

POLISH CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU

REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN POLAND

BSM

This Synthesis presents the results of a group discussion held in Warsaw on 18 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 Warsaw on 18 December 2013 on the subject of citizens' involvement in the European Union.

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

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

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

BOX 1 ► Composition of the group of respondents

Gender	Age
Women: 4	20-34 years: 3
Men: 4	35-49 years: 3
	50-60 years: 2
Social class	
Lower-middle social class: 4 (professions of household head: office employees)	
Higher-middle class: 4 (professions of household head: shop owners (2), high level executive, middle-management)	
Political opinion	
The respondents were also recruited so that diverse political opinions were represented in the group.	

development, opportunities, diversity, tolerance and modernity.

In the background of this picture there is a **second set of associations related to European funding programmes**: investments in infrastructure, education (Erasmus programme) and support of agriculture.

Economic issues definitely predominate over political ones in thinking about the EU. Thoughts of the respondents focus around economic exchange and development, growth and levelling the standards of life of the "old" EU countries. Political themes initially are mentioned only occasionally and relate to successful role of Germany in building a peaceful and secure European community.

Obviously, **all those associations are positive**. Acceptance of Poland in the EU is very high among the Polish society, and reaches 81% according to the latest survey (Polish public opinion research center survey, November 2013).

Negative aspects of the EU include **unification of national cultures, excessive European bureaucracy, too high costs** of implementing European funding programmes and educational programmes (Erasmus) being **not sufficiently effective**.

"All countries lose their individual character, because we all belong to this community and try to be the same. Or at least we aim at the same ideals. And previously it was all divided into different countries. Everybody cherished his own... so if we are to talk about disadvantages as well, then there is this unification going on. No doubt about it. I am far from being nationalistic, but it is a little like that."

1. Initial thoughts about the European union

The basic and foreground picture of the EU can be described as a **common space** with the ideas of **freedom, openness with no boundaries,**

Another issue is the particularly strong relationship of Poland and poles with some European countries, such as Germany or the UK. The majority of respondents consider the EU to be beneficial for Poland in this respect, helping it to improve its image and position. On the other hand, being in the EU can also result in increased tension between Poland and those countries because of competition for jobs leading and to strengthening negative stereotypes.

2. Sources of information and knowledge on the EU

To some extent, polish people receive **information about the EU indirectly**, while they receive information about other issues. That's why the most commonly mentioned sources of information about the EU are: **TV news** (including negative attitudes toward TV in general) and the **internet news portals**.

Social media, such as Facebook, play an increasingly important role in delivering and spreading political information in general (including the EU related information). In this channel, the key are news spread around by "friends", who are interested in some form of politics. Obviously, this is not systematic EU knowledge, they are rather light-mood stories and interpretations of politicians' behaviour and conduct.

"Speaking about friends. I also meant the internet. Linking to news is popular among young people now. It's good to send a link from time to time. Send to your good friends. Or make an intelligent comment. So i mean Facebook. And it also includes the EU."

"my friend, who is a journalist, posts some news on Facebook, and all his friends read it, see what's going on and comment."

EU web sites are also **occasionally** used, especially when looking for information on EU funding programmes.

The respondents also mention TV programmes devoted to EU funding programmes implemented and available in Poland and display boards at construction sites or buildings informing about the EU participation as a (co)funder.

3. Questions regarding the future of the EU

The key European challenge for the future is energy policy. It has many dimensions.

- Safety – the EU policy should aim at providing energy security for all member countries. Russia's activity is considered a threat to that, because the European countries depend to a large extent on its gas and oil.
- Sovereignty – limiting co2 emission is considered a threat to the economic development of Poland. It may result in constraining polish energy industry, which is based on coal leading to increased energy prices and Poland becoming more dependent on other economies.
- Shale gas regulations – restrictions may yield shale gas production unprofitable in Poland. This issue is also related by the respondents with security and sovereignty of Poland.
- Ecology – in the aspect of solutions for supporting renewal energy sources, better monitoring of gas emission and energy management.

Another important challenge for the EU is **Ukraine and the EU activities to support its integration with Europe**. It is important not only for Ukraine to choose its own way, but also for Europe in the context of protecting the EU against influence of Russia, trying to restore the soviet bloc.

"The problem with Russia is that they are so much against the EU. And i think they see us as not wanting to make close relations with them. Because we declared to be on the European side. And we care more about the integration with the western countries than with the east. And then they have exactly the same problem with Ukraine. Either you are their friend or else their enemy."

- They treat us as their colony.

- Yes.

- Russia is quite dangerous.

- it has always been so, and it will stay that way."

Other issues mentioned as important for the future of the EU include:

- The difference of power exerted by euro countries compared to the rest of the EU on the EU financial policy (two sets of countries with different speed rates of development in the EU).
- Good relationships with the USA. Unlike single European countries, the EU as a whole can be a good partner for the USA. It can make the global cooperation work better.

The respondents generally agree that information on the EU present in the media is sufficient. The need for this information is generally defined as moderate. The respondents think that in case of increased need for it, they would easily find it. The challenge might be however to find objective and trustworthy information and to distinguish it from politically biased information influenced by various political groups.

4. Current means of expression of citizens' views

The most often quoted way of expressing citizens' views for the respondents was the **voting on joining the EU** by Poland and the **European parliament elections**. The majority of respondents feel satisfied having had the two opportunities to express their views.

It is important to emphasize that while discussing expression of views, **the respondents think rather about the subjects related to Poland and not about the general European issues** (e.g. Functioning of the EU institutions or common European goals). Taking this into consideration, the perspective of the polish citizen and the polish citizen in the European Union is very close. Given the former perspective, participating in the national polish elections or local government elections is for the respondents the way of expressing their citizen views in general.

Occasionally mentioned are meetings with deputies or expressing opinions in the internet during government consultations of proposed laws (including the EU regulations).

For instance, introducing the euro in Poland was the subject discussed with deputy during a meeting.

The respondents agree that **their needs for expressing their views are modest** and their activities occasional and irregular.

"Poles are too passive. I am trying to be active. But i think poles are passive about it, because they express their views only in the march during the Independence Day. And this is just once a year."

There are a few **reasons for being passive** according to the respondents:

- Expressing views is ineffective (it is futile, because the politicians do not listen)

- People are not interested in public matters (they do not have time, are not interested in other peoples' opinions)
- People remember communist times and the martial law in Poland and are afraid to openly express their views, especially in the form of street demonstrations.

"I don't really think people feel it would be effective. Whether they do it or not, it doesn't make a difference."

The general opinion is that they will do whatever they want. But it will end someday. It will end.

It is also temporary when i feel like a rebel and then i think - i won't go, i won't say anything because it is useless."

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

Spontaneous ideas included **organizing discussion forums**: both in the internet and in public, similar to ancient Greece, at a square or by the polish parliament.

"Discussion centre close to the parliament would be good. Because an ordinary pole has not enough opportunity to express views. So i am not really sure if the polish members of the EU parliament really know what Mr Smith is thinking."

Other ideas included a **telephone helpline**, a **www site**, a **special TV program**, **meetings of the MEPs with local communities**. The EU funding programmes for local communities are especially interesting for the respondents.

Generally speaking the respondents showed lack of belief while speaking of new ways of expressing views.

"Can we be more involved? Of course, you can go and express your views. The question is about the reaction. Will our case be passed to somebody who has the power to decide? Or will we just be talking to bureaucrats, who would just listen?"

6. Assessment of several propositions for improving citizens' involvement

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

The proposal is similar to the ones produced by the respondents themselves. The majority of them are **aware** of the services **already**. **Information** on those services **should be spread wider** so that the services can be better used for exploiting the funding programmes for the benefit of local communities.

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

The **idea was attractive** - the respondents liked the idea of ordinary citizens participating in a lively discussion expressing what the public thinks. The form of an open discussion should guarantee the program will not be dull, as frequently happens with TV interviews with various experts (talking heads).

The respondents are **yet doubtful** if casting the speakers for such programmes would guarantee inviting persons with different opinions and at the same time persons, who would express the voice of a major group. They are also uncertain if it would be possible to maintain the discussion at a right emotional level but not ending up with an argument at the same time.

The respondents are also unclear as to how much such discussions would influence political decisions - they think that the politicians would learn about peoples' views but nothing more.

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

A widely recognized and accepted form of activity, known mainly from the time of joining the EU by Poland.

Discussions were indicated as a better form for gathering peoples' opinions. The point is not to ask

questions (such as in polls) which do not cover important areas for the people and expect their answer. On the contrary, it is crucial to see what people think about an issue which is important for them. This is the reason why the respondents are doubtful whether polls will include themes important for the public.

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

The respondents know and are aware of meetings with polish MEPs, but can hardly give any examples. When they realize this fact, the respondents conclude that polish MEPs are not interested in local matters. Then, the respondents start to think, MEPs should be more active, be closer to people.

What is attractive in this proposition are the words: "in the vicinity of where you live". It suggests **closeness** of subjects and areas covered.

The words "other EU politicians" is interpreted as MEPs from other EU countries. It seems interesting for the respondents for the reason of taking a look at the EU and polish issues from a perspective which is different than polish. Moreover, other, non-polish politicians, who do not fight for polish votes are expected to tell the truth, present the issues as they really are, and not to manipulate it to be re-elected. On the other hand, the respondents doubt that politicians from other countries would be able to devote time to travel to Poland.

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

This proposition is met with **serious reservation**. The predominating view is that the European commission is too high in the institutional hierarchy to be ready to consult matters with simple EU citizens. The respondents suspect that such consultations would rather aim at evaluating solutions, not at modifying them.

Some respondents approve this proposition, especially those, who have had participated in some other consultations before. It is important that consultation requests be personal, addressed to the person himself/herself.

F. Similar consultations, organised by our national government.

This proposition evaluated in comparison to e meets with **an even worse response** due to the negative opinion on the polish government and politicians. Of the two, e seems better.

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

This idea is **especially accepted by young users of social networks**.

The key issue is that the Facebook profile should be sufficiently attractive to get a lot of "likes" and by that be able to reach many users.

Posts informing about new content would be delivered to users automatically, without any need for their action. In addition, anonymity as compared to public meetings would increase honesty and self-confidence of users.

"Interactive service is modern. It would reach more people. Meetings with MEPs would gather 200 or 300 people, and here it can reach maybe several thousand users. So for sure a piece of information would reach them every day. Like it or not, you would see it. Plus you can express your opinion in every moment. And meetings have their time. Here giving your personal view - simply we are more courageous."

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

The respondents generally agree such a campaign should be carried out.

It is important for the respondents to know the future MEPs and what they stand for well.

Summary of propositions

The way the respondents evaluate and perceive the propositions demonstrates their consumerism rather than the citizen approach. Attractive for the respondents are passive elements, those giving them

positive feedback, things that are already well known and accepted by them. Given this attitude, none of the propositions is, is really very attractive for them, given that all of them address the respondents as citizens. None of them really can break through passiveness of the respondents, stimulate their citizen attitude. Some of the propositions are evaluated positively because they are similar to marketing communication known to them from the commercial world.

Proposition g is the most attractive because:

- It fits well with the daily activities of social network users. Obviously it is crucial that the EU profile be attractive both visually and emotionally, be more entertaining than responsible or based on the sense of duty. Under this condition one can expect activity of users. The EU profile would require some sort of distance to the EU institutions and procedures, would have to be based on energy and attractiveness of criticism of some MEPs towards the EU, and in this way explain and prove the reason for the EU regulations - both existing and future ones.
- It resembles consumers' behaviour of looking for best deals. Therefore, people who look for advantages from the EU funding programmes may be attracted. The key issue here is to arrange information on different funding programmes in the way that a user could identify the suitable programmes easily. This can be done for example by making targeted profiles, such as: are you a woman 50+ looking for training for new job opportunities?

Proposition h is also attractive, because it is interpreted as a similar one to well-known social or politic/election commercial campaigns. The key issue in this proposition, and in other propositions too (especially proposition e), is that it provides a sense of being a personal communication. (Ideally it would be addressed personally). It should be emphasized that this proposition is attractive because it delivers interesting information, not because it invites people to participate in a discussion. In this sense it does not challenge respondents' passiveness.

Proposition b is considered interesting, because the concept of a debate is considered to be something like a political or social TV show. The attractiveness of this kind of show depends on delivering high positive emotions for the viewers. In debates like that a suitable balance of rational and emotional elements should be maintained.

Another perspective of looking at the propositions is emerging, being neither consumer nor citizen. It can be observed, when the respondents positively evaluate meetings with MEPs in **d** or presence of people from other European countries in **b**. It is a perspective of a person interested in other people, of **sharing experience, and exchanging values between cultures and nations**. It directly refers to the way the EU is perceived - as a place of freedom, inner openness and commonness.

APPENDIX - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Wprowadzenie

Prezentacja - uczestników kim są, co robią

Theme 1: 10 min

Ue - wiedza, bliskość spontanicznie

Zaprosiliśmy dziś państwa aby porozmawiać o unii europejskiej. Zanim zaczniemy rozmawiać poproszę was aby każdy napisał pierwsze skojarzenia, myśli jakie przychodzą mu do głowy gdy myśli styszy unia europejska. Powiedźcie o swoich zapiskach.

M: dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:

- Natury tych skojarzeń (np osobiste, polityczne, medialne, zawodowe itd)
- Pozytywne vs. Negatywne
- Stopnia zainteresowania, wiedzy o sprawach ue

Theme 2: 10 min

Ue - źródła informacji, wiedzy

Teraz chciałabym poprosić was o zastanowienie się nad tym skąd bierze się to co wiecie, myślicie o unii europejskiej. Jak to jest w u każdego z nas?

....

Zróbmy teraz taką listę wszystkich źródeł miejsc skąd bierze się wiedza lub można tam usłyszeć jakieś opinie o ue - zbierzmy wszystkie takie źródła od tych co wydają się najbardziej poważne i takie zwykłe wydające się niepoważne (m: eksploruj od oficjalnych dokumentów do rozmów żartów z znajomymi).

M: dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:

- Różnorodności aspektów źródeł - np z telewizji - jaki program, jaki dziennikarz, internet jaki portal publicysta itp, kolega - jaki cechy osobiste, społeczne zawodowe itp
- Natury - istoty tego źródła - co stanowi o tym, że jest ono:
 - Atrakcyjne, ważne
 - Wiarygodne

Theme 3: 15-20 min

Przyszłość ue a wiedza

Porozmawiajmy teraz bardziej szczegółowo o przyszłości unii europejskiej, pytań jakie mogą się w tej kwestii pojawiać.

Zapewne są tu takie kwestie, które uważacie za ważne i mniej ważne.

Przyjrzyjmy się im bliżej pod kątem dostępnej wam wiedzy, informacji o tym jak działa ue i jakie przyjmuje kierunki działań. Jakich brakuje wam tu informacji ?

W jakim stopniu te wymienione wcześniej źródła są niewystarczające aby odpowiedzieć na te pytania o przyszłość ue?

M: dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:

- Oceny zakresu własnej wiedzy na te tematy
- Postrzegania głównych wyzwań dla ue w nadchodzących latach
- Wielkości potrzeby posiadania większej wiedzy (w odniesieniu do których kwestii szczególnie) - w czym obecna wiedza o tych kwestiach jest niesatysfakcjonująca, za mała

Theme 4: 10-15 min

Korzystanie z prawa głosu o ue

Pełnimy w naszym życiu wiele różnych ról - mamy rodziny, wykonujemy swoje zawody, mamy swoje sposoby spędzania czasu wolnego, jesteśmy konsumentami różnych produktów i usług, jesteśmy też obywatelami mającymi swoje prawa. Jednym z nich jest prawo głosu, wypowiedzenia swoich opinii i bycia usłyszonym w różnych kwestiach dotyczących również przyszłości ue. I to niezależnie od tego czy zgadzamy się czy też nie zgadzamy się z konkretnym rozwiązaniem czy kierunkiem w którym podąża ue.

W jaki sposób mieliście czy macie okazję to robić dotychczas?

M: dopytuj w stronę wyjaśnienia:

- Stopnia trudności wyrażenia swoich opinii i bycia usłyszonym w kwestiach związanych z ue - w odniesieniu do różnych sposobów?
- z jakich powodów wydaje się to trudne?
- jakie są kwestie, problemy na temat których chcieliby się wypowiedzieć i być wysłuchanym jako obywatele - jakie są tu oczekiwania?

Theme 5: 15 min

Burza mózgów - sposoby ekspresji opinii o ue

Jak się wydaje istnieją czy mogłyby istnieć różne sposoby, narzędzia możliwości poprzez które głos, opinia obywateli ue takich jak my mogłaby zostać usłyszana. Spróbujmy sobie pomyśleć, powyobrazić jakie są i mogłyby być takie właśnie sposoby.

Mamy tu zupełną swobodę - nawet najbardziej dziwny, fantastyczny czy na pierwszy rzut oka niezbyt mądry pomysł jest warty zapisania. Nie przejmujemy się jakie będą praktyczne trudności z jego wprowadzeniem. Liczy się tylko to co przychodzi nam do głowy. Uwaga to taka burza mózgów. *M: zapisuje wszystkie pomysły*

Theme 6: 25 min

Test pomysłów a-h

Interesujący

Ranking

Teraz chciałabym przedstawić wam kilka takich pomysłów na to w jaki sposób uczynić to, aby głos obywateli w sprawach dotyczących ue był lepiej słyszany.

Oto pierwszy pomysł. Co o nim sądzicie? W jakim stopniu wydaje się wam interesujący - z jakich powodów? (*m: pytaj każdego po kolei powtarzaj dla kolejnych pomysłów*)

- serwis informacyjny, gdzie udzielano by informacji na temat funkcjonowania ue i prowadzonych przez ue polityk. W każdym większym mieście otwarte byłyby biura, gdzie można by osobiście uzyskać informacje, byłaby strona www oraz serwis niezwłocznie odpowiadający na pytania zadawane telefonicznie, drogą pocztową lub mailem.
- debaty organizowane w głównych mediach w których braliby udział zwykli obywatele i unijni eksperci, gdzie dyskutowano by nad rozwiązaniami planowanymi przez ue
- badania opinii publicznej na temat ue przeprowadzane regularnie w całej europie, pozwalające obywatelom na dowiedzenie się myśli ich rodacy oraz obywatele innych krajów.
- możliwość spotkania się kilka razy w roku z naszymi europosłami lub z innymi politykami unijnymi, w najbliższej okolicy naszego miejsca zamieszkania.
- konsultacje przez internet organizowane przez komisję europejską zawsze wtedy, gdy podejmowane są w ue kluczowe decyzje, otwarte dla wszystkich obywateli.
- konsultacje przez internet organizowane przez polski rząd zawsze wtedy, gdy podejmowane są w ue kluczowe decyzje, otwarte dla wszystkich obywateli.
- interaktywny serwis w działający w internecie, na portalach społecznościowych stale i na bieżąco zbierający opinie, życzenia i głosy krytyczne odnośnie rozwiązań podejmowanych w przez ue.
- kampanie informacyjne, które będą przeprowadzone w sposób bardziej aktywny niż w poprzednich latach. Ich celem będzie zachęcenie obywateli do zaangażowania się w debaty, które będą miały miejsce podczas kampanii wyborczej do parlamentu europejskiego, na wiosnę przyszłego roku.

Dziękuję za udział w dyskusji. Jeśli coś jeszcze pojawiło się podczas naszego spotkania o co nie

zapytałam, a chcielibyście powiedzieć to proszę teraz albo później proszę wysłać na nasz adres mailowy.

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

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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

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Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

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Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

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

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

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Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 47*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute / Fondation Jean Jaurès, November 2011

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