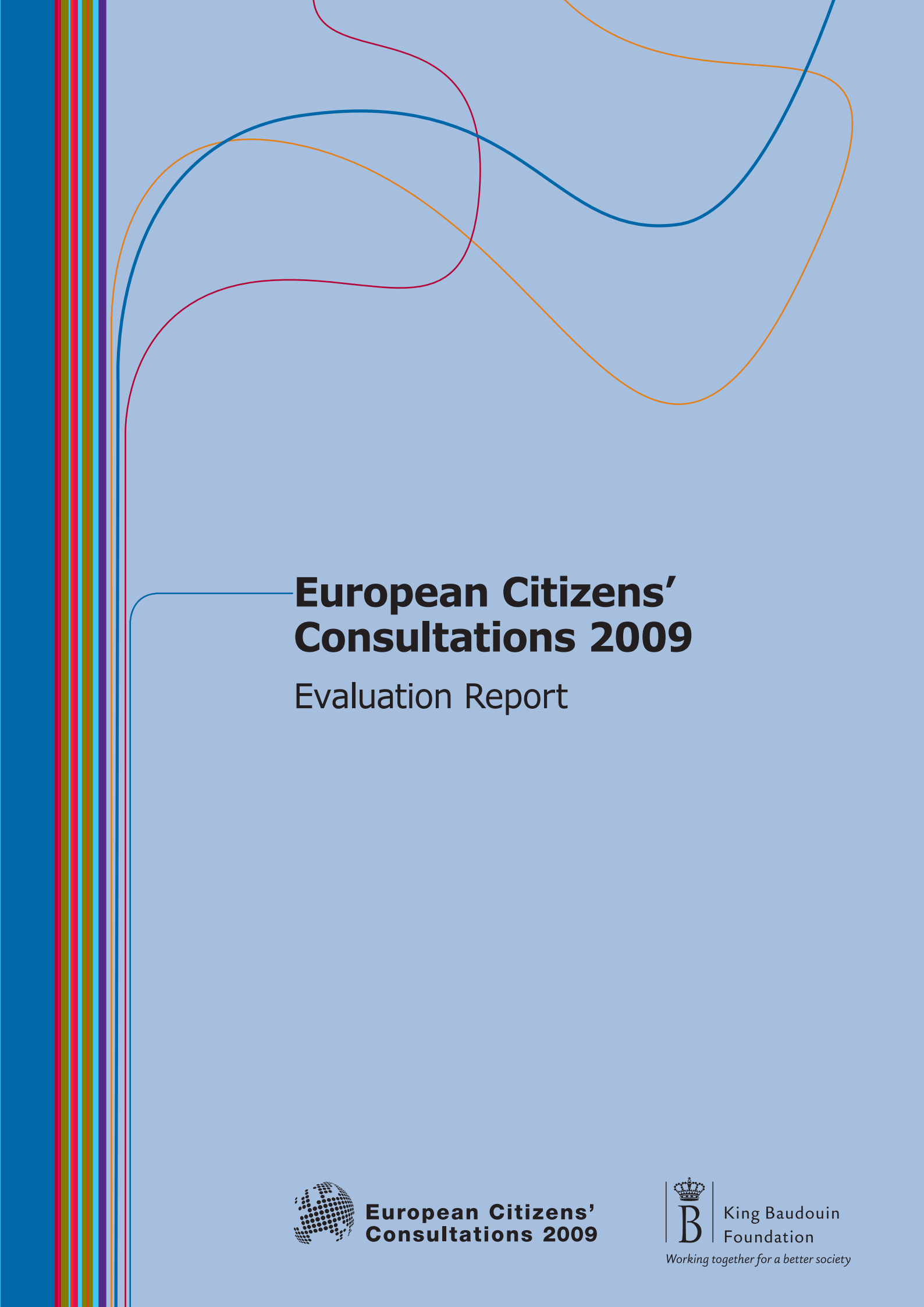




European Citizens' Consultations 2009

Evaluation Report



**European Citizens'
Consultations 2009**



King Baudouin
Foundation

Working together for a better society

European Citizens' Consultations 2009

Evaluation Report

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Commissioned by the King Baudouin Foundation, Brussels, Belgium



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Consultations 2009**



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COLOPHON

European Citizens' Consultations

Evaluation Report. European Citizens' Consultations 2009

A publication of the King Baudouin Foundation
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GRAPHIC CONCEPT LAYOUT PRINT ON DEMAND

PuPiL
Jean-Pierre Marsily
Manufast-ABP, a non-profit, special-employment enterprise

This publication can be downloaded free of charge from www.kbs-frb.be
A printed version of this electronic publication is available free of charge:
order online from www.kbs-frb.be, by e-mail at publi@kbs-frb.be or call King
Baudouin Foundations' Contact Center +32-70-233-728, fax + 32-70-233-727

LEGAL DEPOSIT: ISBN-13: EAN: ORDER NUMBER:

D/2848/2010/16
978-90-5130-701-6
9789051307016
2017

August 2010

With support of the European Commission under its "Debate Europe" programme
and foundations including Compagnia di San Paolo, Robert Bosch Stiftung, ING
and funders at national level.

CONTENTS

Executive summary.....	5
Research Group	7
1. Approach	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Evaluation criteria.....	9
1.3 Methods used for the evaluation	10
1.3.1 Evaluation surveys	10
1.3.2 Media analysis.....	11
1.3.3 Members of European Parliament	11
1.3.4 Online process.....	12
2. Results	13
2.1 Objectives of the European Citizens' Consultations project	13
2.2 Basic design of the project and main process	15
2.3 The National Citizens' Consultations	17
2.4 The basic design: quality of the process	18
2.4.1 External fairness	18
2.4.2 Internal fairness.....	20
2.4.3 Competence of the citizens	21
2.4.4 Transparency	24
2.4.5 Efficiency	28
2.4.6 Impact	29
2.4.7 Multivariate analysis of impact by Evdokia Xekalaki	31
2.4.8 Conclusion	34
2.5 External actors and the role of the websites	35
2.5.1 Media coverage by Miriam Freudenberger	35
2.5.2 The role of MEPs in the national consultations by Martin Karlsson	37
2.5.3 The role of the websites in the ECC 2009 by Raphael Kies and Stephanie Wojcik	40
3. Conclusions	47
Appendix A External Fairness	49
Appendix B Internal Fairness	50
Appendix C Competence of the citizens	52
Appendix D Transparency	55
Appendix E Efficiency	58
Appendix F Impact	60
Appendix G Impact: multivariate approach	64
Appendix H The role of MEPs in the national consultations	66
Appendix I The role of the web sites in the ECC 2009	67

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates the European Citizens Consultations 2009 (ECC 2009), which brought together randomly selected citizens from all 27 EU Member States to discuss key challenges facing the EU. The question discussed by the 1,635 participants in ECC 2009, and the wider public during the online phases, was: what can the EU do to shape our social and economic future in a globalised world? This evaluation of ECC 2009 is mainly based on an analysis of questionnaires completed by participants on the basis of five criteria. The main findings in relation to each criterion are summarised below.

Quality of the process and its impact on the selected citizens

- 1. Fairness: 'External'** fairness requires that all groups in the population have an equal opportunity to participate in the process. The evaluators conclude that selection procedure for participants in ECC 2009 was a clear improvement on ECC 2007 and that sufficient demographic diversity was obtained (apart from a 'bias' towards the higher-educated in some countries). 'Internal' fairness demands that the process offers fair conditions to all participants. A large majority of participants in most countries felt that the facilitators did a good job, that different opinions were accepted, that they were able to disagree openly in the group, and that they were given equal opportunities to speak and to influence the recommendations. Overall, the evaluators conclude that fair conditions and equal opportunities prevailed to a large extent.
- 2. Competence of the citizens:** This relates to a sufficient level of communicative and issue-related proficiency; i.e. the citizens' ability to assess the consequences of their preferences in relation to different options and measures, and to exchange norms, values or emotional expressions. For most indicators, in most countries, participants' competence level was very high. They had a solid information base – supported by fact sheets and experts, were attentive to each other, could express themselves adequately and were not just followers but responsible decision-makers in their own right. They were therefore very well qualified for their role.
- 3. Transparency:** This demands that all methods, proceedings and rules, and the results produced, are openly communicated to everyone involved. The report says participants deliberated in a well thought-out and converging process, and received guidance and instructions whenever necessary. It also concludes that participants' perceptions of the ECC's key objectives partly reflected the objectives set by the organisers. The information available to participants was also judged positively.

4. Efficiency: This concerns the relation between effort (time, money, etc.) and results. The survey results suggest a very high level of efficiency: with the exception of the time available, positive judgments of 85% or higher were recorded.

5. Impact: ECC participants were somewhat disappointed with the level of media interest, but were much more positive about their personal impact. A large majority said that, as a result of participating in the ECC, they learned a lot about the EU, had changed their opinion because of the discussions, and more than two-thirds felt more European. They also followed EU politics in the media and discussed EU politics with family and friends. However, participants had rather low expectations about their chances of influencing decision-makers.

Overall, the findings reaffirm and consolidate the importance of citizens' debates like the European Citizens' Consultations in helping to educate people about issues, making them think, exchanging ideas and forming a basis for a fuller development of their opinions/attitudes. The evaluators conclude that ECC 2009 encouraged the development of a European public sphere not only through the national consultations and the European Citizens' Summit, but also through the websites.

Role of media and politicians

The report also examined the role of the media and politicians in ECC 2009, based on an analysis of media coverage in 15 countries (plus a more in-depth analysis of coverage in Germany and Sweden), and a survey of politicians who took part in panel debates with participants at the end of each consultation.

Media: Traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television, and new media such as the Internet did report on the national consultations, but the coverage varied greatly from country to country. The two in-depth studies suggest coverage was mainly in local and regional media and focused on the national event, describing the process or interviews with participants. There was less interest in the content or the final results. It seems that the novelty of this type of citizen participation was regarded as more important than the political content and the political implications of the results.

Role of MEPs in the national consultations: The percentage of participants expressing trust in the European Parliament was higher after the consultation than before, but fell back to approximately the initial level three months later. This suggests participation had a positive effect in the short term, but this did not persist over time. While the response rate to the politicians' survey was very low (17.5%), it nevertheless indicates that the ECCs had some impact on their communicative practices. The majority were not (very) satisfied with the relevance of the topics discussed or the recommendations, but two-thirds agreed that such projects are useful for strengthening political representation in the EU. It seems they support such initiatives not because they have an advisory function, but rather as a useful forum to interact with citizens.

The role of the online debate in ECC 2009

The online informative and interactive tools used in ECC 2009 for the first time – a European web portal subdivided into 28 national websites open to all EU citizens – aimed to increase both the visibility and impact of the project, offer an opportunity for online discussion and allow the wider public to contribute to the debate. This was particularly useful for increasing awareness of the project among the general public. There were, however, important differences in traffic and active usage between the national websites. The communication campaign on the Internet was efficient in mobilising European association networks and social networking portals, but communication in the mass media was less prominent.

RESEARCH GROUP

As part of the European Citizens' Consultations 2009, an academic research group was formed in September 2008 with the following participants: Miriam Freudenberger (University of Mannheim, Germany), Martin Karlsson (University of Örebro, Sweden), Raphael Kies (University of Luxembourg), Monique Leyenaar (Radboud University, the Netherlands), Kees Niemöller (Radboud University and P&D Analytics), Tanguy Vanloqueren (Foundation for Future Generations; Belgium), Stéphanie Wojcik (University of Paris-Est Creteil) and Evdokia Xekalaki (Athens University). The group met several times to discuss the design of the research and the content and wording of the questionnaires. The data entry was done by the Institute for Applied Social Sciences of the Radboud University Netherlands. Kees Niemöller was responsible for the construction of the database that is used in this report.

The members of the research group have all submitted reports for this evaluation. Miriam Freudenberger is responsible for the media analyses (par. 2.5.1.), Marin Karlsson conducted the research on the role of the MEPs (par.2.5.2.), Raphael Kies and Stephanie Wojcik analysed the role of the websites in ECC 2009 (par.2.5.3.) and Evdokia Xekalaki did a multivariate analysis of the impact of ECC 2009 (par. 2.4.6). Monique Leyenaar en Kees Niemöller are responsible for the other paragraphs and edited the research report.

1. APPROACH

1.1 Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the European Citizens' Consultations 2009. Its main focus is on the methodological concept, design and implementation of the process during the 27 national consultations.

The evaluation is primarily based on an empirical analysis of survey data from participants collected before, during and after the national consultations. However, not only the experiences of, and the consequences for, the citizens themselves (internal impact) are examined. Some attention is also paid to relevant actors and stakeholders outside the consultation process (external impact).

This emphasis on the national consultations and their main actors (the participating citizens), supplemented by some external actors (European politicians, media and online participants), is inspired by the available data. Other aspects of ECC 2009 are evaluated by other parties.¹ For reasons of comparability, the same evaluation criteria are used as in the evaluation of ECC 2007.

The evaluation began in 2008 with the creation of the group of academic researchers who were responsible for the design of the study and for the questionnaires, and was completed in February 2010 with the submission of this final report.²

1.2 Evaluation criteria

The evaluation is mainly based on a set of five criteria. To facilitate a comparison with the final evaluation report of the European Citizens' Consultations of 2007,³ we used the same four criteria and added one new criterion – impact. These criteria are:⁴

Fairness

This criterion requires that all relevant and affected actor groups should have an equal opportunity to participate in the process (external or structural fairness). It also demands that the process offers fair conditions to all participants (internal or procedural fairness). Aspects of fairness include, for instance, the conditions and constraints of the process, the rules and provisions regulating the dialogue and, explicitly, the development of agreement. These rules should be defined beforehand and consensually.

¹ *Evaluation of the Plan D / Debate Europe citizen consultation projects. Final Report (version 1.4), September 2009. Euréval, Matrix/Rambóll-Management.*

² *The activities of the research group were funded by the King Baudouin Foundation.*

³ *European Citizens' Consultations Project. Final Evaluation Report. Rüdiger Goldschmidt, Ortwin Renn and Sonja Köppel. Stuttgarter Beiträge zur Risiko- und Nachhaltigkeitsforschung no. 8, March 2008.*

⁴ *Ibid, p. 1-2 For the online phase other evaluation criteria were used.*

Competence

This criterion refers to a sufficient level of communicative and issue-related proficiency. Participants should be able to assess the consequences of their preferences with respect to different decision options and measures. Competence also includes the ability to communicate and to exchange norms, values or emotional expressions.

Transparency

This criterion demands that all methods, proceedings and rules – and the results produced – are openly communicated to all persons involved. The optimal result is the right balance between availability of information (quantity as well as quality) and mutual understanding of all viewpoints.

Efficiency

This criterion concerns the relation between effort (time, money, etc.) and result. The efficient use of all resources, including the participants' time is of major importance for (subjective) satisfaction with the process.

Impact

This criterion refers to the impact that participating in the national consultations had on the participants. The whole process not only resulted in the collective recommendations, but had some impact on the individuals as well. Changes in attitudes and behaviour towards the European Union could indicate the depth of the deliberative process for the citizens.

Additionally results are presented concerning the external impact, for example on the media and on the attitudes of MEPs.

1.3 Methods used for the evaluation

The evaluation has been based mainly on surveys among the participants in the European Citizens' Consultations. Separate analyses of media coverage, the role of MEPs, and participation in – and quality of – the online process, were also conducted.

1.3.1 Evaluation surveys

The data collection through surveys followed an elaborated four-wave design:

2- 3 weeks before national consultations	Start of national consultations	End of national consultations	3 month after national consultations
France Germany Greece Ireland Luxembourg Malta Netherlands Sweden	27 EU countries	27 EU countries	France Germany Greece Ireland Luxembourg Malta Netherlands Sweden
N=550	N=1635	N=1635	N=550

At the start of the national consultations and at their end (one day later), questionnaires were distributed and completed by the participants in all 27 EU countries. The questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a 100% response.⁵ Altogether, 1635 questionnaires were returned and used for the analysis in this report. As the number of participants depended on the size of the country's population, the number of respondents varied between Member States: 100 or more in Germany, Poland, the UK and France; and 30 people or fewer in Estonia, Latvia, Cyprus, Malta and Luxembourg and 50 or less for all other countries.

In addition to this main body of data, two surveys were distributed among the participants in eight countries, the first two-to-three weeks before the national consultations and the second three months after the National European Citizens' Summit. A total of 550 participants were included in some of the more detailed analyses. The different waves of questionnaires contained items related to each phase of the process. The core questions focused on the perceived objectives of the undertaking and the personal reasons for participating, as well as on assessments of the process itself, such as fairness and transparency or satisfaction with the results and the estimated impact of the ECC project.

In general, most questions were statements in either the fully agree, agree, disagree, fully disagree format, or the often, sometimes, rarely, never format. In the first and fourth waves, other formats were used as well, as measurements of characteristics of more academic interest.⁶

1.3.2 Media analysis

In this type of deliberate process, media attention is important to inform the public not only about the event, but also about the issue discussed by the participants in the ECCs. As only relatively few citizens can actually participate, the media are an important vehicle for communicating with the general public and thus including more citizens in the process.

For that reason, at the start of each phase in the ECC process, press releases were issued in all 27 countries to both the written media and television and radio broadcasters. All national coordinators were asked to collect press clippings and to report on radio and television items about the ECC.

All this material has been analysed by Miriam Freudenberger (University of Mannheim, Germany). Because of language difficulties, the media reports from only 15 countries were included in her overall analysis. She looked at the number of items and the variety of media reporting on the ECC. For two countries – Germany and Sweden – a more thorough content analysis was conducted.

In Germany, the search period was December 1st 2008 – April 30th 2009 and May 2nd – May 18th 2009 and included Internet coverage (46 items), the German national press and the regional press in Berlin, where the ECC was held (39 items). In Sweden, the in-depth analysis was carried out by Martin Karlsson of the University of Örebro (Sweden) and covered the written press, radio and television, for the period October 1st 2008 – March 29th 2009 (19 items).

1.3.3 Members of European Parliament

Apart from involving citizens in European policy-making, the ECC 2009 also aimed to strengthen the interaction between policy-makers and citizens, and to promote debate between them.

For this reason, a panel debate with MEPs and candidates in the upcoming European elections was part of the design. At the end of each national ECC, the recommendations were presented to the politicians on the panel and they were asked to comment on the proposal that they liked most and the one they liked least.

⁵ Occasionally a participant left the consultation prematurely, mainly because they did not feel well. This type of attrition, if at all, was very minor.

⁶ These data will be used for more scientific purposes and the results will be published elsewhere.

The evaluation of the role of the MEPs and candidates in the ECCs is based on the survey among citizens and a separate survey among the politicians who participated in the panels.

Martin Karlsson of the University of Örebro conducted this part of the research, which focused on two questions: whether the ECC succeeded as a tool to produce policy recommendations for EU policy-makers and whether it was able to promote a higher level of trust in EU institutions and in EU politicians among European citizens. Regrettably, only very few participating politicians (17 out of 97) returned the survey, a fact that has to be taken into account when interpreting the data.

1.3.4 Online process

The Internet played an important role in ECC 2009. In each phase, online discussions were made possible through a European web portal subdivided into 28 national websites (Belgium had both a Flemish and French site). The sites were accessible to the general public in some phases, and only to the citizens participating in the national consultations at others.

Designed by the French firm La Netscouade, the national websites were structured in order to provide useful information, allow debates and elaborate propositions on which all the registered users were invited to vote. The 28 websites were managed by national partners under the responsibility of the French information agency Toute L'Europe. At the end of the process, the European portal was entrusted to the European Movement to organise and advertise the regional meetings.

The general objective of whole procedure was to link up the opinions and views posted on the websites with the face-to-face discussions at the national consultations in March 2009.

The analysis of the online process was carried out by Raphaël Kies (University of Luxembourg) and Stéphanie Wojcik (University of Paris-Est Créteil, France), with the collaboration of Romain Badouard (University of Technology of Compiègne, France). The analysis reports first on the traffic on all 28 ECC websites and the ECC web portal, followed by a presentation of the profiles and activities of forum users for all 28 ECC websites. The deliberative quality of the online discussions is then evaluated using a sample of 11 ECC websites, as are the volume of online proposals (for all the websites) and their quality (for the same sample of 11 sites). The analysis is based on the surveys sent to participants at the national consultations, on a traffic analysis of all the national websites and the ECC web portal, and, for a selection of national websites, on content analyses of the debates and propositions.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Objectives of the European Citizens' Consultations project⁷

The project in brief

In the run-up to the 2009 Euro elections, the European Citizens' Consultations 2009 brought together randomly selected citizens from all 27 EU Member States to discuss key challenges facing the EU, first with each other and then with policy-makers.

ECC 2009 focused on the issues that were of greatest concern to EU citizens. 'Family and social welfare' was among the topics chosen by citizens for in-depth discussion at ECC 2007 and recent Eurobarometer opinion polls showed that social and economic issues remained high on the public's agenda. For this reason, the ECC 2009 opted to focus the following question: 'What can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?' As the EU institutions work on a post-2010 successor to the Lisbon Agenda for economic growth and competitiveness, ECC 2009 was designed to provide timely and relevant input for decision-makers.

ECC 2009 had six objectives:

- **Promoting interaction between citizens and policy-makers:** fostering debate between citizens and policy-makers in the run-up to – and after – the European elections;
- **Citizens as policy advisers:** feeding citizens' opinions into the political debate at both European and national levels;
- **Citizen participation as a policy instrument of the future:** mainstreaming trend-setting and long-term-oriented citizens' consultations at the European level;
- **Closing the gap between the EU and its citizens:** bringing the EU closer to citizens and citizens closer to the EU;
- **Increasing the general public's interest in the EU:** generating substantial media coverage of the dialogue between the EU and its citizens;
- **Partnerships in participation:** deepening European co-operation within existing civil society networks and their respective partner networks, as well as with e-participation providers.

⁷ Source: King Baudouin Foundation (project coordination, co-funding and project lead).

More than 1,600 randomly selected citizens, reflecting their country's demographic composition, attended National Citizens' Consultations in all the EU's 27 Member States in March 2009. These identical conferences, held simultaneously in three groups of nine countries at a time over three weekends, were the heart of the ECC process, enabling citizens to discuss issues of common concern with each other and with key national policy-makers. A European Citizens' Summit, with 150 participants drawn from the national consultations, was held in Brussels in May 2009 to finalise a set of European recommendations and present them to EU decision-makers. Throughout the process, the general public was able to participate in the discussions via national websites, giving citizens the opportunity to become involved in the debate on Europe's future. The citizens' recommendations were also discussed with stakeholders, decision-makers and civil society representatives at regional events in autumn 2009.

A consortium of more than 40 independent European partners, including foundations, NGOs, universities and think-tanks implemented the project, with co-funding support from the European Commission under its 'Debate Europe' programme.

Background: What are the European Citizens' Consultations?

ECC 2009 is part of an ongoing process to further develop citizen participation and consultation mechanisms. It builds on ECC 2007, which established a new model for citizen participation as the first pan-European participatory project to involve citizens from all 27 Member States of the EU in the debate on the future of Europe.

ECC 2007 showed how important it is – both for the public and for decision-makers – to give citizens the opportunity to become involved in the processes that shape the EU.

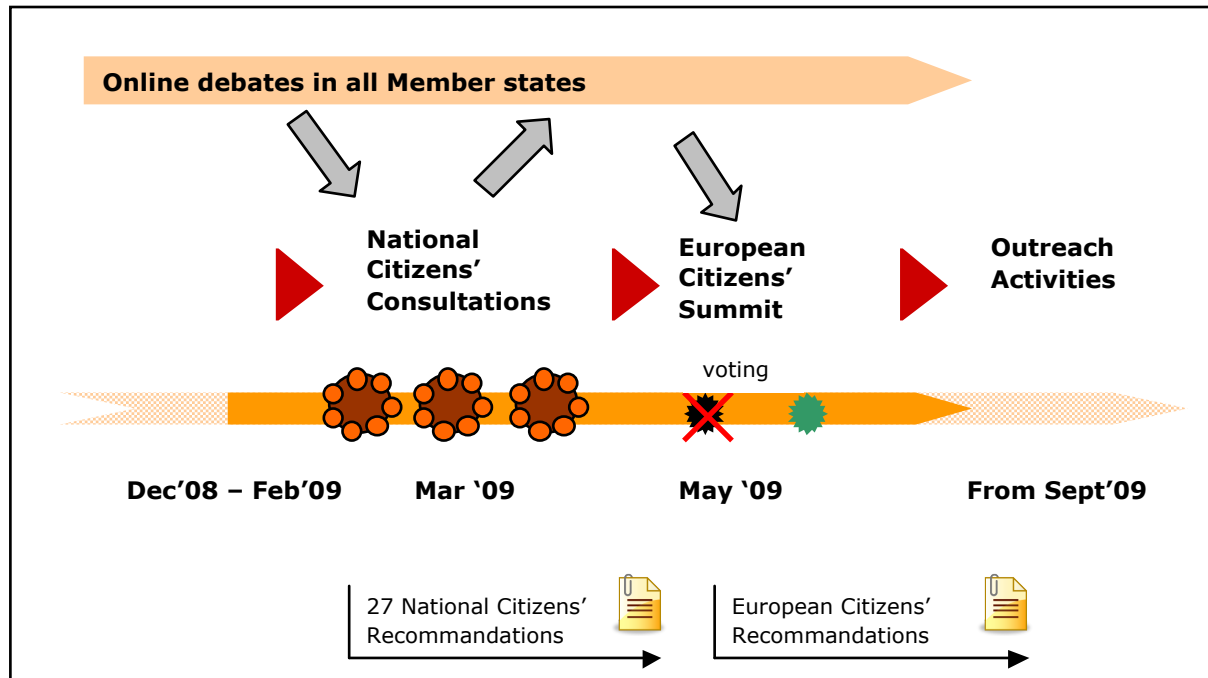
ECC 2009 was not merely a repetition of ECC 2007. It aimed at using the momentum generated by the first series of pan-European citizen participation projects to develop more structured and long-term citizen involvement in EU decision-making processes.

New elements were added to the project, further enhancing its scope, reach and potential:

- An online debate, involving the general public, on the issues to be discussed at the national consultations;
- An internal online forum for participants in the national consultations;
- A focused debate, with the aim of developing comparable European recommendations which could be succinctly summarized and communicated more effectively to policy-makers;
- Greater involvement of policy-makers in the debates at national and European level, with a particular focus on the MEPs newly elected in June 2009;
- A larger final European event, with more citizens participating, to maximise its impact;
- Additional regional outreach activities to ensure that the results of the consultations were disseminated and debated more widely.

2.2 Basic design of the project and main process⁸

ECC 2009 had five main phases, illustrated in the diagram below.



Online debate 1

ECC 2009 officially began on 3 December 2008 under the French EU Presidency. The start of the project was marked by the launch of the 28 national websites through which members of the public could take part in the debate. There, the public were asked to debate their concerns and propose ideas in answer to the question *What can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?* Visitors to the national websites were also able to rank prior contributions, comment on them, make proposals and, above all, engage in a debate with other users.

The national websites also provided visitors with additional information on the wider ECC process across Europe and on activities in their country. Stakeholders and media representatives were also able to become involved in the process, give their input and find out more.

The citizens who had been selected at random to take part in their National Citizens' Consultation were invited to use their national website ahead of the event. They were able to inform and familiarise themselves with the debate and with each other in a special section of the website before meeting in person at their National Citizens' Consultation in March 2009.

National Citizens' Consultations

The National Citizens' Consultations were held simultaneously in three groups of nine countries over three weekends in March 2009, with 30 to 150 randomly selected citizens participating in each one. Citizens were informed about the issues to be discussed through fact sheets and were able to engage in the national online debates in the run-up to the event.

Professional facilitators led participants through a deliberation and dialogue process which ensured that all voices were heard. The top ideas and concerns arising from the national online debate and from the eight

⁸ Ibid.

other countries holding National Citizens' Consultations on the same weekend provided input into the national debates. During the two days of deliberation, citizens worked to draw up a list of ten national recommendations for policy-makers. Although they drew up recommendations nationally, their focus and target audience was the European level and its institutions.

The weekend's events were interlinked in order to ensure an exchange of opinions and views between citizens from different countries. Experts were invited to all events to share their views with citizens and provide them with information.

European as well as national policy-makers, especially MEPs and candidates for the upcoming European elections, were also involved in the process and presented with the results of the national consultations. A panel debate with representatives of the country's main political parties and citizens on their recommendations closed the event.

Online debate 2

The 27 national consultations were followed by an interim online phase, leading up to the European Citizens' Summit held in May 2009. All the 270 national recommendations developed at the 27 National Citizens' Consultations were drawn together, with duplications eliminated, and the synthesised document was then checked by some of the participating citizens. This document was then posted on the ECC website.

Here, during the second online phase, members of the general public were able to comment on and discuss the list, while the more than 1,600 participants in the National Citizens' Consultations voted on the synthesised list of recommendations to choose the top 15.

Ten per cent of the participants were then invited to attend the European Citizens' Summit, where the final list of recommendations was developed further.

European Citizens' Summit

On the first day of the European Citizens' Summit, participants finessed the 15 recommendations and further debated their consequences for policy-makers. Finally, a European report summarising the key economic and social concerns, and the citizens' expectations of EU policy-makers, was developed.

On the second day, this report was presented to – and discussed with – several Presidents of European institutions and leaders of European political parties. Those present were:

Hans-Gert Pöttering, President, European Parliament

José Manuel Barroso, President, European Commission

Mario Sepi, President, European Economic and Social Committee

Wilfried Martens, President, European People's Party

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, President, European Socialist Party

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, President, European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party

Philippe Lamberts, President, European Green Party

Margot Wallström, Vice-President, European Commission

Olivier Chastel, State Secretary of European Affairs, Belgium.

Regional follow-up dialogues

The European Citizens' Summit also marked the start of a comprehensive follow-up process, including regional outreach debates, designed to actively communicate the results to policy-makers at national and European level and to disseminate the results to the broader public and civil society, following the European elections and as a new European Commission was preparing to take office.

Five regional outreach debates were held across Europe between September 2009 and December 2009. They were attended by a wider group of stakeholders, citizens and policy-makers from, in each case, five-to-six Member States.

2.3 The National Citizens' Consultations

The work of the academic research group which was responsible for the collection of relevant data was concentrated on the national events. The evaluation report covers everything associated with the deliberative process around, and during, the national consultations.

Before presenting the analyses, it should be made clear how the deliberative process was structured; in other words, the quality of the question presented to the citizens, how citizens were supposed to approach the question, and rules and procedures were laid down for the participants, and finally, how the final recommendations were agreed upon.

In the literature on citizens' consultations, a number of essentials are highlighted:

- a The question should be clear in its formulation, with a limited well-defined scope;
- b Discussions should be based on balanced and adequate information;
- c Professional moderators should be responsible for the quality of the deliberative process;
- d Acceptable procedures should be used to bring about converging consensus, culminating in useful recommendations.

Ad a. The question in ECC 2009 was *What can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?* Given the wide scope of this question,⁹ which could lead to widely diverging discussions, a funnel format was chosen that aimed at realising convergence from initial loosely formulated individual concerns, through the development of ideas and the creation of headlines summarising groups of ideas, to the drafting of recommendations.

Ad b. Relevant information was brought together in a so-called fact sheet which was sent in advance to the participants in the national ECCs. The fact sheet covered the goals and intentions of the EU with regard to several social and economic issues.

Ad c. At the heart of the deliberative process – the discussions in small groups – well-trained facilitators guided the participants continually. They, and in general everyone involved in the consultations, were equipped with a detailed scenario. Facilitators, other members of staff and the participants therefore knew at all times what was required and how they were supposed to act.

Ad d. In the first phases of the process, participants were invited to voice their concerns and their initial ideas about how to solve these problems. In a later phase, these broad notions were categorised into groups of ideas. A web-based deliberation tool called VoDoO – Voting and Documentation Online – was used for the documentation of outcomes and for the ultimate voting process. This interface followed the design of the national consultations and was used by group facilitators as well as by an editorial team, with different functionalities enabling them to fulfil their separate roles. The group facilitators stored all the results generated by the citizens in their group into one central database. The use of VoDoO made synthesizing the results from the various groups easier: the outputs at table level could be linked to the editorial team, and outcomes – both qualitative (e.g. recommendations) and quantitative (e.g. the number of votes) – could be exported and presented directly to the participants.

⁹ Refer to the more elaborate evaluation of the question in: *Evaluation of the Plan D / Debate Europe citizen consultation projects. Final Report (version 1.4), September 2009. Euréval, Matrix/Rambóll-Management.*

2.4 The basic design: quality of the process

2.4.1 External fairness

The first aspect of the fairness criterion requires all relevant and affected groups in the population to have an equal opportunity to participate in the process. This means that *inclusiveness* is an important criterion in evaluating the sampling procedures. This is not the same as obtaining a representative (based on probability) sample that is a true representation of the population. In a deliberative process, it is important that arguments are represented but not necessarily proportionally to their distribution among the population. In other words, all opinions, preferences and arguments should be at the table. To do so the forum should consist of citizens differing in background.

Compared to ECC07, the selection procedure for participants in the ECC09 clearly improved. This time, the sampling and the recruitment of participants was carried out by agencies selected (and instructed) by B&B Consultant, guaranteeing professionalism and a similar recruitment process in each of the 27 countries. Second, each agency was required to use a strict protocol in order to fulfil quotas for gender, age, professional status and region. The compliance with the general rules of recruitment was constantly monitored by B&B. Finally, test calls to recruited citizens were carried out to verify that the recruitment had been done correctly. In our own surveys, we included additional questions on important background variables, e.g. year of birth rather than three broad age categories, education and social class.

Analysing these characteristics of the participants for each country, it seems that, for most countries, a sufficient demographic diversity was obtained. Below we present a short summary of the data on demographic characteristics.¹⁰

Gender

For the whole of EU, 49% of the participants were female and 51% male. Most countries had more or less the same balance, but in Greece (+12%), Lithuania (+8%) and Estonia (+7%) there was a male surplus, while Slovenia (+11%) and Latvia (+10%) had a female surplus.

Age

The age distribution for all countries over five categories was: 18-29 years (20%), 30-39 years (17%), 40-49 years (20%), 50-59 years (20%), 60 years and older (23%). In some countries, there was a considerable bias towards the older age brackets (e.g. Finland: 36% were over 59 years old), while in some others, the participants were younger than the average (e.g. Portugal: 54% under 40; Slovakia: 52% under 40; Malta: 37% under 30; and Estonia: 35% under 30).

Education

In comparative research, one of the biggest problems is how to measure the participants' level of education, mainly because of the incomparability of different school systems in European countries. In this study a ten-point scale was used, labelled low at the extreme left handside and high at the other extreme. Most respondents had no problem with indicating their (subjective) position; only 14% did not answer the question. It is a well-known phenomenon that the possibility of participating in activities that appeal to political interest and the ability to discuss topics in public attracts far more of those with higher education levels than it does those with lower educational levels. Looking at our data, it is not surprising that such a bias also occurs in the case of the European Citizens' Consultations. Reducing the original scale with ten positions to a scale with five values, 28% chose a position lower than the middle category and 54% a position above the average, while

¹⁰ For detailed analyses we refer to Appendix A.

33% indicated that they considered themselves highly educated. This pattern can be found in all countries. In only in a few countries was the representation of lower-than-average education significantly higher: the Czech Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal and Slovenia. At the opposite extreme, we find a number of countries with higher than average percentages of the highest educated: France (55%), Latvia (50%), Malta (54%), the UK (50%), Romania (45%) and Slovakia (42%). In the other countries, the educational level was more or less balanced among the participants.

Occupation

In social science studies, some characteristics of people are reported to be related and to form a kind of syndrome. Age, income, education, occupation and social class are known to be particularly interdependent. No data on income is available, but in addition to age and education, we can analyse two more variables from this cluster: occupation and social class.

The data on occupation are the least reliable¹¹ because their source – the national reports – did not always use the same categories. Therefore, only a short summary is possible for those countries with a deviating profile. The findings show:

- In Finland, a high percentage of retired people (34%) and students (16%);
- In Slovenia, a high percentage of retired people (37%) and students (17%); a low percentage of employed people (33%) and self-employed (3%);
- In Greece, a high percentage self-employed (36%); a low percentage of students (4%), employed (24%) and retired people (12%);
- In Spain, a high percentage of students (18%); a low percentage of self-employed (4%).

Social class

The data on subjective social class¹² allow us to analyse the overall and country patterns in more detail. The European distribution is comparable to the outcome in many scientific publications. Only 2% of participants positioned themselves in the *upper class*, 18% considered themselves to be *upper-middle class*, the majority label themselves as *middle class* (57%), and 10% belonged to the *upper-working class* or *working class*.

Substantial differences existed between the countries, especially regarding the size of the upper-middle class, with high percentages in Bulgaria (57%), Belgium (38%), France (37%), Germany (29%) and the Netherlands (31%). Relatively high percentages of working-class citizens were found in Cyprus (19%), Italy (20%), Slovenia (28%) and Spain (28%). Most remarkable was Bulgaria, where 65% of the participants considered themselves upper or upper-middle class – far higher than in any other country. In the other countries, the class distribution was according to expectations.

Conclusion

For some countries, the sample was – for one or more variables – somewhat biased, but for a majority of the countries, the profile of the sample is clearly acceptable, with exceptions for the presence of lower-educated citizens. The sampling process had been clearly improved compared to the procedure used in ECC07.

In future, education should also be included in the required quotas and age should be measured more accurately. Furthermore, differences of opinion on the topics of the consultation could enhance the inclusiveness of the group participants and thus the quality of the whole process.¹³

11 For eight countries the data are missing or incomplete.

12 Subjective because respondents were asked to choose the social class they think they belong to.

13 To be able to measure opinion changes however the charge (topic) of the consultation has to be somewhat more limited in scope and more concrete.

2.4.2 Internal fairness

The second aspect of the fairness criterion demands that the process offers *fair conditions* to all participants. In this section, we will therefore concentrate on aspects of the procedures, and evaluate the conditions and constraints of the process, the rules and provisions regulating the dialogue, and the development of agreement.

More specifically, was there a permissive atmosphere, with equal opportunities for everyone to express opinions and arguments, and did the participants listen to each others' arguments? Our analysis is based on six indicators, summarised in Table 1.¹⁴

Table 1: Indicators of internal fairness (percentages)

	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree
During the discussion all participants had equal speaking opportunities	48	45	5	2
Some participants dominated the discussions	14	35	43	9
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
All participants were given equal opportunities to shape our final recommendations	1	1	24	74
We were able to disagree openly in the group	1	4	26	69
Participants accepted different opinions as part of the deliberations	1	5	30	64
The facilitator managed to give everyone a chance to speak	0	3	11	86

Overall, the events provided fair conditions and equal opportunities for the participants.

In more detail, let us begin with the role of the *facilitator*, the person ultimately responsible for the fairness of the process. Only in 11% of answers were respondents less than completely satisfied, saying that the facilitator sometimes managed to give everyone a chance to speak. These 'partly dissatisfied' citizens were chiefly concentrated in Luxembourg (37%) and the Netherlands (31%). Complete dissatisfaction occurred most often in France (7%) and Portugal (6%). But a large majority of the participants felt that the facilitator did a good job.

Some two-thirds of the respondents said that *disagreement in the group* was accepted, but almost a third thought that this was rarely or only sometimes the case. The latter group were found particularly in Austria (42%), Cyprus (61%), Denmark (55%), France (43%), Luxembourg (37%), Malta (35%), Slovakia (35%) and the UK (42%). Some really dissatisfied participants are mostly found in Estonia (21%) and Denmark (16%). A large majority indicated, however, that different opinions were accepted.

The acceptance of different opinions was a particular problem in Lithuania and Luxembourg (both 17%), and Greece, Poland and Romania (all 12%). Citizens in Portugal, Greece, Poland, Luxembourg and Ireland (more than 40%) were also not completely satisfied: they mentioned that different opinions were only sometimes

¹⁴ For detailed analyses see Appendix B.

accepted. The overall pattern is that people in Luxembourg, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Romania were the most critical about the acceptance of different opinions. Overall, 69% said that they were often able to disagree openly in the group and 26% sometimes.

In general, about 90% (fully) agreed that the participants had *equal speaking opportunities*. Only 2% fully disagreed. Even in Estonia, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania, nobody disagreed with this statement. The biggest exception to this pattern of general satisfaction was Luxembourg, where more than a third of the respondents did not agree with the statement about *equal opportunities for everyone*.

Opinions about the presence of participants who dominated the discussions divide the respondents almost equally. This can only be explained by looking at the different countries. Dominance by some participants was clearly an issue for the Czech Republic (92%!), Lithuania (68%), Luxembourg (63%) and Romania (60%). On the other hand, people in Malta (90%), Greece (73%) and Poland (75%) (fully) disagreed with the statement that some participants dominated the debate.

Turning to the way the recommendations were shaped, only 2% stated that participants were never or only rarely given an *equal opportunity to influence the recommendations*, while 74% said they were often satisfied – and 24% sometimes satisfied – with the possibilities they were given. Citizens in Lithuania, Spain, Romania, Poland and the UK were particularly contented with this part of the process.

Conclusion

As has been illustrated in this section, only a few countries differ significantly from the generally positive pattern in one or more aspects. For example Luxembourg is, in terms of internal fairness, a clear exception. The participants in that country delivered a (very) negative judgment on most aspects.

The conclusion is that fair conditions and equal opportunities prevailed to a large extent.

2.4.3 Competence of the citizens

The competence of citizens relates to a sufficient level of communicative and issue-related proficiency. They should be able to assess the consequences of their preferences with respect to different options and measures. Competence also includes the ability to communicate and to exchange norms, values or emotional expressions. The competence of a person is an important criterion – it is the only one that touches on the *individual* qualities of the participant as a person taking part in a deliberative process such as the ECC consultations.

In practice, the operationalisation of these rather abstract concepts is not straightforward. Unfortunately, objective data about the behaviour of the participants – e.g. through observations by trained observers – is not available. Even more difficult is the question of how one can know what citizens really think about their own behaviour and performance, and that of their colleagues in the group. The data that are available are, therefore, the subjective judgments of the participants themselves.

The questions that participants responded to are indicators of level of knowledge, ability to express one's opinions and views, the role of others, the role of the experts (resource persons) and the deliberative qualities of participants. In Table 2, the statements and responses are summarised.

Table 2: Indicators of individual competence (percentages)¹⁵

	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree
My own knowledge about the topics was sufficient to participate in the discussions	17	66	15	2
The other participants in the consultation listened to me	27	69	3	1
The experts on Europe had too much influence on the whole consultation	5	11	62	22
I was able to express my opinions and arguments adequately	32	62	5	1
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I was able to express my views and they were understood by the other participants of the discussions	1	4	29	65
I introduced a new topic for discussion	7	15	58	20
I hesitated to express my opinions that differed from the general view of the group	52	28	17	3
The more people agreed on a certain point, the more I felt inclined to agree as well	21	30	38	11
I did change my views as a result of the discussions we had at the consultations	11	33	52	4

Knowledge

Overall, 17% of the respondents indicated that they fully agreed with the statement that their knowledge was sufficient to participate in the discussions. Together with the 66% who agreed, the knowledge level is surprisingly high, given the complexity of the question. In some countries, people were even more assured of their knowledge. The highest levels were found in Malta (100%), Poland (95%), Bulgaria (92%) and Lithuania (93%). In three countries, the percentage was markedly lower: Estonia (53%), Latvia (75%) and Hungary (76%).

Others listening

Even more impressive is that almost everyone felt that the other participants listened to them: only 4% disagreed. Even the lowest percentage of agreement, 92% in Finland and Slovakia, was still very high.

Experts

Although not a characteristic of the participants, the role of the experts (resource persons) is part of the competence pattern because they were meant to facilitate the participants' discussions. The statement that was presented to the respondents was phrased in a negative way: i.e in terms of experts having too much influence on the consultation. Altogether, 84% (fully) disagreed, thereby emphasising the important and constructive role the experts played in the whole process. There are only a few instances of countries where

¹⁵ For more detailed analyses see Appendix C.

citizens expressed a relatively negative experience with their experts, notably Luxembourg (43%), Bulgaria (40%) and Denmark (31%).

Expression

Fundamental to the deliberative process is that participants are able and feel free to express their opinions, formulate arguments and take some initiatives. With regard to the ability to *express one's opinions and arguments adequately*, we notice again a very high level of agreement with the statement: a third fully agreed and another 62% agreed; only 6% disagreed. With such a high level of overall agreement, it is not surprising that only a few countries deviate from the general pattern. Countries with a relatively low level of agreement with this statement were Luxembourg (79%), Austria and Latvia (both 83%), particularly when compared with Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania and Malta (all 100%).

Adequate expression of opinion and arguments does not necessarily mean that the other participants were receptive and understood the views put forward. However, Table 2 makes it clear that *understanding by other participants* was at a comparable high level: 65% mentioned that it happened often and another 29% said it happened sometimes.

The last indicator in this category is how often participants *took the initiative* by introducing a new topic for discussion. Almost a quarter indicated that they never or only rarely did so, while 20% often introduced a new topic. In some countries, participants took the initiative less often, such as in Hungary, where people rarely or even never did so (48%), as well as in the Czech Republic (37%), Latvia (34%) and Romania (31%). These percentages seem to indicate that there was a reluctance to take such initiatives. However, not introducing a new topic does not mean that participants were not active in the discussions, so this might not be the best indicator for the competence of citizens.

Deliberative aptitude

The last aspect of competence is people's ability to participate in a deliberative process. Are they inclined to agree with the majority, do they have problems with not conforming to the general opinions of the group, and how far are people inclined to change their views because of others? The last three items in Table 2 can be used as appropriate indicators.

With regard to the problems people experienced over *expressing opinions that differed from the general view of the group*, the percentages show that participants were not meek followers: 80% said that they never or rarely hesitated to follow their own views and only 3% often hesitated.

A closely related indicator is how compliant participants were in *following the common opinion*. Only a small group (11%) often 'jumped on the bandwagon' and more than a third did so sometimes. This means that the other half of the respondents (52%) rarely or never agreed on a certain point just because the majority did so. However, participants in Hungary and Lithuania (both 20%), Latvia and Poland (18%) and above all Slovenia (38%) were more willing than on average to yield to group pressure.

The last indicator, actually *changing one's views* as a result of the discussions at the consultation, is closely related to the previous two items. Changing views, however, can also be interpreted as the mark of a successful deliberative process, so we should be careful when interpreting this indicator. Changing one's mind as a result of listening to the opinions and arguments of others is at the heart of the deliberative process. Participants who are not integrated into the group and do not change their views at all are not really competent in the sense of being 'deliberative'.

In our data, only 4% belonged to that group and for 52%, changing their view was the exception: they did so rarely. On the other hand, a large minority of 44% often or sometimes changed their views as a result of the discussions. Participants never changing their views were most often found in Italy (20%) and Luxembourg (17%), as opposed to Slovenia (16%), Romania (16%) and Ireland (10%), where a relatively large proportion of participants stated that they often had changed their views.

Conclusion

For most indicators, the level of competence of the participants was very high and only in a few countries was it somewhat lower for some aspects, in particular in Luxembourg, Hungary and Latvia. The participating citizens had a solid information base, were attentive to each other, could express themselves adequately and were not just followers but responsible participants in their own right. In terms of deliberative aptitude, citizens had no problems with their role as participants in a process where they had to assess the consequences of their preferences in relation to those of fellow participants.

To sum up, the citizens were, in terms of their competence, very well qualified for their role.¹⁶

2.4.4 Transparency

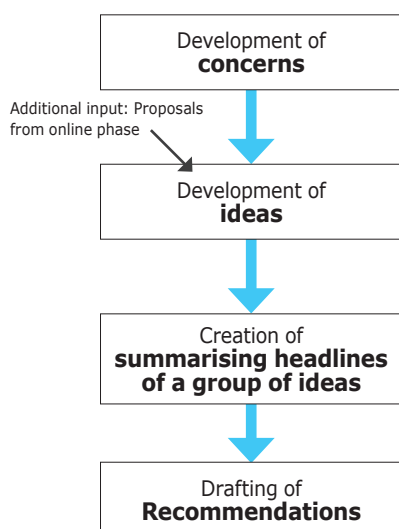
The third main criterion, transparency, demands that all methods, proceedings and rules – and the results produced – are openly communicated to all persons involved.

The optimal result is a balance between availability of information (quantity as well as quality) and mutual understanding of all viewpoints. This implies that it is not only the availability and quality of the information that is important, but also the understanding of the structure and the reasoning behind the whole process of going from an abstract, open formulation to concrete and concise formulated recommendations. Participants' involvement did not begin on the morning of the first day of the consultation. Before coming to the venue, they had their own ideas about the purpose of the consultations and their reasons for participating. Their appraisal of what would be done with the final recommendations was also important.

In this section, analyses will be presented of the perception of the key objectives of the ECC: why people decided to participate, the quality and usefulness of the information provided judgments about the voting procedures, satisfaction with the recommendations and, finally, how their recommendations were received by members of the European Parliament.

Before discussing the results, a short outline of the deliberative process is necessary to understand how participants were guided from mainly unstructured notions (or no notions at all) about the economic and social future of Europe to a set of highly-structured recommendations and their underlying arguments.

The following diagram illustrates the structure of the process, where initial vague notions of concern evolve into purposeful recommendations in steps of increasing convergence.



¹⁶ Higher levels of competence are of course significantly correlated with higher levels of education. The high level of competence is partly due to the bias towards higher levels of education.

To sum up, participants deliberated in a well thought-out and converging process, and received guidance and instructions whenever necessary. Whether this approach was clear and helpful for the citizens will be analysed in this section.¹⁷ But first we look at the phase before the actual consultation was held.

Before the national consultations: key objectives and motivation

Table 3 summarises, for all participants, their reasons for taking part and what they perceived as the key objectives of the European Citizens' Consultations.

Table 3: Key objectives of and motives for participation in the European Citizens' Consultations

Perceived key objectives of European Citizens' Consultations	%	Motives for participating	%
Encourage communication between citizens and policy makers	60	Interesting experience	66
Encourage public debate on European's future	56	Learn more about issues	56
Empower citizens to influence European policies	46	Express my views	47
Contribute to resolving the current problems of the European Union	40	Influence decision makers	29
Strengthen national goals against a unified European policy	24		

The two most important reasons for participating were clearly related to the opportunity for self-expression: experience and learning. Only 29% participated because they saw the ECC as an opportunity to *influence decision-makers*. Most citizens were not very optimistic about their impact on European politics, especially in Luxembourg and Hungary, where very few people (10%) participated because they thought they could influence decision-makers. In some other countries, this was a reason to participate for more people: Austria (55%), Germany (43%), Denmark (42%) and Slovenia (41%).

Remarkable differences are found between countries with regard to participating because it would be an interesting experience. In Hungary, a mere 21% mentioned this and in Bulgaria 40% did. High levels of interest as a motive were found in Belgium (86%), Cyprus (83%) and the UK (85%).

The mean percentage for all four motives was 56% and the pattern for all countries was comparable, with a mean percentage of between 46 and 66%. Only in Hungary was the mean percentage for all four motives only 30%.

For the perceived key objectives of the ECC, a similar pattern can be seen. On average, 45% of the five key objectives cited were chosen and most countries deviated by no more than 10%. The lowest percentage was again found in Hungary (28%)

Further more than 50% of the participants were of the opinion that *encouraging communication and the public debate* were key objectives, and 24% thought that the purpose of the ECC was negative for a unified Europe because it was supposed to strengthen national goals. This opinion was found in particular in the Baltic states – Estonia (60%), Lithuania (51%), Latvia (49%) – and Cyprus (43%).

¹⁷ For more detailed analyses see Appendix D.

Before the national consultations: the information¹⁸

The quality and usefulness of the information provided to participants is another issue and more directly related to the transparency criteria. The information was presented to the participants in a fact sheet that was sent out some time before the national consultations. The participants in all 27 countries were asked several questions about the quality of the fact sheet.

Did they read the fact sheet? More than half (55%) of all participants said that they had read the whole document and 25% read most of it. The document was particularly well-read in Romania (70%), Germany (70%) and the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, Sweden and the UK (two-thirds), in sharp contrast to Greece (15%), France (16%) and Finland and Cyprus (19%).

- Did they understand the fact sheet? Only 8% understood less than half the information, while 63% understood (almost) everything. Again, in some countries, a higher percentages of people said they understood the information: Germany (87%), Estonia (81%), Austria (78%), Bulgaria (75%) and Poland (74%). Significantly lower percentages were found in Finland (18%), Italy (19%), Slovakia (19%), Cyprus and Hungary (both 23%).
- Did they feel more competent than before to discuss the issues introduced in the fact sheet? Not surprisingly, very few participants (3%) claimed that reading it made them feel less competent than before, while 6% felt much more competent after reading it. For 41%, reading the fact sheet did not make any difference, while about half of the citizens felt more confident having read it. This group was considerably larger than average in Bulgaria (87%), Estonia (86%) and Portugal (79%). However, in Italy and Finland, only 10% said they felt more competent after reading the fact sheet.
- Finally, are the differences related to characteristics of the citizens? Here, the answer is yes, at least with regard to some characteristics. Older people read more of the factsheets than younger ones and those with a higher educational level had a better understanding and felt more competent afterwards. There was no significant difference between men and women.

During the national consultations

Two questions¹⁹ pertained to the transparency of the process as such. Information on the voting procedure and on the satisfaction with the final recommendations is only available for the seven countries that were of special interest to the academic research team.

Asked about the voting procedure, only 26% (fully) agreed with the statement *"I found the voting procedure during the ECC not satisfying"*. Most dissatisfied were the participants from Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and in Malta a relatively large proportion of citizens were not satisfied either.²⁰

Nevertheless, in the Netherlands, more people were fully satisfied with the final recommendations than in any other country: 27% fully agreed with the statement *"I am satisfied with the final recommendations in my country"*. Luxembourg showed a more consistent picture: here only 8% fully agreed. In general, participants were satisfied with the final recommendations, especially in Greece, Ireland and Malta, where nobody at all fully disagreed with the statement.

¹⁸ For more detailed analyses see Appendix D.

¹⁹ Other indicators which are available and could be used in the transparency analysis will be used later as indicators for the somewhat related criterion of efficiency.

²⁰ The lack of satisfaction with the voting procedures may also be explained by some technical problems with the voting system that were encountered in these countries.

After the national consultations²¹

At the end of the two-day event, the final recommendations were presented to, and discussed with, a panel of European politicians from the country concerned. The participants from the seven countries questioned some three months afterwards were confronted with a number of statements and asked whether or not they agreed. Table 4 summarises the answers.

Table 4: Evaluation of the reaction of European politicians to the final recommendations.²²

The members of the panel	Fully Agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree
... responded to questions asked by the participants	7	65	19	6
... commented on and discussed the recommendations presented by the participants	11	65	17	3
... were in general encouraging about the recommendations	7	49	28	9
... discussed the differences between the various parties represented rather than discussed the recommendations	19	30	36	6
... will act on the recommendations put forward by the participants in the EU Parliament	4	25	25	10
... will report back to the ECC participants in my country on how they have treated the recommendations in the European Parliament	4	25	20	10

For more than 70% of the participants in the seven countries, the European politicians *responded to the questions asked*, and *commented on and discussed the recommendations*; 56% thought them *in general encouraging* about the recommendations, while 49% thought the MEPs discussed party differences rather than the recommendations. They were less optimistic about implementation of the recommendations. Less than 30% thought the politicians would *act on the recommendations or report back to the ECC participants*. It should be noted that for these two questions, many respondents had no idea at all, resulting in very high percentages (40-50%) of 'don't know' answers.

²¹ For more detailed analyses see Appendix D.

²² Percentages for seven countries (France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and The Netherlands). Percentages do not add up to 100% because the category Don't Know is left out.

The pattern across the seven countries shows interesting differences, as illustrated in the following summary:²³

- Luxembourg: everybody thought that the politicians would not act on the recommendations;
- Malta: politicians were not *encouraging* (44%) and discussed the *differences between the various parties instead of the recommendations* (69%). On the other hand, 50% thought that the politicians would *act on the recommendations*;
- The Netherlands: the politicians did not *respond to the questions* (52%), did not *encourage* (64%), *discussed party differences instead of the recommendations* (92%) and only 12% expect some *reporting back*;
- France: 56% thought that the politicians would *report back* to the ECC participants, while in Greece, only 10% thought they would do so;
- Germany: 51% felt the politicians were not *encouraging* about the recommendations, while in Ireland 84% Felt that they were.

Conclusions

The transparency criterion is not a particularly unambiguous or transparent concept. It refers to different qualities such as the use of information in the deliberation, the methods and rules regulating the discussions, procedures governing the decision-making, the need for clarity about the process and an understanding of what will be done with the recommendations.

Therefore it is neither possible nor desirable that the analyses in this section should converge to *one* clear-cut summarising judgment about the transparency of the ECC 2009.

Instead, a number of not strongly (if at all) related aspects can be highlighted:

- The key objectives of the ECC²⁴ as perceived by the participants, partly reflect the six objectives of the ECC;
- The motives for participation are mainly related to self-expression rather than to exerting influence;
- The information that was available to the participants was judged positively;
- The main process – the deliberations – was structured as a converging process. Starting from a very abstract and broad question, the ECCs resulted in a limited number of agreed-upon recommendations;
- Assessments of the voting procedures and the resulting recommendations were less related than might be expected. For example, in the Netherlands, the judgment on the voting procedures was rather negative, but satisfaction with the resulting recommendations was high;
- With regard to the assessment of the interaction between the participants and the MEPs, the results show a diverse picture. Clearly, personal evaluations of this part of the ECCs depend very much on the overall atmosphere in which the debate with the MEPs took place.

2.4.5 Efficiency

The penultimate criterion, efficiency, concerns the relation between effort (time, money, etc.) and results. The efficient use of all resources, including of the participant's time, is of major importance for subjective satisfaction with the process.

Effective communication depends on many different aspects. Some of these have an impact not only on the efficiency of communication, but are also relevant to the competence of participants and the internal fairness of the process. As shown in preceding sections, two indicators are of special importance here – the performance of the facilitators and the knowledge level of the participants.

In terms of the communication, there was a very high level of efficiency:

²³ More detailed analyses can be found in section 2.5.2.

²⁴ See section 2.1

- 83% of the respondents indicated that their knowledge level was sufficient to participate in the discussions;
- 86% found that the facilitators often managed to give everyone a chance to speak.

In the ECC 2007, the main problem that had a negative impact on the efficiency was time-related, with one-fifth of the citizens expressing a preference for having more time to elaborate the results, and thereby enhance the opportunity to communicate effectively.²⁵

In ECC 2009, 21% fully agreed that the *time for discussion was adequate*. Slightly more than half of the participants (53%) agreed that the time was sufficient. This means that only one-quarter (fully) disagreed and considered the time more or less insufficient.

The countries where the time constraint was seen as a real problem were Denmark (62%), Austria (58%), Portugal (54%), Hungary (50%) and Germany (48%). On the other hand, in some countries there was (almost) no problem at all, in particular in Latvia, Lithuania and Luxembourg.

The available *information presented* no problem: altogether, 91% of the citizens were satisfied. For some reason, respondents from Luxembourg were far less satisfied with the information: 30% found it insufficient. However, overall, the high level of satisfaction means that there was no constraint due to inadequate information.

The *complexity* of the process was not a (big) problem for 88% of the respondents. Again, high marks were scored for the efficiency of the consultations in almost all countries. Luxembourg was the exception, with 28% of the participants reporting problems with the complexity.

There were slightly more problems with the *rules* that structured the discussions. Overall, 13% of the citizens had a problem with the rules. Exceptions to the general satisfaction were found in Portugal (29%), Denmark (27%), Greece (24%), Belgium (22%) and Germany (21%).²⁶

Conclusion

The consultation processes can be characterised as efficient. With the exception of available time, positive judgments of 85% and higher on the indicators are impressive enough.²⁷

2.4.6 Impact

The objectives of ECC 2009 relate to citizens' 'bonds' with Europe. The last criterion, impact, does the same by referring to the *impact* of participating in the national consultations on the participants. The process not only resulted in collective recommendations, but clearly also had some impact on the individuals as well. Changes in expectations, attitudes and behaviour towards the European Union are indicators of the depth of the deliberative process for the citizens.

²⁵ Evaluation of the Plan D / Debate Europe citizen consultation projects. Final Report (version 1.4), September 2009. Euréval, Matrix/ Rambóll-Management. Table 5, page 35.

²⁶ For more detailed analyses see Appendix E.

²⁷ One can wonder in how far the high level of satisfaction is caused by the fact that the samples were strongly biased toward higher educated citizens. The capacity to handle information under a time constraint in a somewhat complex situation with more or less strict rules, could be a characteristic of the higher educated in particular. However, most aspects are only very weakly (though significantly) related to education. The only exception is the complexity: the higher the level of education the less complexity is a problem. But this association with education is also rather weak. In itself this is a reassuring conclusion: it could mean that the process is efficient for all citizens, while that problems are merely country related.

Table 5: Opinions on impact four months after the ECC in seven European countries^{28,29}

After having the experience of the ECC, what do you think of each of the following statements?	Fully Agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree
I am disappointed about the lack of interest from the media in the European Citizens' Consultation	30	52	12	3
I have no idea what happened after the European Citizens' Consultation in March	13	36	38	8
I had the chance to influence decision-makers	9	25	31	15
I found the European Citizens' Consultation an interesting experience	70	29	1	0
I learned more about how the European Union functions	34	56	7	3
My opinion about the European Union is changed by the European Citizens' Consultation	56	37	4	1
I feel myself more a European	28	40	18	4
This kind of European Citizens' Consultations should be organized more often	20	35	35	8

The first three indicators in Table 5 related to the 'outside' world, e.g. the media, politics and decision-makers.

Media

The table shows that 82% of the respondents were (more or less) disappointed with the lack of interest in the ECC shown by European and national media. The disappointment was most pronounced in Greece (97%) and lowest in the Netherlands (62%).

Half of the citizens (49%) indicated that they had *no idea what happened* after the ECC. The level of ignorance differed from country to country, with the highest percentages in Luxembourg (62%), Malta (60%) and the Netherlands (62%).

Only one-third of the citizens were convinced that the ECC gave them a chance to *influence decision-makers*. This negative perception reached a dramatic high in Luxembourg, where only 8% believed they had had any influence on decision-makers. Only in Ireland (58%) and the Netherlands (52%) did more than half of the citizens believe that they had some influence.

More optimistic figures can be found in relation to the impact of the ECC on the participants themselves: for example, all respondents (99%) found the ECC an *interesting experience* and 90% *learned more* about how the European Union functions. It is also relevant that 93% said their opinion about the European Union was *changed* by the ECC and 68% felt themselves to be *more a European* after having participated in the ECC.

To sum up, the participants in the ECC were somewhat disappointed with the level of media interest, but their feelings about their personal impact were much more positive. Overall, 55% were of the opinion that these types of citizens' consultations *should be organised more often*, although again there was a great diversity between countries, with fewer participants in Luxembourg (33%) and Malta (38%) who were of this opinion than in the Netherlands (62%) and in Germany (74%).

²⁸ France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and The Netherlands.

²⁹ For more detailed analyses see Appendix F.

EU-related activities

We asked the participants about their activities in relation to EU matters *due to their participating in the European Citizens' Consultation* (see Table 6 in Appendix F). The answers paint a positive picture: 84% actively followed reports about EU politics in the media often (43%) or sometimes (41%). A particularly high level of activity was found in the Netherlands (96%), contrasting sharply with the 56% in Malta. Furthermore, 79% often or sometimes participated in conversations with friends or family members about EU politics.

Outside the personal realm, the level of activity declines considerably. Between 75 and 80% of the citizens never contacted an EU politician, participated in online debates about EU politics or joined an organisation dealing with EU politics. The highest level of refraining from EU-oriented activities was found in the Netherlands (where 92% did not participate in online debates), France and Luxembourg (where more than 90% did not join an organisation that deals with EU politics).

A sharp contrast between the countries exists with respect to going to events on EU politics. Three-quarter of the participants in Germany and Luxembourg, and almost 90% of the Dutch never visited such events, while in Greece, 38% went often or sometimes.

It is interesting to note that participation in public debates on EU politics is remarkably high in Greece, in comparison with the other countries: 28% did so often and another 38% sometimes,³⁰ while in Luxembourg 92% never participated.

In the remainder of Table 6 (in Appendix F), six more activities are summarised that refer to contacting fellow participants in the ECC 2009 and discussing the topics of the ECC and Europe in general. The highest percentages were found for contacts and discussions with participants from one's *own country*, although the majority never actually did so. The most active were citizens in France: 43% made contact and 39% discussed the topics of the ECC with other participants from France. The citizens from Greece were also relatively active: 35% made contact and 39% discussed the politics of the EU in general.³¹ The last item was also popular in Ireland, where 38% discussed the politics of the EU in general with participants from their country.

Conclusion

Overall, especially the fourth objective of ECC 2009, "*closing the gap between the EU and its citizens and bring citizens closer to the EU*", and the fifth objective, "*increasing the general public's interest in the EU*" were achieved. The very high number of participants who claimed that they learned more about how the EU functions (90%) and that their opinion about the EU was changed by the ECC (93%) indicate this.

2.4.7. Multivariate analysis of impact by Evdokia Xekalaki

The analyses of all indicators of impact in this section so far resulted in an abundance of percentages. Such numbers are useful to describe the many aspects of *impact* and enable us to draw conclusions about their magnitude and direction (positive or negative) and they make it easy to compare countries, highlighting the fact that there was not one ECC, but rather 27 national consultations with sometimes remarkable differences. So far, we have presented only univariate analyses; i.e. every aspect analysed in isolation. In the real world, all these aspects are more or less related, conflicting, mutually reinforcing or counteracting and, most importantly, some are more important than others in terms of their impact. What is called for at the end of this section is a *multivariate* approach.

In this section, we focus on the process of opinion- or attitude-shaping on the issues that appeared to be of importance to this sample of EU citizens. We will do so by measuring the impact of the European Citizens'

³⁰ The survey was held in the summer of 2009. At that time, in the build-up to the national elections, there was a heated debate about the deplorable financial situation of Greece and about the possible role of the European Union in the solution of the problem.

³¹ Ibid.

Consultations 2009 on participants' (political) attitudes and/or opinions (both at national and European level) at certain points during the course of the entire process: from their recruitment through to the ultimate setting of common ground and at the end of a short period immediately after the national consultations.

The question to be answered is: were there statistically significant direction changes in attitude or opinion trends, comparing the citizens' initial responses to those in the intermediate, final and follow-up questionnaires? Several possible issues related to European citizens' perspectives and thoughts in relation to the EU are investigated along these lines. The variables of interest (characteristics of the participants) included in the analysis are: the time of the interview, age, social class, gender, education level, religion, political orientation and country. A full description of the co-variate variables used as an initial input into the analysis conducted can be found in Appendix G.

A multilevel-type analysis was conducted in order to investigate the correlations between the answers of participants on some of the most important political issues and the possible impact of the ECC 2009 on them, while controlling for the variance between individuals and the variance among different countries.

The dependent variables (e.g. the outcome variables) are also described in Appendix G. They refer to (political) attitudes and opinions, and as such are related to the objectives of ECC 2009. These are:

Interest in EU politics	Informed about the EU	Trust in EU Parliament
Trust in People	Satisfaction with democracy in own country	Satisfaction with government in own country
Caring about citizens' opinion by MPs	Interest of parties in citizens' vote	No influence on governmental politics
My vote does not matter	Influence of ECC 2009 on policy makers	

Skiping the statistical details of the testing of the model, the following conclusions are the most important:

Interest in EU politics

First of all, we observe that the time which passed between the start and the end of the national consultation appears to have played a statistically significant role in participants' shifts of opinion and *interest in the politics* of the EU in an obvious manner. Citizens tended to be more interested at the end of the national consultation, compared to their position at the start of the event, only two days earlier.

Regarding the association between the levels of interest in EU politics with demographic characteristics, men appeared to be more interested than women, and older respondents (60+) seemed to be more interested than younger ones, while those with 'middle' levels of education appeared to be less interested than those with higher educational levels. Finally, upper- and middle-class individuals appeared to be more interested than working-class citizens, but there was no statistical difference between citizens with different political views. As to the participants' country of origin, we see that the most interested citizens were located in Belgium, followed by Spain, Greece, Portugal and Romania. No religion effects were detected.

Informed about the EU

The analysis indicates that there were no significant effects on the *information-based knowledge* gained by citizens. This result can plausibly be attributed to the fact that information gains had been already made by participants between the recruiting period and the events, for instance due to the information material sent to them or the efforts people made on their own to find information (e.g. in libraries, on the Internet etc).

The age of the respondent is not significant at a 5% level of significance. At a 6% level of significance, younger citizens (30-) seemed to be more informed. Male and female respondents appeared to consider

themselves equally informed, and the same holds for participants of various social classes. The respondents who considered themselves very well-informed seemed to be those on the right of the political spectrum, when compared to respondents at the centre, although only at a 10% significance level. The most informed citizens at a country level were those of Spain, followed by the UK. We also see that education levels did not have a statistically significant impact on their perceived level of knowledge. Religion was not a statistically significant covariate for the model.

Trust in the European Parliament

It appears that participants' *trust in the European Parliament* did not exhibit any changes at the end of the National Consultation. It also appears that the further towards the right the respondents' political positions were, the greater their trust in the European Parliament. The situation was similar with respect to social class. Upper-class citizens seemed to have more trust in the European Parliament than working-class citizens, at a 10% level of significance. Educational level, gender and age appeared not to be statistically significant covariates for the model.

Trust in people

Regarding *trust in people in general*, only a few of the covariates appear to be statistically significant. In general, male respondents seemed to trust people more than female respondents, at a 10% level of significance. This also seemed to be the case with participants on the right of the political spectrum compared with those on the other side. None of the remaining demographic and social covariates appear to have had any significant role in predictions of citizens' trust. Countries whose citizens seemed to trust other people more include France, Cyprus and Luxembourg, followed by Hungary, Germany and Malta.

Satisfaction with democracy in own country

With respect to the degree of satisfaction of citizens with the way *democracy works in their own country*, there appears to be a significant time-effect that cannot, however, be interpreted to be the result of their participation in the consultations, as the two recordings of their opinion were made three months apart – once during the recruitment stage and again three months after the end of their national consultations. Therefore, time-effects could be attributed to a number of other factors, possibly associated with political changes, not captured by the current analysis.

Satisfaction with government in own country

Similar comments hold with respect to the effects of various covariates on the participants' *satisfaction with what their national government has done* during the last four years. Here again, there appeared to be an opinion shift in the three-month time-interval.

Caring about citizens' opinion by MPs

No time-effects were detected in the citizens' belief that the *members of parliament do not care about their opinions*.

Interest of parties in citizens' vote

By contrast, statistically significant shifts were observed in the time-period from recruitment until the end of the national consultations on the issue of *interest of parties* in the opinion of citizens. Respondents appeared to agree less with the statement that *political parties are only interested in their votes and not in their opinion* after the completion of the consultations. As concerns the other factors, citizens of middle education appeared to disagree more with this statement than those of upper-level education. This was also the case for citizens in the centre of the political spectrum, when compared to citizens positioned on the right, at a 10% level of

significance. No visible differences between male and female respondents or between respondents of different social classes were observed. Religious beliefs seemed to play a rather significant role in citizens' views on this issue. In fact, it was the only occasion where religion appeared to affect the outcome variable.

No influence on governmental politics

The citizens' belief that they have absolutely *no influence on governmental politics* does not seem to have been affected at all by their participation in the European consultations. The presence of other significant effects, either demographic or social, was also limited.

My vote does not matter

On the question of whether citizens agreed with the statement 'so many people vote in elections that my vote does not matter', there is clearly no time-effect. Only upper-class participants seem to differ from people in the other categories, as they appeared to be more certain that their vote did not matter than working-class citizens.

Influence of ECC 2009 on policy-makers

With respect to respondents' views on the degree of *influence of the ECC 2009 on policy-making*, the effects of time are statistically significant, indicating that there was a significant shift in the respondents' views on the topic from the recruitment stage through to three months after the consultations. In fact, time- and age-effects were the only statistically significant effects. The apparent overall absence of demographic/social effects on opinion change on this question is notable.

2.4.8. Conclusion

We have demonstrated through the results of this multivariate analysis that deliberative consultations like the ECC 2009 have a statistically significant impact on attitudes and opinions. The results obtained clearly indicate that deliberation through the European Citizens' Consultations 2009 has enhanced the knowledge of participants on the topics discussed and contributed to their forming firmer views on them. It is obvious that some policy attitudes exhibited a greater shift due to deliberation than others. Overall, the findings reaffirm and consolidate the importance of citizens' debates like the European Citizens Consultations since they outline how such events can help in educating people about issues, making them think, exchanging ideas and forming a basis for a fuller development of their opinions/attitudes.

2.5 External actors and the role of the websites

2.5.1 Media coverage by Miriam Freudenberger

The media are an important player in European politics. The fact that, generally speaking, national media do not pay much attention to the European political debate, European issues and European politicians – and not even to the national consequences of European decision-making – partly explains the lack of knowledge of, and interest in, European politics among European citizens.

This section discusses the media coverage generated by the European Citizens' Consultations in 2009. Media coverage of deliberative processes is especially important, since the process itself only includes a small number of citizens. Media attention is an important way to increase interest in the issue under discussion and thereby expand the number of people involved.

Interest from the media could be expected because of the novelty of the citizens' consultation 'tool', the fact that citizens in 27 countries were asked their opinion through the use of this tool at around the same time, and the issue involved in view of the upcoming European elections.

The focus here is on the media coverage in 15 EU countries,³² followed by a more in-depth analysis of the media coverage in Germany and Sweden.³³

The European Citizens' Consultations took place in all EU Member States during three weekends in March 2009. Traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television, and new media such as the Internet reported on these events to different degrees (see Table 7).

Table 7: Media coverage in Europe: type of media (15 countries)

Type of media	Items
Internet	342
Press	82
Radio	48
TV/Video	28
News / press agencies	13

The majority of articles on the consultations (342 items, 66% of the total coverage) were found on the Internet: 86 of these came from media institutions, the others from different sources such as interest groups, private companies and educational institutions.

Among the traditional media, most items were found in the written press: 82 printed articles (16%). Radio and television stations also reported on the consultations: 48 items (9%) appeared on the radio and 28 (5%) on television. Some news agencies also reported on the consultations, with 13 items found in this category (2%). The media coverage varied greatly from country to country. More items were found, for example, in Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Spain than in Belgium, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia. These differences in 'output' can

³² Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom. These countries were chosen because they submitted a more detailed media report. Moreover some other countries could not be included in the analysis because of the language barriers.

³³ The Swedish case study was conducted by Martin Karlsson and Anders Skoglund. The search period in Germany was from December 1st 2008 – April 30th 2009 and May 2nd – May 18th 2009. In Sweden the search period was October 1st 2008 – March 29th 2009.

be explained by country-specific characteristics such as the extent of the national media and whether other national events took place during the same weekend. In Ireland, for example, the national rugby team won the championship that very same weekend. The media budget and PR knowledge of the national consultation organisers also might have had an impact on coverage.

To produce a more detailed analysis of the sources and content of coverage, we carried out an in-depth analysis in Germany and Sweden. The period chosen for analysis in Germany was longer than that for Sweden, and 85 items were counted there, compared with 19 in Sweden. However, in Germany, 46 of the items were published on the Internet, including on the websites of the organisers, other foundations, companies, interest groups, politicians and private persons. As the main interest is the media, we restrict ourselves in this analysis to the items found in the traditional German press.

In the German media, the majority of articles were published in neutral journalistic formats: 24 items had a journalistic format of a report, four items a news format, six were interviews, one was a comment and one was reportage. Nearly all the articles were published in connection with the German Citizens' Consultation in Berlin (35 items), with only one article appearing about the start of the ECC's online forum. There was no coverage of the European Citizens' Summit.

With regard to the content, 27 items dealt with the consultation process, the selection of the participants, the national online forum, the personal backgrounds of the participants and the costs, organisers and supporters of the event. A second focus, found in five items, was on the topics the citizens discussed during the ECC in Berlin. With regard to coverage of 'Europe' in these reports, the German media described the European design of the ECCs and made reference to the European elections, but there was not any more in-depth reporting on the role of citizens in Europe, Plan D or the Treaty of Lisbon. Thus, the German press alluded to the European design of the whole project, but reported solely from a German perspective.

The participating citizens were the dominant 'actors' in nearly all the articles (32). Other actors mentioned were the German Federal Foreign Office (27), the MEPs (23) and the MPs (7), while 23 articles mention the organisers of the ECCs as minor players (Robert-Bosch-Foundation (10), European Commission (6), IFOK GmbH (5), King Baudouin Foundation (2)). A further 16 articles (44%) gave a positive impression of the ECCs, and no articles described the consultations negatively. In the majority of the articles, the focus was on the participants and their opinions.

In Sweden, the most common types of media output included in the analysis were newspaper articles (7 items) and features on radio programmes (6). Many of the media items came from regional/local newspapers or radio stations (affiliated with the Swedish public service radio stations). These media mostly published stories about participants from their area who took part in the European Citizens' Consultations. In some cases, interviews were done both before and after the national consultation. Another source for the media content was the local media in Örebro, where the national consultation was held. Most of these items were reportages (11), many consisted of interviews (7) and one article was written in the format of a debate.

Most of the media attention was concentrated on the days around the national consultation in Sweden and, as was the case in Germany, no attention was paid either to the European Citizens' Summit in Brussels or the EEC's online forum.

In the reportage on the national consultation, two other topics emerged: the concluding panel debate with MEPs (8) and individual stories about citizens travelling to Örebro to participate in the consultation (11). Finally, 11 items reported basic information about the event, 7 items contained information about the project in its entirety and 6 items related the project to its institutional affiliation (the European Commission's Plan D strategy and the Debate Europe programme) or to the European elections in June 2009.

As interviews were a prominent source of information, the Swedish media coverage mainly gave a positive image of the ECC project and the national consultation. The panel debate at the end of the national consultations

also received considerable attention (7 items), because the debate was conducted in an atmosphere of discord between participants and panellists. The media coverage of the panel debate included many critical quotes about the MEPs taking part.

Conclusions

It appears from these two in-depth studies that coverage of the ECCs was mainly in the local and regional media. Media attention was concentrated around the national event and contained mainly a description of the process or interviews with the participants. There was less interest in the content or the final results of the consultations. The German press often referred to the European Citizens' Summit but did not discuss it in depth. It seems that the novelty of this type of citizen participation was regarded as more important than the political content and the political implications of the results.

2.5.2 The role of MEPs in the national consultations by Martin Karlsson³⁴

One of the aims of the ECC 2009 stated in the project outline was to foster '*interaction between policy-makers and citizens*' and promote '*debate between citizens and policy-makers*' in the run-up to the 2009 European Parliament elections. As mentioned before, to reach this goal, a panel debate with MEPs and candidates in the upcoming elections was included in the national ECCs.

An active role for MEPs and other politicians is important for several reasons. First, given that ECCs are not part of the formal democratic process, more direct channels to communicate the results to decision- and policy-makers are necessary. The ECC's impact on policy outcome is strongly dependent on the ability to influence institutional actors such as policy-makers. Second, research has shown that participation in political projects, especially when they involve discussions with policy-makers, can help to increase trust in political institutions.³⁵

To find out more about these possible functions of the ECCs, data obtained from the participants has been analysed, as well as data collected through a survey sent to all (97) politicians participating in the panels at the national ECCs. Regrettably, the response rate to this survey was very low, at 17.5%, which means that no generalisations can be made on the basis of this data and we have to confine ourselves to descriptive analyses only.

In section 2.4.4, we reported on the ECC participants' views (in seven countries) on the panel debate and the presence of the MEPs and candidates. We found that although 70% agreed that the panellists *responded to the questions and commented on the recommendations*, 46% said the MEPs and candidates *discussed political differences rather than the recommendations* and more than 70% did not believe that the MEPs would act on the recommendations.

These low expectations with regard to the impact of the ECCs are clearly related both to the experiences with the panels and to the participants' preconceptions of the European Parliament. Low expectations of impact (action and feedback) are more common among participants who expressed a low level of trust in the European Parliament before the beginning of the consultations.

The main question here is whether participation in the ECC promoted a higher level of trust in politicians at the European level. In order to investigate this question, the level of trust in the European Parliament was

³⁴ This section is based on a survey among politicians who participated in the panel debates at the end of the national ECCs conducted by the author of this paragraph. The electronic survey was held between September and November 2009 and despite sending reminders, the response was only 17 (17,5%).

³⁵ Wang, X. H., & M. W. Wart. (2007) 'When Public Participation in Administration Leads to Trust: An Empirical Assessment of Managers' Perceptions. *Public Administration Review*, (62)2: 265–278; and Cutler, F., R. Johnston, et al. (2008) 'Deliberation, Information and Trust: The BC Citizens' Assembly as Agenda-Setter' in M. E. Warren and H. Pearse (eds.) *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

investigated among a sample of the ECC participants at three points in time. They were first surveyed at the beginning of the national ECC consultation, then at the end of the consultation, and finally three months later. A comparison of the level of trust in the EU Parliament among the participants at these three points gives us an indication of whether participation in the ECC contributed to an average increase in trust or not, and also of the extent to which any such effect endured. Table 8 displays the results of this comparison.

Table 8: Percentage of the participants who expressed trust in the European Parliament in the seven countries

How much trust do you have in the European Parliament?	Very much/ fairly much	Not much/ absolutely no	Don't know
At the beginning of the national consultation	54	35	11
At the end of the national consultation	60	33	7
Three months after the national consultation	54	39	7

This analysis is based on a sample of the ECC participants (participants in the seven countries representing 20.5% of all respondents) who answered questionnaires on all three occasions. Compared to the remaining ECC participants (who only took part in the first two questionnaires), the initial level of trust among the sample was lower than that of the others (54% expressed trust or much trust compared to 61% among the rest of the participants). The change in trust between the first and second survey was also different, with a very slight decrease in trust among the majority, compared to an increase in trust among the sample (+6%).

The percentage of participants expressing trust in the European Parliament was higher after the consultation than before, but fell back to approximately the initial level three months later. The results suggest that on an aggregated level, participation in the ECC had a positive effect in the short term, but this did not persist over time.

Looking at differences within the totality of ECC participants, we can see that some groups of participants' level of trust was more likely to change than others.³⁶ Changes were more frequent among respondents describing themselves as working class than among those describing themselves as either middle or upper class. The percentage of respondents whose level of trust changed was significantly lower among participants who stated that they intended to vote in the European elections than among those who reported that they did not intend to vote or were undecided. Individual changes in the level of trust in the European Parliament, in either direction, between the first and the last day of the national consultations, were 41%, which shows that the experience of participating in an event like the ECC is evidently relevant to the trust in political representatives. All changes in the answer to the question 'How much trust do you have in the European Parliament?' between the measuring points at the beginning and end of the national consultations are coded as a change. This includes increases and decreases in trust and changes to the answer 'don't know'. Respondents leaving any of the questions unanswered have been excluded.

The second question was whether the ECC can be seen as a tool to produce policy recommendations for policy-makers in the EU institutions. We asked the participating MEPs and candidates about their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the ECC process, and whether they had referred to the project and the recommendations after participating in the national consultations.

The attitudes of participating MEPs towards the ECC project in general, and the quality of the recommendations in

³⁶ See table 9 in Appendix H.

particular, is a crucial factor when evaluating the ECC's function as a tool for producing policy recommendations to EU policy-makers. Only to the extent that MEPs find the recommendations relevant and see themselves as inspired or obligated to adopt those recommendations can a policy impact be expected.

Table 10 in Appendix H shows the percentage of respondents who stated in the questionnaire that they sometimes, often or very often made reference to the ECC project or the proposals put forward by the citizens in a number of situations.

References to the ECC process was more common among the respondents when interacting with citizens and other politicians and in interviews than when debating or speaking in the assembly. Overall, the ECC proposals seem to be more frequently referred to than the project itself.

These results indicate that the ECCs did have some impact on the communicative practices of the politicians who took part in the project and responded to the survey. But the function of the ECCs as an instrument for creating policy recommendations is, according to the majority of the respondents, not very important (see Table 11).

Table 11: Satisfaction of politicians with topics and proposals and their evaluation of the impact of the European Citizens' Consultations (Frequencies)

	(Very) satisfied (N=11)
The relevance of the topics discussed	5
The relevance of the recommendations decided upon by the citizens	4
The feasibility of the recommendations	2
	(Fully) agree (N=9)
Projects like the ECCs are useful to strengthen political representation in the EU	7
Following my participation in the ECC my opinion concerning one or more of the issues discussed changed	2

The top part of Table 11 displays the number of respondents who stated in the questionnaire that they were satisfied or very satisfied (four and five on a five point-scale) with the aspects listed. The bottom part of the table shows the frequencies of those respondents who agreed or fully agreed (four and five on a five-point scale) with the statements.

Of the few politicians who responded, the majority was not (very) satisfied in relation to the relevance of the topics that had been discussed. Even fewer were satisfied with the recommendations and only 2 respondents found it feasible to act upon them.

One reason may be the fact that the proposals were phrased in rather general terms and were therefore difficult to translate into concrete recommendations. Despite this criticism, 7 of the 9 politicians agreed that projects like the ECCs are useful for strengthening political representation in the EU. It seems that the participating politicians support the organisation of this type of project, but not because it has an advisory function. It is possible that they perceive projects like this as a useful forum to interact with citizens.

This interpretation is partly supported by the fact that only 2 of the respondents agreed that their opinions

on any of the topics discussed in the national consultation they participated in changed. Prior studies³⁷ have underlined similar problems relating to the general character of recommendations coming out of participatory projects, and one possibly more rewarding path for future projects might be a closer connection between the issue under debate and a specific policy issue. In that way, criticisms about generality, relevance and feasibility might be overcome.

Whether or not participatory projects such as the ECC might function as tools to restore confidence and trust in policy-makers at the EU level is a less straightforward question. We have seen that, on the one hand, no long-term positive effects occurred, but, on the other, the changes in the level of trust between the beginning and the end of the consultations indicate that for many of the participants, taking part in the ECC meant a re-evaluation of their views on EU policy-makers and institutions.

2.5.3 The role of the websites in the ECC 2009 by Raphael Kies and Stephanie Wojcik³⁸

The innovative usage of the Internet in ECC 2009 has been defined by the organisers of the consultations as 'an experimental method of participation within a procedure of consultation which is still in an experimental phase'.

The decision to implement online informative and interactive tools for ECC 2009 was influenced by the ECC 2007 evaluation report, which advocated use of the Internet not only to increase the visibility of, and create an additional impact for, the project, but also to 'offer an opportunity for online discussion or postings of comments'.³⁹ This is precisely what the ECC 2009 consultations did, by encouraging online discussions through a European web portal subdivided into 28 national websites⁴⁰ open to all EU citizens.⁴¹

The Internet was used in almost all phases of the consultation. During the first phase (from December 2008 to March 2009), citizens could access information about the ECC process and were invited onto their national website to discuss and make proposals to be voted upon. During the second phase (March 2009), the citizens participating in the ECCs were requested to express their opinion on the national online proposals. In the third phase, they were asked to vote for 15 out of the 88 recommendations compiled from the total list of 270 based on the ten recommendations drafted at each national ECC. These 15 national recommendations were the input for the European Citizens' Summit (ECS) in Brussels in May 2009. Finally, during the fourth phase (from April to May 2009), Internet users were able to discuss and comment on these 15 recommendations, through their national web forum before the ECS and through the European web forum after it.

37 S. Boucher, *If citizens have a voice, who's listening? Lessons from recent citizen consultation experiments for the European Union*, EPIN Working paper No.24, 2009.

38 This article was written with the collaboration of Romain Badouard (University of Technology of Compiègne, France). We like to warmly thank the researchers who helped in coding the content of several national web sites: Andrei Fedorov, Adina Lupu, Maria Bozinis, Tiphane Zetlaoui.

39 Rüdiger Goldschmidt, Ortwin Renn and Sonja Köppel, *European Citizens' Consultations Project. Final Evaluation Report*, Dialogik gGmbH, March 2008, p. 124.

40 Two for Belgium, one for the Flemish and one for the French speaking population, and one for every other member state.

41 Designed by the French firm La Netscouade, the national web sites were structured in order to provide useful information, to allow debates, and to elaborate propositions on which all the registered users were invited to vote. The 28 web sites were managed by national partners under the responsibility of the French information agency Toute L'Europe; at the end of the consultation the European portal was entrusted to the European movement to organize and advertised the regional meetings. The general objective of whole procedure was to link up the opinions and views posted on the web sites with the face-to-face discussions at the national consultations in March 2009.

This analysis covers the first phase of the process.⁴² First, it reports on the traffic on all 28 ECC websites and the ECC web portal. This quantitative analysis particularly stresses the role of online campaigns in increasing publicity for the ECC. Second, the profiles and activities of forums users are presented for all 28 ECC websites. Third, it discusses the deliberative quality of the online discussions for a sample of 11 ECC websites. Finally, it reports on the volume of online proposals on all the websites and on their quality for the same sample of 11 web sites. The analysis is based on the surveys sent to participants at the national consultations on a traffic analysis of all the national websites and the ECC web portal, and, for a selection of national websites, on content analysis of the debates and propositions.

Traffic on ECC web sites

Between January 1st and May 31st, the European portal⁴³ received 17,905 visits from 10,971 individual visitors, while the 28 national websites attracted a total of 130,498 individual visitors. There is a clear link between face-to-face meetings and traffic on national websites, with most of the websites experiencing a peak in visits during March, when the national consultations took place, and May 2009, the month of the European Citizens' Summit. Among the national websites (see Table 12 in Appendix I), that of France was the most visited, with 31,901 individuals; followed by those of Spain (29,579) and Germany (13,647). Most of the websites (22 out of 28) received between 1,037 (Lithuania) and 6,050 (Poland) visitors. The websites of the smallest countries had fewer than 1,000 visitors (Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg and Slovakia). Each national website had an average of 30.8 individual visitors per day, which means that put together, the websites received 864.2 individual visitors per day during this period.

In order to obtain a more accurate comparison of the 'performance' of each national website, we calculated the ratio of visitors to the national websites to the national population of the 27 EU countries. It appears that the ECC websites were visited by 0.027 per cent of the EU population. This may seem modest, but if we compare it with other European debate platforms such as, for example, the 'Debate Europe' website,⁴⁴ which receives visits from only ten users a day,⁴⁵ the traffic on the ECC national websites is satisfactory.

The ECC portal received visits from users in 102 countries. Apart from the EU countries (all ranked in the top 30), visitors came from the United States (ranked 21st), Switzerland (23rd), and Turkey (30th), followed by Canada, Brazil and Mexico. The national websites also received foreign visitors: on average almost 30% came from another country. The countries with the highest percentage of 'external' visits were the English-speaking ones (UK 60%, Ireland 46%) and the small ones (Malta 55%; Luxembourg 48%; Estonia 40%; Cyprus 40%). The traffic on national websites was mainly provided by referring sites (see Appendix I, Table 12, column 6). This was the primary source for 23 of the websites, followed by 'direct access' and 'search engines'. Among the referring websites, European institutional sites such as Europa and social networks such as Facebook played a key role, as they generated the largest volume of traffic to the ECC portal. Websites of associations involved in the ECC process such as the King Baudouin Foundation and Toute l'Europe were also an important source of traffic. Other associations mentioned as 'sources' are the European Movement, Active Citizenship and Euractiv.

42 The ECC national web sites – which are at the heart of the first phase – consisted of three sections: 1. 'Find out more' which presented the events (national consultations, ECS) in chronological order and the results compiled in the various stages of the process. The national teams were required to supply this section through texts, images or videos with information relating to the process and the topic of the consultations: 'the economic and social future of Europe'. The Internet users could also post comment; 2. 'Debate and make proposals' which is the core of the web site, allowing Internet users to freely exchange ideas and elaborate on proposals. This section can be considered the real added value compared with the ECC 2007; 3. 'Vote on proposals' is the space where messages previously sent in the second section were gathered once they had been transformed (by users and/or moderators) into proposals on which Internet users could vote.

43 Hosted at <http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/>

44 Hosted at <http://europa.eu/debateeurope>

45 This figure was provided by the webmaster of the Debate Europe portal and refers to those who connect to his count on the web site, thus this figure is different from that for visits.

These findings suggest that the online communication campaign succeeded in mobilising 'friendly' networks and institutional websites that are generally visited by a well-educated public that is already familiar with European matters.⁴⁶ The low scores for 'direct access' and 'search engines' in accessing the ECC websites suggest that the mobilisation campaign through traditional mass media (press, radio, television) was less successful.

Analysis of activity at the ECC national forums

A total of 29,536 people registered for the forums of the 27 national ECC websites (see Appendix I, Table 13), with relatively high numbers in France, Spain and Germany and, given the density of the population, relatively low numbers in Italy (1,069), Poland (1,020), UK (641), the Netherlands (339), Ireland (319), Romania (214) and Greece (207).

Most of the registered visitors participated in a passive way, however: fewer than 20% wrote at least one message or proposition.⁴⁷ We can assume that some users registered for the forum out of curiosity and without any intention of participating in the debates, or just to vote or read the messages and propositions. From December 2008 until March 2009 – the phase where everyone was invited to register for the national consultations' forums – a total of 5,598 messages (threads and replies to these threads) and 1,142 propositions were submitted.

Among ECC participants – who were explicitly invited to take part in the online debates – 39% visited their national online forum; 10% visited the forum at least once every three days, 11% at least once a week, 7% at least once every two weeks and 12% 'less than every two weeks'.

There are differences in the online involvement of ECC participants between the 27 countries (see Appendix I, Table 13): in Belgium (French), Germany, Luxembourg, and Romania (with an impressive score of 73%), more than 45% visited their national forum; in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain, between 45 and 38% were active online; in Belgium (Flemish), Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK, it varied between 34 and 30%; and in Cyprus, Greece and Hungary less than 22% of ECC participants took part online.

There is a significant correlation between the *frequency of participation at the national ECC forums and the frequency of participation in the last three months in other online political forums, visits to websites of political organisations, parties and candidates and participation in political activities on the Internet* questions that were asked in the survey. This means that participants in the national consultations who already used the Internet to take part in (political) debates, or to search for information on political matters, were much more likely to be active in the ECC online forum. There was no difference in participation between men and women. The main reason for not using the forum was *lack of time* (40 %), while 27% said that they prefer *face-to-face debates over online debates* and 18% that they do not feel comfortable with online debates. Only 16% mentioned the absence of an Internet connection. The other reasons were given by just a small minority of people: *lack of impact on decision-makers* (9%), *online debates are not serious* (7%); *complexities of registration procedures* (5%); and *no interest in ECC forum* (3%).

The ECC participants who visited the online national forums (39%) were asked how they used it. It appears that the ECC websites were mainly used for informative purposes: 89% were searching for information and 87% were only interested in the contributions of other participants. The activity levels decreased when a more active use of the forum is requested: a third voted for propositions (33%), 23% participated in the online discussion, 14% elaborated a proposition and 12% initiated a debate (see Appendix I, Figure 1).

⁴⁶ Note that the social network Facebook, a top reference site, may have been able – due to its open structure based on friendship and acquaintances – to mobilize people who are not interested in EU matters.

⁴⁷ Ireland 18%; Italy 17%; Luxembourg 16%; Malta 22%; Roumania 42%; United Kingdom 20%.

Quality of the ECC online debates

A large majority (71%) of the online European Citizens' Consultations participants considered information on the national websites was *generally helpful in participating at the online debates and/or to make proposals*, 71% said that *the contributions to the debates were generally insightful and intelligent*, and 74% perceived the debates to be generally respectful'.

However, quite a number of participants (45%) thought that the debates were *dominated by one or a few participants* and only 23% considered the debates reflexive; i.e. that *participants took (their) opinions and arguments into account*.⁴⁸

With regard to the relation between the online phase and the national consultation, the online European Citizens' Consultations participants were asked whether taking part in the ECC online forum was helpful for participating at the national consultation: 51% answered never or rarely, while the rest said this was sometimes or often the case⁴⁹ (see Appendix I, Figure 2).

There are major differences between the countries: in nine countries, more than 60% stated that participation in the online debates was sometimes or often helpful (and more than 70% in Romania, Ireland, Latvia, Bulgaria and Denmark), while in seven countries, less than 40% considered that this was the case (see Appendix I, Figure 3).

In order to assess the quality of debates, the messages from 11 countries were coded using criteria from the theory of deliberative democracy.⁵⁰ This concerns: a) the reflexive character of the debates, measured by whether the debates were 'real' forms of interaction or just unrelated monologues; b) the level of respect achieved by counting the disrespectful messages; c) the topicality, decided by counting the messages that did not refer to the topic of the consultation, 'the social and economic future of Europe'; and d) the length (in words) of the messages, which provide some initial appreciation of the level of argumentation and information of the debates.

48 Note that several citizens had no opinion on these matters: 38.3% did not have any opinion for the issue of concentration of debates and 68% for the question of the reflexivity of the other interlocutors. These were probably citizens that were not participating actively to the debates, and that could therefore have any clear opinion about these specific issues.

49 The answers to this question are subdivided as follows: 'never' (28%), 'rarely' (28%), 'sometimes' (34%), 'often' (16%) (N:997).

50 For more information on the choice and operationalization of the criteria see Janssen, D. and Kies, R. 2005. Online forum and deliberative democracy. *Acta Politica* 40(4): 317-335; and Kies Raphaël. Forthcoming, *Promises and Limits of Web deliberation*. NY: Palgrave.

Table 14: Deliberative quality of ECC forums (in %)

	Threads with msg	Average responses	Reflexivity	Average words	Absence of respect	Irrelevant messages	Politisation	EU reference
Austria	82	2	71	116	4	63	3	39
Cyprus	21	0	47	243	0	5	9	63
France	47	2	51	105	2	39	6	39
Germany	55	2	74	117	2	26	1	13
Greece	22	0	35	219	0	3	5	63
Ireland	54	2	60	180	0	5	16	77
Italy	67	2	66	164	1	34	3	76
Luxembourg	30	1	41	217	0	41	17	71
Malta	31	1	46	98	8	13	4	38
Roumania	70	3	36	151	7	19	0	45
UK	62	2	67	146	3	13	8	60
Average	49	2	54	160	2	24	7	53

Reflexivity

More than half of the messages (54%) refer to a preceding message. The level of reflexivity was generally higher in countries where a large number of messages were posted, such as Germany, Austria and the UK, compared to countries where few messages were posted, such as Romania and Greece. The reflexive character of the debates was also measured by looking at the length of threads; that is, by counting the number of messages contained in each thread. Almost half the threads (49%) received at least one message and the average number of messages contained in the threads was 1.5.

Respect

Overall, the debates were extremely respectful. In the 11 countries analysed, only 2% of the messages were coded as non-respectful. This particularly low score can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it suggests that participants in the debates perceived the forum as a serious place, visible and influential; on the other, the high rate of respect could also suggest that the debates and the issues at stake were limited, for otherwise the debates might have been more intense and ruder.

Topicality

To what extent were the messages related to the topic of the consultation and to the EU? Concerning the social and economic issues, 24% were coded as irrelevant. The percentage of irrelevant messages was particularly high in Austria (63%), Luxembourg (41%) and France (39%), and was especially low in the countries where only a limited number of messages was posted (Greece, Cyprus and Ireland). 53% of the messages referred

to the EU. References to Europe were frequent in Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg, and rare in France, Malta, Austria and Germany.

Length of the messages

On average, the messages in the 11 countries analysed contained 160 words. They tended to be long in countries where few messages were posted (Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg) and shorter in countries where the number of messages was higher, such as France, Germany, Romania and the UK.

Analysis of the online proposals

We further analysed the number and content of the proposals that were posted on the ECC websites: 5,640 messages and 1,142 proposals were counted on all 28 ECC websites combined.

Proposals were particularly numerous on five sites: France (257), Germany (132), Spain (115), Italy (84) and, to a lesser extent, Portugal (63). In some of these countries, the high volume was the result of interest group activity, such as a pro-Esperanto group, an animal rights group and an anti-abortion group, which were particularly active and elaborated similar proposals on a number of websites.

The quantity of proposals was much more limited in the other countries: 12 websites had between 20 and 50 proposals, and 11 had fewer than 20 (see Appendix I, Table 15). Table 16 in Appendix I also shows in which countries messages were likely to be turned into proposals. On average, 20% were transformed into proposals, but this happened more often in Flemish-speaking Belgium (73%), Luxembourg (63%), Bulgaria (55%), Greece (47%) and Lithuania (35%).

A more thorough analysis was carried out for 11 countries (see Appendix I, Table 17). For nine countries, we selected the first 15 proposals that were voted for; for Malta the first eight; and for Romania the first 13. For all of these, we analysed the number of votes, as well as the content of the 156 proposals.

Clearly there was variation between the countries. In France, the most voted for proposal received 3,829 votes; in Malta only 12. The final analysed proposal received 445 votes in France, but only one vote in Malta and Romania.

For the content analysis, we looked at four criteria to assess the 'quality' of proposals. First, a distinction was made between proposals which were argued or justified on whatever grounds and those which were simply wishes or assertions. Second, an assessment was made of whether the proposals were concrete; i.e. whether Internet users gave information on how the proposal could be realised. Third, the relevance of the proposals was coded, showing whether they were or were not clearly linked to the topic of the consultation (the economic and social future of Europe). Lastly, the proposals that specifically referred to the EU were counted.

The majority of the proposals (72%) were argued or justified (see Appendix I, Table 18). This result was validated by the survey: 63% of the ECC participants (fully) agreed with the statement that *online proposals were generally insightful and intelligent*. On the other hand, almost a third (32%) of the proposals were not linked to the topic of the consultation. This result is consistent with the answers from 30% of our respondents, who also found that *many proposals were not related to the topic*. Moreover, in some countries, this percentage was particularly high. This was the case in Germany, Austria, France and Ireland, where respectively 60, 53 and 47% (in both Ireland and France) of the 15 most voted for proposals were not linked to economic or social issues.

Considering that the ECCs were organised under the aegis of the EU, the fact that only 42% of the online proposals referred to the EU may come as a surprise. Once again, there were important differences between the countries in the sample. In France, only 20% of the proposals mentioned the EU role, compared with 80% of the proposals in Greece and Luxembourg. Furthermore, a third (33%) of the online proposals were not concrete: they did not recommend any concrete actions that could be taken to realise them. For example, proposition number three on the French website simply wanted to forbid GMO culture and trade in Europe,

without giving enough information about how this could be done and which authorities should be responsible for it.

The participants in the national debates had high expectations for the usefulness of online proposals. From the questionnaire distributed just before the start of each ECC, it appears that 66% of respondents agreed or fully agreed with the statement that *the proposals elaborated in the online forum will be useful to structure the debates during the national consultations*. However, it is very difficult to assess precisely to what extent online proposals were useful in face-to-face discussions, since many propositions were not concrete, not directly related to the EU or were promoted by organised groups.

To sum up, the online proposals had an 'agenda function', which means that while participants in national consultations recognised some online proposals as important, they did not stick to the proposed solutions. For example, one could imagine that the proposal for a 'European Financial Supervisory Agency',⁵¹ ranked number two on the list of the most voted for online proposals and provided by the same Internet user on several national websites, might have inspired the Irish participants who pleaded for a "stronger regulation of financial institutions" in their first recommendation.

Conclusion

The online consultation phase, experimented with for the first time in 2009, was particularly useful for increasing awareness of the project with the general public. It has great potential to enrich national debates with opinions and propositions stemming from a wide public.

Overall, however, the quality of the online debate could be heightened by defining the topic of the consultation more narrowly. A broad topic such as 'the social and economic future of Europe' leads inevitably to comments and propositions which are off-topic or too abstract. Conversely, if the topic of the consultation is more limited, such as the regulation of banks or the future of pensions, it is likely that the comments and propositions will be more concrete and therefore more useful as input for the national consultations and for decision-makers. Further, there were important differences in traffic and active usage between the national websites, which were not only due to different national cultures of (online) participation, but also to the variations in effort by the national teams in promoting their websites. It is important to have one person in each national team who has the task of advertising and taking care of the website.

The communication campaign on the Internet was efficient in mobilising European association networks and social networking portals. However, communication around the project in the mass media was less prominent. For this reason, not many citizens were stimulated to participate whose concerns are far removed from European issues and/or are less inclined to use digital tools. In future a greater effort should be made to reach this section of the public.

Finally, the fact that almost 30% of the online visits were external is a particularly encouraging result, suggesting that the ECC 2009 encouraged the development of a European public sphere not only through the national consultations and the European Citizens' Summit, where citizens from the EU's 27 Member States gathered, but also through the websites.

⁵¹ 'pisti007', Hungary, European Financial Supervisory Agency, 12/01/2009, online proposal n° 2 (47 votes). ECC Irish national web site.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation of the European Citizens' Consultations 2009 (ECC 2009) concludes that, overall, the five criteria used to judge the project – fairness, competence of citizens, transparency, efficiency and impact – were satisfied, for most indicators and in most countries.

The evaluators' findings reaffirm and consolidate the importance of citizens' debates like the ECCs in helping to educate people about issues, making them think, exchanging ideas and forming a basis for a fuller development of their opinions/attitudes. They conclude that ECC 2009 encouraged the development of a European public sphere not only through the national consultations and the European Citizens' Summit, but also through the websites.

The evaluators' key conclusions are outlined in the executive summary at the start of this paper. They also made some recommendations for the future which are summarised below:

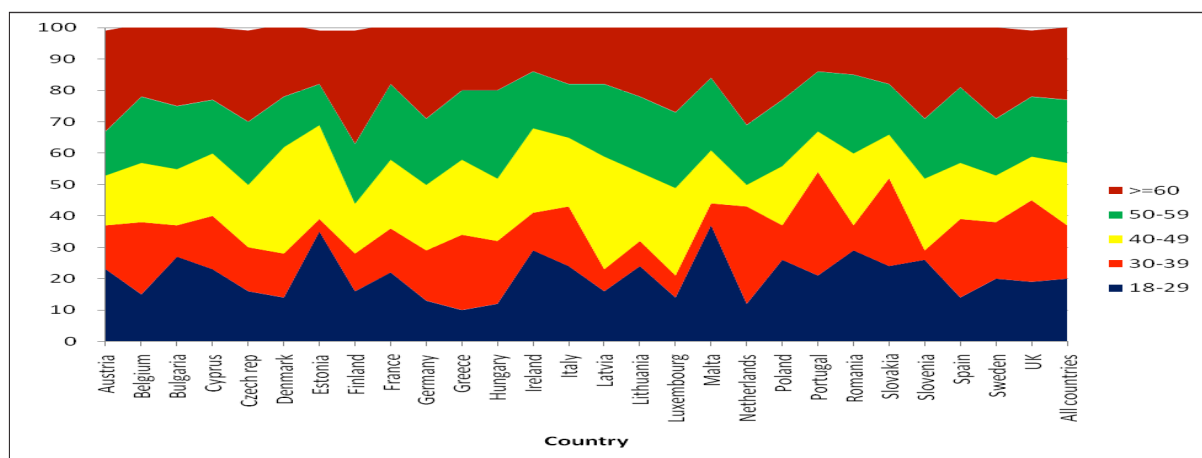
1. In terms of the representativeness of the participants, the report concludes that sufficient demographic diversity was obtained in most countries, but suggests that in order to reduce the existing bias towards higher educational levels, education should be included in the recruitment criteria and age should be measured more accurately. Differences of opinion on the topics discussed could also enhance the inclusiveness of the group participants and thus the quality of the whole process.

2. The report concludes that the ECC succeeded in "closing the gap between the EU and its citizens and bringing citizens closer to the EU", and "increasing the general public's interest in the EU". But it suggests that the impact of such projects on policy-makers could be increased by focusing on a specific policy issue. Given the breadth of the issue discussed (what can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?), the proposals were phrased in rather general terms and were therefore difficult to translate into concrete recommendations. A more rewarding path for future projects might be a closer connection between the issue under debate and a specific policy issue. In that way, criticisms about generality, relevance and feasibility might be overcome.

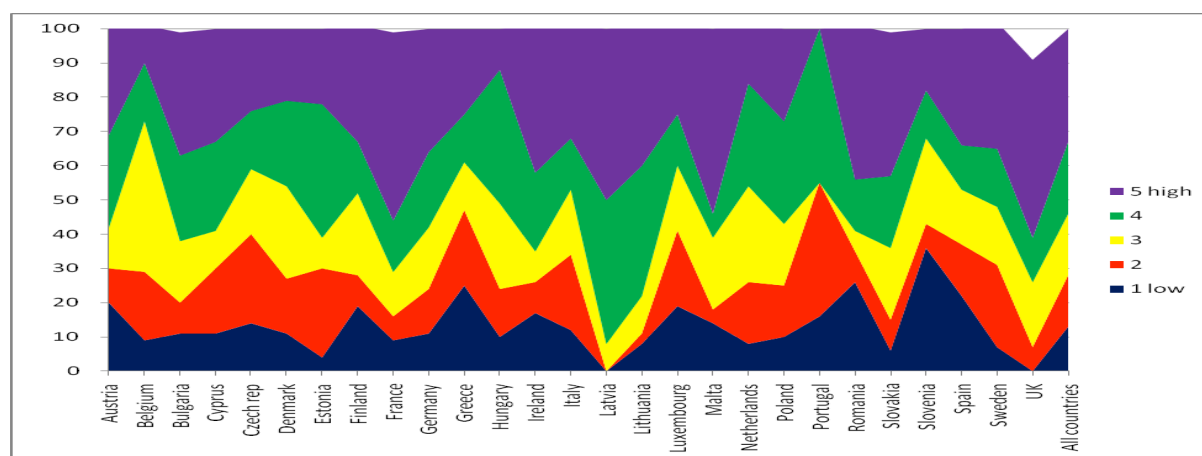
3. The online consultation phase, experimented with for the first time in 2009, was particularly useful for increasing awareness of the project among the general public, and has great potential to enrich national debates with opinions and propositions stemming from a wider public. But the report suggests that the quality of the online debate could be heightened by defining the topic of the consultation more narrowly, as a broad topic inevitably leads to comments and propositions which are off-topic or too abstract. A more limited topic – such as the regulation of banks or the future of pensions – would be more likely to produce comments and propositions that are more concrete and therefore more useful input for national consultations and decision-makers.

4. The report concludes that the important differences in traffic and active usage between the national websites were not only due to different national cultures of (online) participation, but also to the variations in effort by the national teams in promoting their websites. They recommend having one person in each national team tasked with advertising and taking care of the website, and working to generate more media coverage of the project in order to reach more citizens whose concerns are far removed from European issues and/or are less inclined to use digital tools.

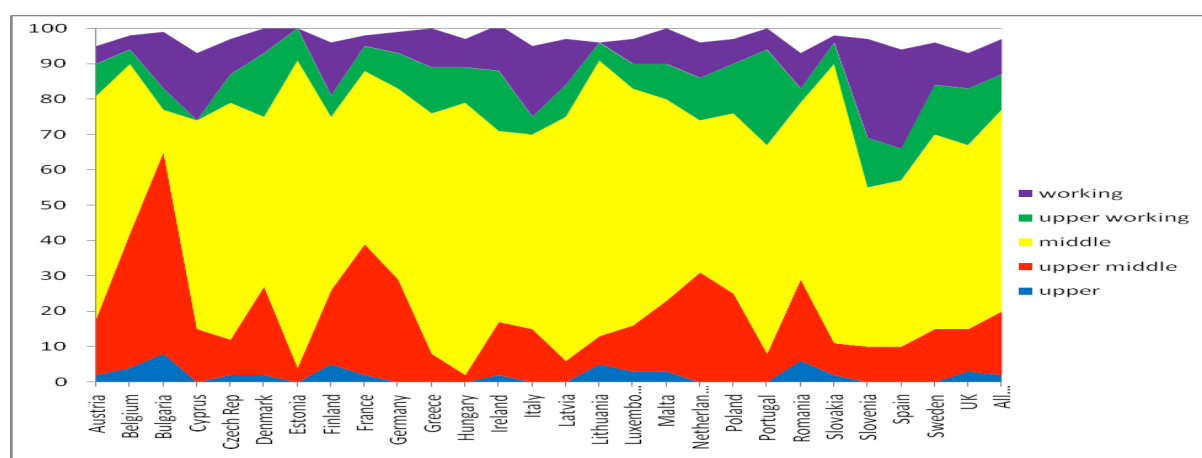
APPENDIX A External Fairness



Age in five categories

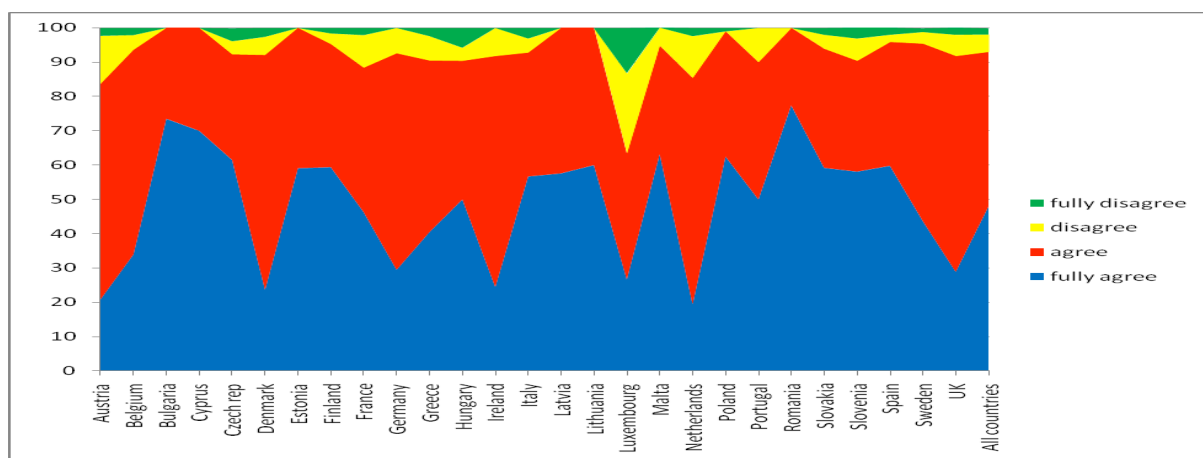


Education level in five categories

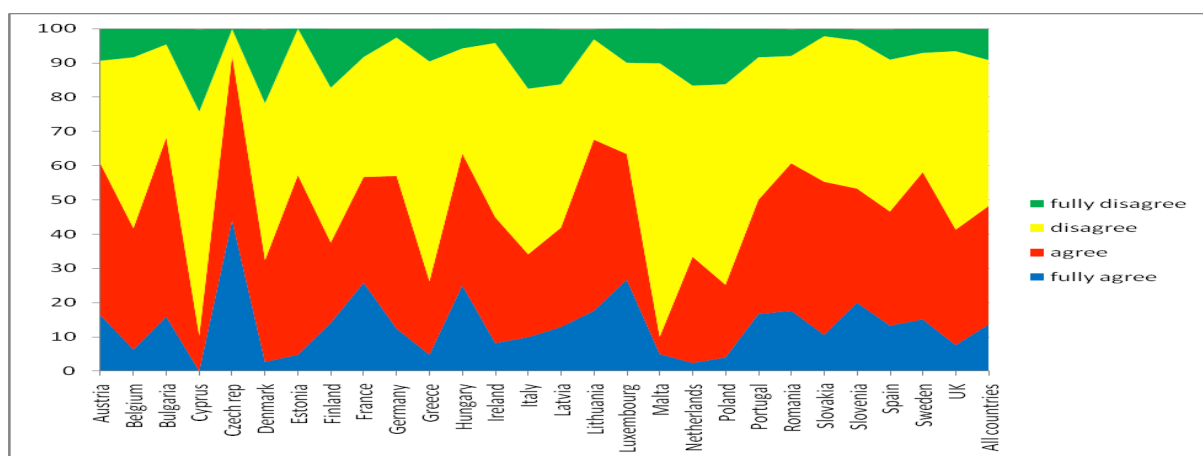


Social Class

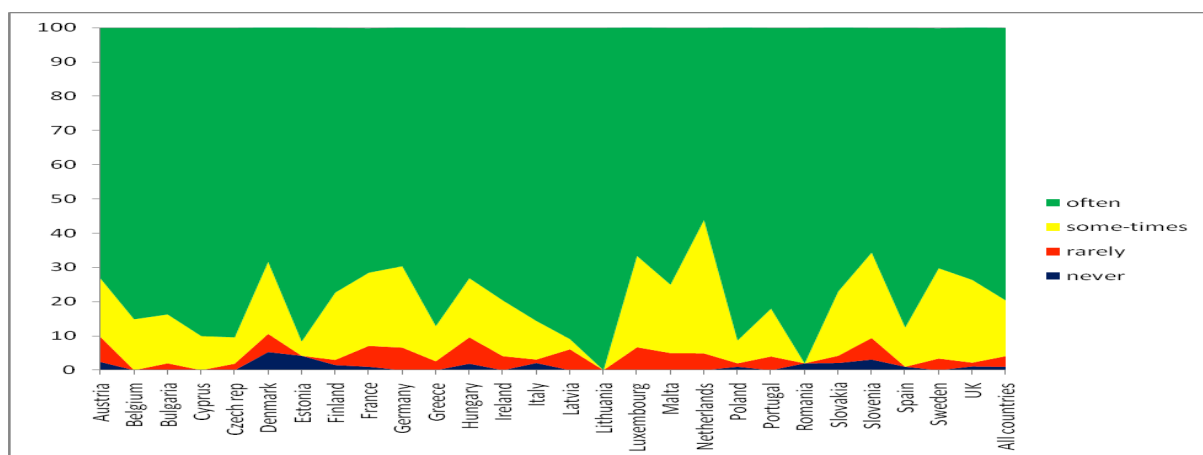
APPENDIX B Internal Fairness



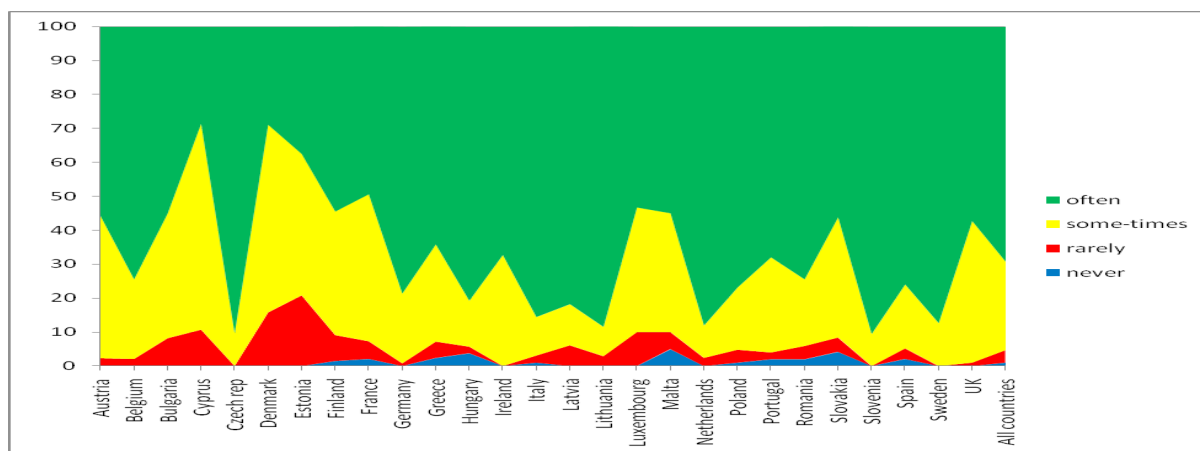
During the discussion all participants had equal speaking opportunities



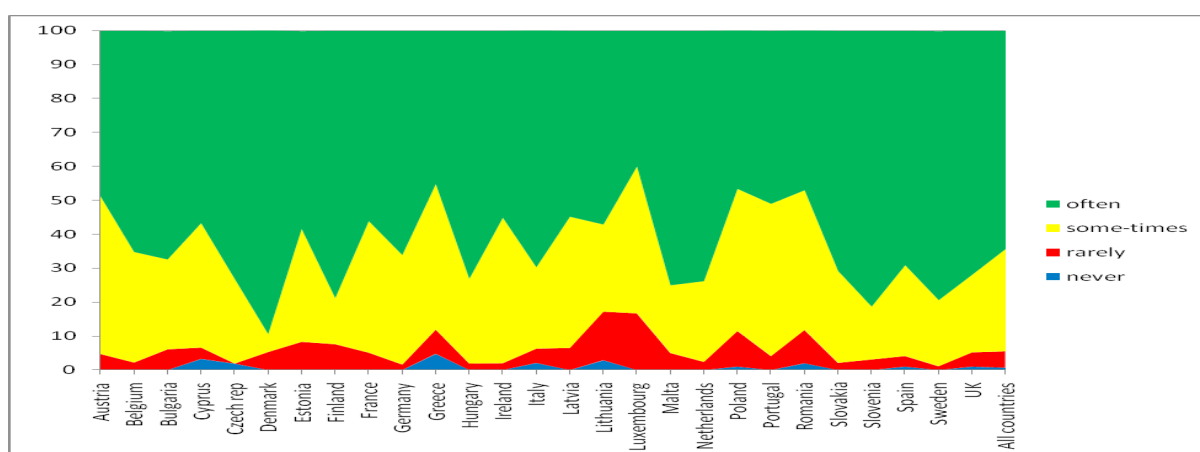
Some participants dominated the discussions



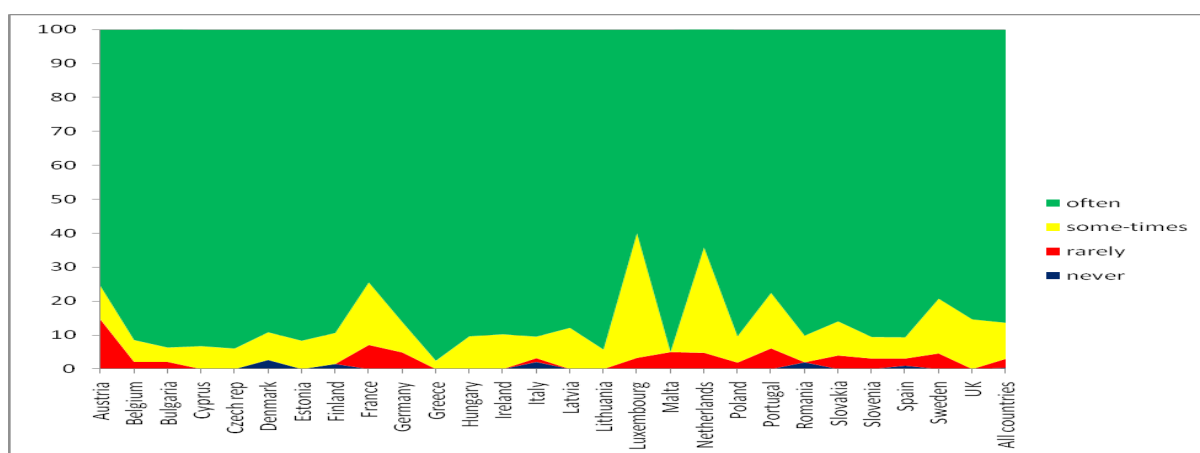
All participants were given equal opportunities to shape our final recommendations



We were able to disagree openly in the group

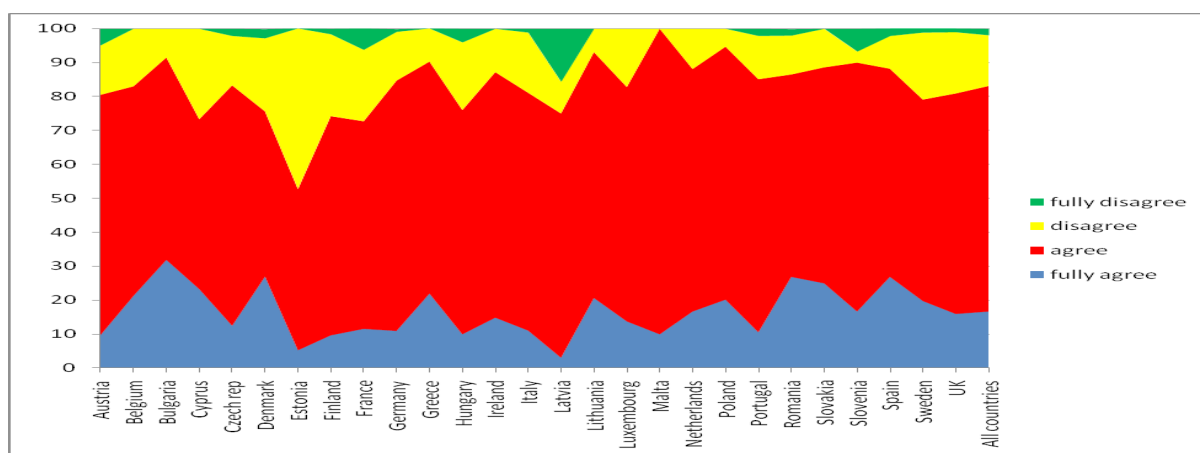


Participants accepted different opinions as part of the deliberations

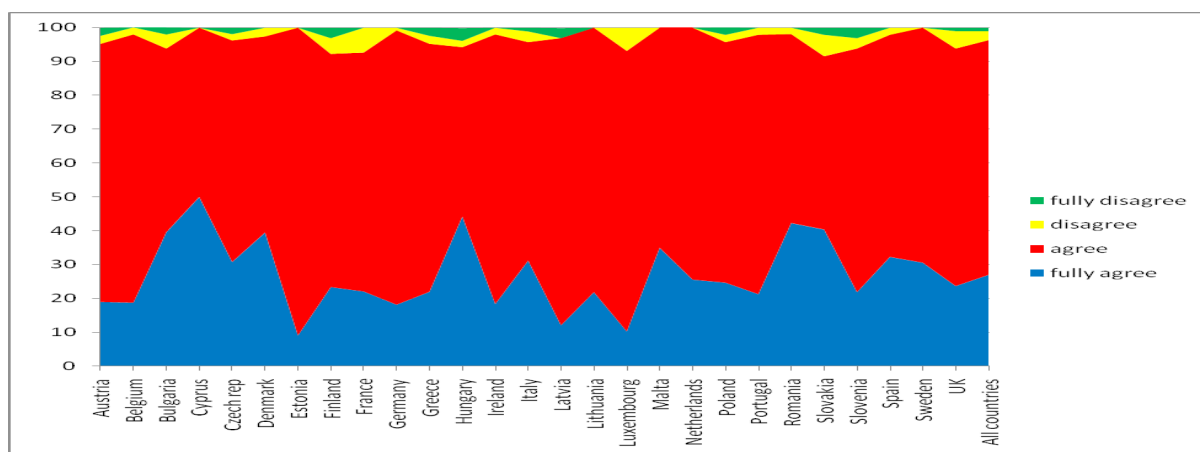


The facilitator managed to give everyone a chance to speak

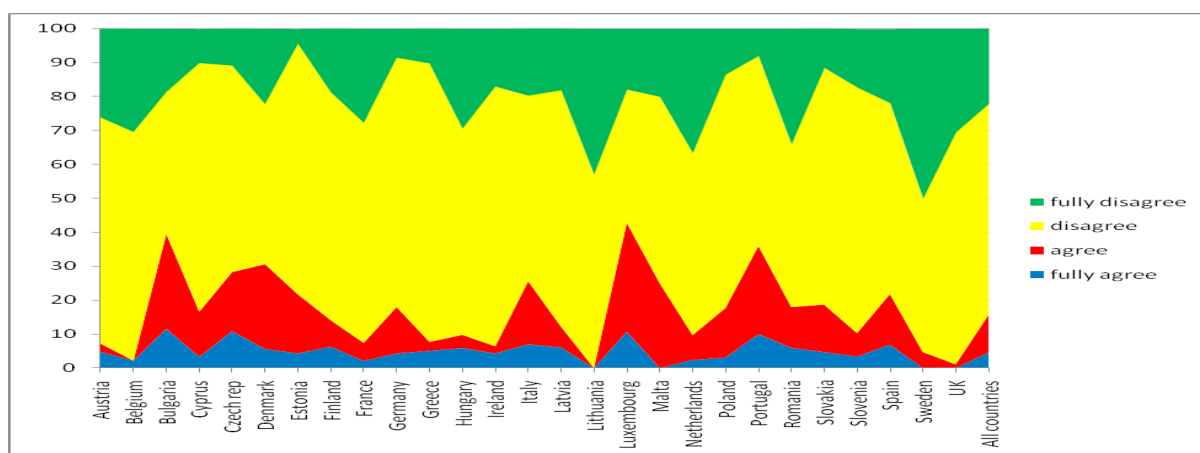
APPENDIX C Competence of the citizens



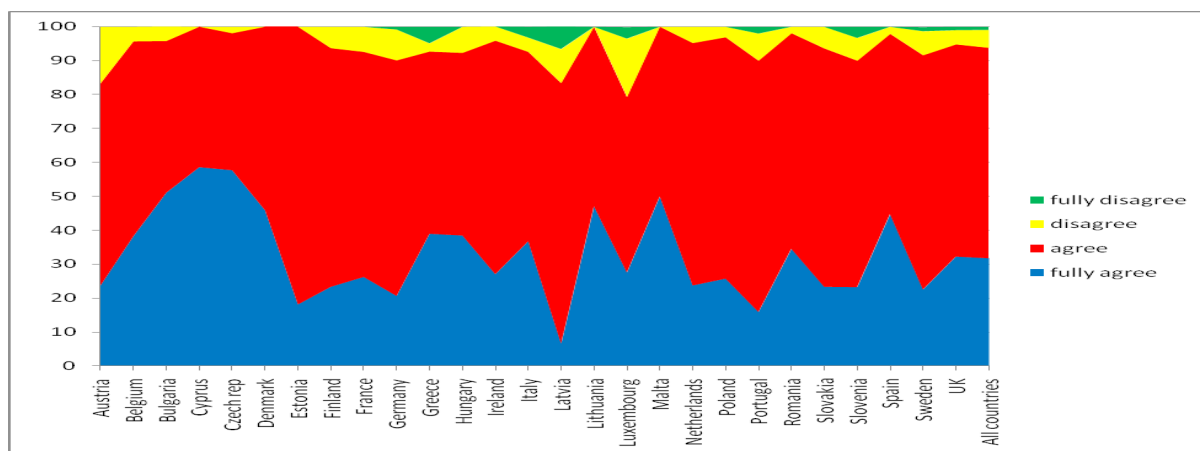
My own knowledge about the topics was sufficient to participate in the discussions



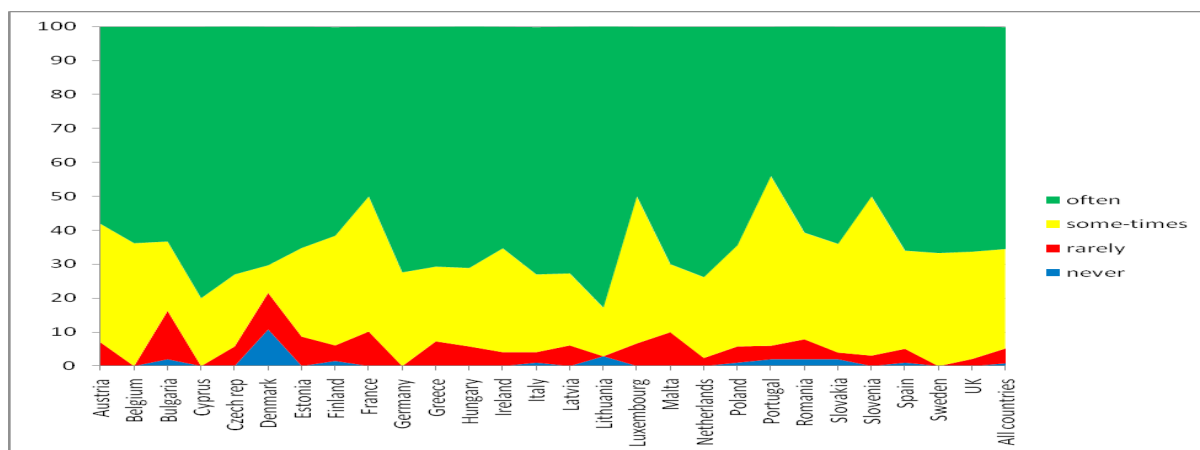
The other participants of the consultation listened to me



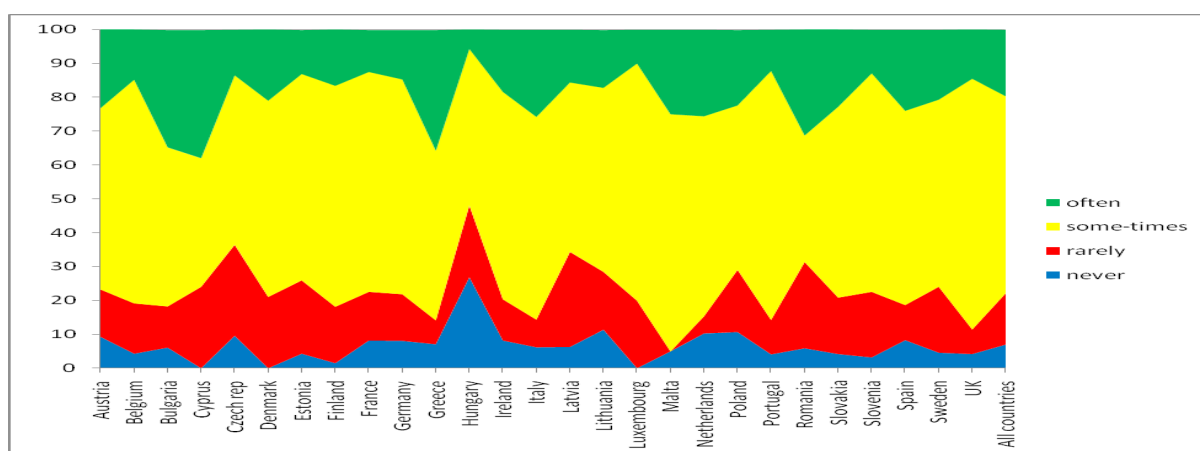
The experts on Europe had too much influence on the whole consultation



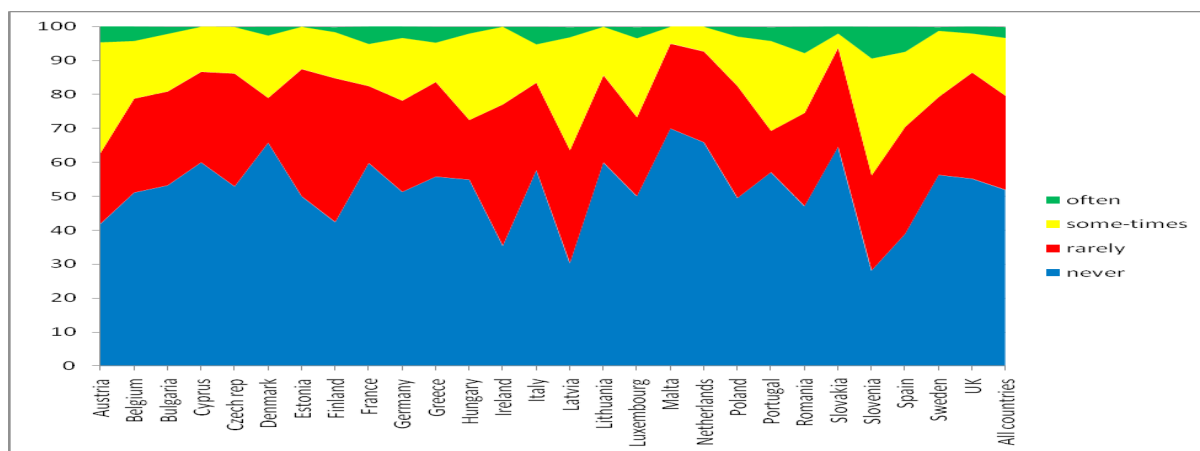
I was able to express my opinions and arguments adequately



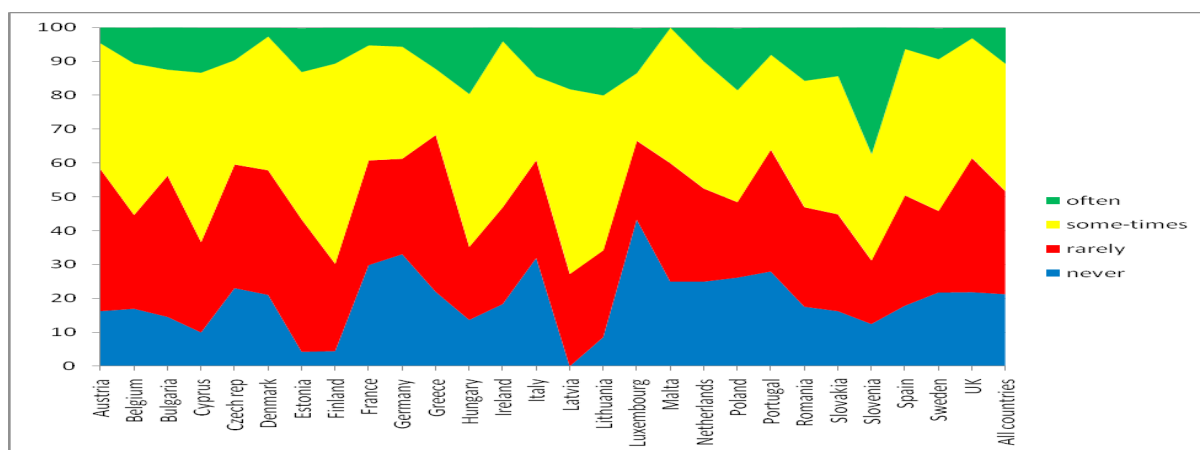
I was able to express my views and they were understood by the other participants of the discussions



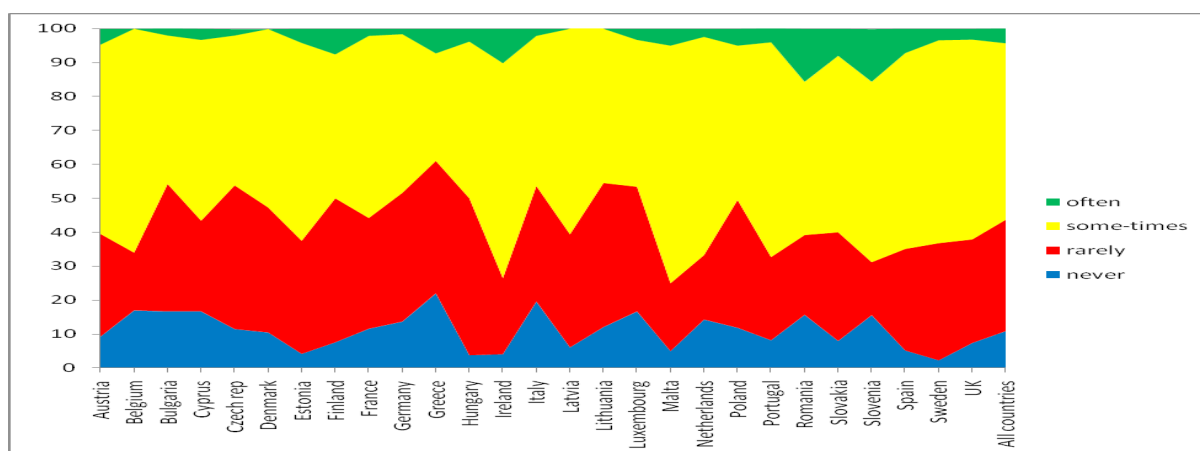
I introduced a new topic for discussion



I hesitated to express my opinions that differed from the general view of the group

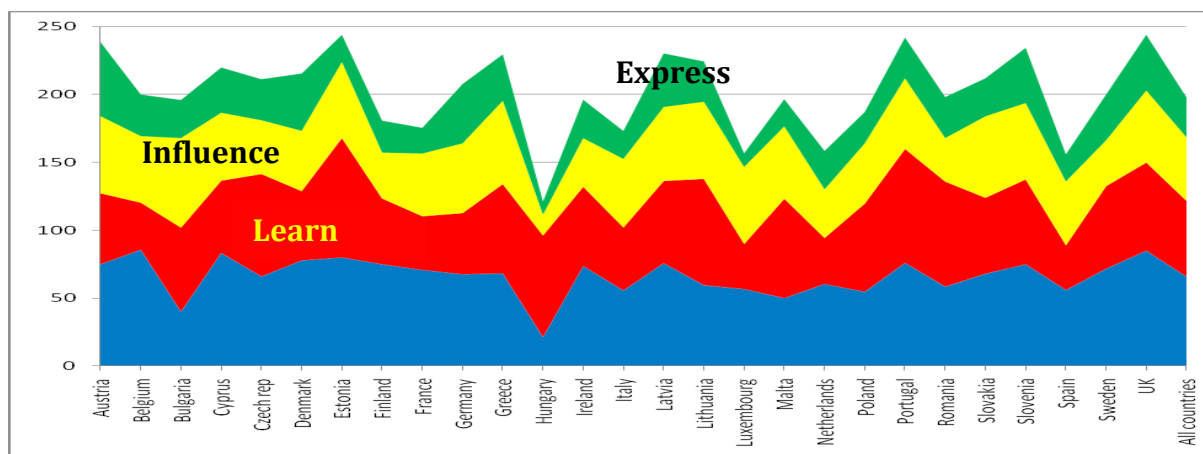


The more people agreed on a certain point, the more I felt inclined to agree as well

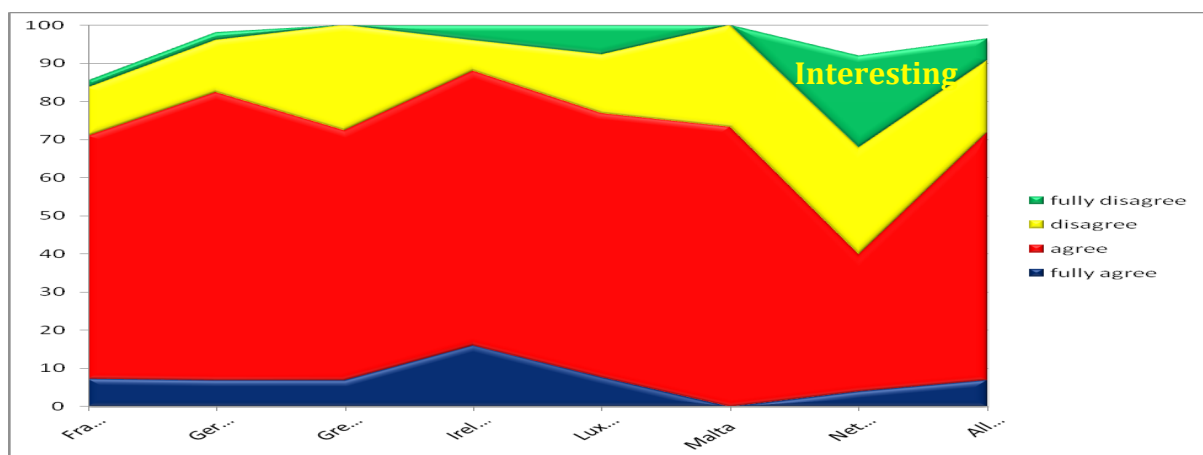


I did change my views as a result of the discussions we had at the consultations

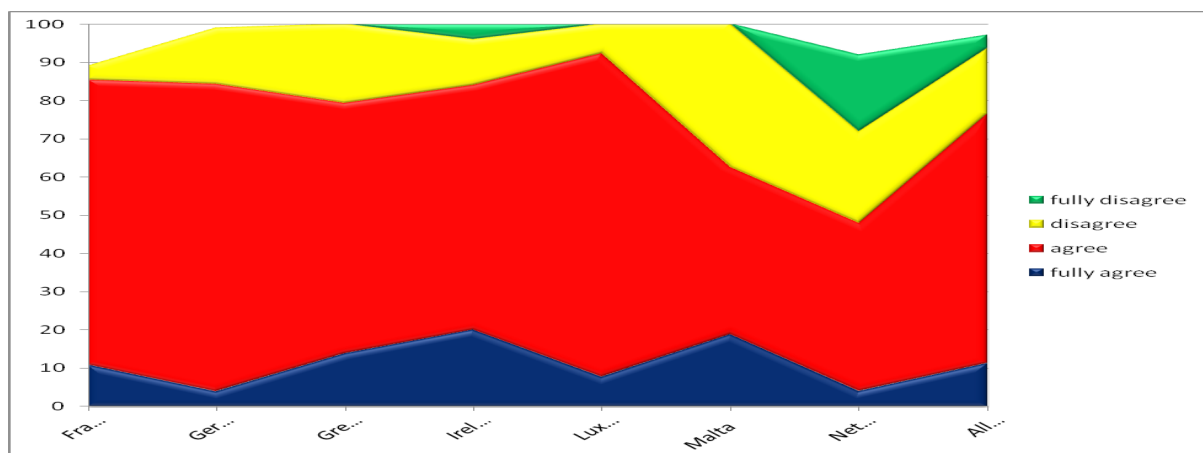
APPENDIX D Transparency



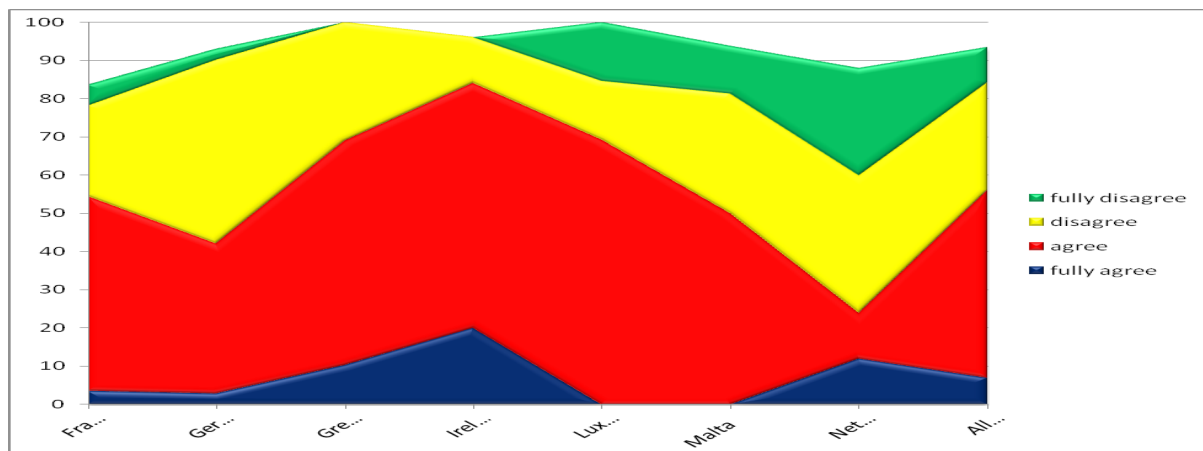
Why participate?



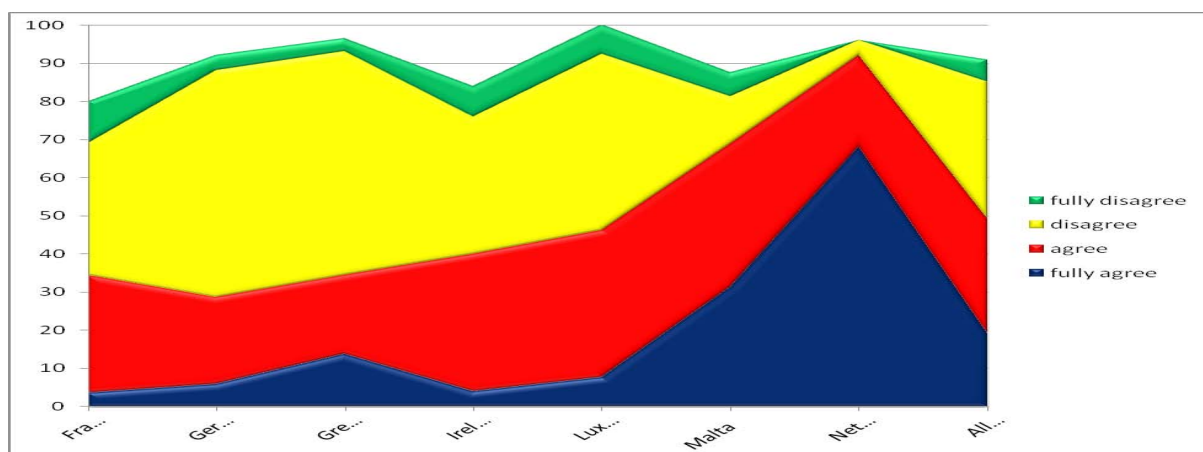
... responded to questions asked by the participants



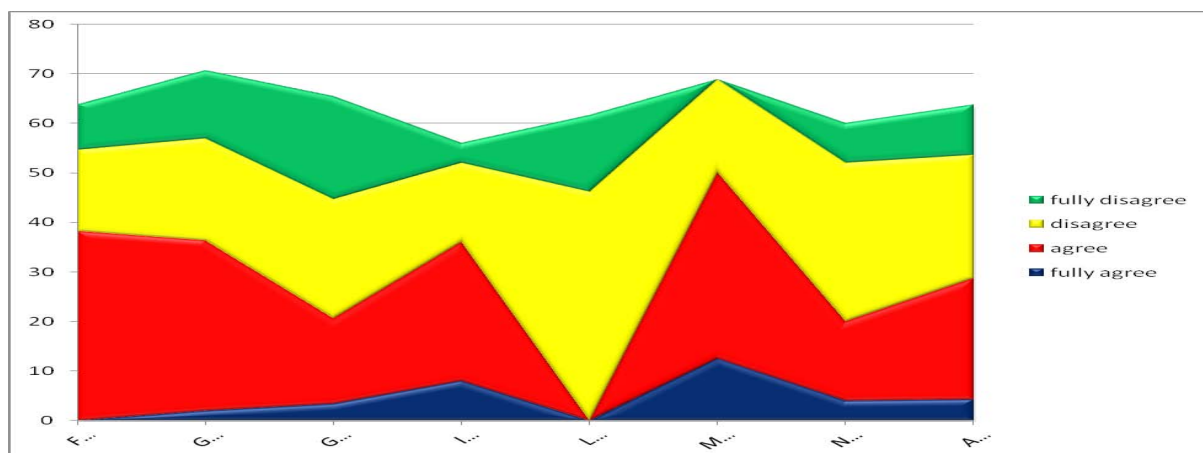
... commented on and discussed the recommendations presented by the participants



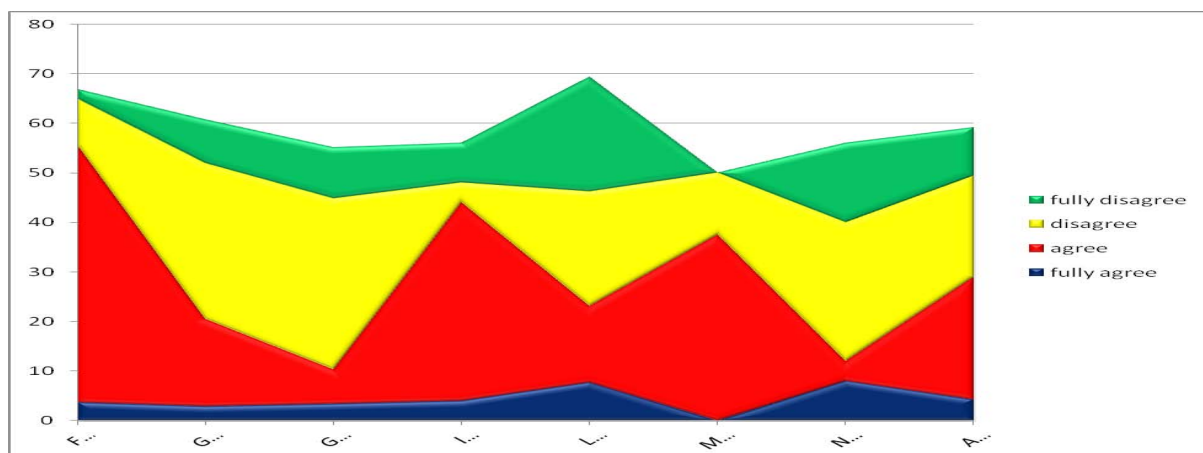
... were in general encouraging about the recommendations



... discussed the differences between the various parties represented rather than discussed the recommendations

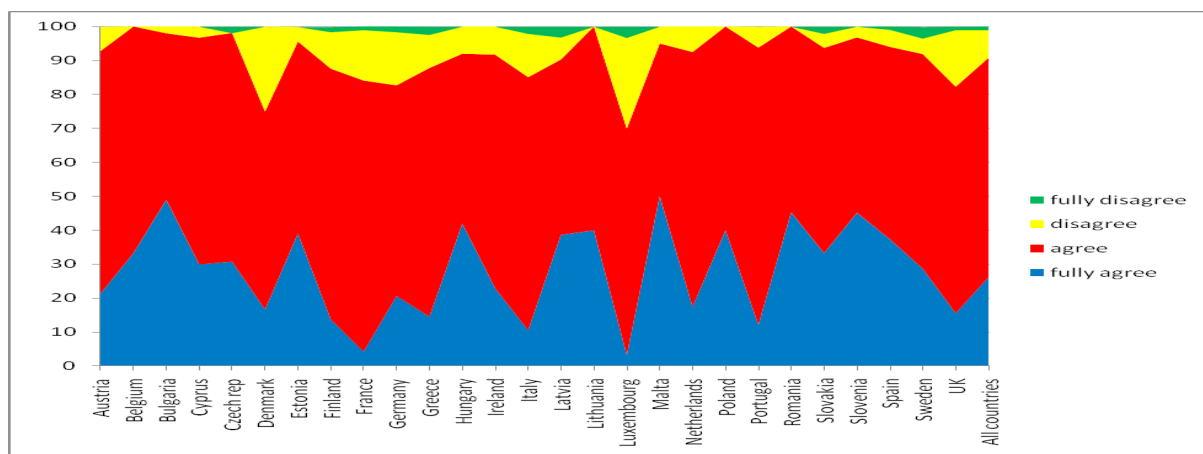


... will act on the recommendations put forward by the participants in the EU Parliament

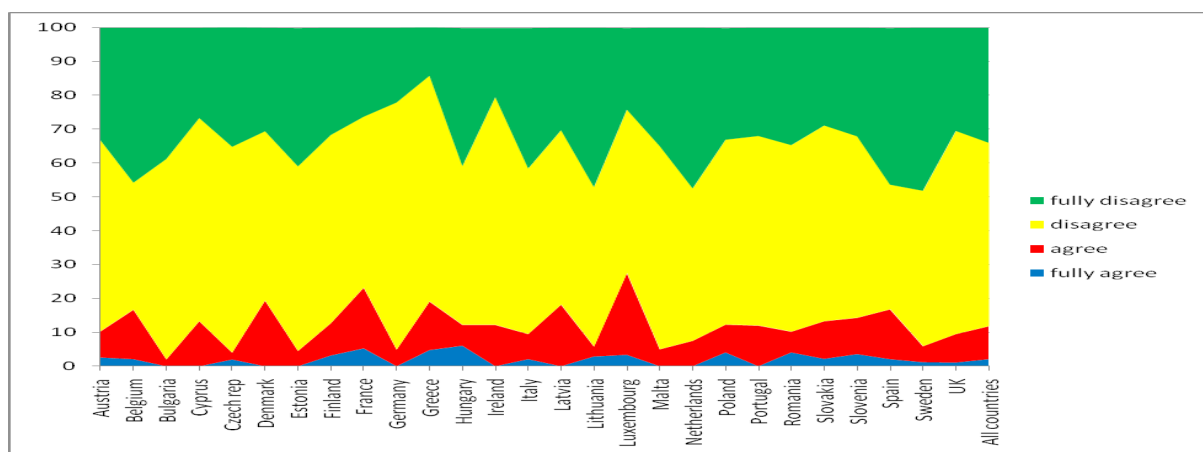


... will report back to the ECC participants in my country on how they have treated the recommendations in the European Parliament

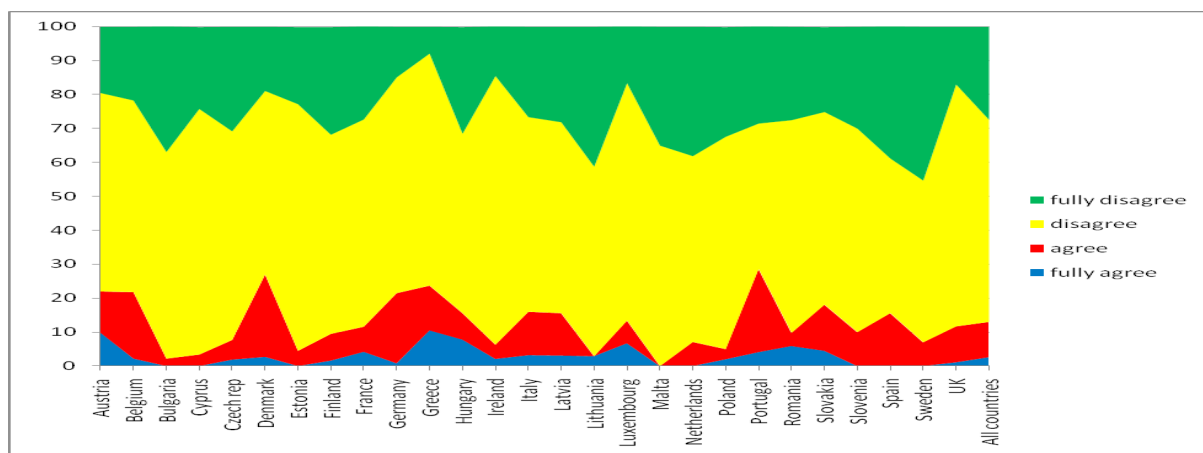
APPENDIX E Efficiency



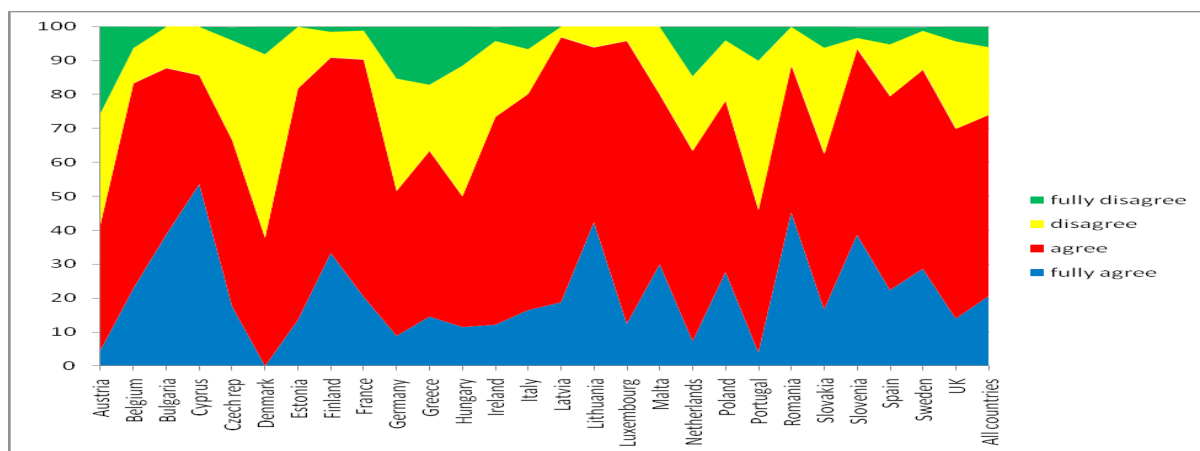
The information provided was sufficient



The high complexity of the process was a problem for me

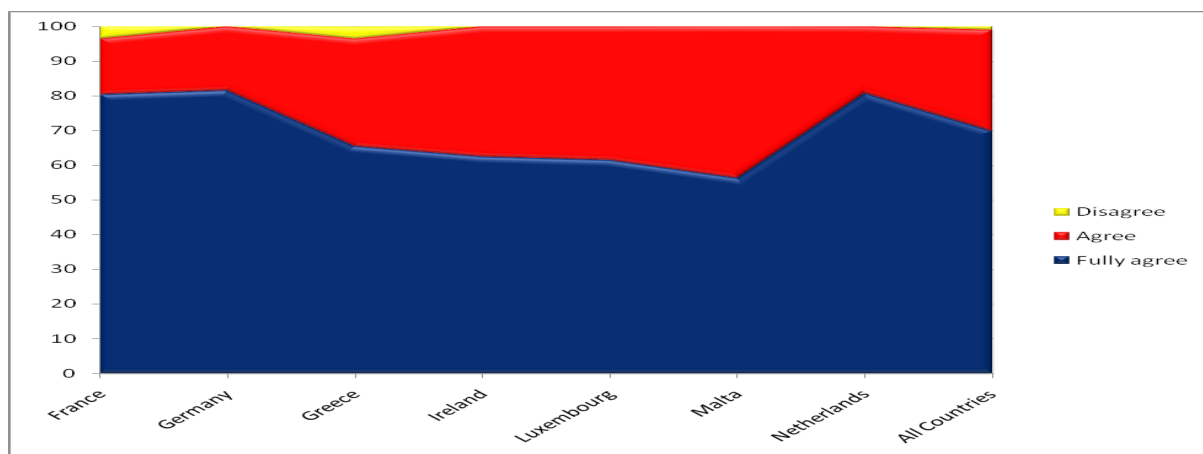


The rules that structured the discussions were too strict

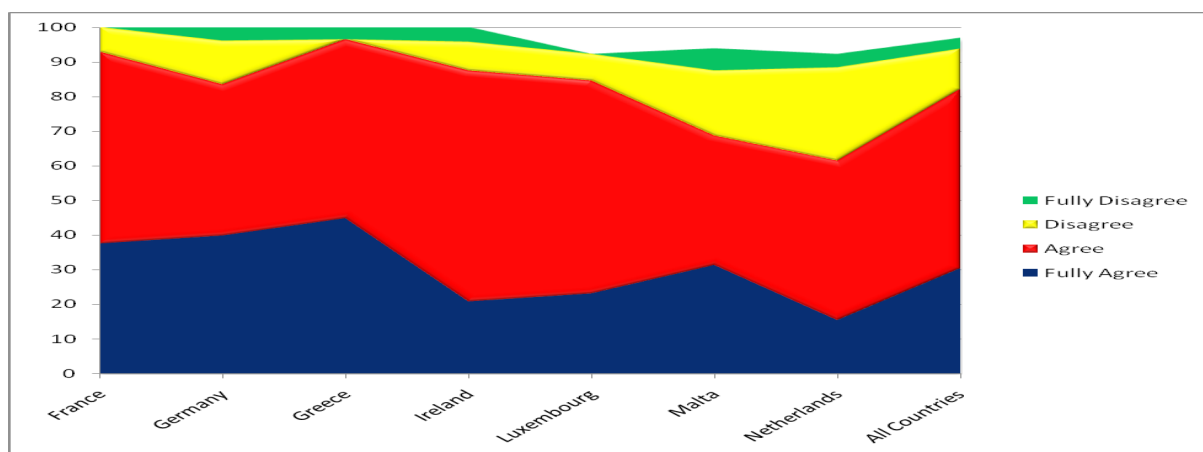


The time for discussion was adequate

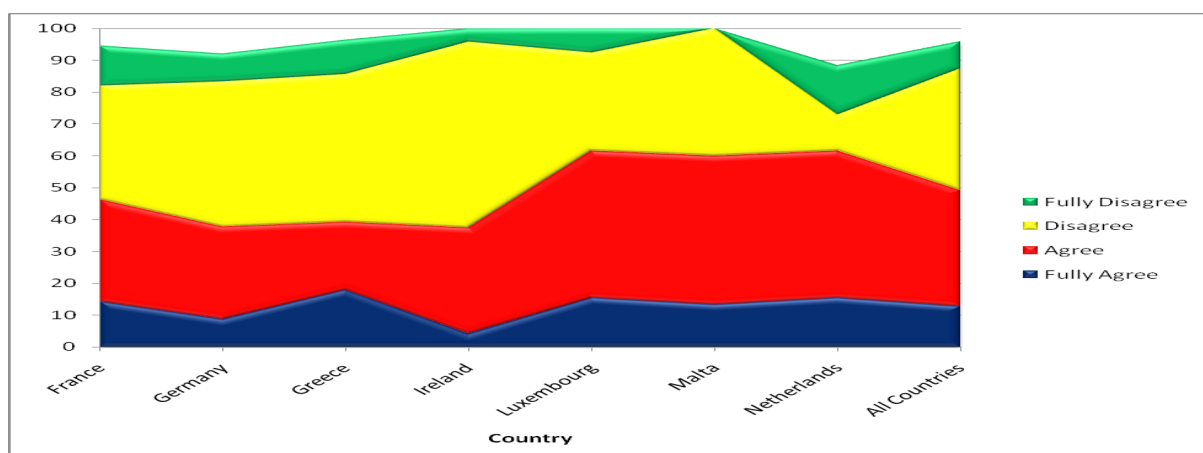
APPENDIX F Impact



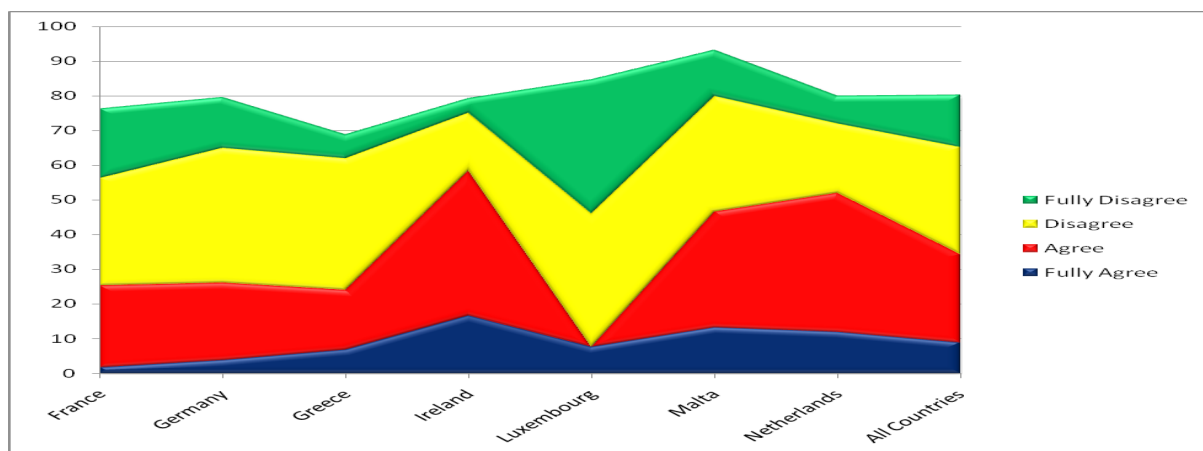
I found the ECC an interesting experience



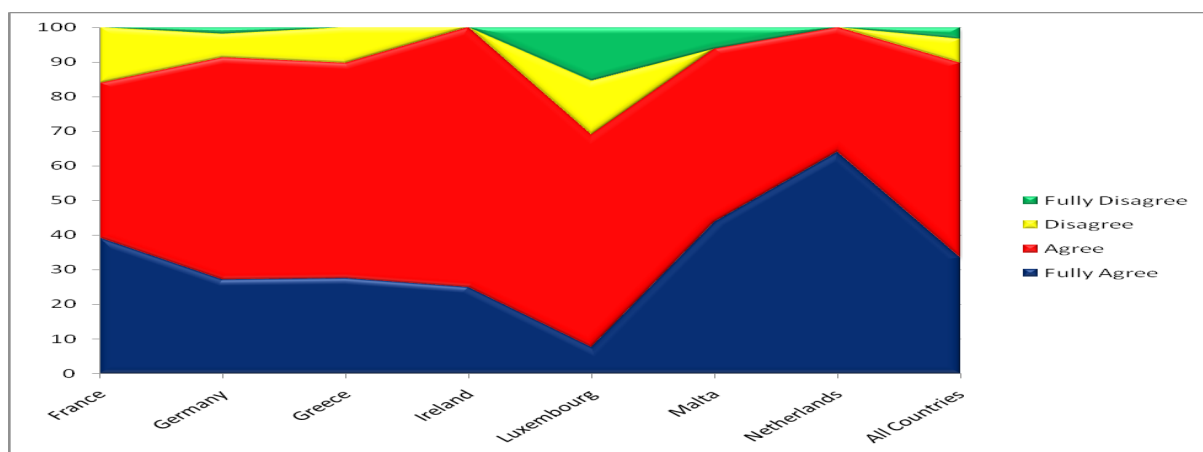
I am disappointed about the lack of interest from the media in the ECC



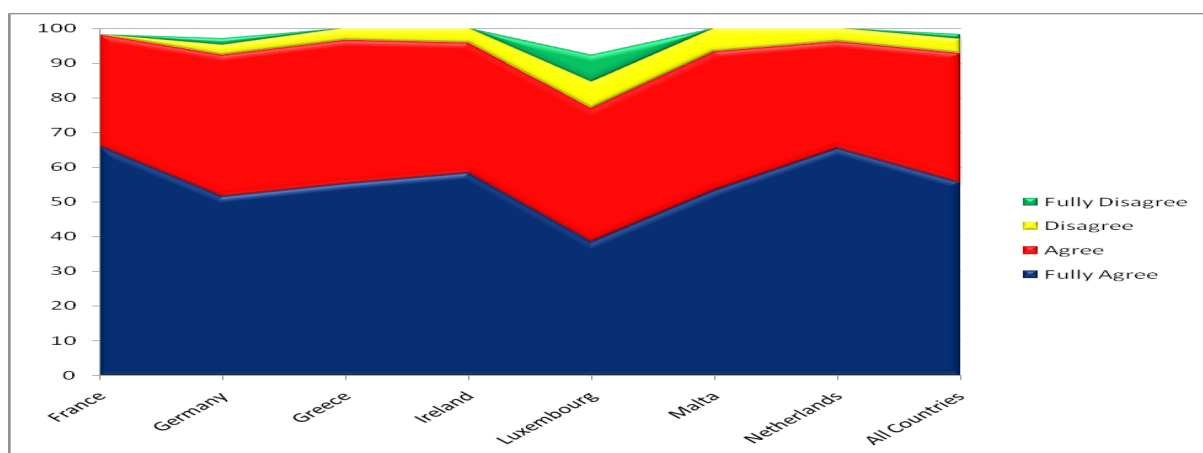
I have no idea what happened after the ECC in March



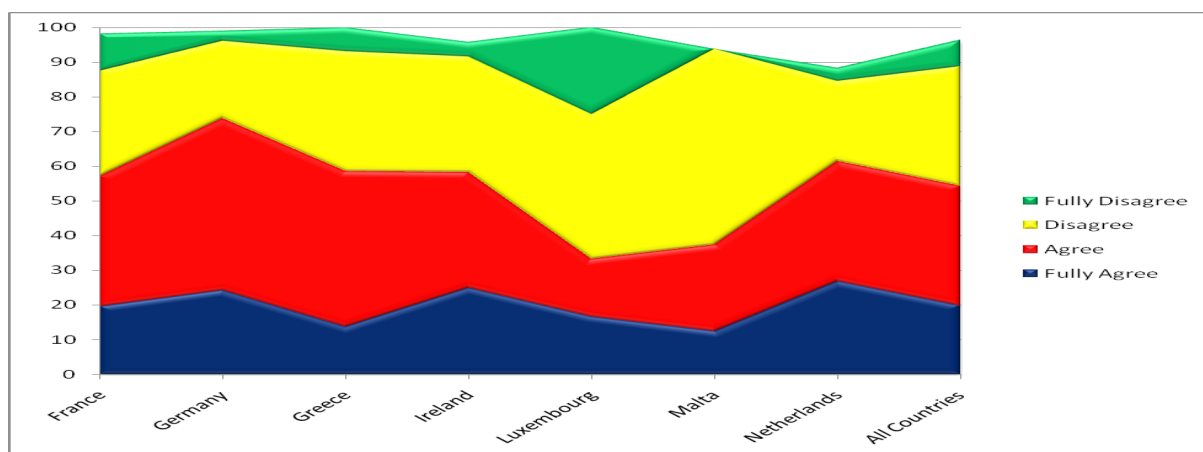
I had the chance to influence decision makers



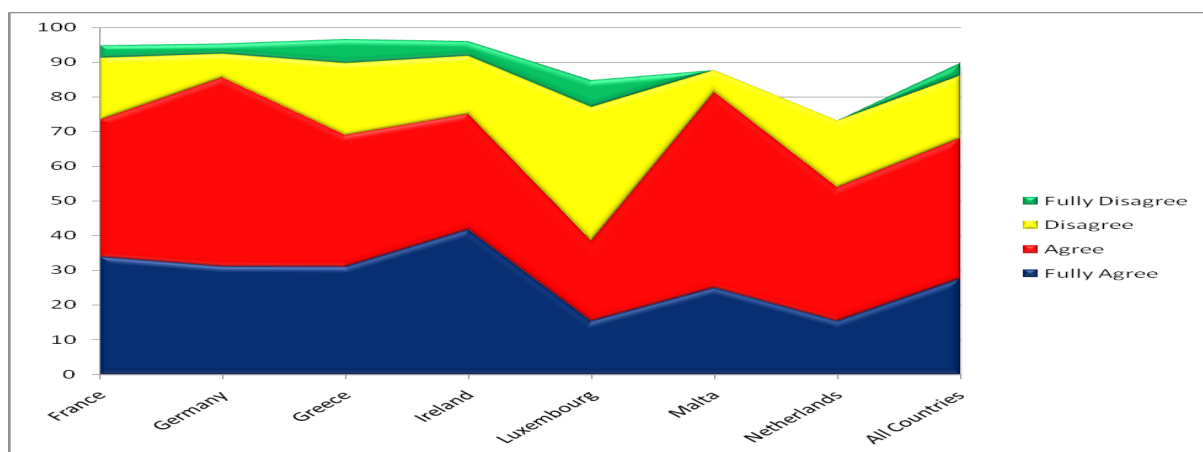
I learned more about how the European Union functions



My opinion about the European Union is changed by the ECC



This kind of European Citizens' Consultations should be organized more often



I feel myself more a European

Table 6: Impact of the participation in the ECC

Due to your participation at the European Citizens' Conference: How often did you	often	sometimes	rarely	never
a) Actively follow reports about the politics of the European Union in the media	43	41	11	4
b) Visit websites of EU-organizations or EU-politicians	12	36	24	26
c) Contact an EU-politician	4	4	17	75
d) Visit events on politics of the European Union	6	17	20	56
e) Participate in conversations with friends or family members about the politics of the EU	30	49	17	3
f) Participate in public debates about the politics of the EU	6	14	15	64
g) Participate in online debates about the politics of the EU	1	6	17	75
h) Join an organization that deals with the politics of the EU	4	6	10	80
a) Make contact with a participant of nyour home country	10	19	16	55
b) Make contact with a participant of another EU country	0	3	8	89
c) Discuss with a participant of your home country the topics of the European Citizens' Consultation	4	22	13	60
d) Discuss with a participant of another EU country the topics of the European Citizens' Consultation	0	5	5	89
e) Discuss with a participant of your home country the politics of the EU in general	4	23	12	61
f) Discuss with a participant of another EU country the politics of the EU in general	1	9	6	84

APPENDIX G Impact: multivariate approach

Variables' operationalization	
Individual-level demographic variables	Values
Age	Age cohorts: <30 years old (1), 31-40 (2), 41-50 (3), 51-60 (4), >60 years old (5)
Gender	Male (1), Female (2)
Level of Education	Lower – (Level 1), Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, Level 5, Level 6, Upper – (Level 7)
Social Class	1: upper class, 2: upper middle class, 3: middle class, 4: upper working class, 5: working class
Political Position	1: left, 2: center, 3: right
Macro level variables	Measured at the prefectural level
Country of participant	Austria (1), Belgium W (2), Belgium F (3), Bulgaria (4), Cyprus (5), Czech Republic (6), Denmark (7), Estonia (8), Finland (9), France (10), Germany (11), Greece (12), Hungary (13), Ireland (14), Italy (15), Latvia (16), Lithuania (17), Luxembourg (18), Malta (19), Netherlands (20), Poland (21), Portugal (22), Romania (23), Slovakia (24), Slovenia (25), Spain (26), Sweden (27), United Kingdom (28)

Dependent variables

"And how interested are you in politics at the level of the European Union?"	very interested (1) quite interested (2) on average interested (3) hardly interested (4) not interested at all (5)
"How well informed do you consider yourself to be about the European Union?"	very well informed (1) well informed (2) on average informed (3) hardly informed (4) not at all informed (5)
"How much trust do you have in the European Parliament ?"	very much trust (1) fairly much trust (2) not so much trust (3) absolute no trust (4)
"How much trust do you have in People in general ?"	very much trust (1) fairly much trust (2) not so much trust (3) absolute no trust (4)
"Could you indicate how satisfied you are with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?"	very satisfied (1) satisfied (2) satisfied nor dissatisfied (3) dissatisfied (4) very unsatisfied (5)
"Could you indicate how satisfied you are in general with what the government of [COUNTRY] has done during the past four years?"	very satisfied (1) satisfied (2) satisfied nor dissatisfied (3) dissatisfied (4) very unsatisfied (5)
"Members of Parliament do not care about opinions of people like me"	fully agree (1) agree (2) disagree (3) fully disagree (4)
"Parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion"	fully agree (1) agree (2) disagree (3) fully disagree (4)
"People like me have absolutely no influence on governmental politics"	fully agree (1) agree (2) disagree (3) fully disagree (4)
"So many people vote in elections that my vote does not matter"	fully agree (1) agree (2) disagree (3) fully disagree (4)
How much do you think the European Citizens' Consultation in which you are participating today, will influence policy makers	Very much (1) Much (2) Somewhat (3) Little (4) Not at all (5)

APPENDIX H The role of MEPs in the national consultations

Table 9: Social Class / Voting intention and changes in the level of trust in the European Parliament (N=1458)

	Changed the level of trust following the national consultations	
	Percentage	Difference %
Middle class or upper class	40	-7
Working class	47	+7
Will vote	39	-11
Won't vote or don't know	50	+11
All	41	

Table 10: MEPs referring to the ECC project and to the recommendations (percentage very often, often or sometimes) (N=9) (Frequencies)

	ECC	Recommendations
When talking to citizens	4	6
When talking to other politicians	3	4
When being interviewed	3	4
During a debate	2	3
When speaking in the assembly	1	3
Average	29%	44%

APPENDIX I The role of the web sites in the ECC 2009

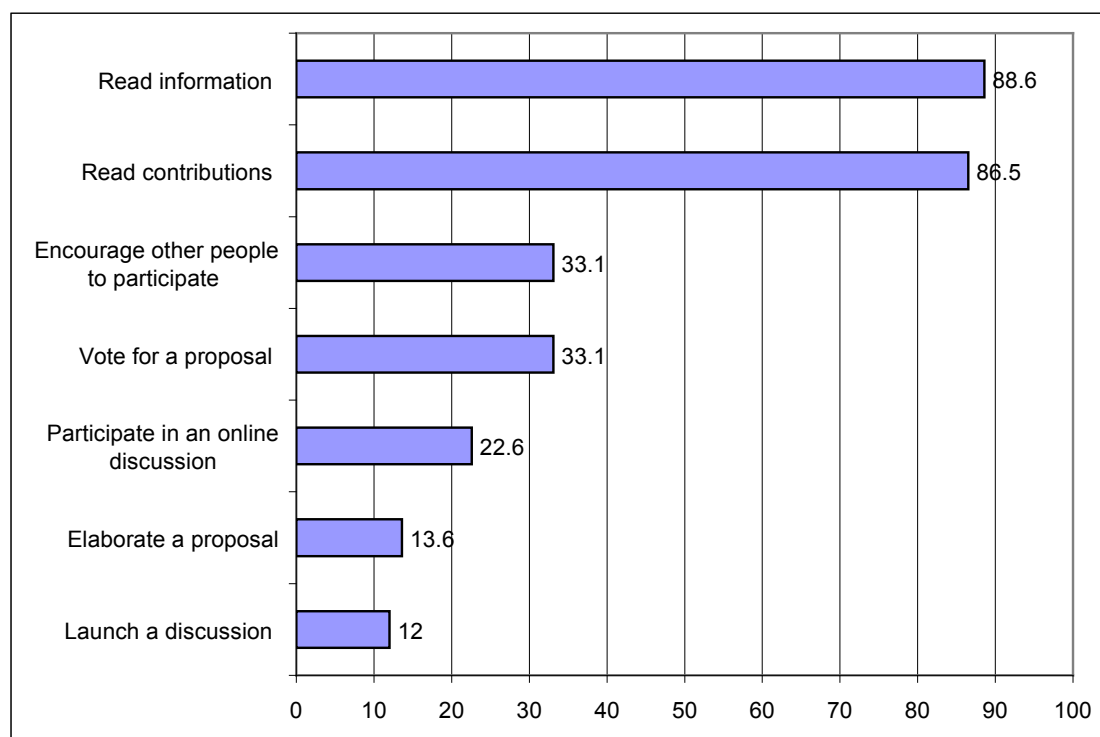
Table 12 : Statistics on the national sites of the ECC in the period between January 1 and May 31 2009

	Number of visitations	Number of visitors	Number of page views	Average time spend on site per visit	Origin of visitors	Percentage of habitants per country that visited the ECC national web site
Austria	5 198	2 514	25 741	7' 08"	Reference sites (51,64%)	0,032
Belgium (Fr)	4 167	2 316	16 748	4' 10"	Reference sites (50,40%)	0,072
Belgium (NI)	3 094	1 809	12 053	3' 30	Reference sites (43,21%)	0,031
Bulgaria	2 399	1 436	10 605	4' 56"	Reference sites (59,36%)	0,021
Cyprus	1 772	766	6 792	4' 58"	Direct Access (40,29%)	0,082
Czech Republic	2 862	1 842	11 705	4' 30"	Reference sites (44,69%)	0,019
Denmark	2 541	1 329	9 516	3' 42"	Reference sites (44,63%)	0,026
Estonia	2 773	1 725	8 334	4' 11'	Reference sites (61,02%)	0,0135
Finland	4 125	2 509	16 037	6' 10"	Reference sites (52,36%)	0,048
France	50 716	31 901	208 988	4' 42"	Reference sites (49,49%)	0,053
Germany	23 023	13 647	109 512	7' 06"	Direct Access (55,57%)	0,017
Greece	2 588	1 141	11 782	5' 05"	Reference sites (43, 78%)	0,011
Hungary	7 032	4 316	24 979	3' 05"	Reference sites (52,55%)	0,048
Ireland	2 068	1 158	8 358	3' 49"	Reference sites (58,51%)	0,027
Italy	9 087	5 434	39 558	4' 56"	Reference sites (49,83%)	0,010
Latvia	3 689	1 986	15 021	4' 27"	Reference sites (44,97%)	0,095
Lithuania	1 988	1 037	8 089	4' 33"	Search Engine (36,27%)	0,033
Luxembourg	1 737	927	7 471	4'	Reference sites (46,57%)	0,204
Malta	1 076	666	3 260	3' 35"	Reference sites (46,84%)	0,178
Netherlands	2 346	1 292	8 628	3' 49"	Direct Access (42,11%)	0,008
Poland	12 052	6 050	47 956	4' 58"	Reference sites (48,62%)	0,017

	Number of visitations	Number of visitors	Number of page views	Average time spend on site per visit	Origin of visitors	Percentage of habitants per country that visited the ECC national web site
Portugal	6 439	4 275	25 026	3' 46"	Reference sites (56,72%)	0,043
Romania	4204	2 902	14 562	3' 26"	Reference sites (63,56%)	0,015
Slovakia	1 916	908	7 832	4' 23	Direct Acces (43,16%)	0,018
Slovenia	2 688	1 638	9 764	4'	Reference sites (46,61%)	0,087
Spain	39 474	29 579	115 354	3' 19"	Reference sites (74,98%)	0,066
Sweden	3 822	2 091	15 733	5' 39"	Reference sites (60,70%)	0,015
United Kingdom	6 222	3 304	23 987	3' 55"	Reference sites (48,51%)	0,006

Table 13: Activity of the forum per country

	No of threats	No of responses	Total number	Total in %	No of propositions	Propositions in %	Citizens registered to the forum	Participants to the national consultation who visited their national web-forum at least once
Austria	76	208	284	5.1	36	3.2	394	44.2
Belgium (Fr)	50	69	119	2.1	35	3.1	525	45.0
Belgium (NI)	26	22	48	0.9	35	3.1	383	33.3
Bulgaria	23	15	38	0.7	21	1.8	236	43.2
Cyprus	39	4	43	0.8	15	1.3	383	18.5
Czech Republic	26	56	82	1.5	12	1.1	388	42.6
Denmark	22	40	62	1.1	12	1.1	353	34.1
Estonia	17	17	34	0.6	7	0.6	217	54.5
Finland	14	28	42	0.8	11	1.0	723	32.4
France	470	705	1175	21.0	257	22.5	9389	41.3
Germany	217	487	704	12.6	132	11.6	4394	54.8
Greece	27	37	64	1.1	30	2.6	207	22.5
Hungary	48	83	131	2.3	28	2.5	536	16.3
Ireland	19	13	50	0.9	24	2.1	319	31.3
Italy	87	164	251	4.5	84	7.4	1069	31.9
Latvia	36	77	113	2.0	19	1.7	154	44.8
Lithuania	40	57	97	1.7	34	3.0	208	30.6
Luxembourg	41	15	56	1.0	35	3.1	195	46.7
Malta	13	24	37	0.7	8	0.7	73	32.1
Netherlands	17	66	83	1.5	21	1.8	339	32.5
Poland	37	245	282	5.0	18	1.6	1020	32.0
Portugal	143	328	471	8.4	63	5.5	591	42.6
Romania	30	74	104	1.9	13	1.1	214	73.7
Slovakia	19	31	50	0.9	7	0.6	242	38.3
Slovenia	41	54	95	1.7	20	1.8	288	32.3
Spain	313	456	769	13.7	115	10.1	5453	40.2
Sweden	23	55	78	1.4	13	1.1	597	32.6
United Kingdom	74	162	236	4.2	37	3.2	641	32.4

Figure 1: Activities in % of ECC websites users participating at the national consultations

Source: Questionnaire of evaluation for ECC (March 2009 N: 1647; Valid responses N: 588-600)

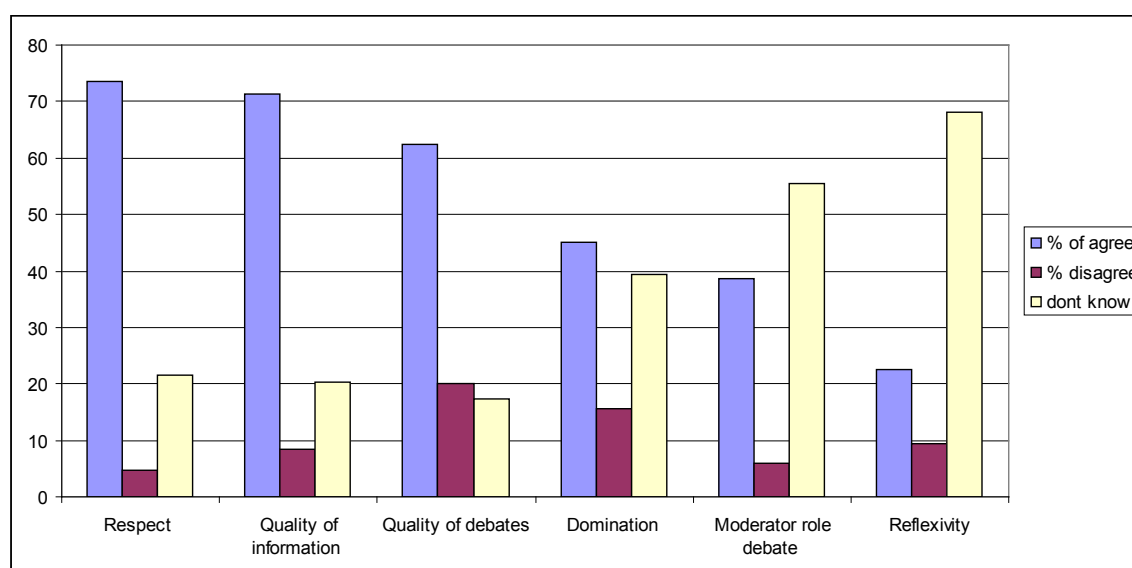
Figure 2: Evaluation of online forum by participants at online consultation (N: 534-560)

Figure 3: Perception of usefulness of the online debates for the national consultation (respondents who replied "sometimes" and "often"; N:

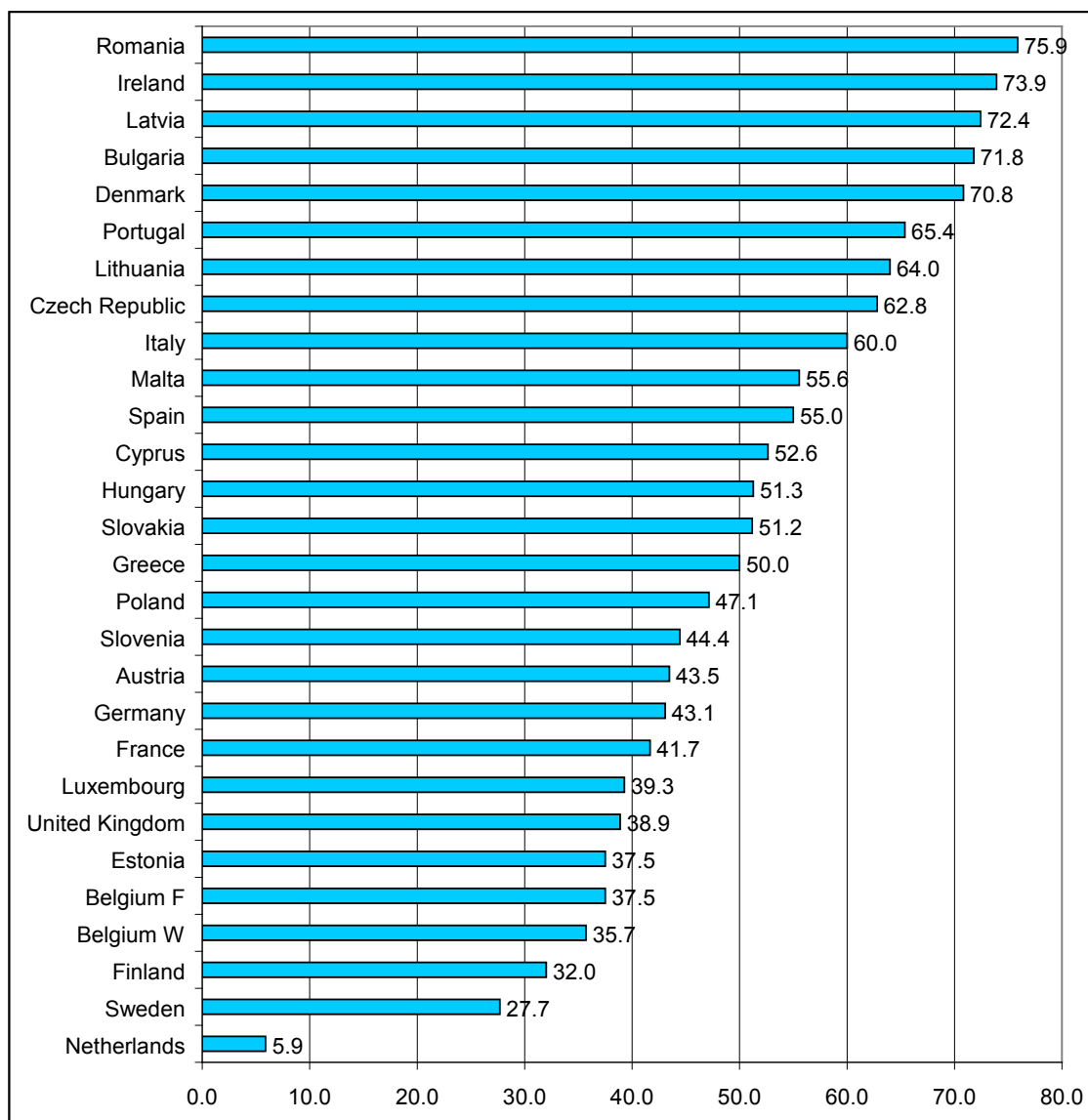


Table 15: Number of proposals and messages posted on the 28 national ECC web sites

Countries	Proposals	Messages	Ratio in %
France	257	1175	21,9
Germany	132	704	18,8
Spain	115	769	15,0
Italy	84	251	33,5
Portugal	63	471	13,4
UK	37	236	15,7
Austria	36	284	12,7
Belgium (fr)	35	119	29,4
Belgium (ne)	35	48	72,9
Luxembourg	35	56	62,5
Lithuania	34	97	35,1
Greece	30	64	46,9
Hungary	28	131	21,4
Ireland	24	92	26,1
Bulgaria	21	38	55,3
Netherlands	21	83	25,3
Slovenia	20	95	21,1
Latvia	19	113	16,8
Poland	18	282	6,4
Cyprus	15	82	18,3
Romania	13	104	12,5
Sweden	13	78	16,7
Czech Republic	12	43	27,9
Denmark	12	62	19,4
Finland	11	42	26,2
Malta	8	37	21,6
Estonia	7	34	20,6
Slovakia	7	50	14,0
Total	1142	5640	20,2

Table 16: Percentage of messages which were transformed into proposals

Countries	Messages turned into proposals (in %)
Belgium (ne)	72,91%
Luxembourg	62,50%
Bulgaria	55,26%
Greece	46,87%
Lithuania	35,05%
Italy	33,46%
Belgium (fr)	29,41%
Czech Republic	27,90%
Finland	26,19%
Ireland	26,08%
Netherlands	25,30%
France	21,87%
Malta	21,62%
Hungary	21,37%
Slovenia	21,05%
Estonia	20,58%
Denmark	19,35%
Germany	18,75%
Cyprus	18,29%
Latvia	16,81%
Sweden	16,66%
UK	15,67%
Spain	14,95%
Slovakia	14,00%
Portugal	13,37%
Austria	12,67%
Romania	12,050%
Poland	6,38%
Average	20,21%

Nb: The countries in red are those which received the highest number of messages.

Table 17: Highest and lowest votes on 11 web sites

The table below shows the number of votes recorded for the first (+) and the last (-) of the 15 proposals in our sample of 11 ECC web sites.

Countries	Vote +	Vote + / Vote -
Austria	148	11
Cyprus	24	2
France	3829	445
Germany	1400	92
Greece	44	4
Ireland	134	2
Luxembourg	87	8
Malta (8)	12	1
Romania (13)	34	1
Spain	3413	171
UK	235	14

Table 18: Qualitative analysis of ECC proposals (sample of 11 web sites)

Countries	Argued proposals	Proposals which have not any concrete stance	Proposals which are not linked with the topic	Proposals which refer to the EU	Politicized proposals
Austria	46.66%	33.33%	53.33%	66.66%	0
Cyprus	93.33%	6.66%	0%	60%	0
France	80%	46.66%	46.66%	20%	0
Germany	60%	33.33%	60%	40%	6.66%
Greece	100%	0%	6.66%	80%	0
Ireland	73.33%	46.66%	46.66%	53.33%	20%
Luxembourg	86.66%	26.66%	20%	80%	33.33%
Malta	37.5%	50%	37.5%	75%	0
Romania	76.92%	69.23%	46.15%	61.53%	0
Spain	40%	26.66%	13.33%	40%	0
UK	80%	40%	26.66%	73.33%	0
Together	71.79%	33.34%	32.06%	58.33%	5.76%



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