which took away at least some meaning from the initiative.

Ultimately, the unstructured and under-funded process which unfolded through the ECCs never stood a chance of generating a critical mass of activities to fix the EU's democratic dilemmas. Nevertheless, if more citizens have had the chance to say what they think about the EU, talk to others about European affairs during or on the margins of the events, learn at least one new thing about the EU, and think about the Union from a new angle or a different perspective, while that may not be enough for fundamental democratic change, the ECCs will not have been in vain.

Several recommendations emerge from the experience of the ECCs so far, both for this round and for the future.

For this round of ECCs:

- ▶ Member states and the Commission should ensure that the summary reports provide a detailed account of the consultations and are made public.
- ▶ Organisers of national consultations should use the momentum of the forthcoming European Parliament elections to strengthen the public debate, and the European Commission should invest more effort in promoting the questionnaire.
- ▶ The European Council should set a clear timeframe for the new leadership to follow up on reports, and EP candidates and civil society should ensure that attention is paid to the results.
- ▶ The current Commission should pass on the conclusions to the next Commission.

For future rounds of ECCs:

- ▶ The purpose of the exercise and its connection to the European level should be made clear.
- ▶ Citizens should be informed from the start about how the outcomes of the consultations will be used.
- ▶ The transnational dimension of the consultations should be enhanced.
- ▶ Organisers should make use of existing models of citizens' participation.
- ▶ There should be a good balance between a common format and diverse national practices.
- ▶ National discussions should include issues that currently feature on the EU policy agenda.
- ▶ There should be a public synthesis of results, which should include independent voices.
- ▶ Another Citizens' Panel should be held.

Looking ahead, any successful new engagement will need more than procedure. There must be a genuine culture of openness in and around the European institutions. It will also require a general shift from seeing similar approaches to large-scale EU democratic reform as single stand-alone projects to understanding them as system interventions that must be built up over time.

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▶ A consultation hosted by the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid, Spain, 28 June 2018.

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The context

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One only has to look at the results of the Eurobarometer survey over the years to see that European citizens have definite opinions about the European Union (EU). Their attitudes differ about whether they praise or criticise their country's EU membership, whether they support or oppose a deepening of European

integration, and whether they favour newcomers joining the club or root for their country to leave it. In fact, research¹ reveals both a greater diversity of people's views for or against EU integration and a stronger intensity of feeling about European matters than with regard to more traditional left-right issues.

A healthy appetite for European discussions

The potential of political contestation on the EU is thus even more powerful than that on the left-right divide, even though the latter continues to dominate the European Parliament (EP) elections and member states' political arenas. If this potential has not yet turned into action, it is mostly because mainstream political parties have not provided the vehicles for contestation on Europe.

At 'home', EU integration has long been presented as foreign policy – the *domaine réservé* of an elite – while EP elections are seen as “second-order national”² contests, run by national parties on national issues. Deprived of choice between different visions and perspectives on Europe's future, voters feel they cannot express their views in a way that will have any political effect.

The public has, so far, remained fairly passive about their lack of options. But for how much longer? New policy 'entrepreneurs' on the far right and far left are already successfully adopting (often anti-) EU stances in order to set themselves apart from other parties and capitalise on citizens' polarised views about Europe.³

Moreover, as the direct effect of EU decisions on people's lives becomes more evident, the harder it is for mainstream parties to characterise Europe as a non-domestic arena in which they should be given free rein, and the more voters expect to have a greater say and influence over EU affairs. In addition, higher levels of education and widespread access to the Internet and a sensationalist media⁴ suggest that the cost of acquiring and processing information about politics has decreased at the same time as citizens' ability to demand political participation and a more prominent voice in EU affairs has increased.

The European Citizens' Consultations (ECCs), initiated in 2018, sought to create room for debate about Europe in the member states by offering an outlet for people's nuanced opinions on the EU and its future, and by increasing the importance of European issues in national and EP politics and elections. Can this new instrument live up to its promise? What does its implementation so far say about its potential and the future prospects of creating a European democratic space?

The Citizens' Consultations: Seeking space for debate

On 17 April 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron formally launched the French process of Citizens' Consultations. This followed a political promise he had made in 2017: that he would encourage similar events to be set up in all member states as his contribution to a pan-European discussion on the future of Europe.

This idea had been inspired by the 2017 French Presidential elections, in which Macron and his *En Marche* movement unexpectedly won the Presidency and secured an absolute majority in the *Assemblée Nationale*. At least in part, this happened thanks to a grassroots movement that collected the concerns, priorities, and desires of the French electorate through a network of more than 3,000 local committees. Anyone interested in this movement was free to join or organise a meeting in their own community, and the conclusions of the discussions from these meetings were forwarded to the *En Marche* leadership to be included in Macron's platform.

Although, in the end, it was not entirely clear to what extent these discussions influenced the resulting electoral programme, the bottom-up approach of formulating political positions legitimised the *En Marche* campaign and revealed the public's thirst for unconventional engagement in politics.

European issues were debated prominently at these *En Marche* gatherings, and in his presidential programme Macron suggested replicating this method at the European level, promising to "give the people a voice" in European affairs through "citizens' conventions".⁵ After his presidential victory, he then repeated his intention to launch such events "all over Europe" in a speech he made in early July before the French Parliament convened in Congress.⁶

Macron outlined five ambitious goals in drawing on his movement's techniques at the European level:

- ▶ "rediscovering the path of democracy";⁷
- ▶ identifying European citizens' "priorities, concerns, and ideas" for the EU's future;⁸

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- ▶ raising public awareness about the EU and how it functions;⁹
- ▶ getting citizens to debate European issues domestically, and making them feel that their leaders are listening to them;¹⁰
- ▶ informing the debate for the 2019 European Parliament elections, as well as the agenda of the next European Commission.¹¹

Nevertheless, good ideas are never enough. Although Macron's initiative quickly won the support of Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, who perceived it as dovetailing with its existing 'Future of Europe' discussions, the member states proved harder to impress.¹²

On the one hand, there was a growing sense that the time had come to re-energise the Union after years of crises.¹³ Moreover, there was an increasing acceptance that the wider public would have to be more closely involved in decisions about the future of EU integration. On the other hand, most capitals insisted that, if they were to adopt Citizens' Consultations as a way to shore up public support and seize the opportunity for European reform, they needed flexibility both in the details and the timeframe of how they were to be implemented.

In essence, this meant diluting the original idea and striking compromises. For example, the name eventually used to refer to this initiative changed at the end of 2017, from Macron's initial reference to "Citizens' Conventions" or "Democratic Conventions" to "Citizens' Consultations", in order to avoid any potential association with EU treaty reform. Initial French plans for a common label to be used across Europe, in order to underline the transnational character of the events, were also quietly dropped in favour of a "minimum level"¹⁴ of homogeneity to ensure the support of the more sceptical countries, such as the Visegrad states, which said that if they were going to participate it had to "respect national practices".¹⁵

The initiative was discussed at the informal European Council Summit on 23 February 2018, when most of the member states gave their backing to the idea.

The process which all 27 EU member states ultimately agreed to endorse follows two tracks:

1. At the EU level, the Commission is hosting an online survey, available in all EU languages, consisting of questions formulated by a Citizens' Panel (see next section). This online platform aims to help grant consistency and a supranational dimension to the process. In parallel, the European Commission is also increasing the number of 'Citizens' Dialogues', a process which has been ongoing since 2012.¹⁷

2. At the member state level, governments are in charge of organising physical events in their respective countries and synthesising the results. They may also choose to involve a wide variety of actors in the domestic arena (such as local communities, enterprises, chambers of commerce and industry, trade unions, cultural institutions, schools, and universities) in the organisation of Citizens' Consultations as a means of reaching a significant and diverse part of the European population.

The heads of state and government will then discuss the results of the online questionnaire and the national syntheses at the European Council in December 2018. For most member states, the European Citizens' Consultations (ECCs) process will have wrapped up by then, but the European Commission's endpoint is the Leaders' Summit in Sibiu in May 2019, which will debate the future of the EU and prepare the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

An informal working group, meeting once a month and consisting of representatives from each member state, the European Commission, and civil society actors, offers a platform for coordination among different stakeholders and informally guides the process.

The Citizens' Panel on the Future of Europe

Anthony Zacharzewski, *President*
The Democratic Society

In planning how to implement the ECCs, discussions between the European Commission, civil society actors, and the French government identified the need for a public process to select the questions that would be asked in a pan-European digital platform set up by the Commission. This was the idea behind holding a “Citizens’ Panel on the Future of Europe”, as a suitable means for Europeans to choose their own priorities from among the many possible issues that could be covered by an EU-wide survey.

The panel took place at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels on 4-6 May 2018 and brought together 96 citizens from all 27 EU member states, selected by the market research company Kantar Public. The participants were invited to Brussels to select the 12 most important issues they were concerned about for the future of Europe. They were then asked to shape and choose the questions relating to each topic, which were drafted by Kantar.

Panellists were selected to create an audience that broadly reflected the European population in terms of gender, age, employment, and economic status. Each member state was represented by at least one man and one woman. No member state had fewer than two or more than six participants, which meant, for example, that France (with five participants) was comparatively under-represented compared to Malta (with three participants), given these countries’ respective populations.

The European citizens who participated did not have to speak, or even understand,

a common language such as English. Just over half of the panellists said that they had some knowledge of English, but this varied widely across countries. Interpreters were used so people could express themselves in their native language. To ease communication, participants were divided into seven groups where they could speak their mother tongues and listen in a language that they understood (though not always their native language). Because of the practical interpretation constraints, the group composition remained the same for the two-day duration of the panel.

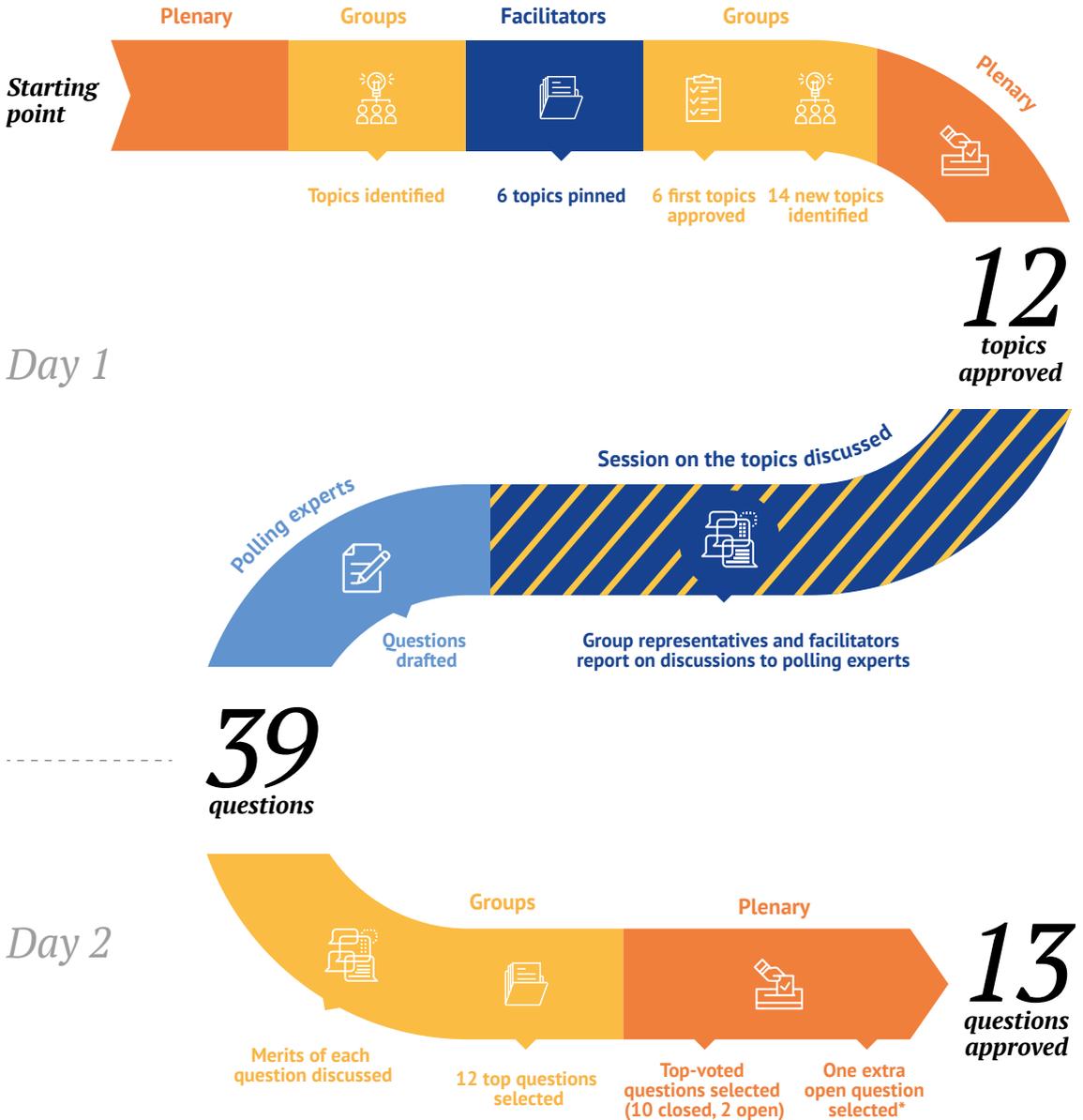
All logistical details were handled by the Commission and the EESC, and each citizen received a symbolic EUR 100 remuneration for his/her participation.

Missions Publiques led the design and moderation of the Citizens’ Panel, with support from The Democratic Society. Further expertise was provided by the European Policy Centre, the *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, and experienced facilitators.¹⁸

As depicted in the Flowchart on page 20, on the first day of the panel participating citizens were asked to nominate topics they considered so vital for Europe’s future that all their fellow European citizens should be asked to comment on them. Each group was facilitated by one of the moderation team, with a note-taker recording the discussions and issues raised. The plan was to identify 12 topics in total.

After an initial round of debate in groups, the lists of topics were brought together by the facilitators, and the six most frequently-

European Citizens' Consultations Citizens' Panel Flowchart



* At least three open questions were required

Plenary: all 96 European citizens participating in the Panel

Groups: division of the 96 citizens into 7 groups according to interpretation availability

Facilitators: moderators of the group discussions and event co-organisers

Polling experts: representatives from Kantar Public with expertise in drafting survey questions

Group representatives: one or two citizens from each group nominated to report on the group's discussions

raised topics were pinned – they could be reopened later, but they were noted as being significant topics that would automatically become part of the final list. The ‘top six’ topics were:

- ▶ Education and Youth
- ▶ Equality, Fairness, and Solidarity
- ▶ Environment
- ▶ Making Rules and Making Decisions
- ▶ Migration and Refugees
- ▶ Security and Defence

In a subsequent round of group discussions, participants were asked to consider the most important topics from the perspective of 20 years in the future, in order to enrich and broaden the list of issues. Each group then had to vote for two topics that emerged from this exchange and present them in the plenary.

This exercise produced 14 topics (two for each group). After consultation with the participants, the plenary session moderators merged some topics, so in the end, ten were submitted to be voted on.

The vote was ‘positive only’ (one could vote *for* but not *against*), and each participant was asked to cast no more than six votes. The six topics eventually chosen to be added to the ‘top six’ already decided were:

- ▶ Health/Quality of Life/Ageing Society (three issues merged) – 86 votes
- ▶ Social Protection – 74 votes
- ▶ Economic Security – 67 votes
- ▶ Maintaining the Union in Future Crisis – 61 votes
- ▶ Work/Technology/Impact of Technology on Employment (three issues merged) – 55 votes
- ▶ Agriculture/Fisheries/Food security – 54 votes¹⁹

Before the end of the first day, each group was asked to nominate one or two participants to take part in an evening session, where they reported key points from their group’s discussion relating to each of the final 12 topics chosen. Group facilitators and note-takers also attended this session, where Kantar Public staff collected input in order to draft questions relevant to the topics discussed during the day. This session had to be conducted in English because no interpretation was available.

The panel brought together 96 citizens from all 27 EU member states selected by the market research company Kantar Public.

The European citizens who participated did not have to speak, or even understand, a common language such as English. Just over half of the panellists said that they had some knowledge of English, but this varied widely across countries. Interpreters were used so people could express themselves in their native language.

The questions selected by the participants were those used in the final questionnaire, without any interpretation or amendment by the Commission.

The European Commission uploaded the final questionnaire on Europe Day, 9 May.

The Kantar Public team then produced a long-list of 39 questions, arranged by the 12 topics selected by participants. They merged ‘Equality, Fairness, and Solidarity’ and ‘Social Protection’ to allow space for a cross-cutting or ‘transversal’ question that picked up on issues that arose frequently. This resulted in 11 topics on specific policy areas and one topic cutting across all policy areas (‘11+1’). This list included both open questions (where respondents could write out answers in full) and closed questions (where they had to choose between set responses).

These questions were then presented to participants the following morning. In the groups, each participant was given ten votes to distribute among the 39 questions (giving no more than one vote per question). They were told that there must be at least three open questions in the survey as a whole, and one question on each of the ‘11+1’ topics. The results of the vote from each group were added together, and the top question for each topic was selected. In the end, only two open questions and ten closed ones were chosen.

On the basis that one more open question was needed, the facilitation team decided to give participants the opportunity to vote in plenary between the two open transversal questions that had been drafted – the most popular was then chosen as the 13th question.

Finally, the Citizens’ Panel voted to approve the list of questions as a whole.

The questions selected by the participants were those used in the final questionnaire, without any interpretation or amendment by the Commission, apart from small language edits for clarity.

The only partial exception was the question on the “Equality, Fairness, and Social Protection” topic, which was transformed from closed to open. This change was likely made to avoid implying that the inequalities listed were in any way exhaustive or prioritised.

The European Commission uploaded the final questionnaire on Europe Day, 9 May.²⁰

The ECCs Civil Society Network

The implementation of the Citizens' Consultations has been the result of compromise among different political interests and different visions for Europe. It was decided within a short timeframe, which limited the possibility for extensive planning and preparation. So, far from being a fully-fledged instrument to encourage public engagement with European affairs, the ECCs can be better understood as an experiment whose merits and future prospects can only be judged appropriately once the consultations have actually been conducted.

WHY A CSO NETWORK?

To assess the ECCs, one needs to answer several key questions. Are the member states following through on their commitment to organise physical consultations? How are the different member state governments bringing the ECCs to life in their own countries? Is the process inclusive and interactive? Is civil society engaged? Which issues are being discussed and in what format? What opinions and suggestions are emerging from these domestic debates? What are the responses to the Commission's online survey? Are European citizens aware of this online platform, and are they using it? What do they think of the questions, and to what extent are these questions being used in the ECCs? How do the ECCs help to improve the quality of European democracy?

It was precisely to answer questions like these, and to keep a close eye on the process, that the Democratic Society and the European Policy Centre – with the kind support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Open Society Foundations – launched the European Citizens' Consultations Civil Society Network in April 2018. Its goal was twofold:

1. **To build a network of civil society organisations (CSOs)** working on, or interested in, the ECCs and their long-term potential, in order to facilitate a steady flow of information about what is happening on the ground in European countries and the risks and opportunities. This network would put civil society organisations in contact with each other and with institutional actors throughout the EU, and help them to develop lasting relationships. It would also make it as easy as possible for civil society to support broad-based participation in the ECCs.

2. To ensure that this **CSO network would act as a critical and independent friend of the ECCs**, reflecting on, researching, and evaluating them in order to highlight best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations about how they could be upgraded in the future. It could also be a means of generating new ideas and thinking for the European Parliament elections and the incoming EU leadership, and about how to develop democratic and civic spaces to continue the debate across Europe.

BUILDING THE CSO NETWORK

The process of developing the network unfolded in three stages:

1. **Identifying and connecting with civil society actors:** The project team undertook desk research, screened our organisations' own contact databases, and spread the word about the project, including by contacting people and organisations via email and social media and at various events. The aim was to find civil society actors working on, or interested in, the ECCs in the member states. Organisations that responded positively were then drawn into an informal network with regular meetings²¹ and online communication to

help the project reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’ and to share information about the ECCs in their own countries.

Efforts to expand and consolidate this broader network of national link organisations continued through chain referrals and by reaching out to civil society umbrella organisations to provide new contacts. The members of the network can be categorised as follows:

- ▶ National actors: 23
- ▶ International or Pan-European actors: 20
- ▶ Foundations: 4
- ▶ Individuals: 3

Additionally, three representatives from EU institutions and four government representatives attended meetings and opted to receive further updates.

2. Establishing a Core Network of civil society actors: Some organisations from the wider network who expressed a keen interest in the ECCs and had proven expertise in democracy and European affairs decided to become part of a more committed core group of CSOs, which oversaw and participated in the project’s activities for the duration of the ECCs. The core members were present at most, if not all, project meetings. These meetings also brought together representatives from the European Commission, participating governments, and other CSOs working on the ECCs from different perspectives: democracy, strategy and design, research and evaluation, citizen activation, and information. The core network provided the support system for the project, as well as vital checks and balances.

3. Setting up an independent Research and Evaluation Working Group: Towards the end of summer 2018, once the wider network and core group had been established, organisations participating in the project were invited to join in the evaluation and

synthesis of how the ECCs had unfolded, based on the data collected through the network. The aim was to reflect on the findings, devise recommendations, and ensure that the next European Commission and Parliament take on board the results and lessons on design, democracy, and citizens’ participation. Some members of the Research and Evaluation Working Group have contributed directly to this report.

COLLECTING THE DATA

The project’s data-collection phase kicked off with online desk research on the ECCs. The team then carried out interviews with stakeholders and interested parties in Brussels and the member states. These included government staff involved in the process, event organisers from civil society, NGO representatives, journalists, academics, and representatives from the European Commission. Desk research continued in parallel with the interviews in order to stay abreast of new developments and corroborate findings that emerged from these discussions.

The starting point for this was the European Commission webpage, which hosts the online questionnaire.²² This contains a list of participating countries, including links to the websites for each national initiative. The website format varies between countries, from dedicated web portals to simple sub-directories on the websites of the Ministries of Foreign or European Affairs. However, in general, it was possible to gather enough information from each website to create a basic overview of how the ECCs operated in each country. To make it easy to compare national data, findings were grouped under eight categories covering details such as the timeframe, the stated purpose of the consultations, the expected outcomes, and how they were branded and promoted.

The data from the websites was supplemented by social media research. Official accounts

linked to the process on Facebook and Twitter were an immediate point of reference, as most promotional activities took place on these platforms. Some countries also used image-sharing platforms such as Instagram and Flickr. The project team searched each platform for instances of the hashtags mentioned on the official websites, as well as doing country-scope searches with the more general hashtags: #citizensconsultations, #consultationscitoyennes (which was also used in some countries other than France), and #futureofeuropa. The purpose of searching social media was to evaluate the degree of visibility and promotion in each country and to find details of specific events.

This desk research generated an overall understanding of how the process was unfolding in several countries. However, the data was incomplete, as at the start of our research in June 2018 only 15 of the 27 participating countries had official ECCs websites. Other countries have since prepared websites, but there are still several member states with no information available online. At the time this report went to print, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden were not listed on the Commission webpage. To gather data for the missing countries, and expand on existing information, the team conducted interviews.

Using the project's wider network of civil society links and government contacts, the team compiled a list of interviewees. The decision to approach both government and civil society actors was deemed essential in order to be able to cross-reference what the interviewees said and thus ensure the information was accurate. It also made it possible to supplement the government's factual knowledge and details of the ECCs with information from civil society's independent point of view and evaluation.

The team also interviewed members of the Research and Evaluation Working Group and relevant officials from the European Commission to make the best use of the project's contacts. Talking with the Commission also provided information about the performance of the pan-European survey and its results.

Interviews took place by Skype, by phone, or face-to-face in Brussels. They were semi-structured, built around a set of questions that drew on the categories used for the desk research but had been adapted to reflect preliminary findings and gaps revealed by the initial research. Interviewees were prompted to elaborate on how their government had referred to, advertised, and given reasons for the

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consultations, plus practical elements such as the timeframe, location, financing, format of events, the follow-up, and outputs (see Guiding interview questions, p. 74).

Contacts were also asked to share their own overall impressions and opinions about the initiative and its implementation at EU and national level, and to provide further and more personal insights. This interview format enabled the team to understand the logistics of each national process while also offering good points of comparison and contrast between countries. All interviews were held on an informal, off-the-record basis to encourage interviewees to speak freely. In total, 53 interviews were carried out between July and October 2018 with a variety of actors from civil society, national governments, and European Commission representatives. The table, to the right, gives the full breakdown per member state and type of stakeholder.

In each case, the interviewer took detailed notes in order to write a summary of the discussion. The summaries primarily aimed to provide answers to the guiding questions and to make it easy to compare countries. They also included country-specific details and the interviewees' evaluative impressions. In the spirit of full transparency, all summaries were made available to the members of the Research and Evaluation Working Group via an online shared drive, so that they could add comments, identify gaps, or expand the notes with further details.

Interviews per member state and type of stakeholder

Country	Civil society links	Government or Commission links
Austria	✓	✓
Belgium	✓	✓ ✓
Bulgaria		✓
Croatia	✓	✓
Cyprus		✓
Czech Republic	✓	✓
Denmark	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Estonia	✓	✓ ✓
Finland	✓	✓
France	✓ ✓	✓
Germany	✓ ✓	✓
Greece	✓ ✓	
Hungary	✓	
Ireland	✓	
Italy	✓ ✓ ✓	✓
Latvia	✓	✓ ✓
Lithuania	✓	✓
Luxembourg		✓
Malta		✓
Netherlands	✓	✓
Poland	✓	
Portugal		✓
Romania	✓	
Slovakia		
Slovenia	✓	
Spain	✓ ✓	
Sweden	✓	✓
International	✓	✓

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- ¹ Van der Eijk, Cees and Franklin, Mark N. (2001), "The sleeping giant: potential for contestation on European matters at national elections in Europe", Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, September 2001.
- ² Reif, Karlheinz and Schmitt, Hermann (1980), "Nine second order national elections – A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results", *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 8, Number 1, pp. 3-44.
- ³ New pro-European parties such as VOLT Europa and DIEM25 are beginning to operate from a transnational starting point, and democratic initiatives such as those of European Alternatives are working primarily at the European level. However, these remain in an early, experimental stage, and their potential has yet to be tested.
- ⁴ Many Internet users receive most of their information from social media 'echo chambers', limiting their exposure to pluralist discourse about the future of the EU and European policy issues. See EPC Discussion Paper "Disinformation and democracy: The home front in the information war" (forthcoming).
- ⁵ "[Presidential programme of Emmanuel Macron](#)", *En Marche*.
- ⁶ "[Speech by Emmanuel Macron before the French Parliament convened in Congress](#)", Office of the President of the French Republic, 3 July 2017.
- ⁷ "[Speech by Emmanuel Macron from the Pnyx, Athens](#)", Office of the President of the French Republic, 7 September 2017.
- ⁸ "[Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne, Paris](#)", Office of the President of the French Republic 26 September 2017.
- ⁹ Speech by Emmanuel Macron at Sorbonne (2017), *op.cit.* and speech by Emmanuel Macron in Athens (2017), *op. cit.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Speech by Emmanuel Macron at Sorbonne (2017), *op. cit.*
- ¹² "[Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address](#)", European Commission, 13 September 2017.
- ¹³ See, for example, New Pact for Europe (2017), [Re-energising Europe: A package deal for the EU27](#), (rapporteur: Janis A. Emmanouilidis), Third report.
- ¹⁴ Nominacher, Maximilian (2018), "[Let's talk about Europe. A review of the proposal for pan-European citizens' consultations](#)", Berlin: Jacques Delors Institut, p. 2.
- ¹⁵ Gulyás, Gergely (2018), "[Equal treatment afforded to all member states is an issue of credibility for the EU](#)", Prime Minister's Office, Website of the Hungarian Government, 27 February 2018. See also The Visegrad Group (2018), "[V4 Statement on the Future of Europe](#)".

¹⁶ Excluding the United Kingdom, which decided not to participate given its forthcoming departure from the EU.

¹⁷ "[Citizens' Dialogues](#)", European Commission.

¹⁸ [Missions Publiques](#) is a French consulting firm specialised in improving governance and decisions through the participation of citizens and stakeholders. The [Democratic Society](#) is a non-profit organisation working for greater participation and dialogue in democracy. The [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#) is the largest private operating foundation in Germany and focuses on areas such as the economy, education, health care, civil society and culture. The [European Policy Centre](#) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank, committed to making European integration work.

¹⁹ Topics with insufficient support were: Climate change – 47 votes; Local vs EU decision making – 46 votes; Size of the EU (states joining or leaving) – 45 votes; More or less integration of the states of the Union – 39 votes. It is possible that these topics were rejected because participants found they were covered by others or simply less significant.

²⁰ "[Consultation on the Future of Europe](#)", European Commission, *op. cit.*

²¹ A total of eight meetings were held between March and September 2018.

²² "[Consultation on the Future of Europe](#)", European Commission, *op. cit.*

Sprechen wir über Europa

DER BÜRGERDIALOG



► German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends the "Citizens' dialogue on the future of Europe" at Imaginata on August 14, 2018 in Jena, eastern Germany.

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The story

2

What has the research revealed about how the ECCs were implemented in the member states? To what extent have different countries resorted to different approaches and what are some common features, if any? What does the data tell us about the challenges organisers have

faced and the efforts they have invested in organising consultations? How has the European Commission fared in its intention of contributing to this initiative with the online questionnaire? This section presents the findings of the research and answers these and other questions.

What happened

The ‘flexibility’ principle, which all member states insisted upon in exchange for agreeing to participate in the ECCs process, and which gave national governments freedom to organise consultations in whatever way they wanted, means that the research team could not collect, organise, and evaluate the data on the basis of hard categories or criteria. So instead of setting a fixed bar for all countries, the team focused on showing the diversity of national experiences without evaluating the ECCs’ format and their quality against any pre-defined principles and ideas. Rigidity regarding specific standards would have risked excluding important details about individual countries, resulting in incomplete remarks and conclusions.

The originality of this process meant it was more important to observe and understand the *what* and the *why* of the ECCs in different member states than to assess whether their implementation fit a certain (ideal) model. In other words, national flexibility in implementing the ECCs required flexibility in carrying out the research and analysis.

As a result, the findings of this report bring together 27 national accounts – each as comprehensive and accurate as was possible – and tell one story of differences and commonalities in member states’ approaches and visions for the European Citizens’ Consultations.

The stars of this story are the member states. But their national consultations have been complemented by the European Commission’s online questionnaire, and so the narrative must cover what happened at each level, and the extent to which they intersected.

THE EU LEVEL

Given that the online questionnaire hosted by the European Commission will remain open until the Leaders’ Summit in Sibiu in May 2019, findings regarding the performance of this platform are unavoidably preliminary. That said, as the Commission will publish a mid-term report to coincide with the member states’ national reports to the European Council in December 2018, it is a good time to take stock of the results so far.

The survey has been online and available to all European citizens since 9 May 2018. At the time this report went to print, some 50,000 people had taken part in the poll. Citizens from all member states, without exception, have contributed responses, but not all countries have registered similar levels of participation. Among the most active member states have been France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and Italy, while countries such as Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus, Croatia, and Lithuania contributed the fewest responses.¹

The European Commission has made efforts to promote the Citizen's Panel, for example, by posting on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook,² by producing short videos,³ and by issuing press releases⁴ after the event. For the questionnaire, the Commission relied more on the member states and civil society actors to spread the word by including a link to the survey on their national websites dedicated to the initiative.

However, European citizens do not seem to be very aware of the online questionnaire or the event that led to it. The relative lack of publicly available information about the Citizens' Panel, for example, even to those interested and wanting to learn more about it, may help explain why there is little knowledge about the ECCs and a tendency towards scepticism about the reliability of the method that was used to generate the questions.⁵

In addition, although the Commission had hoped that the online questionnaire would set the agenda of the ECCs in the member states by addressing topics of common interest, in practice, most national organisers did not use it. Instead, they preferred to decide the themes of discussion themselves in advance (top-down) or source them directly from the audience on the day of the event. Having said that, most of the national websites did include a link to the questionnaire, which participants were encouraged to fill in, even if, in many cases, it did not feature very prominently on the site.

In talking with interviewees, it became clear that many governments perceived the questionnaire as a fallback option. Several government partners said that they had wanted to include their own platform so that citizens who were not able to attend an event could still participate online. Due to a lack of time and resources, they used the European Commission questionnaire instead. Because the responses to this

questionnaire go directly back to the European Commission rather than to national governments, and thus do not contribute to their own synthesis, member states saw this as 'second-best' to having their own platform.

Possibly for this reason, the Austrian and Greek websites host their own surveys instead of linking to the European Commission questionnaire. Some countries have preferred a crowdsourcing, generative dynamic to a survey. Spain and Latvia, for example, offer their own online platforms, where citizens can submit specific ideas, comments, and policy proposals, rather than just responding to pre-set questions.⁶

In parallel to the online questionnaire, the European Commission continued to organise Citizens' Dialogues in member states. This is a strong reminder that the Commission's contribution to the ECCs is conceptualised internally as part of a broader effort to discuss the 'Future of Europe', which preceded the European Citizens' Consultations process and will continue after it comes to an end in December 2018.⁷

The Citizens' Dialogues have been ongoing since 2012 to give European citizens across the member states the means to ask EU politicians questions, make comments, and share their ideas and visions for Europe's future. They are public events, and many are live-streamed. In total there have been some 1,000 Citizens' Dialogues, 500 of which took place between the start of 2018 and President Juncker's State of the Union Address on 12 September.⁸ The plan is to host 300 more by May 2019.⁹ There is no indication on the Commission's website that the Citizens' Dialogues are a different initiative from the ECCs: both are described as 'Citizens' Dialogues', although they are listed separately.¹⁰

As for future plans, the Commission will submit a mid-term report about the

responses to the questionnaire so far, which will be presented alongside the national reports at the European Council in December 2018. It is currently unclear whether the Commission will also organise another Citizens' Panel before May 2019 to discuss the results of the ECCs, based on the European and national reports. This idea was discussed at the time of the first Citizens' Panel but has not been revisited.

THE MEMBER STATE LEVEL

This section covers the following aspects of the ECCs at member state level: branding, rationale, timeframe, promotion, organisation, format, structure and numbers, representativeness, the transnational dimension, and reporting and synthesis.

Branding

While this report uses the term 'European Citizens' Consultations' to refer to the national government-led initiatives that will feed into the discussions at the December 2018 European Council, the overall process has no official common name. Each country uses its own branding, in some cases including logos, slogans, hashtags, and other aspects of visual identity (for a country-by-country breakdown, see Comparative table, p. 63).

The title 'Citizens' Consultations' is the closest thing the process has to a common identity. This is based on the name used in France ("*Consultations citoyennes sur l'Europe*") and shared by several other countries like Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Romania, and Austria. But in Denmark and Finland, the term is 'Citizens' Hearings', while several other member states, including Germany, Lithuania, and Ireland, call the events 'Citizens' Dialogues'. This latter name could potentially lead to confusion with the European Commission's own events, but they are presented as distinct events in these countries.

Some member states, like Portugal and Luxembourg, deliberately re-branded the Citizens' Dialogues they had already planned, calling them Citizens' Consultations, but other countries chose to keep the processes separate. According to one interview partner,¹¹ the use of the term 'Citizens' Hearings' in Finland and Denmark was precisely intended to distinguish these events from the Citizens' Dialogues. Other existing initiatives in individual member states have also been re-labelled as 'ECCs' in individual member states, for example, the *EU-Projektstage*¹² in Germany, in which ministers visit schools to talk about the EU.

The branding process in France – *Quelle est votre Europe?* (roughly "What kind of Europe do you want?") – reflects the kind of question which the consultations aimed to answer. The same question was used in the Czech Republic (*Jakou Evropu opravdu chceme?*), and a similar format, also referring to the individual's preference, is used in the Baltic states – My Europe (*Mano Europa/Mana Eiropa/Minu Euroopa*). Another frequent slogan is the more general "Let's talk about Europe" (as used in countries as diverse as Germany, Greece, Finland, Bulgaria, and Spain).

Rationale

The fact that every member state except the UK formally agreed to participate in the ECCs process reveals a general agreement across Europe that now is a critical time to discuss the EU's future. The return to economic growth after the financial crisis, the easing of the migrant crisis and the wake-up call of the UK's decision to leave the EU have had a unifying effect on Europe's leaders, convincing them that the Union is reaching a critical juncture. In the words of President Juncker's 2017 State of the Union address, "the wind is back in Europe's sails. But we will go nowhere unless we catch that wind."¹³ This is the spirit that the ECCs are intended to capture.

However, in practice, there are differing opinions about the exact purpose of the discussions.

Some countries' websites and promotional materials emphasise the need to involve citizens more closely in EU decision-making processes, sometimes explicitly referring to the forthcoming European Parliament elections. Others cite the need to determine the future priorities for the EU, potentially including reform. Simple awareness raising about the EU was also a motivation in some cases.

Compare the following statements:

Germany

*We want to bring Europe closer to its citizens, make it **more transparent**, and **win new trust**.*¹⁷

Greece

*Europe must become **more democratic, more social, closer to the citizens**, through a project in which we are all involved, **not just political and social elites**.*¹⁸

Luxembourg

*The ideas that emerge from the Citizens' Consultations will feed the thinking of the EU's Heads of State and Government and enable them to **identify priorities for action** for the next five to ten years.*¹⁴

Romania

*The events aim to debate the forthcoming priorities of the EU... to **strengthen the feeling of belonging** to the European project ... At the same time, the initiative represents an opportunity to **meet Romania's strategic objectives** at the European level...*¹⁹

2

Spain

*It is an open, public, and transparent dialogue which will **give a voice to citizens** so that they can express their opinions and make concrete proposals about the future of the European Union.*¹⁵

Lithuania

*This cycle of events is aimed at **raising the public's awareness** of Lithuanian interests in the EU and discussing the benefits of Lithuania's EU membership...*²⁰

Belgium

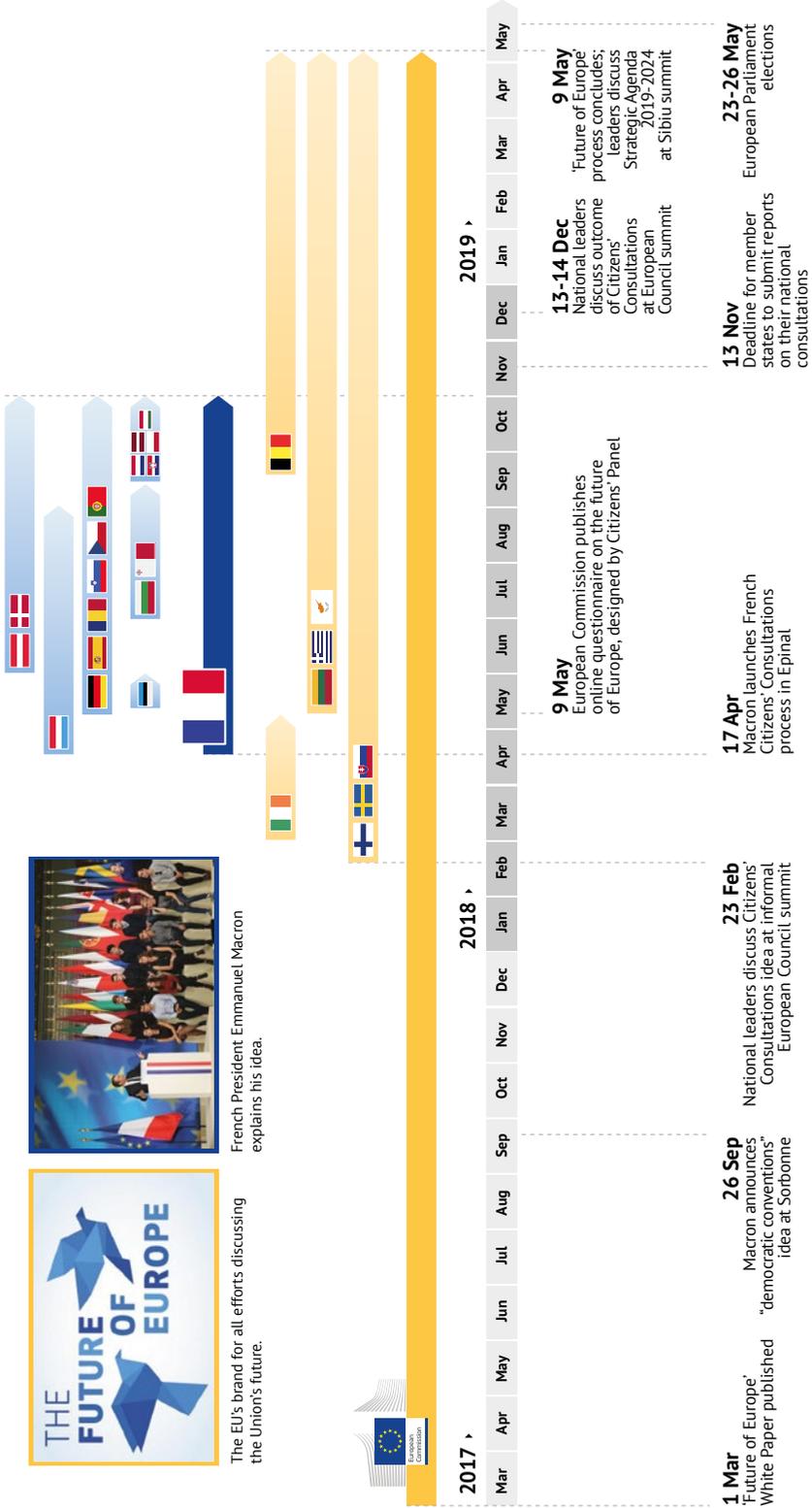
*We want to **bring citizens closer to the European project**, and **better involve them in decisions**.*¹⁶

France

Why participate?

<i>I want to make my voice heard on Europe.</i>	<i>I wish to express my expectations of Europe.</i>	<i>I wish to make proposals for the future of Europe.</i>
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European Citizens' Consultations Timeline



N.B.: Italy did not participate in the Citizens' Consultations.

Citizens were generally informed that the points they raised would feed into a report presented to the December 2018 European Council. In this respect, they understood that their collective contributions would be submitted to European leaders for consideration.

Timeframe

Each of the participating countries has chosen to join the ECCs at a different point in time. While the European Commission's discussions on the 'Future of Europe' will run until the Sibiu Summit on 9 May 2019, the member states are operating the ECCs according to their own timetables.

The vast majority of national initiatives wrapped up in October 2018 to allow countries time to prepare national reports for the December European Council. These member states are following the same model as in France, where events ran from April to October 2018. The initial French plan foresaw stopping the consultations before the start of the European Parliament's election campaigns to avoid accusations that the ECCs were being used by a particular party or interest, such as *En Marche*, to influence the outcome of the vote.²¹

However, there are some countries which will continue to hold events using the ECCs branding after October 2018. In Belgium, Finland, and Lithuania this choice has been unequivocally connected with the European Parliament elections in May 2019, as the events there will aim to encourage voter turnout and citizens' engagement on European issues. These member states could be said to be following the Commission's timeframe, which extends into 2019.

Ireland stands out among all the other countries in that it had already finished the process by May, having organised events in spring 2018 in the framework of the 'Future of Europe' initiative.

Finally, in a handful of member states, elections, changes of government, or other national priorities have delayed the process or truncated the time available. Luxembourg held its last consultation in early September to avoid interfering with the campaign period for the elections on 14 October, while Latvia did not properly kick off its initiative until after its elections on 6 October. The process did not start in Belgium until September possibly because, during the spring, the government was preoccupied with preparations for the NATO Summit in July. Changes of government may

The vast majority of national initiatives wrapped up in October 2018 to allow countries time to prepare national reports for the December European Council.

However, there are some countries which will continue to hold events using the ECCs branding after October 2018.

also have contributed to de-prioritising the idea, as in Sweden and Italy (see p. 61).

Irrespective of their timetables, all participating countries have committed to submitting a report in autumn 2018, in preparation for the European Council in December.

Promotion

National promotional efforts for the ECCs have been quite limited, taking place almost entirely on social media, principally Facebook and Twitter. There is very little consistency between countries: some use dedicated social media accounts, while others post from government ministries' or politicians' accounts. Most member states use a dedicated hashtag, although some use hashtags that also have other purposes, including #futureofeuropa or, in Austria, #servuseuropa, the hashtag of the Austrian Presidency of the European Council.

Some countries, like Lithuania and the Czech Republic, produced audiovisual material, such as promotional videos. In several member states, including Romania, Lithuania, and Malta, the events were live-streamed on social media.²²

In nearly every country, there is nothing about the promotion that would suggest to the average citizen that he/she is contributing to a transnational process in which similar events are simultaneously taking place all over Europe. Each consultation looks like an isolated national initiative. Neither of the two unifying aspects – the Commission questionnaire and the December 2018 Summit report – are given prominence in any country's website description or other promotional material. The only notable exception is Portugal, where the website provides links to all the other national initiatives.²³

Promotional efforts have varied between countries, but in general media attention has not been significant. Several interview

partners reported that regional media had covered events in the local area, but the national press was not interested. Even in France, where the ECCs were one of the President's priorities and were heavily promoted by the government and civil society, media uptake was limited.²⁴

Organisation

In every member state, the government leads the implementation, usually via the Ministry of Foreign and/or European Affairs. Governments' relationships with civil society actors vary in each case. Broadly speaking, there are three types of consultations:

 **Government:** the government organises the consultations itself. Civil society representatives may be invited to attend or even participate as speakers, but they are not involved in the organisation. This is particularly the case in Central and Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Slovakia. The majority of ECCs fall into this category (see Comparative table, p. 63).

 **Partnership:** the government partners with one or more civil society organisations or independent institutions, to which it has delegated the organisation of events. In this way, the government has some control over the number and location of events but has a 'hands-off' approach to their format. This model was used in Germany, Ireland, Romania, the Netherlands, and Malta (see Comparative table, p. 63).

 **Open:** the government launches an open application process, calling on civil society organisations (CSOs) (or even private citizens) to organise events and to apply to use the national ECCs branding. The government may also provide funding, speakers, or moderators. This process took place in France, Spain, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, and Luxembourg (see Comparative table, p. 63).

Format

When it comes to the format of the national consultations, in most cases, government ministers ‘consulted’ the citizens by listening to their views and responding via a question-and-answer session or as part of a panel discussion. This is very similar to the format the European Commission uses for the Citizens’ Dialogues, and a far cry from encouraging citizens to debate EU issues among themselves. ‘Citizen-to-citizen’ events have only been the primary model in a couple of countries, where they were organised by CSOs. This was the default format in Ireland and the Netherlands, and was also used in some consultations organised in Belgium, France, and Luxembourg. In general, high-level panel discussions were the most common format, particularly in Central and Eastern European member states.

By and large, it is possible to group the ECCs into three formats:



Panel discussion: a panel of several speakers give input and discuss among themselves, before taking questions from the audience. In several countries, such as Romania, Lithuania, and Slovakia, the mobile application *Sli.do* was used to ask questions to the audience, including those following the discussions online. Panellists were then asked to respond to the outcome of this on-the-spot poll.



Question & Answer (Q&A): a minister or other politician takes questions without giving a speech beforehand.



Roundtables: citizens, generally in small groups (10 people or fewer), discuss among themselves with no politicians present.

Structure and numbers

Just as the organisation and format of individual events have varied, there has also been considerable diversity in the planning and strategy of each national process. While some countries, notably France, went for a ‘bigger is better’ approach by hosting as many events as possible and getting high numbers of attendees, others adopted a more restricted but systematic implementation.

For example, one common approach has been to plan the whole process in advance, starting with a high-profile launch in the capital, followed by one or more events in each of the

In nearly every country, there is nothing about the promotion that would suggest to the average citizen that he/she is contributing to a transnational process in which similar events are simultaneously taking place all over Europe. Each consultation looks like an isolated national initiative.

Just as the organisation and format of individual events have varied, there has also been considerable diversity in the planning and strategy of each national process.

regions and possibly with another summary event in the capital at the end of the process. In Ireland, for example, there was one consultation in each of the four historical provinces, followed by a concluding event in Dublin. This ensured a regional balance, even within a succinct process – just five events. A similar structure was used in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and the Netherlands.

As in many other respects, France stands out as an exceptional case. According to the secretariat in charge of their consultations, more than 1,000 events have taken place under the ECCs label. In comparison, in Germany, there have been around 115. The figures reflect differing national priorities and intentions: the high number of consultations in France is due primarily to the very flexible open application process and because the ECCs are one of President Macron's priorities. There is a team of 20 people working full time on the ECCs within the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, with their own budget.²⁵ By contrast, according to interviews, most other member states have struggled to allocate sufficient resources to the ECCs, so their efforts have necessarily been on a smaller scale.

Some countries have used the ECCs as part of their own existing efforts to engage the public on European issues, merely implementing a low-key process that expands on their previous initiatives. In the words of one government contact, their intention in signing up to the ECCs was to “do what we normally do and a bit more”.²⁶ This applies particularly to the Nordic countries and Austria. In these cases, it is difficult to ascertain how many ECCs have taken place, as they frequently blurred into initiatives that pre-date the ECCs. In several countries, including Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria, it is not clear which events are formally part of the ECCs and whether they are being documented. It also remains to be seen what content will feed into the reports in these countries.

Representativeness

In several member states, governments made special efforts to involve groups which are often excluded, organising events that targeted specific audiences. For example, in Lithuania, the government held events addressing the Polish or Russian minorities. In Denmark, there were events specifically for senior citizens. However, in the vast majority of cases, little attention was paid to how representative the audience was. Interview partners frequently reported that audiences were diverse in terms of age, occupation, and other demographic markers, but there was no means to control who attended the events, as almost all were open to everyone on a self-selecting basis.

There were a handful of exceptions where participants were selected or screened. For example, one event in Germany, attended by Chancellor Merkel, was organised by a newspaper which hand-picked the audience from a set of applications. A similar model was employed in some events hosted by CSOs in France and the Netherlands. In addition, some events in France were targeted towards particular memberships, such as those organised by interest groups or local chambers of commerce and industry, although these did not operate a ‘closed door’ policy as such.

Agenda

Although the ECCs were nominally about European issues, in practice, many discussions focused on domestic or global politics. Particularly when a government minister was present, the questions were likely to cover the whole of his/her brief rather than being restricted to EU topics or the current EU reform agenda. In several countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the government appears to have interpreted the ECCs as an opportunity to push its own political priorities.

For example, in Poland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not only leads the implementation of consultations but also uses them to promote its political agenda, especially on matters such as security and national sovereignty. These consultations are closer to a lecture series than an interactive and open debate with citizens (see p. 60). The Greek questionnaire²⁷ appears to be heavily skewed towards a particular political position, with potentially leading questions such as “Do you agree that the consolidation of public finances should be accompanied by care for social protection and unemployment?” and “Do you think the European Union has a future?”

However, interview partners overwhelmingly reported that discussions were good-natured and undisturbed by populist or anti-European forces, despite these actors’ growing political relevance in various national contexts.

European topics were generally discussed from a specifically national or local perspective. This was largely inevitable, especially when there was no concern about whether the topics chosen for discussion would apply in a specifically European context or if participants had no prior understanding of how Europe was relevant for national or local issues. For example, one event with Chancellor Merkel in Germany covered domestic working conditions, nuclear energy, the populist opposition in the Bundestag, and the integration of refugees.²⁸

The transnational dimension

None of the national processes included a clear transnational element by design. That said, some individual events have included speakers from other countries. In most cases these were French politicians, reflecting France’s unofficial leadership role in the process. Thus, President Macron participated in events alongside the respective prime ministers in Portugal,

Denmark, and Luxembourg, and French Minister for Europe Nathalie Loiseau was a panellist in events in Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Malta. In Poland, several events featured speakers from various European countries including Hungary, Austria, and France. However, the majority of events in all member states did not feature foreign speakers.

An event in Luxembourg brought together a cross-border audience, which featured participants from France, Belgium, and Germany as well as locals. There were also a few events in France where participants from a neighbouring country (Belgium, Germany, or Spain) were brought in to discuss cross-border issues.

Reporting and synthesis

In countries where the government took the lead in organising events, it also handled how they were reported. This was usually done by an official from the Ministry of Foreign or European Affairs who attended the meetings and took notes. In all other cases, the organisers were tasked with preparing a report for each event, usually using a template provided by the government.

These reports vary between countries in terms of the details requested. When it comes to reporting what was discussed, the French template requested very basic information: only “themes evoked”, and “problems discussed”.²⁹ Germany and Lithuania, meanwhile, asked for a lot more detail, including the mood of the room. In Germany, a feedback form was also distributed to individual participants, so that they could make comments on how they felt the discussions went and whether there were other things they would have liked to discuss. These feedback forms will also be considered in the final synthesis that the member states have to prepare for the December 2018 European Council.

Only in France are all event reports publicly available online.⁵⁰ In most other countries, they are submitted to the responsible government department, but not made public. Final national reports may be published.

In countries where only a few consultations were held, the government synthesises all the

individual event reports. Larger countries have outsourced this process: France has arranged for a commission of experts to work on a synthesis, while Germany has contracted Kantar Public, the same company that organised the Citizens' Panel, to prepare a summary report.

What it means

How is one to interpret these findings? What do they reveal about the process and results of this initiative? In what sense can the ECCs be said to have made good on their promise, and in what sense have they fallen short of expectations? What are the implications for European democracy and what lessons should be learned for the future?

This section answers these and other questions with reference to the national and EU level parts of the process. The following section then lists concrete recommendations for different actors, at different levels, and at different points in time.

THE MEMBER STATES: UNITED IN DIVERSITY

If there is one thing the ECCs story reveals, it is that the member states have stuck to the flexibility principle which they had all demanded. This makes it difficult to compare how countries implemented the ECCs. Starting with the name adopted for the national events, the timeframe for holding meetings, the chosen organisers, format, agenda, and reporting procedure, down to the rationale for joining the initiative, each country has essentially 'personalised' the ECCs and done its own thing.

This freedom has undoubtedly helped to ensure that all the member states felt

comfortable enough to partake in this process. The ability to secure the formal endorsement of each country and its active involvement in the implementation process is a remarkable first in the long legacy of initiatives aiming to shake up European democracy. Most efforts to date have focused on providing EU institutional fixes and tweaks. It is an achievement to have got each member state⁵¹ to follow through and *do something* – no matter how uncoordinated across the whole EU – to create space for citizens to express themselves on Europe. They have done so through asking questions, raising ideas, or making proposals as part of a new experimental approach to solving the European democratic equation.

However, the diversity of member states' approaches and visions for the ECCs creates two problems:

No process identity

Without common agreement on the name of the initiative, its branding, its overall aim or shared methodological principles about how the events should be implemented and how they relate to the European Commission's 'Future of Europe' process, any type of event organised in any member state about any topic and in any format could fall under the umbrella of 'consultations' – or outside it. This means that the initiative does not have a

distinctive identity to give it visibility, credibility, meaning, and durability over time.

Even the element that supposedly links the ECCs transnationally – the European Commission’s questionnaire – only contributes to confusion as it is embedded in the context of the Commission’s ‘Future of Europe’ project and its Citizens’ Dialogues. The result is a process that is united only behind the scenes, with an informal working group in Brussels and the December 2018 European Council the only points at which the disparate national processes come together.

National governments may be able to dodge accountability for any potential weaknesses of such a disjointed process, and play it as safe and as practical as they wish in implementing the initial concept, such as by organising new events or re-branding old ones as ECCs; enabling genuine debates or simply importing the town hall meeting format; having difficult conversations about Europe or making it all about national and personal political programmes, and so on. Nevertheless, the lack of clarity and the heterogeneity of practices – both within and across countries – is not a responsible way to manage expectations and can feed popular frustration about politics and Europe. It also makes it difficult for those monitoring and evaluating the process to assess it fairly and extract lessons for the future.

In the end, one could describe the ECCs as akin to the ‘Tower of Babel’ – out of an ambitious idea with great potential came a situation of generalised confusion in which there was no easy way to make sense of what is happening. Why would European citizens want to put their time and faith into (re-)engaging with such a ruleless process in the future?

No coherent message

They say the journey is more important than the destination. However, as described above, in the absence of a rigorous process – built around joint principles, a similar methodological approach, and a common objective – the ECCs can be seen as a mere collection of individual trajectories. Each one leads to a different place, has different content, different messages, and operates on a different timeframe. Except for the December 2018 European Council, which all participating member states took as a reference point to prepare a report, the ‘destination’ is little clearer than the journey.

Whether member states viewed their participation in the ECCs as part of Macron’s ‘Citizens’ Consultations’ idea or as part of the European Commission’s ‘Future of Europe’ initiative

The member states have stuck to the flexibility principle which they all demanded. This makes it difficult to compare how countries implemented the ECCs.

It is an achievement to have got each member state to follow through and do something – no matter how uncoordinated across the whole EU – to create space for citizens to express themselves on Europe. They have done so through asking questions, raising ideas, or making proposals as part of a new experimental approach to solving the European democratic equation.

2

impacted on their aims, organisation, and timeframe. Across member states, European citizens had different conversations, with varying timespans in mind, about separate issues – which may or may not have been related to the EU. They spoke to different target audiences: their national politicians, the European Council, the Commission, the candidates in the 2019 EP elections, the incoming European leaders, and other fellow nationals or Europeans. This makes synthesising messages and conclusions a challenging task.

The issue is not whether it is one idea that emerges from this process, or 100. The point is whether the ambiguity and dissonance in the results will succeed in having an influence on political discourse and decisions in Europe. The success of this initiative will be judged not only by its process but also by its impact. And it will matter whether people's questions, opinions, and concerns – as expressed during the consultations – will feed into the campaign for the 2019 EP elections, including the campaigns of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Will the agenda of the next European Parliament and Commission in the upcoming politico-institutional cycle (2019-2024) echo – at least in part – the voice of the people as heard during the ECCs? If that voice is mere noise because it was gathered in such a fragmented way, will decision-makers be able to understand it and act upon it? Is there any guarantee that they will not merely cherry-pick the findings they like from an undifferentiated mass of comments and ideas?

Ambition deficit

The member states had limited time to prepare the ECCs. This, in some cases coupled with limited experience in consulting citizens, partly explains the shortcomings that this report has identified.

Between Macron's initial push for Citizens' Consultations and his official launch of the

French process in April 2018, there was a lull of inactivity. Macron gave his speech in Athens at the start of September 2017, and the German elections followed shortly afterwards, with the ensuing uncertainty about the formation of the new federal government in Berlin. This effectively held up EU-level politics until March 2018.

During this period, some CSOs which had been advocating for the idea dropped it from their agendas, thinking that it was not going to happen because there would not be enough time to organise the entire process, hold the events, and synthesise conclusions before the December 2018 European Council.³² When Macron started pushing it again in 2018 and announced dates for the process in France, other member states were unprepared and faced considerable time pressure.³³

Additionally, some countries approached the process cautiously, worried that it might give voice to Eurosceptics. This was a major preoccupation in Germany in the context of the 2017 elections, when the radical populist *Alternative für Deutschland* increased its vote share and became the largest opposition party, with other state elections also scheduled throughout 2018. Although a formal commitment to participate eventually featured prominently in the new German government's Coalition Agreement,³⁴ this hesitation may have contributed to uncertainty at the start of the year, particularly when Macron was looking for signs of German support on this and other reform ideas as a way to revive the Franco-German motor of EU integration. It would not have made sense for France to move ahead without the participation of Europe's largest member state.

The Netherlands, too, was reluctant to participate at first given its 2016 experience with the referendum on the Association Agreement with Ukraine, when populist campaigners used the issue to spread anti-EU messages. In the end, the Netherlands and

Hungary were the last countries to agree to join in the ECCs.

Member states' previous experiences with consulting citizens varied widely. Some less experienced countries chose to relabel existing initiatives as 'ECCs', restrict events to tried-and-trusted formats like high-level panel discussions, and go for a 'play it safe' attitude. This was particularly the case in Central and Eastern Europe (for example Poland, Slovakia, and Bulgaria).

Meanwhile, Germany, which has conducted several similar domestic initiatives in recent years, such as the "*Gut Leben in Deutschland*" consultation in 2015,³⁵ may have had a certain degree of 'consultation fatigue' this time round. One civil society contact suggested that the German government's approach was effectively "been there, done that". This potentially accounted for the ECCs having a lower profile than in France, where they emerged as a relatively new idea and a significant priority for the *Elysée*. However, it is surely no coincidence that the most innovative and interactive formats, like roundtable discussions, emerged mainly in countries which had significant prior experience in consulting their citizens, such as Ireland.

Generally, events were only attended by the most interested people, who were already motivated to participate and did not require further prompting. In short, it was a low-risk strategy, with a low-reward outcome.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: LEADER OR OPPORTUNIST?

In all of this, the role of the European Commission has been ambiguous at best.

On the one hand, the fact that the Brussels executive – often regarded as the most technocratic and least democratically legitimate institution of the EU – decided to engage directly with European citizens

through initiatives under the 'Future of Europe' umbrella was a smart political move. The organisation of hundreds of Citizens' Dialogues throughout the member states may well help to improve the Union's communication and consultation with citizens and raise public awareness about EU affairs. But this process has been ongoing for some years, and these Dialogues would have taken place even without the ECCs.

On the other hand, when the EU member states agreed to take Macron up on his idea of holding Citizens' Consultations, they established a parallel, but similar, process to the European Commission's 'Future of Europe'. Some overlap became inevitable, in terms of timeline (for the April-December 2018 period), rationale, and the format of meetings.

For some member states, participating in the ECCs fitted into the work that they were already doing under the 'Future of Europe' label, (un)intentionally reinforcing the European Commission's efforts. However, at the same time, this added to the confusion about the ECCs in the member states and took away at least some meaning from the process.

It is hard to say whether the Commission's move to link the ECCs to ongoing initiatives was pre-meditated. However, in going to great lengths to organise the Citizen's Panel that supplied the questions for the online EU-wide survey – tagged with the 'Future of Europe' brand but also intended as a complement to the national consultations – the European Commission seemed to be deliberately seeking to plug into the ECCs process.³⁶

A bridge between the EU and the member states could have helped to 'Europeanise' the debates, but this did not materialise – partly because of the low response rate to the online survey, and partly because most national ECCs tended to ignore the Commission's questionnaire. The Commission's somewhat

If citizens end up feeling that their participation in these events was irrelevant to the decisions subsequently taken by the EU, this will reinforce their perception that politicians are unresponsive and unrepresentative, and that the EU is distant and develops beyond their control.

Rethinking the manner in which we do democracy and finding 21st century-appropriate ways to translate our democratic goals into practice is likely to be a long and hard struggle. But it has to begin somewhere, and the ECCs are a good place to start.

puzzling failure to promote it in the member states did not help either.

Arguably, the Commission was obstructed by the member states' insistence on considerable national autonomy. However, its lack of willingness to overcome this challenge, for example by pushing for more widespread use of common questions deriving from the online survey, meant that the opportunity was wasted, actively contributing to the confusion. The Commission's performance in the ECCs process is an example of how even the best intentions (such as reinforcing the 'Future of Europe' process, organising a Citizens' Panel, and consulting European citizens online) fail to deliver if they are not implemented with a clear strategy and consistent efforts.

A STEP FORWARD FOR EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY?

Ultimately, this initiative has been an experiment in improving the quality of democracy at the European level. But the EU is confronted with a long list of democratic problems, and it is unclear which of these the consultations were intended to address.

Was the process supposed to raise awareness about the EU in general, make concrete reform proposals, or share opinions within or across member states? Was it about reconnecting European citizens with their political elites? Was it meant to identify their priorities and concerns, and shape an inclusive future direction for the Union's reform? Was it a way to raise public support for the EU project? Perhaps all of these. Or maybe something else entirely.

To the extent that the member states and the Commission have been (tacitly) working towards any of these goals, they have failed to align their objectives with the means available. An unstructured and under-funded process such as that which unfolded through the ECCs never stood a chance of generating a critical mass of activities to fix the EU's democratic dilemmas. While this is partly due to the short timeframe, flaws in the process design also meant that it was unlikely the results would have been any different even if there had been more time to carry them out.

In terms of process, the consultations have been open to all, reaching further across the EU than previous efforts, in the right democratic spirit. However, many of the events that were organised by national authorities had little involvement from civil society. They used a 'top-down' Q&A format and,

so far, few or no details have been published about what transpired at these meetings. Some governments hardly even bothered to organise consultations at all. The openness alone has not produced inclusiveness, representativeness, transparency, or interactivity (among citizens or between citizens and their leaders), let alone EU-wide solidarity and joint action.

In a similar vein, the Citizens' Panel was an innovative event at the European level, but severe time constraints, both in its planning and execution, negatively impacted the methodology's democratic aspects (especially its transparency and deliberative nature). It is commendable that the Commission uploaded the questionnaire that emerged from the Citizen's Panel without making major changes. However, the subsequent lacklustre promotional efforts meant that few people participated in it.

As for the content that emerged from the ECCs and the online EU-wide questionnaire, if the reports being prepared for the December 2018 European Council are made public, they will probably shed some light on the extent to which the initiative produced common European priorities, concerns, and ideas. However, whatever the outcome, the willingness of politicians to reflect this popular input in their discourses

and decisions will be just as crucial for the democratic impact of the exercise.

If in the end citizens feel that their participation in these events was irrelevant to the decisions subsequently taken by the EU, this will reinforce their perception that politicians are unresponsive and unrepresentative, and that the EU is distant and develops beyond their control. In this case, their support for European integration is likely to drop. It therefore matters a great deal how national and European politicians respond to the results of the consultations.

Nevertheless, for all their faults and limitations, the ECCs were an experimental approach to large-scale EU democratic reform. If more citizens have had the chance to say what they think about the EU, talk to others about European affairs during or on the margins of the events, learn at least one new thing about the EU, and think about the Union from a new angle or a different perspective, while that may not be enough for fundamental change, the ECCs will not have been in vain.

Rethinking the manner in which we do democracy and finding 21st century-appropriate ways to translate our democratic goals into practice is likely to be a long and hard struggle. But it has to begin somewhere, and the ECCs are a good place to start.

Recommendations

This report's analysis of the ECCs shows that they could kick-start a process of EU democratic renewal, which could eventually yield transformative results. There are several recommendations that emerge from the experience of the ECCs so far, and which should apply in the future. They can be divided into two groups:

- 1. Group I:** recommendations for this round of ECCs and immediately after, covering the remainder of the process until May 2019 and the start of the new politico-institutional cycle after the EP elections.
- 2. Group II:** recommendations for future rounds of the European Citizens' Consultations, regarding both form and purpose, beyond 2019.

European Citizens' Consultations

16 Recommendations

Group I - for this round of ECCs

Group II - for future rounds of ECCs



Reporting	Process	Follow-up	Framing	Implementation	Reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member states and Commission should ensure reports provide detailed synthesis of consultations Member states and Commission should ensure all reports are public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisers of national consultations should use momentum of EP elections to intensify discussions Commission should invest more effort in promoting questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Council should be clear about timeframe for new EU leadership to follow up on reports EP candidates should use the results in their election campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the exercise and its connection to the European level should be made clear Citizens should be informed of what the outcome of the process will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transnational dimension of the consultations should be enhanced Organisers should make use of existing models of citizens' participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The synthesis of results should take place in public and involve independent voices Another Citizens' Panel should be held
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil society should keep political attention on the results Current Commission should pass on the conclusions to the next Commission 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There should be a good balance between a common format and diverse national practices National discussions should include issues on the EU policy agenda 	

GROUP I – FOR THIS ROUND OF ECCs

The first set of recommendations covers the immediate next steps that should be taken until autumn 2019. These proposals focus on the two main events during this period: the December 2018 European Council and the elections to the European Parliament on 23-26 May 2019.

This report suggests that:

The member states and the European Commission should ensure that the reports being prepared for the December 2018 European Council provide a full synthesis of the results of the consultations, instead of just a condensed summary.

This will allow what was said during the consultations, and the way it was expressed – the different ‘intonations’, ‘accents’, and ‘attitudes’ in people’s voices – to shine through so that they can be heard by EU and national decision-makers and fellow European citizens. Only in this way will people’s voices feed into future conversations and policies. The more their opinions are diluted into an abridged synopsis, the less this exercise will help to strengthen our understanding about how and why citizens think and act a certain way, and the greater the risk of fuelling peoples’ frustration about their inability to get through to their political leaders.

This also means that:

The member states and the European Commission should ensure that the reports are publicly available.

Publishing the outcomes of discussions would allow interested parties to access specific details so that civil society can verify the information and check for the logical link between these reports and the Conclusions of the December 2018 European Council. As these reports should be available

to a pan-European audience, not merely a domestic one, they should also be translated into English.

Moreover:

The December 2018 Council Conclusions should give the new European leaders a clear timeframe to follow up on the ECC reports in 2019 and beyond.

In the same way, the current European Commission should pass the conclusions from these ECCs to the next Commission, when it is in place, which should build on the process and outcome during its term.

There must be agreement on a concrete follow-up to prove that the ECCs are a credible tool of communication between European citizens and their political elites. Without feedback and concrete actions that show that popular participation and engagement can lead to results, the initiative will not be taken seriously, and its future cannot be guaranteed. This is essential as a way to move towards an open culture and practice.

Furthermore, in the run-up to the 2019 EP elections:

The *Spitzenkandidaten*, those competing to become Members of the European Parliament, and the European political parties should draw on the ECC reports and the December 2018 European Council Conclusions in their electoral campaigns and programmes. They should give visibility to the results of the consultations and create space for (EU-wide) debate on citizens’ concerns, priorities, and ideas.

This will allow European politicians to demonstrate to their electorates that they are listening. It will also strengthen the candidates’ arguments and proposals if they are grounded on citizens’ concerns as expressed in the ECCs.

In addition:

The member states which are still organising consultations should use the momentum created by the European elections to intensify national conversations about EU-related issues and boost public participation in these events.

A potential positive spill-over effect of linking the ongoing consultations to relevant current events, such as the EP elections, is that it could help to boost media interest and convince participants of the importance of using their voting rights. In turn, this could raise turnout in the upcoming European ballot (for the first time).

What is more:

Civil society should use the Conclusions of the December European Council to highlight and focus political attention on the results of the consultations during the EP election campaign.

It is essential to retain the momentum created by the ECCs during the EP elections and in the lead-up to the inauguration of the new EU leadership after the elections. This will ensure that the electoral campaign and the agenda of the incoming leadership highlight the importance of the points that arose from the consultations, encouraging future dialogue and citizens' participation. Media could also play a significant role by including these in their coverage.

In parallel:

Before the online questionnaire closes in May 2019, the European Commission should intensify its efforts to promote it digitally and cooperate more closely with civil society organisations in the member states, which should be encouraged to disseminate it widely through their channels and networks.

Higher participation in the online questionnaire would enable the current Commission to reach sound conclusions for the Sibiu Summit, which will prepare the EU's Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. A wider response to the questionnaire will result in better knowledge of citizens' concerns and should help the incoming European legislature and the new Commission to set their priorities.

Overall, the mobilisation of all relevant stakeholders – the member states, the European Commission, and civil society, including media – around the ECCs reports is essential both for the success of the initiative and because it can focus attention on a positive message that echoes the voice of European citizens. It can also be used to counter the radicals' anti-EU campaigns in the European elections. The ECCs reports can provide inspiration and a concrete basis for the pro-European camp to come together *in favour* of expressing and addressing people's concerns, priorities, and ideas, rather than organising *against* the populists and their negative agenda.

GROUP II – FOR FUTURE ROUNDS OF ECCs

The second group of recommendations centres on the future of the ECCs. If this initiative is to continue to evolve and contribute to improving the quality of European democracy, it is vital to learn the lessons from its implementation this time around. More specifically, in the future, any similar efforts in public engagement should make sure that:

The overall purpose of the exercise and its European-level connection should be clarified at the very start of the process.

This would help avoid disconnected conversations about everything under the sun, irrespective of whether or not they are related to the EU. It would also facilitate understanding and comparison of the

results so that civil society can be in a better position to judge the success of the process. In addition, it would ensure that citizens do not feel the exercise is an attempt by the European and national institutions to ‘brainwash’ them.

At the same time:

The impact of the consultations on policymaking should be clearly stated at the outset so that citizens can understand and trust the process.

This is likely to inspire people’s confidence in the ECCs and encourage more people to participate. Moreover:

Organisers should transnationalise the consultations by including citizens and politicians from other member states in the discussions. They should also facilitate cross-national exchanges on European topics of mutual interest.

If the ECCs had a transnational or European dimension, national commonalities or differences would be more salient. This would improve mutual understanding and get Europeans to talk to each other, rather than about or against one another.

Similarly:

More consideration should be given to the trade-off between standardisation across countries and the importance of respecting national methods of organising the ECCs. This should lead to an informed decision about how much implementation can vary to reflect local preferences and circumstances without sacrificing their coherence and political impact.

As this report has demonstrated, the flexibility granted to the member states in implementing the ECCs has proven to be less a strength than a weakness, having blurred the identity of the process as a whole.

In a similar vein:

National consultations should cover issues on the EU policy agenda as a means of ensuring that the discussions are consistent across borders.

This will increase the likelihood of the discussions having a direct impact on EU decision making.

Organisers should use recognised models of citizens’ participation and adopt clear, common quality standards and processes, reducing the time required to decide on consultation format before getting started. To facilitate the development of these methods and encourage public engagement, digital solutions should be integrated more deeply, such as the existing EU Survey and Futurium platforms and other tools such as the EU-funded CONSUL programme.

In other words, it is not necessary to re-invent the wheel when applying instruments for citizens’ participation. Those implementing such initiatives should use existing know-how in this field instead of improvising from scratch. Processes should not be allowed to develop in the absence of commonly-agreed standards and practices.

Once the process concludes:

The synthesis of responses and feedback should, as far as possible, be a public exercise, and include independent voices and citizens.

To this end:

The possibility of organising another Citizens’ Panel to reflect on the results of the consultations should be considered.

It is crucial that the ECCs are seen as having an outcome. It is equally important that the wider public perceives that outcome

as legitimate. One of the best ways to achieve this is by means of a transparent, inclusive, and deliberative method of summarising people's contributions, such as a Citizens' Panel.

Further consideration will be needed in light of the ECCs' final output. Existing networks and organisations should think about how these recommendations can be taken forward collectively.

Looking ahead

The European Citizens' Consultations take their place in a history of democratic and open government initiatives, which have increased in recent years. The 2007 Citizens' Convention, the Better Regulation work under the current Commission, and transparency initiatives such as the Lobbying Register all show that European institutions are moving, albeit slowly and not always coherently, towards a more open method of working. As the EU's political power and influence increases, the European civic space and the mechanisms for strengthening democracy are taking shape alongside it.

The ECCs were a step forward in that sense, if only a small one. Particularly notable positive elements were the broad approach (involving almost every member state), the link between the Council and the Commission, and the Citizens' Panel process. However, they proved underwhelming in practice, as many innovations do when first tried out.

Looking ahead, the recommendations for a more standardised and streamlined process for citizens' participation (as set out above) fit into a general shift: from seeing new forms of engagement as single stand-alone projects to understanding them as system interventions that must be built up over time.

The ECCs give some clear lessons, both good and bad, of how this work could proceed. However, any successful future engagement will need more than procedure. It will require a genuine culture of openness in and around the European institutions. It will also need a proper feedback loop so that citizens can see how their input translates into action. This culture is beginning to establish itself, as it is in national governments, but there is still a long road ahead. The important thing is to stick to it and keep moving forward.

¹ Interview with Commission representative, 22 October 2018.

² See, for example, European Economic and Social Committee on [Facebook](#), May 2018; European Economic and Social Committee on Twitter [@EU_EESC](#), 4 May 2018; European Commission on Twitter [@EU_Commission](#), 5 May 2018; European Commission on Twitter [@EU_Commission](#), 6 May 2018.

³ See, for example, European Commission, "[Extracts from the European Citizens' Panel of the EESC](#)", 6 May 2018; European Commission, "[Consultation on the future of Europe – citizens make their voices heard](#)", 22 May 2018; Débat citoyen, "[Citizens' Panel on the](#)

[Future of Europe](#)", 12 October 2018.

⁴ See, for example, European Economic and Social Committee, "[The European Economic and Social Committee to host the European Citizens' Panel on 5-6 May 2018](#)", 2 May 2018; European Commission, "[5-6 May: Citizens' Panel on the Future of Europe](#)", 5 May 2018; European Economic and Social Committee, "[First European Citizens' Panel took steps to enable citizens to contribute to the creation of the future of Europe](#)", 7 May 2018.

⁵ For an exception see: Hierlemann, Dominik and Christian Huesmann (2018), "[Evaluation report: European Citizens' Panel on the future of Europe](#)", Gütersloh: The Bertelsmann Stiftung.

6. [“Proposals”](#), Más Democracia en Europa; “[Diàlogi par Eiropas nakotni](#)”, [Manabalss.lv](#).
7. European Commission, [“Future of Europe”](#). The campaign formally began on 1 March 2017 with the launch of the ‘White Paper on the future of Europe’: [“White paper on the future of Europe and the way forward”](#), European Commission, 1 March 2017.
8. European Commission, [“Citizens’ Dialogues”](#).
9. European Commission, (2018), [“State of the Union 2018”](#), European Commission, p. 148.
10. Compare European Commission, [“Citizens’ Dialogues”](#) and the links to the national pages at European Commission, [“Consultation on the Future of Europe”](#).
11. Interview with government representative from Finland, 9 October 2018.
12. [“EU-Projekttag gestalten”](#), Press and Information Service of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.
13. [“Jean-Claude Juncker’s State of the Union Address”](#), European Commission, 13 September 2017.
14. [“Votre avis pour votre Europe: Participez aux consultations citoyennes au Luxembourg”](#), Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.
15. [“Consultas Ciudadanas”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain.
16. [“Consultations citoyennes européennes”](#), Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Kingdom of Belgium.
17. [“Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa, eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland, ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land: Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, 19. Legislaturperiode”](#) (2018), CDU, 12 March 2018, p. 6.
18. [“Μιλάμε για την Ευρώπη”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.
19. [“Consultări cetățenești pentru viitorul Uniunii Europene”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Delegate for European Affairs of Romania.
20. [“Piliečių dialogai ‘Mano Europa’”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania.
21. Assemblée Nationale (2017), [“Rapport d’information, déposé par la Commission des Affaires européennes, sur les conventions démocratiques de refondation de l’Europe”](#), n°482, 8 December 2017 p. 87.
22. Online audiences were generally between 100 and 2000 people. Interview with civil society representative in Romania (27 August 2018) and government representative in Lithuania (14 September 2018).
23. [“Encontros com os Cidadãos: De que se trata”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Portugal.
24. Interview with civil society representative from France, 23 October 2018.
25. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ entire 2018 budget for subsidies, amounting to EUR 600,000, was dedicated to the ECCs. Interview with government representative from France, 28 October 2018.
26. Interview with government representative from Finland, 9 October 2018.
27. [“Μιλάμε για την Ευρώπη”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.
28. [“EU-Bürgerdialog: Europa als Schatz begreifen”](#), Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, 14 August 2018.
29. [“Restituer votre événement”](#), Quelle est votre Europe.
30. [“Comptes-rendus des événements”](#), Quelle est votre Europe.
31. All except Italy, which signed up for the process in early 2018 but did not implement anything in the end. See selected country examples in chapter 3.
32. As expressed in interviews with the research team. See also [“Bürgerdialoge zur Zukunft Europas: Wenn, dann richtig! EBD-Vorstand und Spitzenverbände nehmen Stellung”](#), European Movement Germany.
33. The exception here is Ireland, which held events in spring 2018. They had been following the ‘Future of Europe’ timetable and had already started things under that label in November 2017.
34. [“Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa, eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland, ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land: Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, 19. Legislaturperiode”](#) (2018), CDU, 12 March 2018, p. 6.
35. [“Regierungsbericht zur Lebensqualität in Deutschland”](#), Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.
36. The reverse is also probably true, in that the member states arguably contributed to the confusion created by the two processes, for example around the use of Citizens’ Dialogues, because they hoped it would have a multiplier effect and boost the numbers of ECCs.

► A participant asks a question to the panel at a consultation in Malta, 31 July 2018.
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The member states in focus

3

To further illustrate how the ECCs have unfolded in practice, the following section describes the consultations in six countries: France, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, and Italy. These have been selected to reflect the diversity of the ECCs in different member states. Specifically, these cases demonstrate:

- ▶ a geographical spread, with examples from North and South, East and West, and including both large and small countries;
- ▶ a variety of formats, showcasing both civil society and government initiatives;
- ▶ different levels of ambition regarding the scale of the process.

The order in which the country examples are presented below roughly reflects the third point. Thus, France has implemented a very high-profile campaign with many events and a well-developed open application process. Spain and Lithuania shared some characteristics with the French case, but on a smaller scale. In Romania, a government-led process has been implemented chiefly by an independent body, while in Poland it has been coordinated entirely by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, in Italy, the process completely failed to get off the ground.

Selected cases

FRANCE

Lena Morozova-Friha, *Executive Director EuropaNova*

On 17 April 2018, following his speech and discussion with MEPs at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, President Emmanuel Macron formally launched the French Citizens' Consultations in Epinal.

Macron appointed Minister of European Affairs Nathalie Loiseau to implement his idea. She established the Secretariat General for Citizens' Consultations, a dedicated institutional body led by high-level French civil servants with input from civil society representatives. Besides the Secretariat General, there is a Steering Committee that oversees the implementation and a Commission of Experts that works on synthesising and analysing the results. Throughout the period of the consultations, Minister Loiseau prioritised her public appearances almost exclusively for the Citizens' Consultations.

Organisation

The process in France placed a firm emphasis on the participation of CSOs, which were encouraged to take part in and organise events. The government offered assistance in the form of guidelines and advice, and made a single brand – *Quelle est votre Europe?* (“What kind of Europe do you want?”) – available to anyone who wished to participate. It also provided funding on demand, although many small initiatives did not request this. The Ministry's entire annual budget for subsidies – some EUR 600,000 – was directed towards the Citizens' Consultations.

NGOs already working on EU issues seized this opportunity, as did a wide array of organisations from all parts of society, including trade unions, schools, universities, and local municipalities. For many of them, it was the first time they had arranged events about 'Europe'. In total, over 1,000 events took place between April and October 2018, engaging more than 65,000 citizens and reaching well beyond the pro-EU bubble.

Event details

There were different types of consultations, some more original than others. The most common format was a debate between expert speakers, but in order to qualify as a consultation, it had to reserve a minimum of 50% of the allocated time for discussion with the audience. Many events also involved small roundtable discussions between citizens. Perhaps the most original format was the participatory theatre performance *L'Europe à la Barre* (“Europe on trial”), in which a troupe of actors played the parts of lawyers for the prosecution and defence, with two invited speakers testifying in favour of the ‘accused’ – the EU.

While some events covered broad topics, such as “What future for the EU?”, others were designed to engage specific target groups or professions, discussing specialised subjects such as fisheries or food security. Speakers at these events included industry representatives and those with technical knowledge to address the specific concerns of the relevant sector.

Communication

The consultations were promoted through two websites: the official *Quelle est votre Europe?* website¹ and *Toute l'Europe*,² the government’s online resource for information about the EU. Both included an interactive map of all the Citizens’ Consultations in France, and the former also promoted the European Commission’s online questionnaire. When an organiser registered an event in order to receive the brand, all information about it was published on the website. Every organiser was then responsible for promoting it to their own target groups.

For each branded event, the organiser committed to delivering a report summarising the discussions. To ensure that organisations met their commitment, the Secretariat followed up by email and

phone, starting two weeks after the event. Event reports were then all made publicly available on the website.³

All the collected reports were processed, analysed, and synthesised by the Commission of Experts, which includes researchers and professionals in the fields of public debate, participatory democracy, collective intelligence, and semantics. They used artificial intelligence to conduct an in-depth semantic analysis of the topics raised. Preliminary conclusions from this analysis were announced at a concluding event on 30 October, and they will be published later this year.

Despite the ECCs being a high priority for the government and achieving an exceptional outreach, media attention could have been higher. This has been one downside of a campaign which has otherwise had a transformative effect on French civil society, mobilising an unprecedented number of citizens to discuss European topics.

SPAIN

Salvador Llaudes, *Analyst*
Ignacio Molina, *Senior Analyst*
Ilke Toygür, *Analyst*
Elcano Royal Institute

Given that Spanish elites and public opinion share a strong pro-EU consensus, Spanish citizens are not particularly motivated to talk about ‘Europe’. However, for Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s conservative government, the experiment was a useful way to channel public attention towards a non-contentious subject, distracting from divisive domestic issues such as corruption scandals, disputes over historical memory, and the crisis in Catalonia. Since the 2008-2014 crisis, there has also been a strong public demand to involve citizens more directly in political decisions.

In Spain, the experiment was a useful way to channel public attention towards a non-contentious subject, distracting from divisive domestic issues such as corruption scandals, disputes over historical memory, and the crisis in Catalonia.

In Lithuania, one of the most distinctive features of the EECs has been a competent and highly visible social media campaign, including custom-made promotional videos.

In June 2018, following a vote of no confidence, the socialist Pedro Sánchez replaced Mariano Rajoy as Prime Minister. This had no discernible effect on the approach to the Citizens' Consultations: there were no significant changes in the government staff working on the consultations, and the new political leaders have gladly participated in the process.

Organisation

The responsible department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not receive any new financial resources to fund the consultations. Instead, it resorted to a pre-existing budgetary allocation: the *Hablamos de Europa* ("Let's talk about Europe") programme, which is an annual call for tenders launched ten years ago to promote public discussion about the EU. In April 2018, a total of EUR 280,000 was distributed among 22 applicants. However, as these funds were only payable after the consultations had taken place, this excluded associations with insufficient funds to pay expenses in advance, limiting the applications to relatively well-endowed institutions.

The successful applicants included foundations, universities, think tanks, NGOs, trade unions, charities, and other not-for-profit associations. They developed 25 different projects, covering topics such as general trends of European integration, professional training and higher education, information and communication, and the labour market and working conditions.

Event details

Around 100 events took place throughout 2018. More than half of these were organised within the aforementioned 25 projects, while others were implemented by CSOs which participated in the exercise without receiving any public money. The European Parliament and Commission representations in Spain also contributed by putting on their own events. Consultations took place in small rural towns as well as big cities, making this one of the few occasions when EU affairs have been discussed in all the regions of Spain.

These activities ranged from roundtables on specialised topics to focus groups and more traditional debates with expert speakers. All these models were motivated by the same idea: to emphasise public involvement and interaction.

Attendance varied from one event to the next: some consultations had over 150 participants, while others were intimate occasions with only about ten people. The mixed

approach, involving different kinds of events and diverse audiences, achieved the important objective of reaching out beyond the ‘usual suspects’, the most motivated people who generally monopolise the debate on European affairs in Spain.

Communication

The government’s contribution to the exercise included an official logo, a hashtag (#ConsultasCiudadanas), technical assistance, and a website with an events calendar. Promotional activity was undertaken both by the government and by civil society organisers. The Secretary of State for the European Union also took an active role in disseminating the European Commission’s online questionnaire. As a result, Spain has contributed about 10% of the total answers.

Those who participated in the debates were asked not only to discuss a topic but also to make specific proposals. To facilitate this, one of the funded projects is a dedicated website⁴ where citizens can submit proposals and view and comment on those contributed by others. The proposals submitted online and the reports produced from each event will be considered in the government’s internal evaluation and final report, which will be made public in December.

LITHUANIA

Simona Pronckutė, *Programme Assistant*
European Policy Centre

Lithuania has been implementing Citizens’ Consultations since June 2018 under the name *My Europe*, describing the events as ‘Citizens’ Dialogues’. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has taken a strategic approach by prioritising inclusiveness, especially by engaging with historical ethnic minorities like the Polish or Russian communities as well as socially-excluded groups such as the elderly. The location of each event in Lithuania

was carefully chosen to shed light on the needs, priorities, and interests of often-marginalised groups. Another inclusive aspect was the use of Internet tools to encourage broad online public engagement: events were live-streamed on Facebook, and citizens could participate at home using the mobile app *Sli.do*.

Organisation

Roughly half of the events have been organised by the Ministry itself, while the rest were implemented by civil society organisations with government support. There were two possible means for CSOs to put on events.

First, prior to the official launch in June 2018, they could apply for project funding through an open tender. If successful, they received money to organise a series of events. For instance, the Lithuanian Liberal Youth was given a grant to implement a cycle of seven events.

Second, after the official launch, interested parties could apply to organise one-off events. They received permission to use the *My Europe* brand, and the Ministry provided them with logistical support such as help in finding speakers, facilitators, and venues. It also covered their basic costs, like speaker fees. After an event, the organisers had to submit a report to the Ministry with information such as the number of attendees and the topics they had discussed.

Event details

At the time this report went to print, 13 events had been held under the *My Europe* umbrella. In total more than 30 discussions will be held throughout the country, leading up to the European Parliament elections in May 2019. The first event was held in Birštonas, a small resort town near Kaunas, on 9 June 2018. There were 42 participants, which is about average for the ECCs in Lithuania.

Most events took the format of informal panel discussions with prominent politicians, journalists, and academics, and were based on questions from the audience. A variety of topics and formats were agreed between the Ministry and participating CSOs. These topics included the importance of the Lithuanian contribution to the European Union, the representation of citizens' interests, and possibilities for direct participation in the EU's decision-making process. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs was present at several events, foreign policy subjects, such as security and defence or Brexit, frequently came up. Citizens were also particularly interested in several other critical issues linked to regional challenges such as migration, cybersecurity, and the Eastern Partnership.

Communication

One of the most distinctive features of the ECCs in Lithuania has been a competent and highly visible social media campaign, including custom-made promotional videos. There was also some coverage of events in the regional media, potentially reaching different social groups which are not Internet users. The Ministry's priority was to focus on local communities in the different regions; although there was good coverage in the local press, it seems that the national media did not follow consultations held in the regions.

However, public interest in the Citizens' Consultations increased significantly throughout the process. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has increased the number of events it plans to hold before the end of 2018.

ROMANIA

Dumitru Oprețoiu, *Project Manager and Outreach Ambassador*
Europuls – Centre for European Expertise

Romania began its Citizens' Consultations with a large launch event on 9 May in the

Central University Library in Bucharest. In total, 11 events have taken place under the title "Citizens' Consultations on the Future of Europe", concluding with another event in Bucharest at the beginning of October, when the Minister-Delegate for European Affairs summarised the discussions.

Although participation was self-selecting rather than representative, the consultations succeeded in attracting a wide variety of participants, including students, NGO representatives, and the general public. The events took place in a welcome diversity of locations, including both big cities and small towns, located across the country: all the historical regions of Romania were covered, with at least one city in each region hosting an event.

Even if the participants at the consultations were refreshingly varied, this did not compensate for the lack of diversity among the speakers. Most represented the political sphere, particularly the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD), with the addition of a few academics. This was especially the case at the events that took place in the regions.

Organisation

The European Citizens' Consultations in Romania were implemented using a centralised, top-down approach led by the Minister-Delegate for European Affairs, with the collaboration of the European Institute of Romania (IER), a public body. In some cases, a third partner, usually a university or local government institution was involved, depending on the topic and the location of the event.

The organisers decided that the debates should not just focus on EU reform, choosing instead to cover a great variety of issues, including the Common Agricultural Policy, Digital Europe, and "a Europe of common values". Each consultation was limited to a single subject, so participants could not choose the topics they wanted to discuss.

Event details

The consultations took the form of conferences with high-level speakers, followed by questions and comments from the public. *Sli.do* was used to facilitate interaction from the audience and those following online through live-streaming on social networks. Citizens were asked six questions about the future of Europe, and panellists were then asked to respond to the results of the poll. This method meant that the responses were easily quantifiable and clear conclusions could be extracted from the data. IER prepared a synthesis for the launch event, but they did not do so for the later meetings. A general document with conclusions from the whole event cycle will be published in the autumn.

Communication

One of the most significant drawbacks of the ECCs in Romania was a lack of visibility and active promotion. First of all, there was no calendar of events or any dedicated website to announce or promote them. They were only announced in advance on social media, which had minimal reach, with an average of only 10-20 responses. The event organisers also failed to adequately promote the broader EU campaign, such as the European Commission's online questionnaire. While this was mentioned on the Ministry's website, it was not used or promoted at the events.

Despite the low visibility of the events, participation in the consultations was large enough to suggest that there is a healthy appetite for such debates in Romania. The number of attendees largely depended on the size of the city in which the event took place, with an average of 100-200 people in large cities such as Arad, Constanța, or Craiova, and several dozen participants in small towns like Fălticeni, Panciu, Negrești-Oas, and Bârlad. There was significantly greater interest online, where live-streaming on social networks gathered an average of 2,000 views. The launch event surpassed all subsequent events in visibility and participation, both on- and off-line.

This respectable turnout demonstrates Romanians' interest, even in small towns, for European topics. The answers to the questions posed to the audiences show that they remain overwhelmingly pro-European and confident in the Union's future. As an example, 58% of the participants at the launch event considered that the consolidation of the European project should be the first priority of the Romanian Presidency at the Council of the European Union, which starts in January 2019.

In Romania, the organisers decided that the debates should not just focus on EU reform, choosing instead to cover a vast array of issues, including the Common Agricultural Policy, Digital Europe, and “a Europe of common values”.

In Poland, the events took the format of a lecture or panel discussion with little room for citizens' input. Their chief purpose appears to have been to promote the Ministry's political priorities and to argue for the distinctness of Poland's view of the EU.

POLAND

Hannah Starman, *Director of Outreach*
Yes Europe Lab

On the webpage dedicated to the *Debates on Europe*, as the European Citizens' Consultations are known in Poland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) defined their purpose as "an open debate with citizens on the future of the European Union and the joint development of a vision of the EU."⁵ However, in practice, the events took the format of a lecture or panel discussion with little room for citizens' input. Their chief purpose appears to have been to promote the Ministry's political priorities and to argue for the distinctness of Poland's view of the EU.

Organisation

The Polish Citizens' Consultations took place under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were organised by 15 Regional Centres for International Debate (RODM). The RODM network is part of the MFA structure, and its stated purpose is to "bring Polish foreign policy closer to the citizens".⁶ Even the biggest Polish civil society organisation that works on European issues, *Fundacja Schumana*, was not involved in the project and has never worked with RODM. Some events involved local universities, which provided venues, as in Gdynia, Wrocław, and Łódź.

There were ten events in total, running from the end of August until late October. All took place on weekdays, generally during the day, severely restricting who could attend.

Event details

The first debate took place on 28 August in Opole, under the title "Public, local government and economic diplomacy". It opened with speeches from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Minister of Entrepreneurship and Technology,

followed by two panel discussions, the first on European identity and the second on public diplomacy. The panellists were politicians, academics, and journalists, and included several speakers from other countries, such as the Deputy Mayor of Székesfehérvár in Hungary, the Honorary Consul of Austria in Wrocław, and the Deputy Mayor of Vence in France. While there were speakers from a variety of backgrounds, it appears that most of them were in some way affiliated with, or ideologically close to, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS).

This format was repeated in the other events, which mainly took place in larger cities. Each event was based around a single topic, typically the subject of a speech by a government minister, reflecting the Ministry's political priorities. Thus, subjects included "the Polish vision of the European Union and the role of Central Europe in the EU", "Christian values and European integration", and "Migration – Challenge or Chance?". A participant at the latter event noted that there were no questions from the audience.⁷

Communication

A website was launched in August shortly before the first event, and the hashtag #DebataOEuropie was used to promote the events via social media. However, the outreach was very low, with minimal interaction by other users. While the debates were listed on the website, no information was provided about the speakers of upcoming events. At least one event was uploaded to YouTube, where it received about 130 views.

After each debate, a summary of the speeches and panel discussions was uploaded to the website. These summaries made no mention of the questions asked or any other aspect of citizens' involvement, except to confirm their support for the speakers' views. For example, the summary of the 13 September event in Wrocław, entitled "A sovereign Europe or a

Europe of sovereign states?”, declared: “In the discussion of the panellists and in the voices of the audience there resounded the feeling that the concept of ‘sovereign Europe’, presented by President Macron, is not consistent with the Polish vision of a Europe in which member states play a fundamental role, and the intergovernmental mechanism dominates over the Community mechanism.”

ITALY

Flavio Grazian, *Digital Democracy Coordinator*
Elisa Lironi, *Digital Democracy Manager*
European Citizen Action Service

When Emmanuel Macron first launched the idea of European Citizens’ Consultations in September 2017, the Italian government expressed interest in the proposal. The idea of Citizens’ Consultations on the ‘Future of Europe’ was not new in Italy, as in 2016 the former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini had proposed a similar initiative. The governing Partito Democratico (PD) started an informal discussion about the process and proposed an action plan to implement the ECCs.

However, the March 2018 general election in Italy and the ensuing change of government disrupted the process, as the vote caused political parties’ attention to shift towards the election campaign and national issues. As the election resulted in a hung parliament, Italy experienced an institutional crisis for almost three months, and the political deadlock on forming a new government distracted from the ECCs. Once in power, the new government did not consider debates on Europe a big enough priority to be included in its agenda.

No will in the new government

Although one of the two current parties in government – the 5 Star Movement (M5S) – has always promoted practices of more direct democracy and included them among its

political priorities, it has not followed up on the previous government’s proposal to hold Citizens’ Consultations. In the past months, M5S has focused substantially on national economic and social issues. The other ruling party, La Lega, is more involved with the country’s foreign agenda and has a different vision of Europe, in line with Marine Le Pen’s *Rassemblement National* in France and Viktor Orbán’s *Fidesz* in Hungary. Therefore, it is understandable that Salvini’s party was not interested in organising ECCs based on Macron’s initiative or even promoting the European Commission’s questionnaire.

The only official reference to the process dates from 9 May 2018 on the webpage of the Department for European Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.⁸ It starts by mentioning the European Commission’s questionnaire and goes on to explain that, following France’s initiative, member states will also be able to organise nationwide dialogues and debates in the coming months. It specifically indicates that the ideas from citizens will be summarised at the December 2018 European Council.

However, it does not mention any role for Italy in the process. The consultations have hardly been covered by national media, and no efforts have been made to attract public attention or to promote the initiative to citizens actively. No events related to this process have been officially scheduled, and none are foreseen in the near future.

Civil society fills the gap

Nevertheless, several CSOs in the country have expressed an interest in this exercise of participatory democracy and have actively tried to promote and spread the idea. Following Macron’s proposal, some CSOs have implemented their own consultation processes to try to capture citizens’ perceptions of the ‘Future of Europe’. For example, in January 2018, ahead of the Italian general election in

In Italy, the March 2018 general election and the ensuing change of government disrupted the process, as the vote caused political parties' attention to shift towards the election campaign and national issues.

March 2018, the organisations *Gioventù Federalista Europea* (GFE) and *Movimento Federalista Europeo* (MFE) arranged a big Convention on the Future of Europe, with the participation of all political parties running for election. They also organised a consultation with the country's main trade unions.

Even after the change of government in Italy, CSOs like GFE or MFE have continued to run campaigns on the subject. They believe that consulting citizens in Italy should start by listening to the people using several methods – real interactions with citizens, online consultations, and public debates. In their initiative *Sottosopra 2.0*,⁹ they have teamed up with other youth organisations, such as the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), to organise informal debates on the future of Europe all over the country.

They have also opened an online consultation, *Italia Europea*,¹⁰ specifically aimed at asking citizens how the EU should be reformed in a democratic way so that it can defend citizens' rights. Their primary objective is to build a network of organisations that consult with citizens and use these inputs to address candidates in the next European elections.

In conclusion, while at the government level there seems to have been a lack of political will to implement the European Citizens' Consultations, some CSOs and political parties believe that holding consultations is a fundamental way of encouraging participation and involving Italian citizens in debates about Europe, especially in view of the 2019 European Elections.

1. "[Comptes-rendus des événements](#)", Quelle est votre Europe.

2. "[Comprende l'Europe](#)", [touteurope.eu](#).

3. "[Je participe](#)", Quelle est votre Europe.

4. "[Más Democracia en Europa](#)", [esglobal](#).

5. Juskiewicz, Stanisław on Twitter [@JuskiewiczS](#), 12 October 2018.

6. Ten Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, "[Polska wizja UE - rola Europy Środkowej w Unii Europejskiej](#)", YouTube, 11 September 2018.

7. "[Debata o przyszłości Europy z udziałem szefa MSZ Jacka Czaputowicza](#)", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

8. "[Consultazione sul futuro dell'Europa](#)", Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Department for European Policies, 9 May 2018.

9. "[Interventi: #sottosopra](#)", European Federalist Movement, 4 January 2018.

10. "[Per un'Italia europea in un'Europa federale](#)", Movimento federalista europeo.

Comparative table

Country	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria
Branding	Bürgerkonsultationen <i>Citizens' Consultations</i>	 <i>Citizens' Consultations</i>	 <i>Let's talk about the future of Europe!</i>
Visibility			
Timeline	June - November 2018	September 2018 - May 2019	July - November 2018
Number of events	Not recorded	18+	Not recorded
Event format(s)			
Organisation			
Transnational elements	 Nathalie Loiseau at one event	 One cross-border event with France	-
Use of EC questionnaire	Used own questionnaire		
Reporting			-

Visibility

- Limited promotion on social media
- Some promotion, both on- and offline
- Major promotional campaign

Event format

- A panel of speakers discuss and take questions
- A politician takes questions without giving a speech
- Citizens discuss among themselves in small groups

Organisation

- Events organised directly by the government
- Events organised by the government in cooperation with CSO partners
- Open application process for any CSO to put on an event

Transnational elements

- Some events include citizens from neighbouring countries
- Some events include speakers from other countries

Croatia	Cyprus	Czech Republic	Denmark*
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Styrket EU-Debat

Consultations with citizens

Speaking European: Consultation with citizens

National Convention / Citizens' Consultations

Strengthening the EU-Debate



April 2018 (launch)
Full process starts
October 2018

May 2018 - May 2019

May - November 2018

June - November 2018

1 (so far)
Launch event only

Not recorded

13

125+



(launch)
 (full process)



-



Nathalie Loiseau
at launch event

Multiple speakers

Emmanuel Macron
at one event



-



Use of EC questionnaire

- A link to the survey is available on the national website
- Questions from the survey are used as a basis for discussions in events

Reporting

- Brief summaries of discussions are posted on the website
- Event organisers submit detailed reports to the government
- Participants fill in feedback forms

* In Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, the government has opted to support existing initiatives and to develop a continuous process of consultation rather than launch a prominent time-limited campaign. For this reason, in these countries, there is no common identity or 'official' list of events.

Country	Estonia	Finland [*]	France
Branding	Minu Euroopa <i>My Europe</i>	Puhutaan EU:sta! <i>Let's talk about Europe!</i>	 <i>What does your Europe look like? Citizens' Consultations on Europe</i>
Visibility			
Timeline	May 2018	February 2018 - May 2019	April - October 2018
Number of events	9	100+	1,000+
Event format(s)			
Organisation			
Transnational elements	-	-	 Cross-border events with all neighbouring countries
Use of EC questionnaire	-		
Reporting	-		

Visibility

-  Limited promotion on social media
-  Some promotion, both on- and offline
-  Major promotional campaign

Event format

-  A panel of speakers discuss and take questions
-  A politician takes questions without giving a speech
-  Citizens discuss among themselves in small groups

Organisation

-  Events organised directly by the government
-  Events organised by the government in cooperation with CSO partners
-  Open application process for any CSO to put on an event

Transnational elements

-  Some events include citizens from neighbouring countries
-  Some events include speakers from other countries

Germany



*Let's talk about Europe:
The Citizens' Dialogue*



May -
October 2018

114



-



Greece



*We are speaking
about Europe*



May 2018 -
May 2019

Not recorded



Austrian Ambassador
at one event

Used own
questionnaire

-

Hungary



*Forum on the Future
of Europe*



October -
November 2018

11



-

-

-

Ireland



*Your Future, Your Europe:
Citizens' Dialogues*



February -
May 2018

5



Final event included
panel of expats



Use of EC questionnaire



A link to the survey is available on the national website



Questions from the survey are used as a basis for discussions in events

Reporting



Brief summaries of discussions are posted on the website



Event organisers submit detailed reports to the government



Participants fill in feedback forms

* In Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, the government has opted to support existing initiatives and to develop a continuous process of consultation rather than launch a prominent time-limited campaign. For this reason, in these countries, there is no common identity or 'official' list of events.

Country	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania
Branding			
		<i>Dialogue on the Future of Europe</i>	<i>My Europe - Citizens' Dialogues</i>
Visibility			
Timeline		October - November 2018	June 2018 - May 2019
Number of events		20+	30+
Event format(s)	No process		
Organisation			
Transnational elements		-	-
Use of EC questionnaire		Used own online platform	
Reporting			

Visibility

-  Limited promotion on social media
-  Some promotion, both on- and offline
-  Major promotional campaign

Event format

-  A panel of speakers discuss and take questions
-  A politician takes questions without giving a speech
-  Citizens discuss among themselves in small groups

Organisation

-  Events organised directly by the government
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Transnational elements

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Luxembourg

Malta

Netherlands

Poland



*Citizens' Forum /
Citizens' Consultations*



June -
September 2018

9



One cross-border event;
Emmanuel Macron
spoke at one event



Have your say on Europe



July -
November 2018

7



Nathalie Loiseau
at one event



*Burgerdialogen
over de toekomst
van Europa*



September -
October 2018

5



-

Opinion poll and focus
groups



Debate on Europe



August -
October 2018

10



Multiple speakers



Use of EC questionnaire



A link to the survey is available on the national website



Questions from the survey are used as a basis for discussions in events

Reporting



Brief summaries of discussions are posted on the website



Event organisers submit detailed reports to the government



Participants fill in feedback forms

Country	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia
Branding		 CONSULTĂRI CETĂȚENEȘTI PENTRU VIITORUL UNIUNII EUROPENE	
	<i>Meetings with the Citizens</i>	<i>Citizens' Consultations on the Future of Europe</i>	<i>We are the EU</i>
Visibility			
Timeline	April - November 2018	May - October 2018	February - December 2018
Number of events	50+	10	8
Event format(s)			
Organisation			
Transnational elements	 Multiple high-level speakers	-	-
Use of EC questionnaire			-
Reporting			-

Visibility

-  Limited promotion on social media
-  Some promotion, both on- and offline
-  Major promotional campaign

Event format

-  A panel of speakers discuss and take questions
-  A politician takes questions without giving a speech
-  Citizens discuss among themselves in small groups

Organisation

-  Events organised directly by the government
-  Events organised by the government in cooperation with CSO partners
-  Open application process for any CSO to put on an event

Transnational elements

-  Some events include citizens from neighbouring countries
-  Some events include speakers from other countries

Slovenia	Spain	Sweden*
Posveti – Kakšno Evropsko unijo si želimo državljani?		Arbete för ökad delaktighet i EU
<i>Consultations - What kind of EU do citizens want?</i>	<i>Let's talk about Europe - Citizens' Consultations</i>	<i>Work for increased participation in the EU</i>
		
June - September 2018	May - October 2018	December 2016 - present Adapted for ECCs in 2018
3	100+	57
		
		
-	-	-
	Used own online platform	
		-

Use of EC questionnaire

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Reporting

-  Brief summaries of discussions are posted on the website
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*In Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, the government has opted to support existing initiatives and to develop a continuous process of consultation rather than launch a prominent time-limited campaign. For this reason, in these countries, there is no common identity or 'official' list of events.

List of ECCs websites

European Commission

"Consultation on the Future of Europe"; European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/future-europe/consultation-future-europe_en

Austria

"Bürgerkonsultationen zur Zukunft Europas"; Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria, <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/buergerkonsultationen>

Belgium

"Consultations citoyennes européennes"; Department of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of Belgium, <https://www.diplomatie.be/burgerraadplegingen/FR/ccitoyennes.html>

"Europese Burgerraadplegingen"; Department of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of Belgium, <http://www.diplomatie.be/burgerraadplegingen/NL/raadpleging.html>

Bulgaria

No website

Croatia

"Konzultacije s građanima"; Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, <http://www.mvep.hr/hr/konzultacije-s-gradanima/>

Cyprus

"Ευρωπαϊκά μυχώντας"; Press and Information Office, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, <https://www.pio.gov.cy/cwc-arxiki.html>

Czech Republic

"Občanské konzultace"; *Euroskop* European Affairs Information Department of the Czech Republic, <https://www.euroskop.cz/9274/sekce/obcanske-konzultace/>

Denmark

"Regeringen vil styrke EU-debatten"; Ministry for Culture of the Kingdom of Denmark, <https://kum.dk/nyheder-og-presse/pressemeddelelser/nyheder/regeringen-vil-styrke-eu-debatten/1/1/>

Estonia

No website

Finland

"Puhutaan EU:sta!"; Europe Information Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Finland, <https://eurooppatiedotus.fi/2018/03/05/puhutaan-eusta/>

France

"Je participe"; *Quelle est votre Europe?* <https://www.quelleestvotreeurope.fr/>

Germany

"Europa im Dialog"; Press and Information Office of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/eu-buergerdialog>

Greece

"Μιλάμε για την Ευροπη"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, <http://www.oureurope.gov.gr/>

Hungary

No website

Ireland

"Future of Europe"; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Ireland, <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/ireland-in-the-eu/future-of-europe/>

Italy

No website

Latvia

"Dialogi par Eiropas nākotni"; Manabals, <https://manaeiropa.manabals.lv/>

Lithuania

"Piliečių dialogai 'Mano Europa'"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.urm.lt/default/t/uzsienio-politika/uzsienio-politikos-prioritetai/lietuva-europos-sajungoje/pilieciu-dialogai-mano-europa>

Luxembourg

"Votre avis pour votre Europe: Participez aux consultations citoyennes au Luxembourg"; Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, <https://www.consultations-citoyennes.lu/>

Malta

"Debating Europe's Future"; MEUSAC, <http://meusac.gov.mt/future-of-europe/>

Netherlands

"Burgerdialogen over de toekomst van Europa"; Netwerk Democratie, <http://netdem.nl/en/projects/burgerdialogen-toekomst-europa/>

Poland

“Debata o Europie”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/debata_o_europie/

Portugal

“Encontros com os Cidadãos”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Portugal, <https://encontroscidadaos.pt/>

Romania

“Consultări cetățenești pentru viitorul Uniunii Europene”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Romania, <http://afacerieuropene.mae.ro/node/2905>

Slovakia

“#MYSMEEU”, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, http://www.mzv.sk/europske_zalezitosti/mysmeeu

Slovenia

“Prihodnost Evropske unije – Kakšno je vase mnenje?”, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, http://www.vlada.si/teme_in_projekti/prihodnost_evropske_unije_kaksno_je_vase_mnenje/

Spain

“Consultas Ciudadanas”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Spain, <http://www.hablamosdeeuropa.es/>

Sweden

“EU-handslaget för delaktighet”, Government Offices of Sweden, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/eu-handslaget/>

Guiding interview questions

The following list of questions guided the interviewers in their discussion with a variety of actors from civil society, national governments, and European Commission representatives. Not all questions were necessarily asked or answered during each interview.

1 HOW HAS YOUR GOVERNMENT EXPLAINED THE REASON FOR THE CONSULTATIONS?

Europe needs reform? / Citizens must shape the future of the Union (without implying need for reform)? / Europe must become more democratic? / The government must raise awareness about the EU? / Other? Please specify.

2 DID YOUR GOVERNMENT REFER TO THE CONSULTATIONS AS PART OF THE SAME PROCESS AS IN FRANCE, AS PART OF THE COMMISSION'S 'FUTURE OF EUROPE' DEBATE, OR AS SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER?

Please specify.

3. WHAT WAS THE TIMEFRAME FOR THE CONSULTATIONS IN YOUR COUNTRY?

End by October 2018? / End by 9 May 2019? / End by 2019 EP elections? / Other? Please specify.

4. HAS YOUR GOVERNMENT DEvised A PLAN FOR WHETHER AND HOW THE RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATIONS WILL BE SYNTHESISED?

Will a national report be issued? If yes, how will it be produced? Will results serve as input into the December 2018 European Council or the 2019 EP elections? Please specify.

5. HOW WERE THE CONSULTATIONS ADVERTISED IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Any specific channels used? Any branding? Dedicated hashtag or social media? Were non-governmental actors involved in the promotion of the consultations? How do people find out about consultations near them, especially in countries where info is not available on website? Please specify.

6. WHO HAS BEEN IN CHARGE OF ORGANISING CONSULTATIONS?

(A dedicated group within) your government? / Local councils? / Civil society organisations (CSOs)? / Other? Please specify.

7. HOW MANY CONSULTATIONS HAVE BEEN HELD IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Are concrete numbers available? If not, more than/less than type of approximations or general impressions (many, a few, or none). Please specify.

8. WHERE HAVE CONSULTATIONS BEEN HELD?

The capital? / Big cities? / Small towns or villages? / All over the country? / Other? Please specify.

9. IN WHAT FORMAT HAVE CONSULTATIONS BEEN HELD IN YOUR COUNTRY? WERE THEY ALL HELD IN THE SAME FORMAT? WERE GUIDELINES PROVIDED ON THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE IN THAT REGARD?

9.1. Event type

► Speech and/or question & answer (Q&A): who have been invited as speakers? How long did they speak? How much time was allocated to the Q&A session? Could citizens respond

to one another or was the discussion 'unidirectional' (that is, between speaker and audience)?

► Open discussion: for how long and how interactive?

9.2. Event topic

► How many topics were discussed at individual consultations?

► Were topics chosen in advance? / On the day of the consultation? / By vote? / On the basis of the Commission's questionnaire? / Other? Please specify.

► If more than one topic was discussed, how much time was allocated to each topic?

9.3. Participation

► How many people did each consultation gather (approximately, if exact numbers are not available)? Were numbers capped? If yes, why (for example, room capacity)?

► How many people were mobilised overall for these consultations in your country (approximately, if exact numbers are not available)?

► How were participants selected? Members of interest group (for example, political party, trade union) / Hand-selected by organisers? If yes, how and why? / Selected to be representative? If yes, on the basis of what criteria? / Open access (self-selection) / Other? Please specify.

► Has the demographic background of participants been recorded (for example, age or gender)?

9.4. Materials

► Was any supporting material presented (for example, a lecture or handouts)?

► Who produced this, and how was it distributed?

9.5. Transnational character

► Was there any transnational element to the consultations (for example,

international speaker, the presence of citizens from another country, and/or a specific focus on European versus national context)?

10. HOW HAVE CONSULTATIONS BEEN FINANCED?

► What kind of budget has been allocated for the organisation of consultations in your country?

► Have funds been made available for non-governmental actors wishing to organise consultations? How much? How can they be accessed? Has anyone applied and received them?

11. WHAT KIND OF FOLLOW UP TO INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS HAS BEEN DELIVERED?

► Were notes taken during the consultations? Has a record been kept of the discussion/opinions expressed? What kind of information has been documented (by whom and why)?

► Has a report been issued for any of the consultations? If yes, for how many and on the basis of what template (if any)? Are these reports publicly available?

12. PLEASE SHARE WITH US YOUR OVERALL PERSONAL IMPRESSION/OPINION ABOUT THE INITIATIVE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION AT EU AND NATIONAL LEVEL (IN YOUR COUNTRY/OTHER MEMBER STATES). PLEASE SPECIFY WHETHER YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE



The European Policy Centre (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The EPC is grateful to its main supporters that enable its five thematic programmes to provide insight in EU policies and develop practical prescriptions.



The King Baudouin Foundation's mission is to contribute to a better society. It promotes change-makers and innovators that serve the public interest and increase social cohesion throughout Europe. In 2002, it established a strategic partnership with the EPC to set the stage for an informed debate about the future of Europe with a wide range of stakeholders. The foundation's sustained support allows the EPC to fulfil its vision while preserving its independence.



The EPC has been awarded an annual operating grant for the period 2018-20 from the Europe for Citizens programme, funded from the EU budget, along with other similar think tanks and civil society organisations. The EPC contributes to the aims of the programme through activities designed to promote citizens' understanding of the EU policymaking process and their involvement in the European public policy debate, as well as through its work on the future of Europe.

The support the European Policy Centre receives for its ongoing operations, or specifically for its publications, does not constitute endorsement of their contents, which reflect the views of the authors only. Supporters and partners cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

The European Citizens' Consultations (ECCs) are a new experiment in improving the quality of democracy at the EU level by giving European citizens the possibility to express and exchange their opinions about the Union and its future. To independently monitor and evaluate how the ECCs were organised in practice, the European Citizens' Consultations Civil Society Network was established with the kind support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. It has been working to build a sustainable network of civil society organisations from across the EU which are involved or interested in the process.

This report presents the results of the research and analysis carried out by the Network over the past seven months, as well as a number of recommendations for how to capitalise on the current round of ECCs and how to improve the way they could be executed in the future.

A key finding of this report is that the member states have stuck to the flexibility principle which they all demanded in exchange for their participation. From the name adopted for the national events, the timeframe for holding these meetings, the chosen organisers, format, agenda, and reporting procedure, down to the rationale for joining the ECCs, each country has done its own thing. This freedom has helped to ensure that all member states felt comfortable enough to join the initiative, but it has also created problems.