

New Democratic Toolbox For New Institutions

European Citizens' Panel Latvia, November 14, 2009



What is European Citizens' Panel?



The aim of the European Citizens' Panel is to find an answer to the following question:

“What are the most effective tools in order to involve the European Union citizens in the decision making process of the European Union (EU)?”

Participative democracy means that the society is actively involved in the decision making process, therefore improving the quality of decisions taken, strengthening the civil society, promoting legitimacy of the decisions taken and trust in political power. In comparison to the traditional participatory methods (such as for example the opinion polls), the new tools provide the decision makers with more depths on the opinions of the citizens and their concerns. Admitting the usefulness of these methods, more interest on the participatory methods comes not only from the academia and civil society but also from the decision makers on the local, national and EU levels.

The aim of the Citizens' Panel therefore is to bring about recommendations and proposals to the decision makers in EU institutions (European Parliament and European Commission) on how to engage citizens in EU decision making effectively, using the participatory tools.

As the Citizens' Panel is organised not long after the elections of the European Parliament as well as before the new College of the European Commission has started its work, the European Citizens' Panel provides citizens with the opportunity to express their recommendations on the engagement process to the new deputies and commissioners.

4 identical Citizens' Panels

In the European Citizens' Panels in 4 EU Member States (Bulgaria, Latvia, Hungary and Germany) 200 citizens are participating. They have been selected with the help of specialised research institutes according to the principles of random choice and taking into account the demographic situation of each of the countries. On the Panel there are also citizens who have previous experience from other participation activities, in each of the national Citizens' Panels they comprise 10% of the participants. The Citizens' Panels took place on November 14 in Latvia, November 21 in Bulgaria, November 22 in Germany and November 28 in Hungary.

In all 4 Panel discussions the citizens worked on proposals on the democratic toolbox for the European decision makers according to the same methods.

European Panel

After 4 Citizens' Panels in the European Union Member States have taken place, on February 26, 2010 the European Panel will happen in Brussels, where 20 participants from 4 national Panels and 10 participants with previous experience in similar events will take part. Elaborating on the results from the national discussions, the citizens will work on the European proposals and discuss them with the European decision makers.

Project Partners

There are five project partners implementing the European Citizens' Panel – *European Academy Berlin, Nonprofit Information and Training centre Foundation, Open Society Institute – Sofia, European Citizen Action Service and Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS*. European Citizens' Panel is co-financed by the EC's Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), project partners and other organisations, which support the Panel discussions on the national level.

European Citizens' Panel in Latvia



European Citizen's Panel in Latvia on November 14 called together 38 citizens in Riga to work on their proposals on the engagement in the European decision making process. The participants (33) of the discussion were chosen randomly, according to the demographical situation in Latvia – diverse age groups, education levels, occupations, genders, places of living – in order for the European Citizens' Panel to represent the diversity of the people living in Latvia. Five of the participants had previous experience in participatory events – European Citizens' Debates in 2007 and 2009 and project "Tomorrow's Europe", which took place in 2007.

The European Citizens' Panel in Latvia was organised by the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS.

PROVIDUS is an association established in 2002. PROVIDUS functions in accordance with the aims formulated in its statutes and the strategic plan – to provide input in the areas important for Latvia's development - good governance, criminal justice policy, European policy and tolerance and inclusive public policy, as well as to become a source of expertise on the international level. PROVIDUS activities include: publishing research and policy analyses, providing expertise to the government in the policy-making process, advocacy and monitoring, consultancy services and training as well as promoting public participation in the policy process and holding of an annual Public Policy Forum. PROVIDUS also provides institutional home for the largest on-line policy resource in Latvia – politika.lv.

European policy is a new branch of thematic activities for PROVIDUS that it started in mid 2006. PROVIDUS wishes to decrease competence deficit in the area of European Union policy in Latvia at large and within its separate branches. This deficit of competence results in the difficulties of the civic society to participate purposefully in building of European policy, to meaningfully evaluate the actions of the Latvian government on EU scale and to maintain accountability of public officials in front of the society. PROVIDUS will work with issues concerning the EU enlargement, gradually developing expertise also in

other areas of European policy. PROVIDUS will also use the fact that the contents of PROVIDUS previous areas of activities include such policy aspects that are tackled on the EU level.

European Citizen's Panel took place in Riga, Albert Hotel, Dzirnavu street 33. The Panel was opened by Mrs. Iveta Šulca, Head of the European Commission Representation in Latvia and Ms. Dace Akule, European policy researcher at the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS and project leader of the European Citizens' Panel in Latvia.

The results of the Panel will be delivered to the Members of the European Parliament from Latvia, representatives from the European Parliament Information Bureau and the European Commission Representation in Latvia as well as from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia and non-governmental organisations.

Recommendations by the Latvian citizens



Development of the ideas and discussion

Participants were working on ideas, answering the following questions: "How will you feel when involved in a successful and meaningful dialogue with the EU? What just must not happen?"

How do we want to feel when involved in a dialogue with the European Union?

- Equivalency between EU-27 and EU-15
- To belong to the totality of the EU citizens
- Certainty on the possibility of using the knowledge and skills
- Mayor investment of EU in its citizens
- Security and stability in the future
- 2 words are keywords: meaningful and successful
- Very good
- Heard also during the intervals between the elections
- Satisfied
- The feeling is determined by the results
- Results in a clear form
- Pronounced, where the ideas will go
- A possibility to express, be heard, receive an answer
- Belonging to a qualitative dialogue
- To receive an access to the materials of the dialogue, historical memory, public discussion
- Wider access, understandable information from the EU
- Important, with an aim, welcomed, equal, free, easy, useful, constructive
- Not to be ridiculed
- Want to know an easy way how to find out issues on the EU
- Society's and experts' opinions have to be balanced
- To be informed on pros and cons
- Language in the documents has to be simple, not only for the "professionals"
- Sure that will be understood
- To have a feeling that everything can be done easily

What just **MUST NOT** happen?

- To lose faith in the EU
- Not to give a response
- EU laws must not be inconsistent with the national laws
- The answer should not be formal
- EU foreign policy must not be contradicting the national interests
- Deputies from Latvia must not represent interests from other states
- To ignore an opinion
- To enforce and opinion – big countries, lobby groups (in the fora of the EU the main should be the common good and not the strive for selfish benefits by the big countries or the lobby groups)
- Feeling that it is unlikely that an opinion will be heard
- To be without a result
- To ignore
- Capability to participate and express
- To have *brainwashing*
- To whine, to be indifferent
- To split
- Come to a conclusion that the opinion was not heard, bitterness
- To judge an opinion by the size of the country
- Must not ignore people's opinions, positions
- To create a mechanism that prohibits, does not allow to continue the dialogue that has began
- Humiliate
- Boring speech (with unnecessary introductions)
- Penalties, sanctions
- Heard only when the elections are approaching
- Manipulations
- Inequality
- An opinion expressed in wane
- Enforcement of an opinion
- To make people *get lost*

Opinions of the participants on different statements

(1 not very important – 5 very important)

Displays the average of different groups

A The deliberation should result in clear recommendations for policy makers.

Red table – 5

Blue table – 4,58

Violet table – 4,5

Green table – 4,85

Yellow table – 4,4

B The discussion should be very detailed and of great depth.

Red table – 3,25

Blue table – 3,7

Violet table – 3,75

Green table – 3

Yellow table – 3,75



C Policy makers should report back on how they have integrated citizens' recommendations in their work.

Red table – 4,75
Blue table – 4,4
Violet table – 5
Green table – 5
Yellow table – 4,1

D The deliberation process should be great fun!

Red table – 3,375
Blue table – 3
Violet table – 3,25
Green table – 3,85
Yellow table – 2,9

E All participants should be able to participate using their individual level of knowledge.

Red table – 4,25
Blue table – 4,7
Violet table – 4,9
Green table – 5
Yellow table – 4,5

Discussions in groups

Participants discussing in groups worked the most significant ideas into recommendations. At each table one of the pre-assigned topics were discussed. The discussion continued changing groups when the participants had a possibility to exchange ideas with other groups.



1. When in the decision-making process should the EU engage with citizens?

	Pros	Cons
Agenda setting	Clearer results Informed citizens or certain organisations	The process is lasting longer When engaging in the stage of the agenda setting the resources and attention might be lost to follow the decided upon a norm till the final approval
Expert input	Wider opportunities to influence To defend a position Support from the target group Expertise on different topics Input from the professionals	Experts from one field providing their opinions
Implementation	Decisions are of a higher quality as several sides are involved Wider circle of experts	Everybody has to adopt to the same standard as there has not been an engagement process in the first stage
Other	Citizens as watchdogs Citizens must be informed on the final results of the decisions so certain groups can implement them successfully (healthy protectionism) ¹ Information must be available both on the decisions as well as on the initiatives in a form acceptable to the citizens	

¹ As one example in the group the construction standards were mentioned – Latvian construction organisations have been involved in the decision-making on the implementation of a specific requirement and now are implementing them themselves instead of passing the requests to others in the EU market. The main idea – to be involved in the elaboration process and afterwards to participate in the implementation of the specific decisions in Latvia and elsewhere.



When in the decision-making process should the EU engage with citizens?

Too early:

The group could not come up with any arguments. The dominating opinion was – the sooner, the better as the most important in to put the decision project in a discussion framework, identifying the principles. At the same time the guiding force of the decision has to inform the society how the citizens can engage and comment on the expected norm.

Too late:

- On the expert level in the European Commission the professionals from Latvia have not been involved.
- The position has been accepted in the government of Latvia without involvement of the citizens.
- The decision is made at the European Parliament.

2. On what policy areas should the EU engage with citizens?

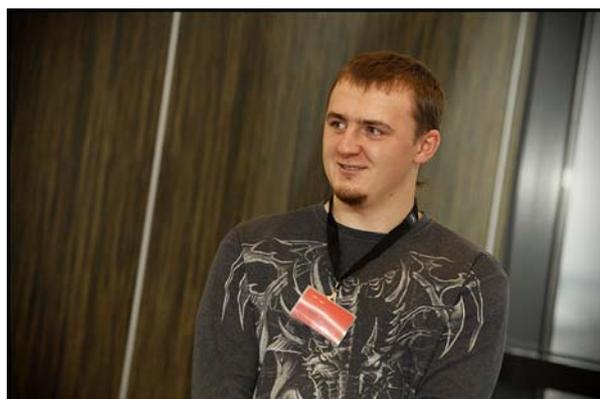
Policy areas, which will motivate citizens to become involved:

Agriculture, fisheries, food	Evening up of the payments Europe does not know what we need, what grows by us Genetically modified food
Business	Support programmes Common market conditions
Culture, education and youth	Harmonise education ages in EU Harmonise higher education programmes (especially concerning the student exchanges) Youth NGOs Competitive education Education has future Link education with science
Economy, finance and tax	The necessity of introduction of euro Tax % harmonisation to ensure the competitiveness
Employment and social rights	The solutions for unemployment
Energy and natural resources	Energy sources, their alternatives, security Green energy
Environment, consumers and health	Health issues are topical for everybody Purification plants Frequently our concern about the environment place 'economical' obstacles for example impedes construction of new factories
External relations and foreign affairs	
Regional and local development	Co-financing and infrastructure Regional cohesion
Science and technology	Safeguarding competitiveness Early involvement in the technological education To see technological competence and EU economic development as a direct continuation of each country's education system
Transport and travel	
Cross-Cultural issues	

Questions to ask citizens if involving them in these policy areas

- Does your financial situation is such as it allows you to educate your children?
- In which way, do you think, the education should be developed in Europe?
- In which way, do you think, the level of knowledge of the lecturers should be developed?

- What should be done in order for the well educated specialists not to flow away from Latvia or the EU in general?
- Is there a need for bigger support for the health system?
- Is there a need for a bigger support for science, which researches and works for the future of medicine?
- In which way should the state finance the health system?
- How do you see the opportunities to work with other representatives of your profession in the EU in order to promote cooperation and coordination?
- Which kinds of plants are actual in your region, what prohibits their development?
- What would we like the EU to do to promote fishing in the sea?
- What prohibits growing and production of freshwater fish?
- In which way would you like to receive information on the possibilities to participate in the development of your region?
- What are the needs in your specific region?
- How could one implement cohesion in specific places?



3. What would motivate citizens to engage in EU decision-making?

The benefits of citizen participation

For me	For the European Union
<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Possibility to influence situation in the spheres where there are problems and that influence our lives</p> <p>Hope that the voices of the European citizens will be heard in the EU and institutions</p> <p>Self-confidence</p> <p>Confidence on one's knowledge</p> <p>Information</p>	<p>More quality in decisions by the EU institutions</p> <p>Decisions have more legitimacy – they are taken with support of the greater part of the society</p> <p>In the long-term – the quality of life of the EU citizens will increase</p> <p>More qualitative (based on data, calculus, forecasts) decisions which will influence the development of the EU (also decisions which are not currently supported by the majority of the EU citizens)</p> <p>Greater amount of people who realise that they are EU citizens and are co-responsible for the decisions</p> <p>EU institutions have an impulse to talk about problems, failures and actions needed to overcome them. A solution is to be open to the EU citizens, which will increase the trust and respect</p> <p>More qualitative EU</p>
Incentives	Participation killers
<p>The low quality and slow decision-making process on the EU decisions</p> <p>People do not want to accept the current situation</p> <p>A wish to clear the myths of the perfection of other EU member states</p> <p>Desire to engage</p> <p>A wish to clear the myths on the decisive role of the EU in the socio-economic processes of Latvia</p> <p>A capacity of people to evaluate the situation of EU, state and themselves and take decisions on the actions needed</p>	<p>Lack of information</p> <p>Disbelief in engagement activities and possibility of change (pessimism)</p> <p>Lack of confidence</p> <p>Sometimes fear to lose job, status (especially for the state employees)</p>



Things that motivated me today:

- Interest on EU issues, desire to know more than is known now,
- Reflection on the need of creation and implementation of a new model of governance,
- Interest in engagement processes, decision-making and their justification (quality),
- Desire to understand the possibilities of engagement and its meaning,
- Desire to get to know what is the Europeans Citizens' Panel, who are the organisers? What PROVIDUS is doing?
- Positive examples (NGOs and work of other organisations).

In the evaluation questionnaires the participants mention the following factors:

- Desire to participate in the problem solving of the EU,
- Interest and desire to research the processes happening in the EU,
- Desire to provide own input,
- Curiosity and interest,
- Desire to get to know different suggestions,
- Experience in similar projects,
- Desire to be active, not to be aside, to acquire new information,
- Own point of view on different things,
- Desire to get away from daily problems,
- Amount of eurosceptics has increased. If there would be a referendum on staying in the EU, the vote would be negative. Want to know the reasons,
- To get to know other opinions on membership and possibilities in the EU,
- Interest on getting to know something new,
- Desire to develop communication skills,
- Interest on EU decision-making process,
- Wanted to know what will be discussed during the event,
- Desire to participate in the EU decision-making, get to know more and be actively involved,
- To enhance the knowledge,
- Desire to participate in the discussions and express suggestions on these topics,
- Desire to acquire information and to get confidence that the EU processes are amenable.
- This is a very familiar topic to me,
- Possibility to express own opinion on the EU topics, participate and look for solutions to the EU problems.

4. What preparation do citizens need to take part in such an event?

Content:

- To get to know the current situation (pros and cons),
- To get acquainted with the historical development,
- To find out how the changes are going to affect the citizens,
- To find out the aim,
- To inform and explain in an interesting and exiting way,
- To find out what is promoting change (state, politicians, groups),
- To find out on what level will the change be (state, region, person).

Logistical:

- How to get to know where to look for information?
- Where to find information?
- To ask for explanations of the documents, translations and consultations,
- To know the expenses for the transportation, stay, replacement for doing the house work while one is way, if there is a possibility for remuneration,
- How safe it is – is going to an unknown place not too risky if there is no travelling experience (payments, orientation, physical safety),
- How to get to know that something is being discussed upon and is a topical question,
- Technical means – available and knowledge on how to use them (e.g. internet).

Personal:

- Knowledge of languages,
- "Mature", feel inclined, determination, implementation,
- Understand who is the one that must hear me,
- Understand what do I want to get,
- Understand what do I want to say,
- Know and be ready to hear others' opinions.

Other:

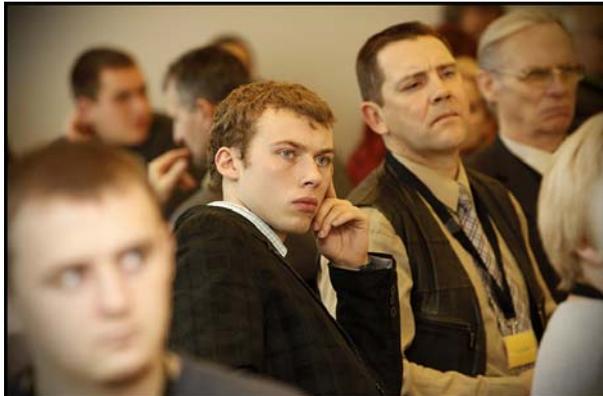
- Take interest in others' opinion in order to understand one's own,
- Outer conditions (natural disasters, political situation, strikes, etc.).



5. How should the EU follow-up on recommendations made by citizens?

How should they be integrated into policy?	Who's responsible?
<p><i>The opinion of the group was divided – one part thinking that it is better if the citizens unite in bigger groups (NGOs) and in this form express their opinion, which is heard by the decision makers. The counter opinion – also a single citizen must have a possibility to be heard</i></p> <p>Must be heard according to the policies which are in the EU competence</p>	<p>The receiver of the notification – institution, that has received the notification from a citizen</p>
Which form of communication/media?	Who's responsible?
<p>Officially to the submitter (in paper or e-mail)</p> <p>In a home page a specific section where to find out how far in the process is the proposal</p> <p>Broadcast in public media (exciting)</p> <p>Hotline on the progress of the documents – a citizen or an organisation can call and find out how far in the decision making process is their proposal</p>	<p>EU</p> <p>Latvia as a Member State</p>
When?	Who's responsible?
<p>Specific term</p>	<p>The receiver answers according to the hierarchy – the institution which receives the documents answer immediately that the document has been received and in what period of time the answer will be provided. The answer is in substance as well as one is notified later if in the result of the proposal some decisions are made, new policies developed, etc. (Or on the topic of the proposal new decisions are being made)</p> <p>The answer must be in substance and on the result</p>
Other	
<p>There must be juridical sanctions against the MEPs if they are not informing the voters</p> <p>There is a wish for the deputies to meet actively (regularly) with the voters and explaining what and how they are doing</p>	<p>To include in the internal procedure documents of the EP</p> <p>MEPs themselves regularly and actively organise meetings with the citizens in their country</p>

How were the results achieved?

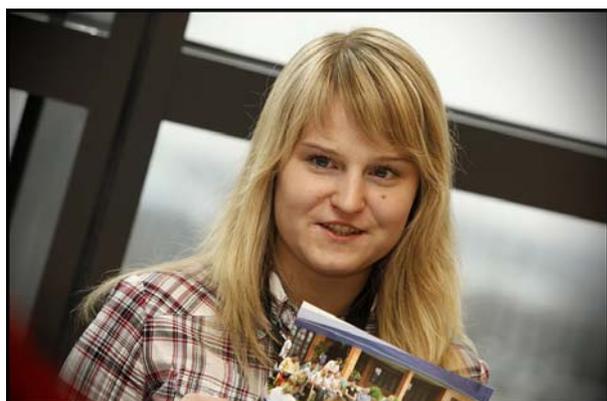


The process of the Citizens' Panel

The results of the national Citizens' Panel are achieved thanks to a carefully developed method that allows engagement of every participant. Due to the discussions with the experts, the recommendations worked out by the participants are concrete and can be implemented. The participants are divided in five groups, working each at a table moderated by a professional facilitator. His/her task is to engage every participant of the activity as well as not to let anybody to dominate the discussion. Before the event participants received information on the EU policy areas and activities, but they were not asked to have any knowledge on European topics or the EU itself.

	Activity
Morning	Opening, introduction
	Panel discussion with EU and participation experts Participants together with the experts discuss the engagement process and methods
	Working on the ideas and discussion Participants work on the ideas, answering questions: "How do we want to feel when involved in a dialogue with the European Union? What just MUST NOT happen?"
Afternoon	Discussion in groups Participants working in groups transform the most significant ideas in recommendations. At each of the tables one of the five question is being discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When in the decision-making process should the EU engage with citizens? - On what policy areas should the EU engage with citizens? - What would motivate citizens to engage in EU decision-making? - What preparation do citizens need to take part in such an event? - How should the EU follow-up on recommendations made by citizens?
	Rotation Participants are exchanging ideas with participants from other groups
	Finalising recommendations After the reactions from other groups the participants make the necessary changes in their recommendations
	Voting
	Closure

Participants of the Citizens' Panel



The selection of the participants was carried out by the market and sociological research firm Gateway Baltic in telephone interviews asking the respondents if they would have an interest in participating in a national level European Citizens' Panel in Latvia. The respondents were not asked on their attitude towards the European Union. Also they were not asked whether they have knowledge on the issues to be discussed.

Additionally to these participants there were five participants who already had participated in similar events.

Participants were representing different age groups, different regions of Latvia, different professions and education levels.

There were 38 participants in the European Citizens' Panel in Latvia – 18 women and 20 men.

Participants were representing the following age groups:

- Younger than 40 years – 7 participants,
- Age between 31 and 45 – 10 participants,
- Age between 46 - 60 – 6 participants,
- Older than 60 years – 15 participants.

Participants were representing the following occupations:

- Students, pupils – 6 participants,
- Employed – 18 participants,
- Self-employed – 1 participant,
- Pensioners – 12 participants.

Impressions from the European Citizens' Panel in Latvia

In the evaluation questionnaires the participants, answering the following questions “What personally was a benefit for you from the participation in the event?” and “What interested you most/left the best impression?” wrote:

- The best impression was from the way the event was organised. It was interesting to see how totally different people could co-operate and find compromise,
- “Pile” of positive emotions and deep information on the EU,
- Clearer understanding of the EU,
- Possibility to express an opinion,
- Understanding on the work of the EU,
- After the Panel discussion I will be able to understand more easily the processes happening in the EU,
- New experience. Awareness that with my contribution I not only get to know something new but also encourage others,
- Got to know wonderful people; original questions to discuss,
- Heard opinion of other people,
- Organisation and form in which the discussions took place,
- Fact that the citizens can practically influence the EU decision-making also in the intervals between the European Parliament elections,
- Better perception on EU functions,
- Feel that people are not indifferent on what is happening in the country, EU and not indifferent to themselves either,
- Received information and perception on the European Commission, Lisbon Strategy, EU structure; hope that also an average citizen can influence that EU decision-making,
- Possibility to get to know different people, diverse opinions,
- I can see that people are really interested in the EU processes.





Contact information

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