

HUNGARIAN CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN HUNGARY

Psyma Hungary

This Synthesis presents the results of a group discussion held in Budapest on 16 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 held in Budapest on 16 December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.

It is the Hungarian section of a pan-European qualitative study involving 18 of the member states.

In each country the study was carried out by the national partner of the European qualitative network coordinated by optem: in Hungary by psyma Hungary.

This study forms a part of a wider citizenship project managed by Notre Europe – Jacques Delors institute on behalf of the European commission.

BOX 1 ► Composition of the group of respondents

Gender	Age
Women: 4	20-34 years: 2
Men: 4	35-49 years: 3
	50-60 years: 3

Social class

Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of head of household: window manufacturer worker, school catering manager, insurance agent, small entrepreneur)

Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of head of household: physician (gp), architect, electric engineer, interpreter)

Political opinion

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

1. Initial thoughts about the European Union

The **initial reactions** regarding the European Union are **very diverse**, not only at a group level, but also on the level of individuals. In addition to mentioning a positive aspect about the EU, the respondents also made some negative comment right away. Or the other way around: a negative opinion was immediately followed by a positive one.

"It is a necessary evil, as it offers some freedom and some restrictions at the same time."

"It involves a higher level of freedom but it also implies restrictions."

The spontaneous reactions regarding the EU can be grouped around **three main topics** in the course of the discussion:

1.1. The EU as an economic formation

When evaluating the EU as an economic formation, the spontaneous reactions, on the whole, showed a **negative trend**.

The respondents not only evaluated the events/experiences of the past 10 years. The presumed or real grievances originate from the 1990s, the period of political and economic restructuring in Hungary. These two dimensions, these two lines of events (change of regime/entry into the EU) and their consequences are often merged together.

Many people claim that the result of the change of regime and the entry into the EU is that the **Hungarian economy is now controlled by foreign interests**, and, parallel with this, **Hungarian companies and traditional Hungarian industries**

(agriculture, sugar industry etc.) are **gradually disappearing**. They feel that this was mainly favourable for foreign companies (market acquisition, purchasing Hungarian companies etc.). These negative opinions are added by the impacts of the economic crisis in the recent years, which the interviewees – directly or indirectly – connect to the EU, as well.

The first spontaneous reactions on the EU mainly focus on economic issues: how advantageous is the EU membership for Hungary in economic terms? How much do we pay into the common fund, and how much do we get back, what is the balance? If someone feels that the balance is positive, the EU-related attitude is also positive:

"I think the incoming and outgoing payments are more or less balanced, or we are slightly on the positive side. There are huge investments going on in the country. Wherever you go in Hungary, you can see what subsidies were used, and these are quite significant amounts. I never saw these posters before. You can see them at so many places now that I don't think these could have been achieved without our membership."

If, however, someone feels that the balance is not positive, it will heavily influence their negative opinion on the EU:

"I don't believe in miracles. I cannot imagine that 2-3 big and strong countries would act as Santa Claus and go to Eastern Europe to support the poor. What do they take out of the country in exchange for the support they offer? Now that we have no agriculture, we do not have any industry, banking system etc. Either."

Negative feelings come from the fact that the use of EU subsidies is fixed, and **it is not always for Hungary to decide how to spend funds**, and how much:

"We pay some money, and we get some amounts back, but certain funds are granted for specific purposes, e.g. Agricultural, industrial support etc., so we cannot freely decide on them."

"There is a big box where they collect money from each country, and then they allocate amounts from that big box. However, the allocations and developments are not determined by the specific countries, but by the whole community. The targets are pre-determined. If we look at it from this aspect, we can feel that we get a huge opportunity. This is promoted on all posters because of transparency. And there is another side: they do not point out what areas are not

developed. Some fields that are not EU priorities but would be important for Hungary are not developed."

Some interviewees claim that the EU wants to have too much dominance, and this may violate the sovereignty of the member countries: *"there is a nice term: the subsidiarity principle. The former rule was that everything had to be settled at the lowest level. This was promoted by the EU. Now they tend to have a say in more and more things – legislation etc. – from above, sometimes even violently. In fact, it shouldn't be the au's job to decide on the internal regulations of any country."*

However, the respondents have the feeling that currently more EU investments and developments are in progress in Hungary than in the previous years. More funds are available, and more cash can be drawn. On the other hand, some other people claim that this is just the "outside" because these investments are now communicated to the citizens much more strongly and efficiently than earlier:

"When it comes to any development, they must display a big board saying exactly how much money is allocated and what for purpose. The way these are made public is really a kind of marketing."

"Maybe this is a programme-closing period, maybe the available funds have to be spent. Perhaps this is why it is promoted stronger than before."

1.2. The termination of country borders

The pulled down country borders were mentioned **mainly in a positive context** upon the discussion.

The merely formal existence of borders gives a wide feeling of freedom to people: they can go anywhere, at any time, either as tourists or employees:

"The right of free movement and stay is definitely a positive feature".

At the beginning, the open borders were favourable for tourism. Today, however, the opportunity to study/work abroad is more dominant. Upon the discussion almost everyone claimed to have a relative, acquaintance etc. Who already lives/works abroad? The opportunity to seek jobs is definitely a positive feature on the individual level. At the same time, it also carries a negative message because some people leave Hungary because they cannot make a living here.

The pulled down borders also have a symbolic, historical aspect. The EU membership and the formal borders make it easier to digest the Trianon cataclysm, which is a problem for some of the Hungarian population (in the wake of the Trianon decision after the First World War, large areas populated by Hungarians were cut away from Hungary). This problem may become relieved as the terminated borders: *"Seem to have brought history to some kind of a balance"*.

1.3. Hungary is part of a political/value community

Being a part of an organisation **mainly** has a **positive message**, as well. People hold the opinion that Hungary – partly because it is a small country and also due to its historical traditions – always has to belong to a federation. An advantage of the EU membership is, contrary to the former alliances, that this is a voluntary membership, and it is in harmony with Hungary's traditions and values:

"Belonging to a community. At last, we can feel European. In fact, the country always joined some organisation, either this way or that way, but perhaps this is a good direction".

"This membership is much more voluntary than any other former blocs. Hungary has always wanted to belong to the western part".

The respondents feel that their knowledge of EU issues is not at a very high level. In their opinion, there are **several reasons** for this:

- Lack of basic factual knowledge, lack of education
The members of the middle-aged and older generations became members of the EU in such a manner that they did not know too much about this institution. Therefore, it is many times difficult for them to understand how this institutional system is set up and how it is operating. It is somewhat easier for young people as they were born into this, and they are living in this system, however, some people find it a serious problem that EU-related subjects and courses have not been integrated in the school system so far, although this could provide youngsters with more information on this topic.
- Lack of interest
The respondents are mainly passive recipients of the news and they are no active players in the communication space, they do not regard themselves as people who actively gather EU-related information. For them, home politics are much more important than EU-related issues.

- Information-related problems

The politics-ridden media filters, selects and interprets the news and information, and the interviewees claim that this does not make it easier to see clearly and to form an unbiased picture.

2. Sources of information and knowledge on the EU

The information channels are relatively diverse.

Internet portals represent the primary information source. Even within the internet there is a wide range of sources: various news portals in Hungarian and in foreign languages, as well as specific and thematic homepages made by the EU (also available in Hungarian).

Various TV and radio programmes (news) were also mentioned often by the respondents as sources of information.

As against this, the weight of written and printed press is lower. Fewer people purchase and read it today.

Personal/family communication appears as a particular source. As many people have relatives and acquaintances living and working abroad, they get first-hand information about what people in other countries think about EU-related questions.

There are **serious doubts about the completeness and the authenticity of the information received** – primarily in the case of the electronic and printed press. Basically no one has trust in objective information; people think that the information is filtered and selected. As the EU is a political organisation, everyone tries to evaluate events from their own political perspective, therefore, *"it will never be possible for me to read unbiased press"*. The same news item is presented and interpreted in the left-wing or right-wing press sometimes totally differently.

The respondents believe that the media is strongly intertwined with politics. The interviewees can clearly see which political side the top media players support. If they are in favour of the spirit of the given media, they can accept the information that it conveys, if not, they are less inclined to accept the information.

It is hard to find authentic and reliable information sources, and this is also due to the fact that there is a general crisis in Hungary in terms of confidence, and it affects the whole of the political, economic and social institutional system: *"no one trusts anyone."*

3. Questions regarding the future of the EU

On the whole, **the level of EU-related knowledge is not too high, and the interest level is also mediocre.** The not too much information that is available to the interviewees basically meets the people's information needs.

There are **few topics and issues about the EU that are really interesting to people.**

During the discussion only one topic came up where the respondents feel that **a lot of information is missing.** As the EU-related opinions of the interviewees are basically determined by the **financial balance:** how much the country pays and gets back, the participants would like to gather more information about that. People would like to see full and accurate financial statements with concrete figures and data to show how much is, and was spent, and on what? How much financial profit does Hungary gain from the EU membership, as well as what direct and indirect financial losses Hungary has to face due to the EU membership?

"What I'm really interested in is the balance. Once someone should put it on the table to show how much money is taken out by multinational companies, by banks, what profit is lost, and – compared to this – how much subsidy funds come in. I would be very interested in this, as this would actually help me to decide if I like it or not."

"Many multinational companies may take their profits out of the country. But they do leave some money here, as well. They are given tax exemptions but they also create 'x' number of jobs. This is a line of figures that can be displayed. On the other side, we also have to see how much money we, Hungarians, leave in, and take out from various parts of the world, or the EU, through our companies and subsidiaries."

This is closely related to the demand that people would like to see clearly what is exactly in the background of the EU's financial subsidies, and what the support is aimed at:

"I would like to see the scheme of support because I think we have stepped back. I think the EU is more or

less at fault in this respect. We used to have milk and sugar industry, and these have totally disappeared from the provincial areas."

The respondents claim to know almost nothing about the EU's financial operations: what is spent on what, and from what: *"we should have a clearer insight because there are some grey spots. Most of us can only see a grey spot here. No one can see clearly, including me."* Some feel that this kind of disinformation can even be intentional. It is not by accident that nobody knows anything about these concrete, financial data.

People are mainly interested in these financial statements, accounts and comparisons.

As the respondents primarily define the EU as an economic formation, they also approach the **future challenges** to the EU along this line. Although the future challenges that the EU is facing are diverse, the interviewees can **mainly** spot problems of **financial/economic nature:**

3.1. Challenge in terms of economic power

The respondents find it questionable how the economic unity of the EU and the euro zone can be preserved amidst the current economic circumstances. The financial and stability-related problems that are becoming permanent in some member states (e.g. Greece, Cyprus) weaken the EU, and perhaps these problems cannot be financed in the long run. If that happens, a weak and fragmented European economy cannot keep pace with the large economic powers, mainly with China and, in the second place, with the USA.

3.2. Modern-age migration

It was frequently mentioned with regard to the future how the EU should handle (whether it should permit or prohibit) the more and more powerful immigration waves. These movements can be seen at two levels:

- Movements within the EU

More and more citizens of various member states seek jobs abroad, in another EU member state, which can cause a lot of problems for the emitting country (labour force migration) as well as for the recipient country (e.g. The load-bearing capacity of social provision systems). This recipient role is not yet very important in the case of Hungary, but the emitter role can already be seen, more

and more people find jobs abroad, and some people say that this emitter role will lead to negative impacts in the long run.

- Movements from outside the EU
Europe is becoming a more and more attractive target for people from the Third World, which also leads to many conflicts inside the EU (humanitarian disasters, cultural differences etc.). This is not yet a relevant problem for Hungary, but it may be a problem in the long run.

3.3. Unemployed young people

The high unemployment rate of young people is a general problem all over Europe, which is also one of the triggers of labour migration inside the EU. The EU has to come up with some solution.

3.4. Demographic problems

Another general problem is the aging European societies, the lower birth rate and the related, potential economic difficulties (e.g. financing pension systems in the future).

4. Current means of expression of citizens' views

In the course of the discussion, the respondents mentioned **several ways of articulating citizen opinions** when we asked how citizens can/could voice their opinions about EU issues. A common feature of these spontaneously mentioned ways of opinion-forming is that the interviewees consider them mainly as a **theoretical** scheme. They know that they are available but they have not really used them. Partly because there are not many EU issues where they want to voice their opinions, but a more important aspect is that they think nothing would happen, and if they used the opportunity to use this tool, it would not lead to any result.

However, this kind of **disappointment** is **not only related to European politics**. The same scepticism can also be observed if we look at Hungarian political matters and see how citizens voice their opinions about them.

4.1. Members of the EU parliament

Keeping contacts with the parliamentary members is a frequently mentioned channel. This, however, is

only a theoretical possibility as there is no live contact between the citizens and the MEPs. The respondents do not really know what matters the Hungarian MEPs represent in the EU; what's more, they do not even know who represents them in Brussels.

"When someone went out there, we could hear for some time what they did there, but now we get less information. It would be really good to know who did what on our behalf."

However, people do not expect too much from them. They claim that the MEPs follow the interests of their political parties and not the opinion of the people who voted for them. The MEPs are very far away from the citizens who elected them.

It is disturbing for many people that the MEPs cannot be called to accounts. The only thing that can be done about this is that we don't vote for them 4 years later, but this tool is too weak:

"We elect them, but then they don't give a shit. I don't feel that i am important to those who we voted for. So i don't think it is important to vote. But this should not be the proper way in democracy, where it would be important to know that my vote carries some value."

4.2. Written enquiries

The respondents also mentioned frequently the opportunity to write letters or emails to the competent EU authorities, EU officials and politicians. This is expressly offered by internet websites to all interested parties. However, people seriously doubt whether anything would happen after such enquiries and whether anyone would react to them:

"If i had an idea that something should be done differently, and i would write a letter and send it by mail, i wonder if it would really reach anybody."

4.3. Media

Since the respondents do not regard individual actions (contacting MEPs, writing letters) to be effective (MEPs are not accessible, they do not reply letters), some find it a solution to turn their opinion or problem into a media case, which can no longer be simply ignored:

"I definitely need a tool to grab their attention. So i have to make myself heard, e.g. In a TV program".

"If i really want to highlight something, i would contact the media. A TV channel, where i could try to draw the attention in form of a report".

"It should go into the news. Then the politician will have to deal with it."

4.4. Spontaneous initiatives

As against individual actions, the respondents think it is a stronger weapon if citizens cooperate and join forces to voice their opinion. This is technically easy to do in the internet and Facebook age.

4.5. International forums for legal recourse

It is a specific form of opinion and interest representation to turn to an international court if someone's rights are violated and this cannot be settled within the country borders. This opportunity is relatively known among the respondents because these cases are mentioned quite frequently in the media.

4.6. Demonstrations

One interviewee would even take more radical tools: *"i go to protest in front of the G8, just as it is done by a few people."*

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

The group members approached this issue creatively. The basic idea was invented by 1-2 respondents, but later everyone tried to make a contribution and to somewhat polish the idea. They liked the final product so much that they said may be worth requesting a patent for it. It is true though that some participants said these kinds of solutions may already exist in the west, but we don't know about them: *"i can imagine that what we write down here as a utopia is already used e.g. In Sweden".*

The substance of their idea is **an internet-based online system** that could be used by anyone in principle. This would be a central forum offering a multitude of topics. It would basically cover all possible and current EU topics. There would be main topics, within this: sub-menus and sub-topics to choose from. For each topic, they would either set up continuously modified questionnaires that would be translated into each language and the citizens could fill it in if they are interested in the given topic, or they would simply provide a customer service address for the given topic and everyone could send their opinions or proposals in email.

The interested parties could log in with an email address and they could mark the topic that they are interested in. Thus the system would always inform them that they can voice their opinions or they can fill in a questionnaire in a given topic.

There was a dispute among the participants as to whether opinions could be voiced obligatorily with a name, or also in an anonymous manner. The system should be able to handle both options.

"I would form an opinion about anything only if i give my name to it. I guess it is not fair to tell something without a name."

"I think it is more and more important in Hungary that this can be made anonymously. Maybe i would not want them to know the email address from where i sent my opinion."

"It would be important to make sure that they won't throw dirt at me if i give my name. This is essential! An absolute guarantee would be required for this."

Sending in the completed questionnaires or the emails is the first step in the system operation. The second step is acknowledgement: the system verifies that the questionnaire/email filled in/written by the respondent was received by the system. Moreover, the respondents would also expect regular information on the progress of the case that they addressed: where and to whom it is sent, how it is processed, what is the result etc. This kind of acknowledgment is very important to the respondents as this is where they can see the biggest problem with the operation of the currently available instruments.

The online system could even be extended with personal customer service spots so that opinions cannot only be voiced online. All interested parties could simply walk into an EU point where they can say what they want. The opinion would be registered and forwarded into the administrative process. The interested parties could also check the case progress at this stage, the number of submittals made in similar matters etc.

As this would be an IT system, it could easily sum up the results. (It is important to ensure that the system cannot be hacked, and it should be verifiable that everyone's opinion can be featured only once). If it comes to voting, the majority opinion can be displayed quickly. The operation of this kind of system would ensure that *"EU matters would be decided based on a continuous referendum flow"*.

If the system only received proposals and opinions, their summary could show whether the number of people voicing their opinion reaches a threshold value (e.g. 1,000,000 people), and if yes, the EU would have to deal with the given question in the merits.

"If the case reaches a certain level or a certain number of contacts, it would be obligatory to make it public in some form, on TV, at courts, in the parliament etc., depending on what the matter is about."

"In fact, i don't know if this really exists, i.e. that a case must be examined above a critical level. Who knows? Maybe it is prescribed somewhere in the EU, but we don't know about it."

6. Assessment of several propositions for improved citizens' involvement

The research tested 8 specific opportunities to form opinions on each one. Their acceptance was very diverse within the group.

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

This is **the most popular of the surveyed options**. Partly also because the respondents think that this is the closest to the method that they spontaneously created and found ideal (see chapter 5).

The interviewees basically accepted all of its elements positively. They regard it as a complex system, which not only offers an online platform but also enables personal administration. Most people are mainly attracted by the possibility of online administration, but many are also in favour of the option of making personal contacts:

"For an average citizen it is good to meet a living person there, to whom they can tell what they want. It is already comforting to know that someone listens to you."

However, the success of the system can basically be determined by how effectively this opportunity is communicated towards the citizens:

"I would use it, but - on the one hand - do they tell me which forum to go to? Where can i write and what, and what can i find and where?"

Using the services of information offices would also be influenced by the opening hours - it is important that they should be open as long as possible.

Some interviewees remembered that such information offices and customer service points used to operate earlier:

"When we joined the EU, there used to be such "Europe point" offices, and then they were gone."

It is a general opinion that if these offices were opened, they should be available everywhere:

"Each local municipality should have a small, separated office where i can submit my proposals or letters."

"Each district or village should have a place that i can go to."

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

The respondents accepted this option less positively. Primarily because they feel that these debates can be manipulative: who will be invited as a debate partner, who will be the moderator, how unbiased s/he would be, would there be an organised (selected) audience or not etc. These manipulative elements could be fully excluded only if independent experts can be invited to the debates. Such a discussion would be somewhat interesting to people, but it is a question whether it can be organised at all.

The "debate" genre of the discussion is also disturbing for the majority. Knowing the Hungarian culture of debates, they think that it would not produce the desired result. These would be autotelic discussions, turning into crazy debates, without any palpable result. Few people start out from the fact that a debate offers the chance to: *"see something from a different aspect. If i think about something, i usually don't think of any other aspect. So this would be the advantage of such a debate"*.

The respondents have not heard too much about such type of debates in Hungary, but some of them have seen this in foreign TV channels. Most of them associate this programme type to afternoon talk shows running on commercial channels in Hungary (e.g. Mónika show), which cover a certain topic and civilians are invited to talk

about current but quite informal topics in front of an audience in a studio. The participants had no favourable opinion about these shows, and this also had a negative impact on the opinions about the tested debates.

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

This option was not very attractive to the respondents, either. One or two people would like it but not the majority. Namely because if it comes to this type of questionnaire-based opinion poll, people would like to see a scheme where everyone would get a role, *"just like in a referendum"*. However, public opinion research is conducted on smaller samples, and small is the chance for someone to get involved as a respondent: *"this is interesting only if they ask as many people as possible."* If it was online research, those who have no internet would be squeezed out of the research. If it was about personal interviews, maybe they would prefer towns but not villages etc.: *"it is not for sure that they can hear opinions from all social groups."*

There was one person in the group who had already taken part in such an EU opinion poll. He had a clearly positive opinion about this method.

Beside the many rejections, there was someone who regarded it as an advantage of this method that passive citizens can also be accessed in this manner:

"If they contact me, it may be easier to voice an opinion about something, compared to having to do something or go somewhere in order to say what I think, e.g. Going to an office, sending a letter."

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

Maybe this is **the proposition that divides the respondents the most**. It is interesting to see that this option is mainly rejected by the interviewees who come from the lower social class, but those from the higher class like this opportunity more. The form itself, i.e. Meeting an MEP

is relatively feasible for the participants, mainly starting out from the Hungarian conditions, and on the analogy of how one can get in touch with the representatives working in the Hungarian parliament or at local municipalities.

However, there was a problem upon the discussion about interpreting meetings with politicians: does this meeting cover a face-to-face talk (in the form of a consultation hour) or a public get-together that is attended by many people (like a residential forum). Both ways can have advantages and drawbacks. People are sceptical about the effectiveness of the former because this may turn out to be a protocol meeting *"with polite smiling"*. The latter was criticised because communication would be hard to control:

"It leads to a scandal, which makes no sense. They all want to tell about their problems, and then they start a fight."

All in all, people highlighted two advantages of this option. The most positive feature is the opportunity of personal contact:

"If it is personal, it may be easier for people to tell about their thoughts and opinions."

The other good point is that representatives can be more or less controlled in this manner, and later they can be called to account about what they said and whether they kept their promises.

But not everybody thinks that way. Some hold the view that such meetings would only be informal, and what is put forward there would mean no consequences at all for the representatives. Another drawback of this scheme is that it requires a high level of activity from the people, so relatively few people would use it. Many people would not attend such meetings for various reasons: due to the lack of time, or because they do not like the representative, etc.

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

From among the 8 tested tools, the respondents accepted this **most positively** in addition to option "a", partly also because this opportunity is very close to the system that they find ideal (see chapter 5).

Many participants said that this scheme is like public opinion research, with the difference that – in principle – everyone can take part in this. They hold the view that a great advantage of the system is that it can reach masses of participants. It is true though that, according to some interviewees, the online platform is exclusive and some people (the elderly, those living in villages) may not be able to use it. Aspects of comfort also emerge as advantages of the system: the online questionnaires/forms could be filled in anywhere, and at any time:

"It is not attached to a specific time of the day, like a consultation. I can fill it in at 2 A.M. If I feel like it".

It is a basic expectation towards the system operation that the citizens should be notified that their answers are received and processed, and they get feedback on the results.

However, a few problems incurred in connection with system operability. For example, how are people informed about the launch of internet consultations (who informs them, when and how)? Some think that this is probably preceded by a registration process and the interested parties are notified at a given email address about participation in the consultation. This may also give motivation:

"If i get an email, i feel they are interested in my opinion, so i take the chance when it comes."

It is, however, a disadvantage due to the obligatory registration that the system cannot be used anonymously.

F. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

As the system is basically the same as the former one, we received the **same opinions** as before. But the respondents were **slightly more critical**. When it comes to discussing EU issues, they regard it unnecessary to involve a further participant because:

"This can slow down the processes."

"There is another chance that information may get lost."

"Maybe the government would pose the question a bit differently; maybe they would try to control my answer."

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

This solution was given the **most criticism**. Although many people like the online platform, they do not support this tool in this form and in this topic. They feel that appearance in the social media would result in such a huge quantity of data and opinions that would be impossible for the EU to cover analyses and interpret.

"Who's going to read them?" Some would use search engines for key words, but it would also consume huge power sources. *"It is probably feasible in technical terms, because we know how many people have been tapped recently."*

Both the quantity as well as the quality of the information is formidable because the respondents claimed that a lot of unnecessary information is also supplied in such an internal-type communication. After a few comments, the whole thing gets too personal, and it will only generate conflicts:

"There would plenty of personal remarks, sometimes in a simply unprintable tone, and one could not filter out the essential thoughts".

Some people also held the view that such a system cannot work anonymously, and they would prefer anonymous ways of communication.

On the whole, the respondents believe that this would not produce the proper results: *"it would be counter-productive"*. The discussions among people would become limitless after a while, and the participants would get bored of talking.

The interviewees claimed that running such a system would not produce the required results, and - as sarcastically mentioned - the maximum "profit" for those who make comments in the system would be *"to let some steam off"*. *"It would be like an EU rage room where people can smash their anger away."*

H. Information campaigns to be developed much more actively than in past years, in order to encourage citizens to involve themselves in the debates that are to take place and to take

part in the coming election of members of the European parliament next spring.

The respondents did **not** accept this opportunity **positively** because this is only a one-way communication, and they cannot make their voice heard directly in this form:

"It is like the government's current cost reduction campaign on posters, TV and everywhere. It is already there, and i cannot influence it anymore."

The respondents defined this merely as a propaganda and advertising tool. They can more or less accept this tool if the issue is handled only as an information campaign, where the purpose is to inform the citizens: *"this can also be used well"*, but there are some problems with this method.

These campaigns may not reach their targets amidst the numerous advertising campaigns. It is difficult to launch and maintain real eye-catching campaigns, and the topic itself - i.e. The EU - is not so attractive to people either. In addition to this, cost effectiveness aspects were also mentioned: *"this costs a lot of money"*. Contacting people by their names may be a more effective tool than classical advertising (TV commercials, outdoor posters):

"The online method or notifications registered to names could draw my attention better than campaigns organised on a monthly basis. There are lots of them. If it goes online, i have a look and decide if i am interested."

On the whole, the respondents would find information campaigns useful only in some specific cases, when the EU is before or after deciding on some very important issues. For example, the respondents regard the EU parliamentary elections as such an essential topic.

APPENDIX - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Kvalitatív kutatás az állampolgárok involváltságáról az európai

Unióval kapcsolatban

Interjúvázlat

(bevezetés: kérd meg a résztvevőket, hogy mutassák be magukat néhány szóban, mondják el, hogy kik ők, mivel foglalkoznak, stb.)

1. Téma

Azért vagyunk most itt együtt, hogy az európai unióról beszéljünk. Meg tudnák mondani, hogy mi jut először az eszükbe az eu-ról?

- spontán reakciók
- rákérdezni:
 - az eu-ról spontán tett említések természete
 - az eu-val kapcsolatos pozitív és negatív aspektusok
 - milyen mértékű a válaszadók kezdeti érdeklődése és érintettsége/involváltsága az eu-val kapcsolatos témákban

2. Téma

Most, tekintetbe véve mindazt, amit tudnak, gondolnak az eu-ról: mindez honnan jön? Milyen forrásokból szereznek információkat az eu-ról illetve honnan hallanak róla – a „forrás” szót a legszélesebb értelemben véve, a hivatalos információforrásoktól kezdve a barátokkal vagy más emberekkel való informális beszélgetésekkel bezárólag...?

- spontán reakciók
- rákérdezni:
 - az említett források változatosságának/sokrétűségének mértéke
 - az egyes forrásokból származó információk természete
 - az egyes források iránti érdeklődés és a források hitelessége

3. Téma

Most beszéljünk még konkrétabban az eu jövőjéről és azokról a kérdésekről, amelyeket talán önök is feltesznek maguknak ezzel kapcsolatban.

Mivel lehet, hogy nem kapnak meg minden információt, amit szeretnének, a korábban említett forrásokból, ezért lehet, hogy vannak bizonyos dolgok az eu működésével, az eu által követett irányokkal kapcsolatban, amelyeket fontosnak tartanak, amelyekről többet szeretnének tudni, amelyeket jobban szeretnének érteni.

Milyen dolgokról szeretnének leginkább többet tudni?

- spontán reakciók
- rákérdezni:
 - általános benyomások azzal kapcsolatban, hogy nagy vagy kismértékű-e az ezekkel témákkal
 - kapcsolatos tájékozottság és megértési szint
 - az elkövetkező években az eu előtt álló nagyobb kihívások észlelése, érzékelése
 - a kérdezők kifejezik-e annak szükségességét, hogy több tudásra, nagyobb megértésre volna szükségük - milyen témában leginkább? Az ezekről a témákról jelenleg elérhető információk milyen szempontból nem kielégítőek?

4. Téma

Állampolgárként lehetőségük kellene, hogy legyen arra, hogy véleményt mondhassanak és a hangjukat hallathassák az eu jövőbeli irányait illetően - hogy vajon elfogadjanak-e vagy elutasítsanak-e ilyen és olyan irányokat, vagy bármilyen más kérdésben véleményt nyilváníthassanak. Ma ezt önök hogyan tehetik meg, milyen lehetőségeik vannak erre?

- spontán reakciók
- rákérdezni:
 - hogy érzik, mennyire könnyű/nehéz kifejezni magukat, hallatni a hangjukat az eu-val kapcsolatos
 - kérdésekben - milyen eszközökkel?
 - hogy érzik, miért nehéz ez, mik ennek az okai
 - konkrét témák, amelyekkel kapcsolatban a válaszadók különösen szeretnék kifejezni véleményüket és szeretnék, ha meghallgatnák őket, mint állampolgárokat; elvárások ebben a vonatkozásban.

5. Téma

Számos eszközre gondolhatunk, amelyek segítségével mi, mint európai állampolgárok, hallathatnánk a hangjukat. Arra kérem önöket, hogy próbáljuk meg és gondoljunk most ezekre az eszközökre, bármire, ami lehetséges, csak engedjük szárnyalni a képzeletünket, ne hagyjunk egy gondolatot sem elveszíteni, még ha nem is tudjuk ebben a pillanatban, hogy ezt az ötletet hogyan lehetne a gyakorlatba átültetni. Miket tudnának elképzelni?

- spontán reakciók

- ösztönözd a csoport kreativitását azzal, hogy bátorítod a válaszadókat, hogy „ugorjanak” egyik ötletről a másikra.

6. Téma

Most különböző eszközöket mutatok be önöknek, amelyek alkalmazásával lehetőség nyílik arra, hogy az állampolgárok jobban hallathassák a hangjukat az eu-val kapcsolatos kérdésekben. Mindegyikről meg fogom kérdezni a véleményüket.

- a kérdezőket egymás után mindegyik javaslatról kérdezed meg. Minden egyes javaslat kapcsán kérdezd meg: mennyire érdekli őket az adott javaslat és miért.
- információs szolgáltatás az eu és az eu politikájának működéséről. Ez magába foglal egy információs irodát, amely minden nagyvárosban elérhető a lakosság számára, egy honlapot (website-ot) és egy ügyfélszolgálatot, ahol bármilyen telefonon, levelben, e-mail-ben, stb. Erre kerdesre gyorsan választ adnak.
 - a nagyobb mediákban szervezett viták, amelyek átlagos állampolgárok és eu szakértők között zajlanak az eu által követett irányokról, az eu által tett intézkedésekről.
 - közvélemény-kutatások az eu-ról, amelyeket rendszeresen bonyolítanak le egész Európában, lehetővé téve az állampolgároknak, hogy megtudják, hogy saját honfitarsaik illetve más országok állampolgárai mit gondolnak.
 - lehetőség arra - amely évente többször is adott volna -, hogy az emberek találkozzanak az európai parlamenti képviselőkkel vagy más eu politikusokkal, a lakohelyükhöz közel.
 - az európai bizottság által szervezett internetes konzultációk minden olyan alkalommal, amikor nagyobb döntéseket kell hozni az eu-ban, nyitott minden állampolgár számára.
 - ehhez hasonló konzultációk, amelyeket az adott országok kormánya szervez.
 - egy interaktív szolgáltatás, amely az internetet és a közösségi hálózatokat használva állandó jelleggel gyűjti a polgárok véleményét, kívánságait vagy kritikáit az eu irányvonaláról.

H. információs kampányok, melyeket sokkal gyakrabban szerveznek, mint az elmúlt években, azért, hogy batorítsák az állampolgárokat, hogy vegyenek részt az elkövetkező vitákban illetve, hogy vegyenek részt a jövő tavasszal esedékes európai parlamenti választásokon.

Köszönöm meg egyszer, hogy részt vettek a beszélgetésünkön.

Ha a beszélgetést követően eszükbe jutna meg valami a témával kapcsolatban, kerem, jelezzék nekünk. (adjon meg egy e-mail címet, amelyet a résztvevők ebből a szempontból használhatnak.)

WHAT DO CITIZENS THINK THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE EU ARE?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW WOULD CITIZENS LIKE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMUNICATE WITH CITIZENS?

Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

HOW DO CITIZENS SEE THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

▶ HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EU? THE OPINION OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

CITIZENS FACING "BRUSSELS' EUROPE"

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS IN BRUSSELS: WHAT MESSAGES?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

THE INVOLVEMENT OF EU CITIZENS IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT GLOBALISATION

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT EURO

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EMPLOYMENT IN THE EU

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

EU NO, EURO YES? EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINIONS FACING THE CRISIS (2007-2012)

Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 90*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, March 2013

DO THE EUROPEANS STILL BELIEVE IN THE EU?

Daniel Debomy, *Studies & Reports No. 91*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, June 2012

MIGRANTS – EUROPEAN STORIES

Frédéric Praud, Florence Brêthes, Hamed Borsali and Kiel, *Comics, Paroles d'hommes et de femmes / Notre Europe*, May 2012

On the same themes...

Managing Editor: Yves Bertoncini • The document may be reproduced in part or in full on the dual condition that its meaning is not distorted and that the source is mentioned • The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher • *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* cannot be held responsible for the use which any third party may make of the document • Translation from Hungarian: Eurologos • © *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

