



## European citizens agree on one agenda for the future of Europe

On 7th and 8th October 2006, 200 citizens from all EU member states came together for a European agenda-setting event in Brussels. This kick-starts a cycle of national consultations in all 25 member states, leading to a citizens' blueprint for the future of Europe.

"The citizens have succeeded in giving a real sense of direction and impetus to this whole process," said King Baudouin Foundation Managing Director Luc Tayart de Borms.

Citizens showed a high level of consensus across national boundaries. As one participant put it, "Knowing that citizens can come together for the first time and, despite language and cultural differences, agree on a common agenda in forty-eight hours, is a lesson to our politicians to make the EU work faster and better."

Out of twenty-four subjects, which the citizens themselves had pre-selected, three were chosen by a clear majority: Environment and energy; social welfare and family; and global role, outside borders, and immigration.

This "European Citizens' Agenda" is attached and is being handed over to the organizers of the twenty-five national events.

Why was the result so clear? The process was thorough and transparent. Citizens were grouped for discussion round twenty-six tables, with a moderator: each group appointed a representative to a European table to explain their priorities. The initial list of themes was first refined and improved, with some subjects merged. Indicative voting by each table showed a growing consensus round five subjects. This was then narrowed down in a further European round table discussion and final vote to the three which were chosen. Citizens had a "marketplace" of written material and experts at their disposal, but did not appear to rely much on these for support.

Were these citizens particularly knowledgeable about the EU? This was not the case, because they were selected from a representative sample of the population in terms of age, income and profession, following the same methodology used for opinion polls.

The view of the 100 observers at the event was positive; they were struck by the offer original insights by citizens, their sense of distinction between different geographical levels of decision-making, and pertinent connections made between different policies. It was a useful reminder to the world of the European institutions, where a detailed agenda is often captured by experts, that they can rely on the judgment of ordinary citizens. The event was also an encouragement to other citizens to make their voice heard.

In a personal and often passionate speech to the citizens, Margot Wallström, vice-president of the European Commission, promised her support and said that the EU must succeed in overcoming its "participation deficit" at its own peril.

During the discussion with the observers, it became clear that the European agenda-setting event was an innovation in attracting attention from a number of observers from the US and



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other countries, to see how a technique generally used at a more local level could be adapted to a multi-lingual, transnational setting, using interpretation and sophisticated technology.

The European Commission's Communication Director-General Claus Sørensen announced that the Commission would take the results of this and other Plan D projects and reflect them in their report to the June 2007 European Council. Partners in the project as well as observers stressed the need for the EU institutions to ensure that the expectations of citizens participating in such events were not disappointed. They had a right of reply and a right to see their recommendations given due weight in the political process.

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