

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

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This Synthesis presents the results of a group discussion held in Vienna on 17 December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union. It is part of a wider citizenship project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, with the support of national partners of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM, on behalf of the European Commission.

Introduction

This report presents the results of a group discussion (see Box 1) held in Vienna on 17 December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.

It is the Austrian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the Member States.

In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European Qualitative Network coordinated by OPTEM: in Austria by Karmasin Motivforschung.

BOX 1 ► Composition of the group of respondents

Gender	Age
Women: 4	20-34 years: 3
Men: 5	35-49 years: 3
	50-60 years: 3

Social class

Lower-middle social class: 5 (professions of head of household: 2 manual workers, 3 non managerial office employees)

Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: 2 middle management, 1 higher level executive, 1 small business owner)

Political opinion

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

Mainly, the European Union is spontaneously associated with general characteristics and its fundamental objectives:

"Union of 28 Member States"

"Freedom of establishment, economic freedom in Europe"

"One fundamental objective is to promote the peaceful coexistence of people"

"Human rights"

"Democracy"

"Established in 1993"

"Originally formed in 1952 by the Inner Six"

"Equality for all citizens"

"The euro"

"Three presidents who rotate every six months"

Several times, **current candidate countries** were named.

"Serbia is the next acceding country"

"So is Montenegro"

"Bosnia and Herzegovina"

"Accession negotiations with Turkey have been going on for years; supposedly Turkey will join the EU soon"

In few cases, the EU is perceived **negatively** in the context of **lobbying**, more precisely when it comes to the representation of large corporations.

The impression remains that the average citizen has only little chance to be heard or to have their interests become part of the decision-making process.

"Lobbying"

"Theoretically, the EU is a good thing – yet in the current form it rather seems to be a Union for big enterprises"

1. Initial thoughts about the European Union

1.1. Spontaneous associations with the European Union

In the beginning of the group discussion, all participants were asked to name spontaneous associations with aspects, thoughts, pictures and feelings on the European Union.

"Most of the time, the EU acts in the interests of the industry, not in the interests of the citizens"

Another topic which has come up spontaneously and which has a **rather negative connotation is the administrative burden associated with the EU.**

"Very bureaucratic"

"Huge bureaucracy"

"Occasionally, it is perceived as very abstract"

"Partly very abstract"

1.2. Positive and negative aspects relating to the European Union

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

BOX 2 ► Specific aspects were addressed in a positive way

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

"No borders – this makes travelling within the EU very pleasant"

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

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

"Online shopping in Germany or Spain is really not an issue anymore"

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

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

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

"Yes, this is important, especially in the food industry"

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

"This will particularly benefit citizens in the new Member States"

Single currency/the euro

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

To ensure and stabilise **peace in Europe**

"This is a great success – we have never had such a long period of peace in Europe before"

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

BOX 3 ► Specific aspects addressed in a negative way

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

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

"The average citizen is not really involved"

Lack of transparency in regards of decision-making processes

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

"The tricky question is whose interests have had influence on the respective provisions and laws"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I believe it's the other way around – they go into debt at the same conditions as Germany and borrow money which they will never be able to pay back"

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

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

2. Sources of information and knowledge on the EU

The participants use various sources in order to obtain information concerning the EU; the most frequently used media sources are: **Internet, newspaper/magazines, information programmes on television, but also informal discussions with friends, acquaintances and relatives.**

The **radio** as source of information is also mentioned in a few cases.

Media coverage as source of information:

Some participants agree that **foreign media** (German media in particular) are **being used more frequently than Austrian media for the**

gathering of information about the EU via newspaper/magazine/journal due to their higher quality and quantity regarding the reporting on the European Union.

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

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

"In addition, I read German newspapers like the 'FAZ' or the 'Zeit'".

"I enjoy English media in general, especially in the context of Europe, as they focus on totally different topics than we do".

Media reports provided on TV, in particular by the Austrian national public service broadcaster ORF, are partially described as **"disastrous"**, biased and insufficient.

Broadcasts on the topic of Europe on **TV channels such as 'Arte' and the German public service channels 'ARD' and 'ZDF'** are **preferred** by those who are dissatisfied with the ORF reporting.

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

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

"In my opinion, the Austrian print media are equally bad".

At the same time, the participants express their **general scepticism towards media coverage as they suspect information processed on this kind of basis to be filtered**. Thus, most participants treat media coverage about the European Union with caution, since they criticise a lack of credibility.

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

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

"I know from my foreign relations that some topics are presented differently in their country".

The participants use **online editions of newspapers or Google** to gather information about the

European Union or to keep up to date with EU-related topics on the Internet.

In a few cases, the official EU website is used to collect information about current issues or to search for specific information, although the website is being evaluated as very complicated and confusing in its design and structure by those who have visited the site before.

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

Most participants state in the discussion that **the EU** is definitely **an important topic** with friends, acquaintances or relatives.

In some cases, they swap ideas on the EU with people from foreign countries who they know or have met on vacation.

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

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

In general, informal discussions are evaluated as more credible as the **interaction** is happening face-to-face which is why, according to the participants, the provided information and opinions can be conveyed more authentically and questioned more easily.

Some participants consider lack of time and interest of the general public as well as a certain complexity of the topic as rather problematic in relation to the EU.

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

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

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

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

3. Questions regarding the future of the EU

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

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

"Right now, we can't tell at all what will happen next".

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

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

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

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

"The actual goals have been postponed since 2008".

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

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

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

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

"The certainly reasonable Maastricht criteria were adopted in 2001 or 2002, but nobody adhered to them. I'm sure that the Greek have already known at that time that they wouldn't be able to accomplish

everything; they lied to all of us and now all of the EU is working to tackle the crisis".

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

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

"The corruption in these countries is also a major problem".

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

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

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

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

"I think so too - I can't simply go somewhere if I haven't even reached my previous goal".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We can only do this together".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The catching up of other countries results in a loss of prosperity for us, in the EU as well as globally. This can be seen by the fact that we will be paying for Greece for decades, that's our prosperity, our money. Greece is being financed by the other States and will increase in strength in a global context. When India and China catch up, they will take something away from us in a sense that they will have more and we will have less. No State would want that because nobody is ready to give up on things".

4. Current means of expression of citizens' views

Most participants know **only** little about **the possibilities of active citizenship** available to average citizens in the EU.

The following forms of civic participation and means of free expression are named spontaneously:

- **Referenda** in Europe
- **Elections** to the European Parliament
- **Written communication** with the European Parliament and individual Members of the Parliament
- **NGO petitions**
- **Protests**
- **The representation by the Austrian Ministers in the EU** is also regarded as **indirect** form of civic participation by some (*"The ministers are supposed to be our voice, our ambassadors"*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I agree that the main problem is disinterest and indifference".

"It's just the same situation as in Austria".

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Perceptions of new ways for citizens to get their voice heard

The participants only named **a few spontaneous ideas** regarding new forms of civic participation:

Ongoing (online) **surveys** on various topics based on representative samples (the Eurobarometer is not mentioned in this context).

"The Internet is a huge network for people. You could do online surveys on alternatives, objectives etc. with a certain number of people from every social structure per country. This would be a practical way to involve citizens".

Information and discussion events, organised by all regional offices **in regional capitals**.

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

"But also in the state capitals, because events and such in Vienna are of no use for me if I live in Tyrol".

Organisation of **discussions and events** where **people from various European States** can meet and talk about EU-related topics.

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

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

6. Assessment of several propositions for improving citizens' involvement

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

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

Evaluation of the different proposals on civic participation:

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Important for older people without Internet access"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The transparency of results is important".

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

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

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

"To be honest, I'm not interested in it. I wouldn't want to meet Karas or Swoboda".

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

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

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

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

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

The moderator points out that the EU website offers the possibility to participate in so-called 'consultations': citizens can access surveys, proposals, reports

and strategic proposals by the European Commission and are invited to deliver their opinion. This idea is mainly evaluated as **positive**.

"That's a good thing".

"I didn't know about that but I like it".

"Yes, that's definitely interesting".

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

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

The distribution and opportunity for participation via the Internet is also a point of criticism in a few cases. "Online consultation for all citizens - that's not correct. My parents don't have Internet access, so does this mean they are no citizens?"

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

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

6.6. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

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

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

"Yes, this kind of information distribution needs to be politically neutral, that's very important."

"That's why it has to be provided by the EU itself".

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

The idea is welcomed by some of the participants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We can only approve of it. We'll see if it'll get us anywhere".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Right now, people feel like they have had enough".

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Einleitung, Vorstellung (5 Minuten)

Begrüßung, Vorstellung, Erklärung d. Ablaufs etc.

Im Wesentlichen wird es um Informationen an Bürger über die EU und wie sich Bürger besser bei EU-Themen beteiligen könnten gehen.

Vorstellungsrunde: Am Beginn des Interviews würde ich Sie bitten, dass Sie sich kurz vorstellen: Alter, Familienstand, Beruf, Hobbys etc.

1. Einstieg – Allgemeines zum Thema EU (10 Minuten)

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

Was kommt Ihnen **spontan** in den Sinn, wenn Sie an die Europäische Union denken? Was verbinden Sie mit der Europäischen Union?

Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:

- Welche **Themen** fallen Ihnen gleich einmal ein, wenn Sie an die EU denken?
- Welche **positiven**, welche **negativen Aspekte** verbinden Sie mit der EU?
- Anfängliches Interesse und Involvierungsgrad der Teilnehmer an Angelegenheiten, welche die EU betreffen erfragen

2. Quellen Wissen über & Einstellung gegenüber der EU (10 Minuten)

Basis Ihres Wissens und Ihrer Einstellung gegenüber der EU, ausgehend davon was Sie über die EU wissen und denken: Woher kommt Ihr Wissen über die Europäische Union?

Wie sind Sie zu Ihrem **Wissen über und Ihrer Einstellung gegenüber der EU** gekommen?

Wodurch wurden Sie sagen, wurden **Einstellungen gegenüber der EU** beeinflusst?

Welche **Quellen** nutzen Sie, um sich über EU-Themen zu informieren?

Mit wem tauschen Sie sich über EU-Themen aus?

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

Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:

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

3. Zukünftige Herausforderungen der EU (15-20 Minuten)

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

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

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

Welche Aspekte bzw. Themen sind das konkret, über die Sie gerne Näheres erfahren würden?

Was hat Sie bisher daran gehindert Näheres über diese Dinge zu erfahren?

Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:

- Allgemeiner Eindruck zum Wissensstand bzw. dem Verständnis in Zusammenhang mit diesen Themen
- Wahrnehmung der zentralen Herausforderungen der EU in den nächsten Jahren (**Welchen zentralen Herausforderungen steht die EU Ihrer Meinung nach in den nächsten Jahren gegenüber?**)
- Inwieweit äußern die Teilnehmer die Notwendigkeit eines höheren Wissensstands und besseren Verständnisses – insbesondere in Bezug auf welche Themen?

- In welcher Hinsicht sind die aktuell vorliegenden Informationen bezüglich dieser Themen nicht zufrieden stellend?

4. Meinungsäußerung (10-15 Minuten)

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

Auf welche Weise ist das derzeit möglich? Welche **Wege** stehen Ihnen **aktuell** zur Verfügung, **um Ihre Meinung zur zukünftigen Entwicklung der EU kundzutun** und gehört zu werden?

Wie einfach ist es derzeit, die **eigene Meinung zu EU-Themen** und vor allem zur zukünftigen Entwicklung der EU **kundzutun**?

Mit welchen Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie sich in diesem Zusammenhang konfrontiert? Welche Hindernisse sind hier für Sie bemerkbar?

Welche Aspekte/Themen sind das zum Beispiel ganz konkret? Zu welchen Aspekten/Themen, die Zukunft der EU betreffend, würden Sie gerne Ihre Meinung äußern und auch gehört werden?

Was erwarten Sie sich in diesem Zusammenhang?

Moderator nachfragen/untersuchen:

Welche Schwierigkeiten/Problematiken werden geschildert? Bemerkbare Schwierigkeiten/Hindernisse bei dem Versuch seine Meinung kundzutun und gehört zu werden

Bemerkbare Gründe warum das schwierig ist

Erwartungen in diesem Zusammenhang

5. Spontane Ideen – Mittel & Wege der Meinungsäußerung (15 Minuten)

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

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

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

Was stellen Sie sich alles vor? (Spontane Reaktionen)

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

6. Mittel zur Meinungsäußerung (25 Minuten)

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

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

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

6.1. Ein Informationsdienst über die Funktionsweise der EU und der EU-Politik, bestehend aus einem öffentlich zugänglichen Informationsbüro in jeder größeren Stadt/Großstadt, einer Website und einem Service, das eine schnelle Beantwortung der Fragen per Telefon, Post oder E-Mail anbietet.

6.2. Diskussionen in bedeutenden Medien zwischen den Durchschnittsbürgern und den Experten für EU- Fragen über die von der EU vorgegebenen Entwicklungen.

6.3. Meinungsumfragen über die EU, die regelmäßig in ganz Europa durchgeführt werden und den Bürgern ermöglichen sollen zu erfahren, was einerseits ihre Landsleute und andererseits die Bürger anderer europäischen Ländern denken.

6.4. Die Möglichkeit, mehrmals im Jahr die nationalen Mitglieder des EU-Parlaments oder andere EU-Politiker in Ihrer Wohnnähe zu treffen.

6.5. Beratungen über das Internet, welche die EU-Kommission bei allen großen Entscheidungen

organisieren würde und welche für alle Bürger zugänglich wären.

6.6. Vergleichbare Beratungen, aber von unserer Regierung ausgehend bzw. organisiert.

6.7. Ein interaktives Service, das Internet und soziale Netzwerke einbezieht um Meinungen, Wünsche und Kritikpunkte von einem Stammpool der Bürger bezüglich der Entwicklungen, die EU einschlägt, zu sammeln.

6.8. Informationskampagnen sollen viel aktiver als in den vergangenen Jahren entwickelt werden, um die Bürger zu ermutigen, sich an Diskussionen und der kommenden Wahl der Abgeordneten des Europäischen Parlaments im nächsten Frühjahr zu beteiligen.

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