



Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

Working Paper

## **Does Deliberative Democracy Wane Populist Sentiments?**

Measuring democratic efficacy at citizens' assemblies in  
Eastern and Western Europe

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## Abstract

This working paper aims to investigate the extent to which participation in deliberative democracy practices influences citizens' populist attitudes, as evidence suggests an association between the rise of populist movements and citizens' frustration with politics. To examine this question and be able to compare results, DEMOS organised Citizen's Deliverations in Budapest and Brussels, based on the model and method developed by America Speaks, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Hall Meeting. The Belgium exercise took place in a one-day event, while the Budapest deliberation happened in two weekends in collaboration with the local City Council. In both cases, citizens were selected through an online survey and had to fill in a questionnaire before and after the event. Six expectations were defined for research: E1: Populist attitudes concerning people-centrism would increase; E2: Populist attitudes concerning anti-elitism would decrease; E3: Populist attitudes concerning a Manichean approach to social conflicts would decrease; E4: Positive attitudes concerning the EU would strengthen; E5: Internal political efficacy feelings would strengthen; E6: External efficacy feelings would strengthen. The conclusions differed among the six expectations. For E1, data did not seem to reject the first expectation that populist attitudes concerning people-centrism would increase. However, results for E2 were less straightforward due to differences between the findings in Brussels and in Budapest. A very cautious hypothesis might be that deliberative exercises increase anti-elitist attitudes in the Belgian context and decrease them in Hungary. In E3, results showed a difference between the cases of Brussels and Budapest: the conclusion might be that deliberation seems to decrease 'Manichean' attitudes in Budapest, while its effect is uncertain in Brussels. Data did not support E4. In E5 and E6, results did not show attitude changes in Budapest. In Brussels, participants reported an increase in internal political efficacy, but a slight decrease in external political efficacy. Given the small sample of respondents, results have limited statistical significance but allow for both logical interpretation and input into future research on the effectiveness of deliberative practices as tools to mitigate populist views and attitudes.

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## Introduction

Deliberation plays an important role as a means of developing political skills and internal efficacy. The more one discusses politics, the more likely one is to come away from those experiences feeling more confident in their political skills, eliciting a “virtuous” circle between participation and individual self-efficacy (Gastil & Xenos, 2010).

Populism is on the rise, and populist citizens are angry because they feel politicians do not listen to them. One response to this trend would be to give citizens more options to make their voice heard via tools of deliberative democracy (e.g. citizens assemblies, G1000). This is indeed what many academic and non-academic experts and organisations propose. However, until today we do not know whether this proposed cure works (or not) to decrease populist attitudes among citizens.

The disconnect between the fields of populism and deliberation is tangible. Populism scholars try to include the standard populist attitude questions in surveys that typically do not include questions on deliberative democracy. Similarly, democratic innovation scholars try to include questions on deliberation in surveys that typically do not include questions about populist attitudes. As a result, while one can either study populist attitudes or attitudes about democratic innovations, it is still impossible to study the two together. And this is precisely what we need to be able to examine whether democratic innovations work to decrease populist attitudes. The key contribution of our explorative study to the populism literature is that one should examine the fit between the demand (here: populist attitudes) and the supply (here: Citizens’ Deliberations).

In order to address the question *To what extent does participation in deliberative democracy influence populist attitudes?* in an explorative approach, ECAS and CSS organised Citizens’ Deliberations in Belgium and in Hungary based on the model and method developed by *America Speaks*, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Hall Meeting. The two events resembled in terms of setting and organisation, but while the Brussels meeting was a one-day deliberation event, the Budapest event was a true citizens’ assembly, co-organised with the city hall of Budapest on the future of the EU and its role in the development of Budapest, which led to the development of specific policy proposals by the participants. Our approach followed a before-and-after study design, surveying the political attitudes of the participants before and after the event. The survey questionnaire included items concerning attitudes about the EU, measures of political efficacy, and populist attitudes.

Our expectations were mixed:

E(1). Populist attitudes concerning people-centrism would increase. Since a citizens’ assembly is about common people deliberating among themselves, we thought that this experience would reinforce those attitudes that express the idea of people-centrism.

E(2). Populist attitudes concerning anti-elitism would decrease. A deliberative exercise may reveal the complexity of issues and put politicians in a less critical light. Also, deliberative democracy is about the inclusion of people into the decision making, which may reduce the anti-elitist stance of people.

E(3). Populist attitudes concerning a Manichean approach to social conflicts would decrease. A deliberative exercise may reveal the complexity of issues and the simplicity of ‘black and white’ approaches, on one hand; deliberating with people holding views that diverge from one own’s may increase empathy and tolerance, on the other.

E(4). Positive attitudes concerning the EU would strengthen. Since the topic of the deliberation was the EU we expected that dealing with it will increase the feeling that participants understand better how the EU works and what its *raison d’être* is.

E(5). Internal political efficacy feelings would strengthen. A deliberative exercise should empower the participants and increase their confidence in their own capacities to participate in politics.

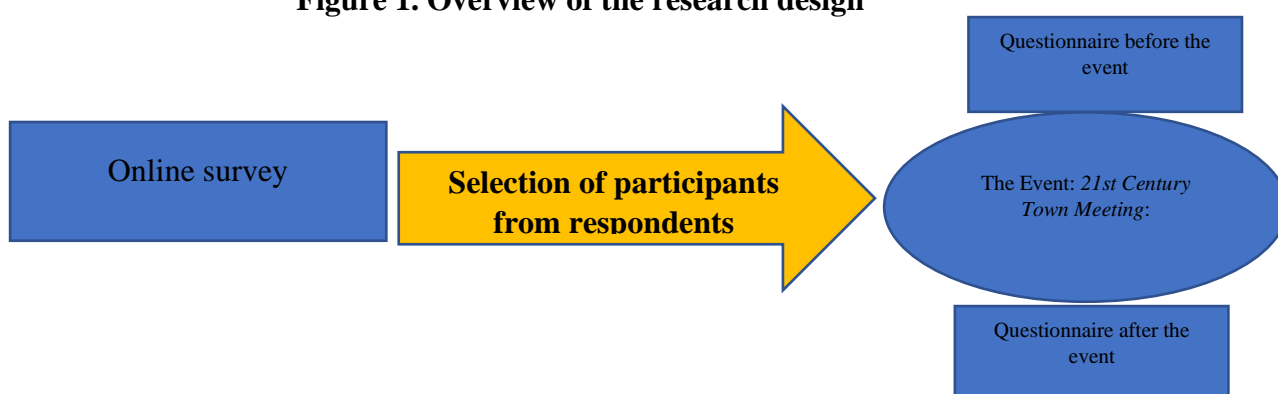
E(6). External efficacy feelings would strengthen. We are more uncertain about this expectation than about the previous one, but overall we assume that since deliberative democracy is about enhancing participation in politics, it would reinforce trust in politics.

## **Methods and research process**

*The 21st Century Town Meeting*: the method was developed by AmericaSpeaks to increase the number of participants without decreasing the quality of dialogue and deliberation. The method was conceived in an attempt to “update” the New England Town Meeting format for the digital age by integrating the use of Audience Response Systems and similar connective technologies. These deliberations are structured, dialogue events that involve plenary debates among all participants, and table level debates, where participants sit in small working groups. Citizens will thus work at tables and in plenary to deliberate on politically sensitive topics that are used in populist discourses. They will be supported by both professionals and by modern technology, such as electronic voting, to help the group arrive at a consensus. As deliberations are professionally facilitated and take place in small working groups – typically 8-12 people – it is possible for every citizen present to become involved in the discussion and to make their voice heard. The results are then discussed in the next dialogue step. Creative elements will also be integrated, ensuring that the event is both fun and productive. A short survey at the beginning and at the end of the deliberations (asking the same questions) will inform us on any change of opinions.

*Online survey*: the primary aim of the method was to study the role of deliberation and deliberative settings in attitude formation, comparing attitudes before and after a deliberative exercise. The online survey shed light on the broader patterns regarding whether the 21st Century Town Meeting method was able to reduce populist attitudes (and what is the relationship).

**Figure 1. Overview of the research design**



As Figure 1 indicates, the process started with a representative online survey. The online survey formed the basis of the selection of the participants of the event, but it was also needed to assess the level of populist attitudes of citizens. It is a short survey with the main independent variable measuring populist attitudes (using a slightly modified scale of Akkerman et al. 2014); dependent variables measure socio-demographic status and political interest (see below).

For the event 40 citizens were selected from those citizens who responded to the online questionnaire.

A survey of the participants was held at the start and at the end of the event. The surveys shed light on the broader patterns regarding whether deliberation can reduce populist attitudes.

### **The citizens' assembly, topic, and organisation**

The first event took place in Brussels, while the second event took place in Budapest. The two events were different regarding their length and content: ECAS organised a one-day event (deliberation day) in collaboration with a non-profit organisation (Particitiz) specialised on deliberative events, while CSS organised a Citizens' Assembly that lasted for two weekends with the City Council of Budapest – however, the research part was limited to the first weekend. The objective of this dual approach was to adopt a comparative perspective between two cities that, despite their similar size, have diametrically opposed political systems and different relationships with populism, which is in power in Hungary and in opposition in Belgium. The setting of events was similar, characterised by a structured, dialogue event that involved plenary debates amongst all participants, and table-level debates. The topic was partly similar: the Budapest Citizens' Assembly was focused on the EU and how to make it more accountable and more effective in helping local development, while the Brussels deliberation day dealt with issues concerning democracy – but the EU was also implied. The most important difference is

that the Citizens' Assembly also enabled participants to come up with policy proposals with the help of facilitators and experts during the second weekend – but this did not directly affect the research, which was limited to the first weekend of the event.

#### The *deliberation day* on Saturday 11 December in Brussels

In Brussels a one-day event, a deliberation day was organised. To help this event *ECAS* contacted *Particitiz*, a non-profit organisation created in 2015 whose mission is to connect citizens with the political institutions. *Particitiz* is based in Brussels and specialises in facilitating citizen participation mechanisms at all institutional levels (municipal, regional, national and European).

Given the lack of access to the national registry in the Brussels-Capital Region, a communication plan was developed by *ECAS* and *Particitiz* to recruit citizens to participate in the deliberation day. The recruitment campaign was based on three key actions:

- 1) Word of mouth within the capital's network of associations, starting with organising associations, as well as 90 other associations active in various sectors, such as human rights, including minorities, and youth support;
- 2) Street recruitment during which the recruiters explained the *Demos-Bru* project and asked people questions, and then invited them to register for the event as participants. In total, 150 people, exclusively French speakers, filled in the questionnaire, 60% of whom were men, with a majority of young students (79.3%), followed by the 25–34-year-olds (10.7%).
- 3) Promotional communication on social networks *Facebook* and *Twitter*. More specifically, 9 posts on each of the two platforms, i.e. a total of 18 posts with a link to the registration site ([demos-bru](https://demos-bru.be)). 71 citizens responded to the call, with a slight overrepresentation of women (51.5% vs. 43.9% men) and the 25-34 age group (24.2%), followed by the 55-64 age group (21.2%), as well as people with a higher education qualification, from a university (62.1%) or not (30.3%).

Among the 221 voluntary registrations obtained, 40 people (based on an effective target of 35) were invited to participate in the deliberation day. The selection of this sample was based on the principle of representativeness and was based on 5 main criteria: mother tongue, gender, age, occupation, and level of education. The future participants were sent an email on Tuesday 23 November announcing their selection. They were then all contacted by phone on Friday 26 November to give them the opportunity to ask their potential question(s), confirm their attendance and to provide them with logistical information. Of the 40 people contacted by phone, 14 declined to take part in the day for various reasons (e.g. work obligations, loss of interest, health constraints, see Appendix 1). A second draw was organised using the same process described above to select 14 additional participants. All the citizens were offered an allowance of EUR 50 for their participation.

Prior to the deliberation day on Saturday 11 December, participants were invited to fill in a questionnaire, which they were asked to complete again at the end of the deliberation

process. The objective was to gain insight into the evolution of their perception of democracy and populism.

The day's two experts were chosen because of their very different, and even opposing backgrounds. Isabelle Durant, with a long political career within the institutions, embodies the voice of the "establishment". And Michael Damman, the "designer" of Agora, which advocates an alternative form of democracy. Through these two experiences, it was possible to present citizens with two distinct and complementary visions of democracy.

### The *Budapest in Europe* Citizens' Assembly

The Citizens' Assembly called "Budapest in Europe" was organised as part of a series of conferences on the future of Europe. The event sought answers to the question, "How do we, citizens of Budapest take advantage of the opportunities offered by the European Union and become active builders for the future of the community." The 40 randomly selected residents of Budapest discussed this issue for two full weekends on 4-5 December 2021 and 8-9 January 2022 with the help of experts and facilitators.

The selection of participants was supported by the Sortition Foundation, a nonprofit company that aims to promote fair, transparent, inclusive and efficient community gatherings. The random selection of participants followed international good practice, using a two-step random selection method. The first step was the online application of the participants, followed by a stratified, random selection of participants as the second step. International experience shows that the proportion of those registering for community meetings is typically between 3-5%. In the case of the Budapest community meeting, 10.000 invitation letters were sent and 314 invitations were registered in Budapest during the two-week registration period, which means a registration rate of 3.1%. It should be noted that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, recruitment began later than originally planned, at the end of November, which probably reduced the response rate. In the second step of the process, a list of forty participants was compiled who represented the population over 18 years of age in the capital by gender, age, education, and place of residence.

The meeting was originally planned with the personal participation of the organisers, but due to the next wave of the Covid virus, the organisers felt confident if the meeting would be held in hybrid mode. Two-thirds of the participants attended the meeting online, they logged in from their own home on their own computing device. The organisers offered technical assistance to any participant who had either incomplete technical knowledge or inadequate technical equipment (such as a computer without a microphone or camera) and offered the opportunity to enter the Municipality's customer service office. This was a great help to several participants and this support was greatly appreciated by the participants when evaluating the event.

The first weekend was dedicated to learning and exchange of ideas, with a total of eight presentations and one panel discussion. In addition to clarifying the principles on which



the European Union operates (the main EU institutions and their competences, the European Union's development policy, subsidiarity), the presentations focused on the topics of the conference on the future of Europe (the EU in the World, Values and Rights, the Rule of Law, Security, Digitalisation, European Democracy, Migration, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) and presented good examples. The members of the Assembly asked questions and processed them in small groups with the help of experienced facilitators. During the first day of the second weekend the Assembly came up with a total of 26 proposals, of which the members of the assembly selected 13 proposals by secret ballot that were discussed and elaborated in detail.

(See a short qualitative assessment of the two events in the Annexes.)

## Survey data and findings

The main topics of the survey:

The online survey contained questions about citizens' views on democracy and politics, questions of the populism scale, trust about politics, knowledge on the EU and political efficacy. The survey was repeated at the beginning as well as the end of the deliberative events. Below we provide descriptive data: the means of the responses for the different groups of respondents.

Table 01. Responses of the different groups (mean scores)

Questions on populist attitudes (scale 7, 1 not at all 7 fully agrees)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
Politicians should always pay attention to people's problems.	6.2	6.1	6.1	5.9	5.9
A country's politics should primarily be about what people want.	4.8	5.7	5.5	5.2	5.4
Disagreements concerning the state and politics are stronger between the elite and the people than among citizens.	4.8	4.7	5	5.1	5.1

I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a professional politician.	4.4	4.9	4.1	4.1	3.8
Politicians talk too much and act too slowly.	5.4	5.8	5.1	5.5	5.1
Knowing one's political views will tell you whether that person is good or bad.	2.8	4.8	2.6	2.3	2.1
What people call "compromise" in politics actually hollows out the basic principles of the parties.	4.3	4.5	3.4	3.4	2.7
The government is being driven by a few interest groups according to their aims	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.6	5.8
It is important in a democracy that the representatives of different viewpoints arrive at a compromise.	5.8	5.7	5.9	5.9	6
It is important that the arguments of groups representing other views are heard.	6	6.1	6.4	6.4	6.3

Question (scale 5, 1 not at all 5 fully)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
How much do you trust the European Union?	3	2.8	3.5	3.5	3.2
How much do you trust the Parliament?	3	2.6	2.1	2.4	2.2

How much do you trust the Brussels/Budapest Regional Parliament?	2.8	2.5	3.4	3.6	3.5
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Question on the EU (scale 4, 1 totally agree 4 do not agree at all)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
I understand how the EU works	2.1	2.4	2.3	2.7	2.4

Question on the satisfaction with democracy (scale 5, 1 not at all 4 totally)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
How satisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in your country?	2.1	2.2	1.9	2	2.1

Question on political interest (scale 5, 1 very much 4 not at all)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
How much are you interested in politics?	1.5	1.6	1.8	2	2.1

Questions on political efficacy (scale 5, 1 not at all 5 totally)	Brussels participants before (N=21)	Brussels participants after (N=21)	Budapest registered (N=314)	Budapest participants before (N=27)	Budapest participants after (N=23)
How much do you think the political system allows that people like you influence politics?	2.1	2.6	2	2	2
How much do you think you are able to play an	3.8	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.4

active role in a group concerned with political issues?					
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Due to the low number of respondents, the results have no statistical significance. They should be interpreted in an explorative logic and as inputs for future research. The main conclusion is that results are difficult to evaluate even in this light. Differences in responses before and after are so small in most of the cases that they hardly allow to draw any meaningful conclusions. Interestingly, sometimes the changes in attitudes point to different directions in the two events which implies that further research might indeed be relevant to study cross-country and cross-cultural differences in terms of the effects of deliberative settings.

In the following we summarise the results in light of our expectations.

E(1). According to our first expectation populist attitudes concerning people-centrism would increase. Data do not seem to refute it: the respective attitudes either did not change, or changed in the expected direction. For instance, in case of the question “A country’s politics should primarily be about what people want” a relatively strong increase in agreement happened in Brussels comparing the before and after responses (mean 4.8 before and 5.7 after on a 1-7 scale), while a smaller in Budapest (5.2 and 5.4).

E(2). Our second expectation was that populist attitudes concerning anti-elitism would decrease. Here the results are less straightforward. Changes in attitudes are close to zero and if not, their directions differ between the two locations. For instance, agreement with the statement “Politicians talk too much and act too slowly” increased in Brussels (from 5.4 to 5.8) and decreased in Budapest (5.5 and 5.1). Since the magnitude of the changes in attitudes looks bigger than that simply driven by chance, we suggest that this finding may justify further research. Our – very speculative – assumption is that in the Belgian context where deliberation is more generally used and known by the people on the one hand, and the political system is characterised by the proportional electoral rules and deliberative politics, on the other, people in the deliberative setting may feel that they can do better, and it is not so complicated to reach an agreement after all. However, in Hungary the electoral system is majoritarian, political decisions are typically taken fast. People confronted with the deliberative exercise may feel that politics is complicated and realise that decision making in Hungarian politics is not at all slow compared to that complexity. This speculation is indirectly supported by another result: agreement with the statement “I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a professional politician” increased in Brussels (4.4 and 4.9), while it decreased in Budapest (4.1 and 3.8). Trust in political institutions also decreased by the end of the deliberative events, especially in Brussels – it is unclear to what extent the small decreases in Budapest are relevant. A very cautious

hypothesis might be that deliberative exercises increase anti-elitist attitudes in the Belgian context and decrease them in Hungary.

E(3). According to our third expectation, populist attitudes concerning a Manichean approach to social conflicts would decrease. Again, results are not unequivocal. Agreement with the ‘Manichean’ statement “Knowing one’s political views will tell you whether that person is good or bad” slightly decreased in Budapest (from 2.3 to 2.1) and actually dramatically increased in Brussels (2.8 and 4.8). We do not have any explanation for this and suspect an error in the background, especially because other related variables (“It is important in a democracy that the representatives of different viewpoints arrive at a compromise” and “It is important that the arguments of groups representing other views are heard”) do not show this pattern – with the exception of the variable “What people call ‘compromise’ in politics actually hollows out the basic principles of the parties” in which case attitudes in Brussels slightly increased in favour of rejecting compromise (4.3 to 4.5), while they decreased considerably in Budapest (3.4 to 2.7). The conclusion might be that deliberation seems to decrease ‘Manichean’ attitudes in Budapest, while its effect is uncertain in Brussels.

E(4). We also assumed that positive attitudes concerning the EU would strengthen. Data do not support this claim. Trust in the EU decreased slightly both in Brussels and Budapest (3.5 to 2.8 and 3.5 to 3.2). Interestingly, participants in Brussels felt that they understood the EU a little bit better at the end of the day (2.1 and 2.4), while contrary to this, Hungarian participants expressed a slightly growing perplexion (2.7 and 2.4). Again these results might be influenced simply by the small number of responses, but one may speculate that – similarly to the arguments presented above concerning E(2) – this may represent a pattern: Hungarian citizens without prior experience of deliberation may feel that politics is more complicated after all than they thought before.

E(5) and E(6). Finally, we expected that both internal and external political efficacy feelings would strengthen. Data do not show attitude changes in Budapest, which is surprising because we speculated that such a participative exercise should increase internal efficacy, but this did not happen. Again, this may add a further argument to the speculations presented above. In Brussels, in line with our expectation, participants reported an increase in internal efficacy (2.1 to 2.6), however, contrary to that, a slight decrease in external efficacy (3.8 to 3.5). This might be explained by the low numbers of respondents, but also by the fact that – contrary to the Budapest event which was a real citizens’ assembly – the Brussels event was a stand-alone deliberative exercise, not included in the real decision-making processes. In this light the no-change or slight decrease in external efficacy feelings seem justified.

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## **Annexes**

### **A qualitative assessment of the events**

#### The deliberation day in Brussels

##### **First deliberation: emotions and politics**

Citizens were divided into 4 tables of 6 or 7 for a discussion. They were invited to talk about their relationship with politics based on coloured cards representing the emotions they felt (e.g. red for anger, green for fear and yellow for joy). This discussion per table was followed by a summary in plenary aimed at reporting on the content of the discussions at each table. The pervasive emotions were: (1) Anger (e.g. at the lack of strong decision-making by parliamentarians, inequality, injustice or participatory); (2) Fear (e.g. of the impact of current decisions on future generations, especially in relation to the climate situation, but also in relation to the rise of populism and nationalism). This double exercise was conducted for one hour with the emphasis on sharing rather than debate.

##### **World Café on three key issues**

After a one-hour lunch break, the participants were invited to break the ice again with a mime game on the theme of the city of Brussels. Subsequently, the theme of democracy and populism was explored through a “World Café”<sup>1</sup> in three 30-minute rounds. At the end of each round, the citizens changed tables, except for two people who acted as the “pillars” of the table. They were responsible for explaining what had taken place in the previous rounds. The aim of this exercise was to listen to people and discuss their wide variety of views by reaching out to the majority of participants. These three rounds were based on three key questions. Following, are several comments that illustrate these discussions:

- 1) Are you in favour of a democracy or an autocracy?

“At some point, we’ve all dreamed of a short dictatorship to restore order, but the problem with dictatorship is that we know when it starts, but we don’t know when it will stop.”

“Centralisation doesn’t necessarily mean efficiency. Decentralisation and efficiency are definitely possible.”

- 2) What would your solutions be to reduce this gap between citizens and politicians?

“In order to reduce the gap between citizens and politicians, citizens need to inform themselves, which they aren’t doing enough.”

- 3) In your opinion, what solutions could make Europe more democratic?

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<sup>1</sup> A “World Café” (or Dialogue Café) is a working format that allows a large number of participants to exchange ideas and share views on a current topic. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal.

“More control and transparency regarding the lobbies.”

These explorations were followed by a coffee break before the presentations of the results of the discussions.

### **Plenary presentation of the results of the discussions**

The day’s deliberations continued with a half-hour plenary presentation to share the discussions that took place throughout the afternoon.

#### **Table No.1:**

- 1) Democracy or autocracy: “We’re all democrats who defend the view of local actions with a global structure. By ‘democracy’ we mean a participatory democracy promoting citizen assemblies rather than a party-based democracy.”
- 2) Gap between citizens and politics: “We want citizens to be better informed as part of a proactive approach. But we also want politician to improve in terms of listening and greater transparency starting with education (e.g. by popularising how the political institutions work).
- 3) Europe: “The core values of the European Union are crucial and their non-observance requires stricter sanctions, even exclusion. It’s also about creating a European tax system and a union closer to its citizens not to companies, by limiting mandates and salaries.”

#### **Table No.2:**

- 1) Democracy or autocracy: “Democracy is better than autocracy, but there’s a need for improvement, especially in terms of freedom of speech and the need for independence of the three powers.”
- 2) Gap between citizens and politics: “It’s about increasing transparency, through the quality of information, the implementation of citizenship courses (e.g. learning how to fill in tax forms), but also the limitation of the number of mandates and the inclusion of young people in politics through citizens’ assemblies. The example of the German-speaking permanent assembly is inspiring.”
- 3) Europe: “We’d like citizens’ conferences in the European Union to have a real impact, but we’d also like a reduction in the salaries of Eurocrats, and more transparency and balance in the lobbies’ access to the institutions.”

#### **Table No.3:**

- 1) Democracy or autocracy: “Autocracy often leads to dictatorship and populism. However, democracy is characterised by delays and bureaucracy, which leads us to conclude that the current democracy is running out of steam. We believe that



- the solutions lie in participatory and/or direct democracy.”
- 2) Gap between citizens and politics: “We demand greater control over the governance of elected representatives through greater transparency and fewer mandates in terms of quantity and duration. We also suggest changing the electoral system by integrating the possibility of voting for Dutch-, French- or German-speaking representatives and to include citizens in the choice of the majority of the national government. We also question the dominance of the executive over the legislative.”
  - 3) Europe: “We’d like to put an end to the unanimity rule that blocks European democracy, but also more transparent lobbying, a limitation of the Commission’s power in relation to the Parliament, and a greater effort to popularise the issue.”

**Table No.4:**

- 1) Democracy or autocracy: “Autocracy creates more inequality compared with democracy. However, we’d like to underline the perfectibility of the latter, because it’s the people who should make the decision through participatory and/or direct democracy, rather than a very small group of technocrat experts.”
- 2) Gap between citizens and politics: “We believe it’s important to impose a limit on mandates to prevent people from staying in power forever, but also from forgetting the motivations of the people. In addition, politicians must be trained in the specific field in which they want to practice. Education is key for everyone, especially in the creation of patriotism. Moreover, accountability needs to be given a key place.”
- 3) Europe: “Above all, it’s about going to vote, then it’s about the importance of transparency and accessibility of information.”

Here are the main highlights from the presentations: (1) Adherence to a democratic system; (2) The exhaustion of our current political system, which could perhaps be solved by increased citizen participation; (3) The role of education and the media; (4) The need for increased control of elected representatives through limits on mandates and salaries, but also accountability at national and European level, specifically in the context of citizen participation; (5) The lack of transparency concerning the influence of lobbies on decisions at European Union level; (7) The importance of civic engagement through voting, seeking information and questioning elected representatives.

Citizens’ Assembly in Budapest

The first stage of the Assembly was dedicated to providing participants with meaningful knowledge on the functioning of the European Union (including decision-making, development policy, good development practices in individual cities, local attachment and Budapest’s diplomatic opportunities) and the purpose of the Future of Europe conference series. Accordingly, participants were able to learn about European Union-related topics through 10-minute presentations by experts. After each presentation, participants were able to discuss what they heard and ask questions about it in small groups (breakout rooms) with the help of facilitators. These questions could then be put to the experts, who

answered them as soon as possible. In all of this, there was no obstacle to this phase of the meeting taking place in the virtual space, as the facilitators documented each post on a so-called virtual board. The issues concerning the European Union that were discussed by the participants with the experts were as follows (without claiming to be exhaustive):

- How does the conference on the Future of Europe work in other countries?
- How can the EU become more visible for citizens? What can we do in the EU?
- How can one get information on planned EU tenders?
- Why are development funds used less effectively in the less developed regions of the EU?
- What are the consequences of a Member State failing to respect the principle of subsidiarity?
- What opportunities are available for the public to have a say in developments?
- What development tools do municipalities have?
- How can tools of urban development help people to meet more?

During the first part of the second weekend citizens gained more knowledge regarding the plans of the City Council of Budapest. As in the previous weekend, the lectures were followed by table discussions. The purpose of this phase of the community meeting was to help citizens in developing their proposals for the Conference on the Future of Europe. As in the previous weekend, those present sat at their virtual table.

As a next step in the process, each table set out responses to the challenges that the EU has to face and the opportunities of the citizens of the Hungarian capital city, using creative brainstorming methodologies. Their task was to highlight two proposals in view of these challenges and tasks, also considering the advantages and disadvantages of implementation. On January 8, the goal was for a table company to give as many ideas as possible, then the ideas were presented to each other, questions could be clarified, and the lead expert and lead facilitator also gave feedback to the small groups on how much those ideas can be formulated to fit to the aims of the conference. The task of the facilitators was to reinforce the “yes and” attitude at the tables instead of the “yes but” attitude. The small groups were extremely active and at the end of the day nominated a total of 26 proposals, which were narrowed down to 13 proposals by an online anonymous vote. All 13 proposals all received more than 50% support from participants.

#### Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly:

- Extending European social security coverage beyond emergency care.
- Development of a methodology for calculating the European minimum wage.
- Making the European Union's resources available for energy modernisation and greening of residential buildings more accessible, understandable and better known.

- Separate funding for large cities should be provided. The role of the Committee of the Regions should be extended beyond an advisory capacity to a decision-making role.
- EuroNews should be available in each country's own language.
- Introduction of scrap premiums – to encourage people to replace old cars with environment friendly, green cars.
- Monitoring if EU subsidies sent to municipalities are actually allocated.
- Make exchange programs available to EU students to let students to travel to other countries in order to discover common values and differences.
- The European Union should elaborate a comprehensive program to tackle homelessness.
- The EU should give priority to support the development of technologies to recycle environmentally harmful waste.
- Development of a uniform methodological directive at the European level for public education curricula.
- Improving public transport in large cities to replace fossil fuel vehicles.

On the last day (January 9) participants were given the opportunity to work out the proposals in six rounds of table discussions. It was important that the ideas were connected to each other and that the comments and suggestions of everyone were considered by the fellow table members. During the six rounds, participants had the opportunity to discuss each proposal. Finally, the support of participants for the proposals discussed in this way was tested with an online questionnaire.