

European Conference
**The European Union and the Promise of Democracy:
What can Citizenship Education and Civil Society contribute?**

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Input

Workshop 1
**Creating a bottom-up Europe: Can citizenship education
interact or co-operate with civil society movements?**

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The Citizens Pact

A fundamental part of the work of European Alternatives has been dedicated to consulting citizens across Europe on different issues, finding common threads across countries, linking citizens initiatives and groups across the EU, and empowering citizens to act collectively and transnationally on their shared demands.

The Citizens Manifesto is the result of a three-year process of popular consultations across Europe. It has involved thousands of Europeans who were asked to elaborate policy proposals, which in their views should constitute the primary focus of the work of the next European Parliament and Commission.

The consultation process began in six countries: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. Six macro areas in which more integration was sought by the European institutions - through the Stockholm Programme that had been launched in 2009 - were identified. These were labour and workers' rights; the rights of Roma people and LGBT minorities; the rights of migrants and asylum seekers; freedom of expression and media pluralism; and legality and the fight against corruption and organised crime. Each country hosted three citizens' panels in three different cities on three different topics. The methodology implemented was based on the technique called "World Café". This method, used by local governments in many countries, consisted in inviting citizens to a welcoming venue set-up as a series of round tables with a maximum of 15 seats at each table. At each of these tables a pre-identified policy issue of importance to citizens was discussed for a short time (maximum 45 minutes) by the citizens themselves, with a table moderator organising but not leading the discussion. Citizens were then invited to join another table to further develop the thoughts and ideas generated in previous rounds.

After a first session on brainstorming, participants were invited not only to discuss problems relating to the issues they care about, but also to think about possible **solutions** they would implement if they were the decision-makers. At the end of each forum, dozens of citizens-led proposals were collected. In each city we worked with several local partners who ensured that the topics discussed made sense locally and who extend the invitation to their existing networks of local contacts. Each forum took place in the local language.

In the second part of the year, six transnational forums were organised, one in each of the six countries and on one of each of the six macro themes. The most active participants of each of the three local forums on a certain topic were invited to attend these meetings, together with other stakeholders, activists, practitioners and academics from all across Europe. The various proposals that had emerged previously were translated in English and further elaborated.

Common and **concrete action plans were born out of this process**, such as the European Initiative for Media Pluralism, which aims to collect 1 million signatures across Europe on the issue of media pluralism. Or the international campaign “Open Access”, which demands access by journalists and civil society to detention centres for migrants. Both of these are currently on going Europe-wide campaigns that mobilise citizens and citizen groups transnationally. The process behind the manifesto has isolated these groups, refined their demands to make the compatible with concrete requests for legislative changes at EU level, empowered them with know-how on EU campaigning tools (the ECI, the European Parliament Committee on Petitions, etc.), and then worked with them to get their action off the ground. We consider this a process of “enacting European citizenship”, whereby citizens “**learn by doing**” and activate themselves politically at European level.

In 2012, those involved in the process of the previous year, plus many more who joined afterwards, met in Rome for a transnational forum to kick-start the second year of this process. Attended by more than 700 people from across Europe, this forum focused on a Europe-wide strategy to defend democracy, work, income and common goods. Rather than focusing on the Stockholm Programme, the work of 2012 was inspired by the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Aside from the six issues discussed in the previous year, roundtable citizens’ panels were also organised on new forms of democracy and participation as well as the struggle for common goods. The process gathered momentum, as it managed to attract the interest of those involved in **the protest movement**, which was happening across Europe, from Puerta del Sol in Madrid to the Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt.

Hundreds of representatives of civil society organisations met in Brussels in December to present the results of their consultations to MEPs. The result of this meeting was the creation of a Citizens Pact for European Democracy. This took the form of a double pact. On one hand, this was a pact among citizens, who despite being active in different geographic or thematic areas agreed to combine their struggles in a request for more democracy and more participation. On the other hand, this was a pact between citizens and the only democratically elected institution of the EU, the European Parliament.

2013 witnessed the fine-tuning of this process leading to the Citizens Manifesto, containing a 4-page preamble and 80-pages of concrete policy alternatives. After a final series of participatory panels in eight countries (Slovakia and Germany joined the ranks of countries hosting panels), all the proposals collected in the previous three years were collected on the website **www.citizenspact.eu**, where online visitors made additional proposals and voted for the proposals they perceived as most important.

In the second half of the year, eight research workshops were organised in eight different countries. The aim of these workshops was to translate those proposals that could realistically fall under the current or possible competences of the EU into legally sound policy proposals. Each workshop was attended by five experts in a specific field. We defined twelve central policy areas and asked each committee to select and elaborate up to five proposals per topic. These led to the development of 53 policy proposals.

Before merging these proposals into one document, we believed it was necessary to consult the people of Europe one more time, with the aim of including as many people as possible.

Rather than inviting people to come to our events, we decided to go and find them where they already were: train stations, streets, squares and parks in cities across Europe.

Through this process that came to be known as (Mani)fest, the proposals were translated in ten languages and printed and organised in different thematic folders. Stands were put up in ten cities, including in countries that had not previously hosted any related event, such as the Netherlands or Poland. Passers-by were approached with flash cards or dices with each of the twelve topics and asked which should be the priority area of work for the EU next year. They were given the folder relating to their topic of choice and were invited to choose one proposal and vote for it. To be as inclusive as possible, people who would not be able to vote at the EP elections, such as migrants or teenagers, or people who were unlikely to vote, such as Roma beggars or homeless people, were approached and encouraged to vote.

Finally, in October 2013, a group of people who had been active in the development of the proposals met in Berlin with the challenging task of summarising three years and hundreds of pages of participatory work in a short document containing the key principles. This was achieved and a 4-page Manifesto drafted. The Citizens Manifesto was presented in front of hundreds of Europeans, who further advised on how to reformulate certain concepts or rephrase certain ideas.

The Manifesto will be sent to those running for European Parliamentary elections in 2014, as well as used as a concrete handbook to continue linking together citizen groups across Europe. In April 2014 we will travel to 18 European countries by organising 8 “caravan-journeys” to bring the manifesto to life with citizen groups across the EU. European Alternatives wants to be where the people are, and believes that citizenship education, especially European citizenship education, is inseparable from the activation of **citizenship practices** at transnational level.

To find out more:

www.citizenspact.eu

www.euroalter.com