



Citizens' Recommendations and Discussion with Politicians

European Workshop Berlin March 1 & 2, 2020

Contents

1	Introduction: European Workshop and European conference	3
2	Result: Citizens' Recommendations and Discussion on the Future of Europe.....	3
2.1	Strengthening values and democracy in Europe	4
2.2	More cohesion within Europe	5
2.3	The role of Europe in the world	6
2.4	Creating socially compatible progress and sustainability.....	7



1 Introduction: European Workshop and European Conference

Under the heading “2020: Shaping the Future of Europe Together”, the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the German Foreign Office issued an invitation to a joint event on March 1 & 2 2020.

In the first part of the event, the European Workshop, seventy five citizens from Poland, France and Germany developed concrete recommendations for a strong, sovereign, united Europe. In the subsequent European Conference, they discussed their proposals with the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and his Bulgarian counterpart Ekaterina Zaharieva.

The two Foreign Ministers gained direct, first-hand insights from Polish, French and German citizens into what citizens demand from tomorrow’s Europe and what issues are really important to them.

The European Workshop is a new Citizens’ Dialogue format. A total of seventy five citizens – twenty

five citizens randomly selected from Poland, France and Germany respectively – held a two-day cross-border dialogue at the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. Participants came from a wide range of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Equal numbers of men and women were present. All participants were able to speak in their respective native languages – with the help of interpreters, moderators and other experts.

The results of the European Workshop are presented below. They include citizens’ recommendations that were developed in eight mixed table groups, as well as a summary of the discussion with the two foreign ministers.

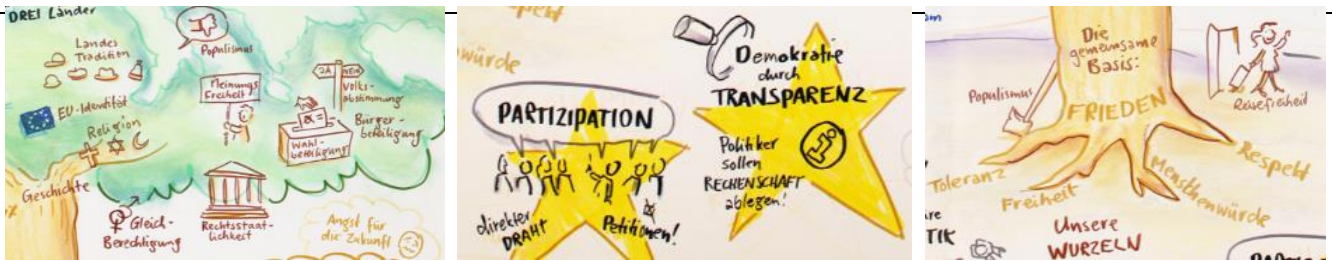
2 Citizens’ Recommendations and Discussion on the Future of Europe

Do we need more cohesion within Europe? How can we strengthen values and democracy? How can we shape Europe’s role on the world stage? How can we make Europe more sustainable?

These were the issues that seventy five citizens discussed for one and a half days. They developed recommendations for policymakers and discussed their proposals with the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva.

Heiko Maas took the impetus from the Europe Workshop for the German Council Presidency from July to December 2020.

Below are the recommendations of the citizens from the eight table groups and the reactions of the politicians.



Values and democracy in Europe: How can the foundation of values be strengthened?

Two key issues that emerged from the discussions on values and democracy were demands for more transparency and citizen proximity. Participants also demanded an expansion of opportunities for citizen participation and better protection of minorities, which could be achieved in various ways.

More information: European television channel, news, app

One proposal for improved transparency is the creation of a European public television channel called T.E.N. (Transparency. Europe. News.). T.E.N. would offer various formats in the fields of politics and culture, but also programs about individual Member States. The channel would provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of European policies and the impact they would have on citizens' everyday lives. T.E.N. would also offer concrete examples and practical information on how the EU works. A news program entitled "5 Minutes for Europe" would broadcast regular news reports about Europe as a means of establishing a greater public awareness of European issues. The idea is that the European Union, rather than individual Member States, would be responsible for news items. A further source of information demanded by the citizens was an app called "Europe in your pocket" for the presentation of videos with the possibility to leave comments. One feature of the app is that comments can be used as the basis for citizens' petitions. A common theme of all citizens' proposals is the importance of presenting information in a way that is easy to understand, and an opportunity for citizens to introduce their own ideas for subsequent commentary by experts. Formats which cater to different information requirements and age groups are needed. Use of media such as YouTube would ensure that the app would be attractive to younger viewers.

Reaction from politicians

Both Foreign Ministers welcomed the citizens' proposals and the desire for a clear format, as sometimes even experienced diplomats do not understand the press releases issued by the EU Commission. Clear, intelligible information is essential for ensuring that people know how the EU affects their everyday lives, as this makes it easier for citizens to find out whether their own government or the EU is responsible for certain decisions. However, both Foreign Ministers were dubious about the feasibility of a pan-European public television channel.

More participative formats

Besides their demand for the provision of more information, citizens want a greater say in the workings of the European Union. They want to see more participative formats such as Citizens' Consultations or Citizens' Dialogues with the relevant responsible politicians. One idea is the transmission on all public TV channels and YouTube of regular live discussions with experts and citizens from different Member States.

Reaction from politicians

Heiko Maas and Ekaterina Zaharieva can well understand the desire of citizens for further citizen participation. They believe it is important to have a visible follow-up on citizens' proposals at the European level.



More European cohesion: Do we need more solidarity in Europe?

From the citizens' point of view, it is important to develop a common European identity to strengthen cohesion inside Europe and genuine solidarity with the citizens of other countries. The citizens also discussed other socio-political challenges such as old-age poverty.

Promoting a common identity through cross-border encounters

Facilitating direct personal contacts and face-to-face cross-border encounters among people from all walks of life is an essential factor in increasing solidarity and cohesion. Opportunities to experience Europe personally must be created. Some of the possibilities for new impulses are a voluntary European Year or a European Exchange for cross-border internships and voluntary service. Existing structures such as the Erasmus Programme or cross-border encounters in cultural and sporting contexts should be promoted more intensively and extended to reach a wider target group. Among the possibilities are an Erasmus Programme for apprentices and senior citizens, or the expansion of the Interrail scheme. In addition to face-to-face meetings and the broadening of personal horizons, the use of European symbols – for example in passports or ID cards - can also reinforce a sense of common identity.

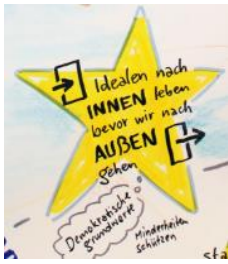
Combating old-age poverty and the shortage of skilled labor

Citizens are concerned about old-age poverty and the shortage of skilled labor, particularly in rural areas. The EU can introduce a number of measures to reduce the risk of old-age poverty. Firstly, financial aid must be given to needy pensioners to allow them to grow old with dignity. Furthermore, the

EU must expedite the harmonization of medical supplies and provide financial support for the adaptation of living accommodation as required in the case of illness or old age. Besides training programs for volunteers and family members in the care sector, sensitizing young people to the attractions of emergency services would be a good way to tackle the shortage of skilled labor, especially in rural areas. Incentives to attract doctors to work in country side areas, such as EU programs and bursaries, could also be created. Other topics discussed by the citizens were the tensions between national social security systems and intra-European solidarity, and the issue of how much cohesion is necessary within Europe.

Reaction from politicians

Although the EU is not responsible for the pension system, the Foreign Ministers are willing to take the problem of old-age poverty with them and consider what can be done at the EU level to combat senior citizens' poverty more effectively, e.g., in education and training. They also want to reduce the wage gap between the EU states and promote the cause of a European minimum wage. Heiko Maas explained that the topic of an 'EU framework for a European minimum wage' would also be on the European agenda during the upcoming EU Council Presidency.



The role of Europe in the world: What form will it take?

Many problems in the world are a result of inequality. The citizens consider that the EU must pursue a fair trade policy in order to prevent problems caused by social inequity, such as uncontrolled migration. The EU must be strengthened from within to reinforce its external sovereignty.

Promoting a fair trade policy

Consumer standards are at the basis of a fair trade policy. The citizens advocate the introduction of product labelling to sensitize and educate consumers. The new label would evaluate the social, ecological and economic impact of products. This would require the establishment of an independent certification body that would assess criteria such as fair wages, industrial safety, environmental protection and tax payments, and define standards. Initially, the label would be awarded on a voluntary basis and subsequently be made obligatory. In addition, emerging economies should be supported in their efforts to comply with trade agreements. The citizens also demand a firm, sovereign stance of the EU towards other major trading powers such as China and the USA.

Reaction from politicians

With its trade policy, the EU can influence EU-based companies that produce abroad and thereby contribute to the promotion of fair trade. For these companies, the EU is already working on a label that takes similar product criteria into account, such as its participative footprint. Sanctions would be imposed in the event of human rights violations.

Strengthening Europe from within for external strength

Europe must adopt a stronger role in the world, but will only succeed if the EU becomes stronger from within. This could be achieved by expanding the competency brief of the European Public Prosecutor. In future, it would not only be able to intervene in fiscal matters, but also in questions of fundamental civil rights. The citizens are critical of “opting-out” and demand equal application of obligations and rights in and by all EU Member States. Citizens and civil society should be given access to the public prosecutor and processes should be simplified. Inner strength should also be achieved through more intensive cooperation in foreign policy and security. The citizens demand the abolition of the Member States’ veto rights and the introduction of a system under which legislation is decided by a majority decision. The EU’s legitimacy must also be reinforced by giving the European Parliament more supervisory power. Moreover, the EU must monitor the Member States more closely and, as a last resort, impose sanctions.

Reaction from politicians

Foreign Ministers Heiko Maas and Ekaterina Zaharieva advocate an expansion of the responsibilities and powers of the European Public Prosecutor. However, this must be set in motion by the institutions of the individual nation states. The issue of expanding the powers of the European Public Prosecutor will also be taken up during Germany’s EU Council presidency.



Creating socially compatible progress and sustainability: How can Europe become more sustainable?

According to the citizens, only a socially compatible and fair European sustainability policy will work.

Promoting green businesses and supporting employees

As concrete measures, the European Union should give incentives to prioritize the setting up of green businesses in economically underdeveloped regions, and supporting the companies by reducing bureaucracy. Employees who lose their jobs because of the restructuring or closure of CO₂-intensive industries must also receive support and, where necessary, retraining from the EU. However, the best way of initiating a complete rethink in terms of sustainability – and also digitalization – would be to provide more educational opportunities from primary school to university level. In addition, citizens demand further education at municipal/community level, for instance in the field of IT. Citizens consider it important to have a common European approach to education and training procedures.

Green Deal: Promoting innovation – preventing waste

Under the heading of the “Green Deal”, citizens are also expecting short-term measures to encourage innovation and investment as a means of reducing the wastage of natural resources, such as sharing models and new packaging concepts. In this context, transparency is one important aspect for citizens. One concrete proposal is the introduction of a “sustainability traffic light” to improve consumer information and guidance. The citizens demanded a Europe-wide reduction of the price gap between conventional and organic products. All citizens

should be able to afford organic products, and corresponding agricultural subsidies could be introduced in a bid to achieve this aim. European platforms for the exchange of knowledge, or for companies and investors to pool their resources, as well as financial support for startups, are equally important aspects of the Green Deal as measures to reduce the risk of EU Member States being at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis companies based in non-EU countries.

Reaction from politicians

The German and Bulgarian Foreign Ministers both stated that the Green Deal is given high priority in the EU. Increasing investment in innovation and research is at the very top of the agenda. However, the Foreign Ministers also warned that the financial backing of innovation and sustainability also presents a challenge. Due to various conflicting interests, the current negotiations on the EU’s long-term financial framework are difficult. The root of one such conflict is the subsidization of organic farming. Farmers are demanding subsidies not only for organic agriculture, but also for traditional, conventional farming. In an attempt to lend more weight to demands for more innovation and sustainability in the negotiations, the Foreign Ministers asked the citizens to become involved – by forming working groups, for example. Input and concrete proposals from citizens would expedite the treatment of these topics at European level.

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