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GUIDELINE

FOR E-PARTICIPATION

IN EUROPEAN UNION POLICY-MAKING

MARGIT KINYIK

TELECENTRE-EUROPE AISBL

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INTRODUCTION

This Guideline was prepared in frame of the **Enabling European e-Participation** (E-UROPa) project, whose main aim is to increase the information and awareness about the e-participation tools, especially in European Union level policy-making.

E-governance is a new paradigm throughout the world to promote government and public administration reform via the use of the Internet and available Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the 21st Century, e-governance provides the capacity for citizen-focused, responsive governments, a broader involvement of citizens in decision-making, better quality and cost-effective public services.

E-governance approach can be an appropriate answer for democracy deficits that have affected modern welfare societies in both West and East in the last few decades. Hence, international organisations (e.g. UN, World Bank, OECD and the EU) and governments at local, national and EU level embraced e-governance concept and established various so called e-participation tools to involve citizens and civil society organisations to take part and contribute to public issues.

The present Guideline focuses on the European Union level e-participation by introducing and guiding through 4 different direct, e-participatory measures:

- The European Citizens Initiative,
- Petition to the European Parliament,
- European Commission Public Consultation and
- Puzzled by Policy.

It gives practical support on how and for what to use these online tools, as well as a general framework about e-governance concept and characteristics of e-participation tools.

The Guideline primarily targets citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs, NGOs, and NPOs) involved in E-UROPa project and beyond and is intended to serve as a basis for organising events, workshops and other activities on e-participation, e.g. European e-Participation Day on **7 May, 2015.**

The Guideline has 2 main parts:

- In Part I **'Good Governance, E-Governance, E-Participation'** we give an overview of how the e-government paradigm has been developed, what problems are addressed and what solutions are offered by this new concept on social and political level. We define e-participation and describe its characteristics (actors, types, features etc.). It also introduces what evaluation techniques exit.
- In Part II **'Practical Guide to EU-level e-Participation Tools'** we present 4 different e-participation tools set-up by European Union institutions and other stakeholders to involve citizens all over the EU. We explain how they work, what purposes they can be used for and we provide a step-by-step user guide and some good samples and best practices.

1 GOOD GOVERNANCE, E-GOVERNANCE, E-PARTICIPATION

Representative democracy has been the most influential political system since the second part of the 20th century and due to the globalisation phenomena and the international political and economic forces, it has been the most significant political model for mass societies. Modern welfare states solidified after World War II have been based on a mixture of values derived from liberal, social and conservative ideologies - freedom, individual rights, pluralism, participation, social protection, solidarity, rule of law etc. These values vary between western and eastern societies depending on their historical roots and development.

Although public participation is one of the most solid pillars of representative democracy, some democratic deficits can be globally traced in the last few decades:

growing apathy of citizens;

increasing number of people who are turning away from politics;

declining voter turnouts;

decreasing membership in political parties.

There are also economic challenges: globalisation, fast technological development and aging population have re-shaped the global economic scene and economic sustainability (sustainability of growth) has broken down. The global economic crisis deepened the problem.

Due to these trends, governments needed to apply cost-reduction in public administration and public services while being continuously expected to provide quality services and respond to arising social issues like ageing societies.

Welfare governments throughout the world and intergovernmental organisations (United Nation, OECD etc.) also recognised the technological

development (e.g. the Internet) as a new potential and capacity for a possible and sustainable reform, especially after 2000.

Since governments are major users of information and communication technology (ICT), they realised the benefits and ICTs became crucial elements of national infrastructure not only in public administration, but in public policy-making. (OECD, 2003/1 p.3.)

The ICT solutions used by governments to provide public services and for a broader, wider engagement of citizens in policy-making are know as 'e-participation tools'. The range of e-participation tools is wide; from e–polling, voting, campaigning through web surveys, e-petitions, online consultation opportunities, discussion forums to chat and social media opportunities. We can say that many traditional, non-technology governance procedures and services can be turned into electronic somehow.

The expectations to this new paradigm are high:

- to improve efficiency in governance,
- to enhance quality of public services,
- cost-reduction, cost-effectiveness,
- to increase overall trust between citizens and governments.

Today, e-governance can be deemed as an 'imperative' - more and more e-participation tools and pilots appear through all over the world.

This first part of the Guideline provides a better understanding about e-governance and e-participation. We overview how the approach evolved, who were the main actors in defining the term, how the European Union adopted the idea and the practice, what kind of e-participation tools exist and what are their main characteristics.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITALISATION

The fast development of technology in the last few decades has changed many aspects of everyday life and impacted not only individuals' habits and routines but values, societal needs and social and economic responses.

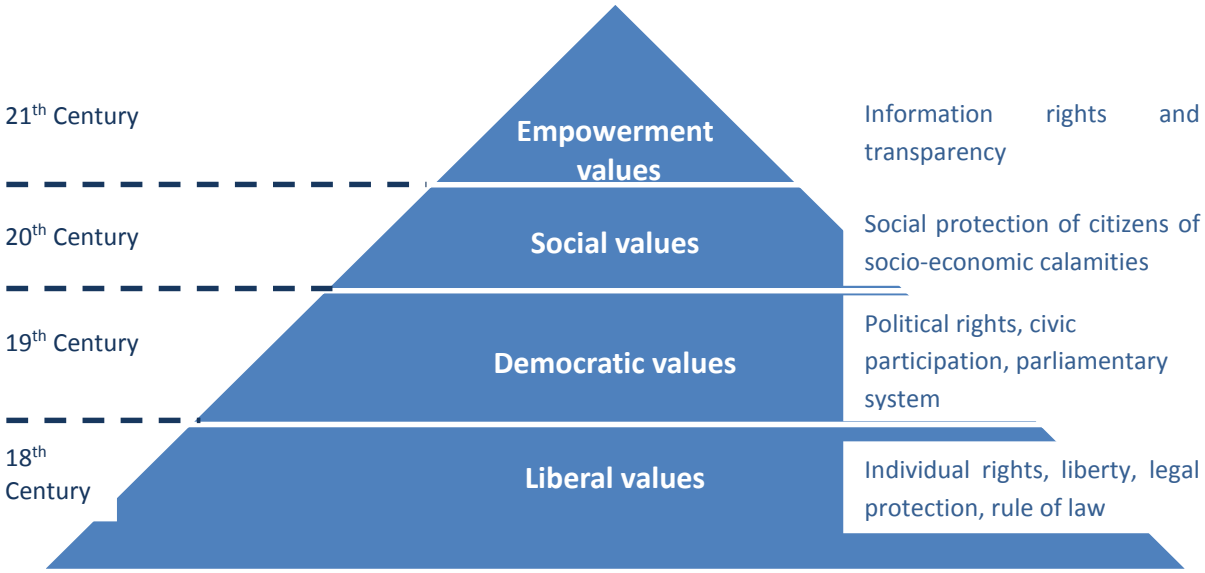
As Jeremy Millard states, in the information society, *e-inclusion and e-empowerment* became the most important values the *'needs hierarchy'*. (Millard, 2006, p. 3-4. cites Bovens – Loos, 2002)

In Maslow's pyramid, the human needs can be derived from the most *physical life conditions* (food, warmth, shelter, air, sleep), then from *safety needs* (like protection, order, rules, limits), thirdly from *belongingness and love needs* (family, group, relationship). At the end of the scale, more specified and sophisticated needs can come as *esteem needs* (reputation, achievement, status) and finally *self-actualisation* (personal growth). According to Maslow, the lower layers are necessary conditions for each succeeding layer and they need to be satisfied before stepping further up.

As an analogy, Bovens created a similar, house-like edifice of the historical evolvement of societal values, to which new storeys have been added during the course of centuries and peaked in the digital constitutional state of the 21st Century. In this historical building of modern states, liberal values give the foundation, democratic, social welfare and empowerment values are the floors. (Figure 1)

'Empowerment' is increasingly identified by political 'buzzwords' and trends of 'good' governance', 'active' citizenship etc.

Figure 1: Evolution of societal needs *(based on Bovens – Loom, 2002)*



However, with the emerging technological background, supported by the 3, 4 and recently 5G wireless environment (European Commission, 2015) and the increased connectivity of people and businesses, the emphasis - as Millard and many authors highlight – has been shifting to 'digital' aspect of empowerment. In the 21st Century, access and digital skills are more important factors than income, education or age in societal stratification in welfare states.

Nowadays, traditional non-technology and digital solutions are both operable. However, ICT-based solutions are increasingly penetrating everyday life. The mainstream technologies serve many day-to-day activities (communication, work, shopping, entertainment, banking etc.). Nevertheless, they can be found – rather as pilots than a mainstream – in public services (e-health and e-care technologies provided by a peer support, online public services), too.

Although the use of ICTs raises many debates about its dangers (e.g. safety issues) or about its impact on human relations and human services (that can lead finally to the lack of the 'h-factor' – 'human service factor', as Millard notes), there is quite a wide consensus that ICT has a considerable potential in the democracy area:

- it can mobilise people from the **'passive'** to the **'active'** attitude,
- it can move services from being **'user-centric'** toward **'user-driven'**,
- it can help transforming societal and political approach from **'government for people'** into **'government by people'**. (Millard, 2006)

From the governance point of view, digital empowerment can be deemed as the new paradigm for 'good governance' called 'e-governance', realised through various e-participation tools. In this sense, the 'digital' aspect of empowerment both can mean:

- acquiring digital skills by more and more people (learning, organisational support etc.),
- providing and accessing information (about societal processes and decision-making) and
- enabling people with the rights and accessible online procedures to participate in public life.

FROM GOOD GOVERNANCE TOWARD E-GOVERNANCE

The 'e-governance' paradigm has been introduced by several organisations – the United Nations, the OECD and the World Bank, and was embraced by the European Union, national, regional and local governments. These international organisations realised the potential of ICTs with regards to governance. They support their member states by:

- collecting good practices of e-participation techniques throughout the world;
- elaborating indicators and indexes to measure the impacts of e-participation activities;
- gathering and analysing data about e-participation and e-governance;
- monitoring and evaluating the impacts of ICT solutions at different levels of governance;
- preparing guidelines and recommendations to member states.

In the following section, we overview how the concept of e-government and e-participation has been applied by these international organisations, what differences can be seen, what efforts have been made in the last decades.

United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1945, to promote international co-operation, which now has 193[1] member states.

The United Nations have significantly supported the principle of good governance since the late 1960s. In its statement, UN declared that good governance needs public participation. Participation has been defined as:

> *'Enabling people to realise their rights to participate in, and access information relating to the decision-making that affects their life.' (DESA, 2012)*

In 1995, UN stressed the need for governments to utilise the power of ICTs to reduce the digital gap and provide benefits of technology for all. (DESA, 2012, p. 2.)

In the eight **Millennium Development Goals (MDG)**[2] established following the Millennium Summit **in 2000**, a specific target for access to new

[1] http://www.un.org/en/

technologies was defined. Target 8F: *'In co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications'* included recommendations about the percentages of population who should access telephone lines, personal computers and the Internet by 2015.

The progress of the goals had been reviewed in 2010 and as a result, a **Post-2015 Development Agenda**[3] was set-up in 2013. Governments were encouraged to adopt measures that will facilitate the contribution of people to decision-making. Anew, it called the attention to the digital divide between the seniors and youth in accessing information via ICTs. UN recommended developing e-government and capacity building activities (improving digital skills) for the deprived segments of the population. The overarching goal is to encourage citizens to deliberate on contemporary public, social, political issues.

UN established an 'e-government development index' (administrative, political and social impacts) aimed at assessing the e-readiness of governments, which are ranked by the online services, telecommunication infrastructure, human capital and e-participation.

Finally, the **World Summit on the Information Society** (**WSIS**), a pair of United Nations-sponsored conferences about information, communication and, in broad terms, the information society that took place in 2003 and 2005 established **17 May** as **World Information Society Day**[4]**.**

World Bank

The World Bank is an international financial institution that provides loans to developing countries. The World Bank's official goal is reduction of poverty.

With regards to e-government, the World Bank mainly supports local and national projects, for instance through the E-Government for Regional Reform Program (APL) Project for Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries[5]. The aim is to promote the efficiency, quality, and transparency of public services through the delivery of regionally integrated e-government applications.

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[2] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/news.shtml
[3] http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml
[4] http://www.un.org/events/infoday/2007/about.shtml
[5] http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/lac/projects/operational-documents?qterm=&teratopic_exact=Governance&count_exact=OECS+Countries

OECD's approach on e-participation

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) was established in 1960 in Paris. It promotes policies to achieve sustainable economic growth and employment while maintaining financial stability.

The OECD, in frame of its **Public Sector Innovation Programme** seeks to develop a better understanding of innovative approaches and tools, and their impact on government performance and public services.

As part of the programme, e-Government **Project** explores how governments can best use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to apply good governance principles and achieve policy goals[6].

The OECD developed an own definition[7] for e-government, as follows:

> *'The term 'e-government' focuses on the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) by governments as applied to the full range of government functions. In particular, the networking potential offered by the Internet and related technologies has the potential to transform the structures and operation of government.'*

In 2001, the OECD published *'Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making'* based on a survey throughout its member countries. Two years later, in 2003, another book came out *'Promise and Problems of e-Democracy'*. It contains a set of country case studies on the use of ICTs for citizen engagement collected in 2002 as well as a detailed guideline and practical recommendations for local and national e-participation activities.

The OECD calls the attention to the following considerations:

- Technology is an enabler and not the solution.
- The provision of information by governments to citizens is essential precondition for engagement. However, quantity does not equal quality (a lot of information does not automatically lead to deeper engagement).
- Barriers are usually cultural, organisational and constitutional, rather than technological. (OECD, 2003/2, p. 10.)

On one hand, OECD experts remind that social inequalities can result in digital deprivation. Therefore, awareness raising and capacity building (individual, organisational etc.) have an essential role. On the other hand,

[6] http://www.oecd.org/gov/public-innovation/
[7] http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=4752

traditional, non-technology solutions cannot be ignored and substituted by digital ones, due to inequalities in access and skills. Successful e-participation methods need to combine traditional and digital procedures (e.g. workshops, roundtables etc.) and online participation tools.

European Union and e-government

While the United Nations or the OECD are intergovernmental organisations with policy orientation and 'developer attitude', the European Union is a political alliance of member states with own decision-making (Parliament and Council) and executive bodies (Commission and agencies). Therefore, the EU is not only supporting its member countries with its policies but appears as a 'user': a unique government system that – similarly to national governments – has adopted and applies e-government and e-participation tools. However, as a specific international arena of democracy and governance, its e-government and e-participation functions might differ from local and national functionalities.

The integration of e-government approach

The legislation of e-participation at EU level started in 2000. The focus was mainly on issues of transparency and accountability, and was followed in 2002 by laying down minimum standards for consultations as the EU began to insert consultations in policy making in the framework of good governance. (European Commission, 2009)

The introduction of *'Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate'*[8] and the *'Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission'*[9] in 2005 signalled the use of ICT for better communicating policies to citizens as well as vesting more powers to citizens in policy making. Also in 2005, the *'i2010: Information Society and the media working towards growth and jobs'*[10] provided an integrated approach to the information society and to audio-visual media policies in the European Union. (followed by the *'i2010 eGovernment Action Plan'*[11])

[8] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/decisionmaking_process/a30000_en.htm

[9] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/decisionmaking_process/l11002_en.htm

[10] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/information_society/strategies/c11328_en.htm

[11] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/information_society/strategies/l24226j_en.htm

In 2006, the *'White Paper on a European Communication Policy'*[12] came out, in which connecting citizens with public institutions got a greater emphasis. With *'Communicating Europe via the internet'*[13] policy document and *'Communicating Europe in partnership'*[14] in 2007, the EU refers explicitly to e-participation as a means of citizen empowerment.

In March 2010, the *'Europe 2020'*[15], the 10-year strategy proposed by the European Commission has been accepted and *'A digital agenda for Europe: to speed up the roll-out of high-speed internet and reap the benefits of a digital single market for households and firms'* became one of the flagship initiatives.

Figure 2: e-Participation in legislation and policy (based on EC, 2009)

YEAR	ACTION	RESULT
2010	▪ Europe 2020	**ICT-enabled public sector innovation**
2008	▪ Reviewed Plan D ▪ Communicating Europe through audiovisual tools	**Citizen empowerment in policy-making, two-way communication, e-participation tools**
2007	▪ Communicating Europe in Partnership ▪ Communicating Europe via Internet	**Citizen empowerment and better communication (Plan D tools)**
2006	▪ i2010 eGovernment Action Plan ▪ European Communication Policy Wider and Deeper Debate on Europe	
2005	▪ Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate ▪ Action Plan on Communicating Europe ▪ i2010: Information Society and the media working towards growth and jobs	**Better regulation, good governance. Feedback and inclusion in policy making**
2002	▪ Minimum standards for consultation	
2001	▪ European Governance Information and Communication policy	**Transparency, legitimacy**
2000	▪ Commission reform	

[12] http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com2006_35_en.pdf
[13] http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/docs/internet-strategy_en.pdf
[14] http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/decisionmaking_process/l11017_en.htm
[15] http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

The role and functions of e-participation

The European Union embraced and integrated the e-government approach as part of its 'active citizen' concept. Government agencies today use web technologies to offer various electronic participation applications to citizens.

At the EU level, numerous types of web services are available, e.g. online polls, web surveys, agenda-specific online discussion forums, e-mail contacts, online policy forums, etc.

E-participation tools in the EU are new channels to:

- build more open and accountable governments;
- widen the involvement of all citizens and broaden participation;
- access information;
- utilise societies' resources;
- improve the quality of policy- and decision-making;
- re-engineer representative democracy by offering more direct forums;
- localise decision-making. (European Commission, 2009, p. 6.)

Therefore, the most important functions of e-participation can be summarised as:

- Decision and policy-making initiated by the (EU) government.
- Empowerment from the bottom.
- Empowering communities and localities.
- Transparency and openness.
- Accountability and responsibilities.

In addition, through e-participation, many other benefits can be realised, as:

- cost-reduction, resource rationalisation,
- time saving,
- simplified procedures,
- greater empowerment.

How EU institutions respond to e-government challenges?

E-participation has been adopted and institutionalised to a different extent concerning different EU bodies and agencies, due to their different characteristics.

From all the EU institutions, the **European Parliament** and the **European Commission** can be deemed as the most active in e-participation activities (EC, 2009). Two of the most significant e-initiatives are SINAPSE[16] and CONECCS[17].

SINAPSE is a web communication platform offering tools to promote a better use of expertise in EU policymaking and governance (networking of advisory bodies, support to expert groups, ad-hoc/public consultations and e-debates, etc.). SINAPSE allows the creation of 'e-Communities' which enables groups of members and organisations with a common interest to share and exchange information in a dedicated environment.

CONECCS is a database for consultation, especially for civil society organisations, as part of the Commission's commitment to provide better information about its consultation processes. The list here is the directory of non-profit making civil society organisations organised at European level. The directory is established on a voluntary basis and it is intended only for information.

The **EU agencies, council presidencies** – although, they need to connect and involve relevant stakeholders in their specific domains – are less active to involve citizens in the discussion, due to the rather fragmented and thematic topics they are responsible for. Therefore, they usually 'restrict' their e-participation activities to information provision and communicating via mass media to the wider public.

On the contrary, **political parties** part of the European Parliament extensively use ICT for communication to express their strategies, values, and objectives. They are especially active before and around the parliamentary elections. The list of the appointed MEPs is available via the European Parliament's website[18] with direct contact information. This way, national representatives can be contacted anytime. (European Commission, 2009, p. 13-14.)

Some experiences about e-participation in the EU

In the *'European eParticipation Summary Report[19]'* published by the European Commission in 2009, 255 case studies from the member states were identified and analysed. 33 % of the e-participation activities were implemented on local level and further 12 % on regional level. 29 % concerned some national level issue. 19 % of the e-participation actions were

[16] http://europa.eu/sinapse/
[17] http://powerbase.info/index.php/European_Commission_CONECCS_Database
[18] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/map.html
[19] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/european-eparticipation-summary-report

realised at the EU level, the remaining per cents included other trans- or international activities.

The vast majority of the e-participation 'projects' covered some deliberating activity, like information provision or consultation (both at national and EU levels). The composition of e-participation was quite diverse on both levels: e-participation tools are available for polling, campaigning, voting, and to a lesser degree, for community building.

CHARACTERISING E-PARTICIPATION

As we can see from the evolvement of the e-government concept, it has been continuously changing and trying to catch up with the fast technological developments. The different stakeholders also give differing emphasis in their definitions.

The e-participation tools can widely vary depending on the technology used, the purposes, the type of the stakeholder owning the tool etc. Here, we cite and apply a quite simple, but comprehensive definition by Ann Macintosh (Macintosh, 2004, p. 1.):

> *'E-participation is the use of ICT to support the democratic decision-making process.'*

According to Macintosh, the overarching objectives of e-participation are to:

- reach out a wider audience to enable broader participation;
- support participation through a range of technologies to cater for the diverse technical and communicative skills of citizens;
- provide relevant information in a format that is more accessible and understandable to the target audience to enable more informed contributions;
- engage with a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberations. (Macintosh, 2004, p. 2.)

Following the typology set up by Macintosh, e-participation tools can be grouped by many factors.

'Top-down' and 'ground-up' (or 'bottom-up')

One of the most important factors of e-participation is the initiator who sets up and makes available the tool for some purpose. Although, e-participation tools can be oriented top-down or bottom-up, it is important to note, that the **owner is usually a public stakeholder and the tool is a public/state initiative**. *(This does not mean that the idea of or the need for a tool cannot come from the civil society! For instance, e-petition by CSOs can be used to open an online discussion forum not only for agenda evaluation but even for agenda setting on a specific topic.)*

Nevertheless, there are major differences between the top-down and bottom-up orientations, shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Top-down and ground-up e-participation *(based on Macintosh, 2004)*

Level of e-participation

This key dimension considers how far or to what level citizens are engaged. It reflects on the three basic functions of e-participation: citizens must be 1) informed, 2) equipped with mechanisms to take part and 3) contribute and influence public agendas.

Therefore, three types can be distinguished:

E-enabling: e-participation tools used for information provision (understandable and accessible)

E-engaging: top-down consultations by governments to involve a broad audience

E-empowering: bottom-up initiatives facilitated via available e-participation tools providing the user with access to react on government led initiatives. (Macintosh, 2004, p. 2-3.)

Actors of e-participation

As it was indicated in the different definitions of e-participation, it is a tool for better governance; therefore, the interactions occur between *decision-makers* and those actors *who are affected by the decisions*.

Decision-makers

With regards to actors of e-participation, first we need to mention decision-makers or policy-makers. As we indicated earlier, e-participation tools are usually settled and opened by the public. Decision-makers from the highest level to the 'single' elected representative can be addressed and involved. Similarly, the local, regional, national and EU level institutions and representatives can be concerned.

These actors (non-exhaustive list) can be as follows:

- parliament (national, EU),
- government (local, regional, national, EU),
- government agencies (ministries, background institutions, DGs, councils, committees at all level),
- elected/appointed representatives (members of local governments, national governments (MPs), European Parliament (MEPs).

The range of e-participation tools can be various, from blogs of elected representatives through online discussion forums by local governments to e-petitioning to the European Parliament.

Citizens

Citizens represent the most important target group of e-participation. Although, debates about passivity of people or about the 'usurpation' of the elites (who are better informed) are raising doubts, the 'democratisation effect' of ICTs has been agreed as a basic premise. (Millard, 2006)

In general e-participation is for everyone. However, it always depends on the topic and the decision-maker as to which group, what size and scope of citizens should be addressed. (Macintosh, 2004; OECD, 2003). On the other hand, the digital skills and 'connectivity' of citizens' groups should be taken into account during the design of an e-participation tool or action. In case of lower accessibility to Internet or ICT, the traditional, non-technology solutions should be also applied.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs) civil society organisations (CSOs), international organisations

These organisations 'by law' or by their 'grassroots nature' represent the informal part of society and are usually seen as 'mediatory structures' between the citizens and the state. They have an important role is displaying societal diversity and representing particular interests or interest groups that might not be fully recognised by the state (e.g. vulnerable groups, groups with a very specific interest like infrequent diseases etc.).

Mass media

To some extent, media-hosted websites, blogs (online newspaper, TV, radio) are also seen as actors of e-participation. Primarily, they have a role to provide information and to acquire grassroots opinion. However, they usually focus on local and national level because of linguistic and cultural reasons. (European Commission, 2009, p. 14.)

In the EU, audiovisual channels have become as important as Internet and ICT-based communication. A good sample is the **EuroparlTV** (www.europarltv.europa.eu) launched in 2008, the web TV of the European Parliament including news, debates, interviews, educational videos, archives as well as live streaming of parliamentary sessions and committee meetings.

The TV is also available through social media like:

- *Facebook* (https://www.facebook.com/europarltv?ref=hl),
- *Twitter* (https://twitter.com/europarltv) and
- *YouTube* (https://www.youtube.com/user/EuropeanParliament).

Other characteristics of e-participation tools

Beyond the above-mentioned dimensions, some other characteristics can be taken into account when applying and evaluating e-participation measures for both owners/designers and users:

- Technology used (beyond common Internet and ICT applications, new technology can be avatars, natural language processing – NLP, speech technology).
- Rules of engagement (e.g. safety issues).
- Duration and sustainability.
- Accessibility (multi-channel solutions).

- Resources and promotion (finances, budget and human resources to design, set-up, evaluate and give a feedback).

e-Participation or lobbying?

Finally, we need to mention an important question about those segments of society, namely the business sector (like multinational companies) or certain NGOs (e.g. international environmental organisations or business associations), where particular interests are more tangible and directly expressed and whether *lobbying* can be seen as part of e-governance concept.

In the context of the EU, lobbying has been formalised and institutionalised in frame of an open dialogue with special interest groups (Working Paper, European Parliament, 2003[20]). The European Parliament, European Commission Directorate Generals and some EU agencies have several formalised procedures to invite relevant stakeholders – including lobby organisations – in the discussion (for instance, via the registration of lobbyists). Lobbying, especially because of the 'broadening, widening' orientation of participation, might not be part of the e-governance concept. However, 'e-solutions' can be applied in lobby communication.

HOW TO EVALUATE E-PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES?

At the end of this chapter, some evaluation methods are introduced. Evaluation of an e-participation tool is more important for the owner, but some aspects can be relevant for users or user groups, too. Through these measures, users can follow and evaluate the decision-making process they have taken part in, they can consider whether their actions and contributions were worthy and were well channelled and taken into account. Thereby, users can decide whether to continue using a certain effective tool, look for a better e-participation channel or apply multi-method strategies.

With regards to evaluation, many authors highlight that e-participation tools were established earlier than the evaluation frameworks were set-up. Many local and national e-participation opportunities appeared in different countries usually as pilots, often without a strategy for assessing possible impacts, analyses of performance or feedback to citizens. (Millard, 2006; Macintosh, 2008; OECD, 2003/2)

[20]Lobbying in the European Union: Current Rules and Practices, Working Paper

Therefore, the above-mentioned key organisations (OECD, UN and the EU) decided to collect good practices and after analysing, to create an evaluation framework with indicators. Today, several guidelines are available for local or national governments on how to design e-participatory activities.

Here, we expound an overall framework by Macintosh (2008) based on the characteristics of e-tools, which can be useful to take into account for both e-tool owners and users.

Basic evaluation criteria

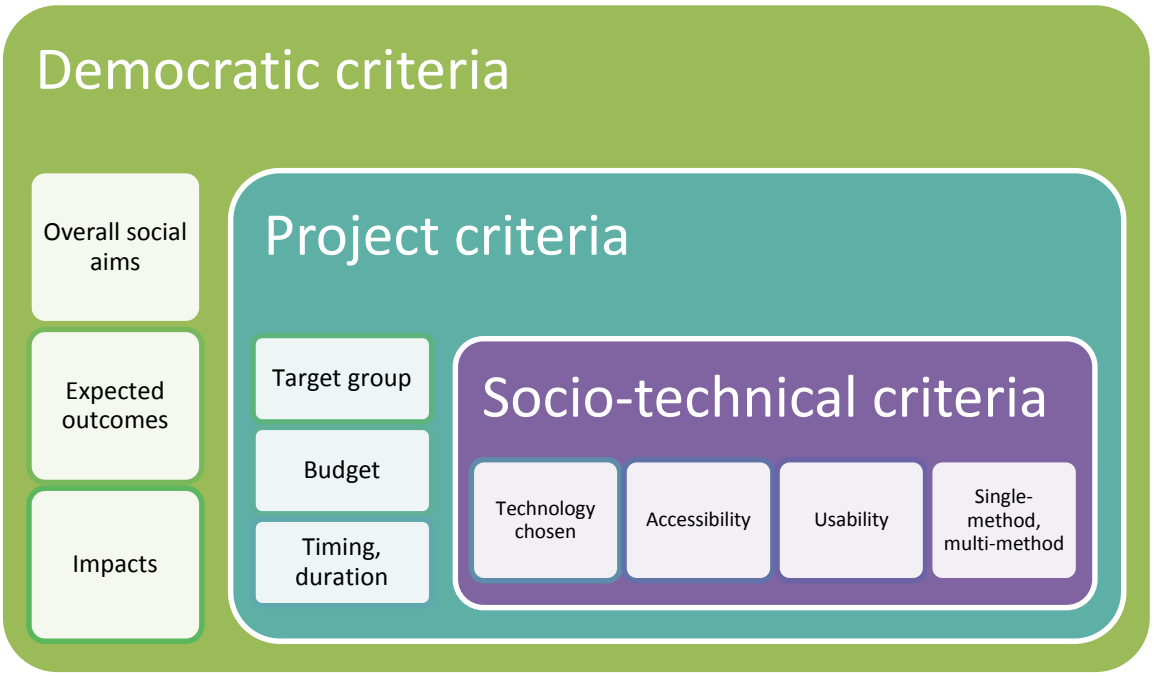
For any e-participation tool, three major criteria can be identified (Figure 6):

Democratic criteria: it covers the social issue, the problems and challenges addressed. The possible outcomes and impacts can be achieved via citizens' contribution.

Project criteria: set-up or using an e-participation tool needs a 'project-approach', a step-by-step design considering the target group, timing, budget and financing.

Socio-technical criteria: it contains all the technical circumstances (selected technology) by taking future users' digital skills into account (easy-to-use technology).

Figure 6: Evaluation framework for e-participation tools



Indicators for evaluation

Based on these three aspects, a more detailed system of indicators can be described. In the following tables, we overview what aspects can be evaluated, what kind evaluation questions can be applied to measure the outcomes and how relevant the indicators are for stakeholders (owners of e-participation) and/or for users. (Based on Macintosh, 2008)

1. Democratic criteria

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	RELEVANT FOR OWNERS	RELEVANT FOR USERS
Representation	How did it support, enhance or compliment representative democracy? Did it provide a direct participation opportunity?	+	+
Engagement	Did it support local identity? If yes, how? Could individuals, local communities link to the issue discussed?	+	+
Transparency	Was all relevant information available to a deliberate contribution? Was the debate opened enough? If no, why?	+	+
Conflict and consensus	Could it schedule the divergences of possible outcomes? Could it estimate the main directions of policy development?	+	+
Political equality	Was it available of specific social groups (languages, disabilities, people with less digital skills etc.)?	+	+
Community control	Was any kind of feedback provided about the results?	+	+

2. Project criteria

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANT FOR OWNERS	RELEVANT FOR USERS
Engaging with a wider audience	How many and what kind of users took part? How did they respond to the targeted groups in size and composition?	+	
Obtaining better informed opinions	Was more/better information available through it than without it? If yes, why and how?	+	+
Enabling more in-depth consultation	Was the background information well organised and easy-to-understand and overview? Was the available information relevant?	+	+
Cost-effective analyses of contribution	Did it save cost? If yes, how? Did it save time? If yes, why?	+	+
Providing feedback to citizens	Did it provide any feedback on the results? Did it provide a feedback on how policy was changed, influenced? Was it satisfying?	+	+

3. Socio-technical criteria

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANT FOR OWNERS	RELEVANT FOR USERS
SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY			
Trust and security	Did the tool provide security to users?	+	+
Relevance and legitimacy	Were the users satisfied?	+	+
USEFULNESS			
Accessibility	How far could it reach and involve people with disabilities?	+	+
Appeal	How attractive was it for users to use?	+	+
Content clarity	How far was the content clear and understandable according to users' situation?	+	+
Responsiveness	How far was the tool to answer users' question quick and effective?	+	+
USABILITY			
Navigation and organisation	How far were the procedures easy-to-follow? Were users guided properly?	+	+
Efficiency and flexibility	Could participants attend tasks in an acceptable time? Were there repetitive tasks?	+	+
Error recovery	Could users correct mistakes without starting the process again? What mistakes did users face?	+	+

What methods can be used for evaluation?

Concerning the concrete methods, most of the commonly used research tools can be combined. Without providing a full list, these can be:

- (web) surveys;
- workshops or online discussion forums;
- interviews (structured or semi-structured);
- stakeholder analyses;
- text-analyses of opinions;
- live chats (e.g. with participants, contributors) etc.

These methods or a mix of them can be applied at both sides of the e-participation actions (owners – as evaluation of the success of the e-participation tool, users – evaluation of the effectiveness, usefulness of the tool).

What advices can be given to users?

Although the e-participation tools are very diverse on local, national or EU level, here are some general considerations for users:

- depending on the issue, it is possible to participate individually;
- taking part in any kind of e-participation activity (at any level) might need a project-like strategy, especially when groups of citizens, organisations intend to participate;
- formulating a strategy in advance can be useful (what opinion we will represent?);
- collecting information in other (maybe in traditional) ways;
- to consider whether it is worthy to mix traditional, non-technology solutions with e-solutions;
- to think over what other channels are available to represent our opinion (multi-methodology approach) in order to maximise efforts and possible impacts.

2 PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EU-LEVEL E-PARTICIPATION TOOLS

In the second part of this Guideline, we will introduce 4 e-participation tools launched by the European Union.

These four tools provide various opportunities for direct democratic participation not only for citizens but also for public, civic or business organisations.

They allow taking part in policy-making: formulating or evaluating policy agendas, contributing to regulation and in policy creation, 'sending messages' to EU level decision-makers about everyday issues that are part of our life in the multicultural European Union.

They are based on a diverse and accessible technology and they are user-friendly and easy-to-follow. They provide a safe and secured participation.

The first three e-participation applications have been established by the European Commission in frame of the *'Get Involved in European Union Policy-Making'* initiative and are aimed to influence EU-level decision-making and regulation.

- The **'European Citizens' Initiative'** has been available since 2012 and it is a classical 'e-empowering' application, since it needs 1 million signatures coming from at least 7 EU member states on a specific issue. It is based on a former Greenpeace initiative from 2010. It can be very effective to call the attention of high-level decision-makers to issues that are influencing life across countries (e.g. environmental issues). One of its limitations is that the issues launched here need to be quite significant. However, joining existing initiatives can be a good exercise for anyone.
- The **'European Public Consultations'** can be seen as an 'e-enabling' e-participation measure, through which organisations or individual citizens can follow and impact on thematic policies before formal 'ratification'. The EU opens many specific issues (from energy sector to social affairs) for a debate and collects opinions (professional or laic).
- The **'Petitions Web Portal'** is the most 'personal', since it provides an opportunity to formulate issues that are suffered in everyday life, both in personal and in social environment – in so far as the solution concerns the EU level. For instance, if one can challenge their national

institutions if they are not applying EU law correctly on the national levels in areas regulated by the Union. On the other hand, it can be also used for policy-making, indicating social, political, economic situations that need a better regulation.
Another similar tool, but on a more practical level, is **SOLVIT** – the "complaint service" of the EU. It is for people who live in a foreign country or have a business there and face some problem (discrimination, pensions, taxation, health insurance, etc.).

The fourth e-participation tool has been set-up under an ICT-PSP project funded by the European Commission too. It is a technical frame that can be uploaded with content in the future.

- The **'Puzzled by Policy'** is an electronic 'e-engaging' platform where mostly politicians, as decision-makers can engage people throughout the EU to formulate their opinions about specific issues.

The structure for presenting all tools is similar. We will provide a general table structured by the characteristics discussed in the previous chapter about Evaluation.

Then, we will show how each website looks like, what participation opportunities it provides, how these options can be used in practice. It is intended to be used as a 'step-by-step' manual.

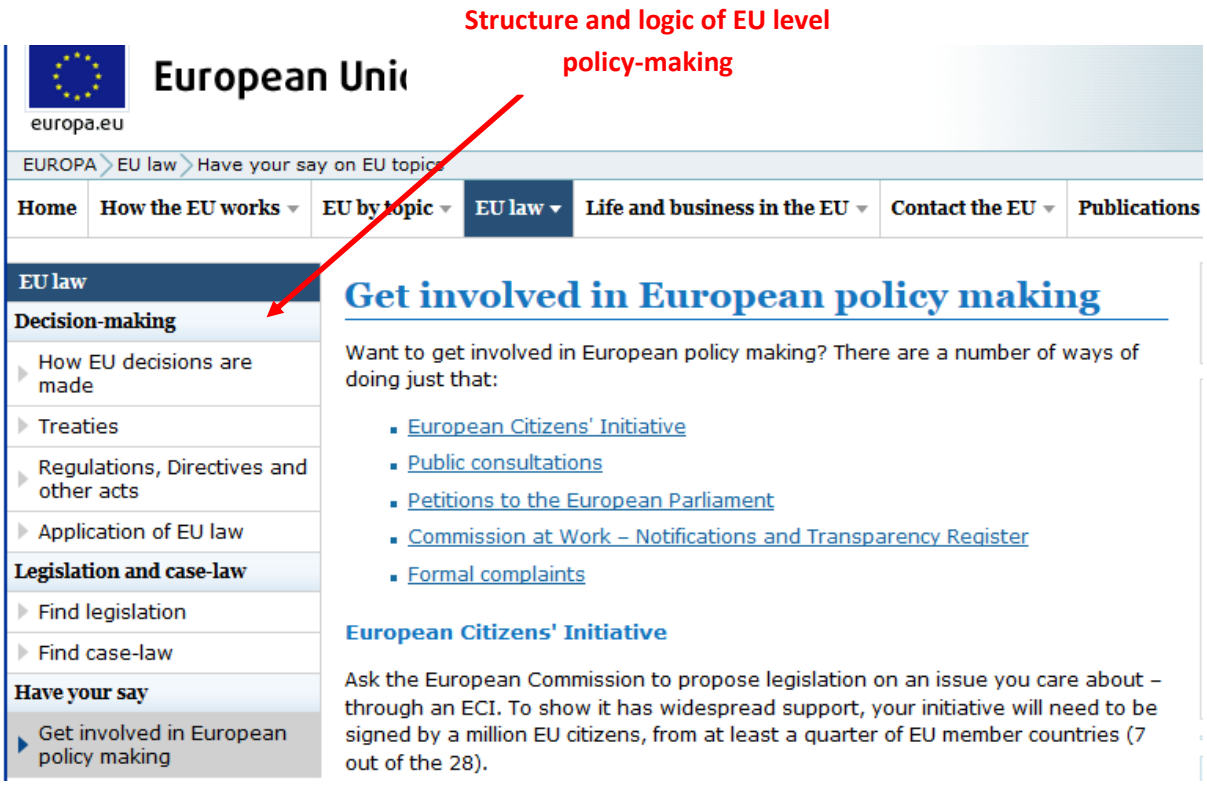
GET INVOLVED IN EUROPEAN UNION POLICY MAKING

The European Union offers more and more opportunities for EU citizens to participate in a direct way in EU level policy-making.

First, we will introduce a number of e-participation tools set up by the European Union in order to call citizens in policy-making and regulations:

- European Citizens' Initiative
- Public Consultations
- Petition to the European Parliament

See http://europa.eu/eu-law/have-your-say/index_en.htm



The website shown above is not a participation tool, but gives structured overview about EU level policy-making in general (see left-hand menu). Before applying any e-participation tool, it is advised to study the structure, the terminology and logic of EU policy- and decision-making process.

1. THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS INITIATIVE

The **European Citizens' Initiative** (ECI) introduced with the Treaty of Lisbon aims at increasing direct democracy in the European Union. The initiative enables one million EU citizens (nationals of at least one quarter of the Member States), to call directly on the European Commission to propose a legal act in an area where the Member States have conferred powers onto the EU level. This right to request the Commission to initiate a legislative proposal puts citizens on the same footing as the EP and the Council. The Commission holds the right of initiative in the EU. The start of the ECI was marked on **9 May 2012** (Europe Day).

A citizens' initiative has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens, coming from at least 7 out of the 28 member states. A minimum number of signatories are required in each of those 7 member states.

The antecedent of the initiative was initiated by Greenpeace in December 2010. It collected 1 million signatures for a petition against the authorisation of new genetically modified crops in Europe. Although it was published in the media, it has never been formally registered with the Commission as this was not possible before 1 April 2012.

The first successful initiative was registered by Right2Water on the 21 March 2013 and they reached the minimum quota of signatures in 7 countries on 7 May. They stopped the signature collection on the 7 September with a total of 1,857,605 signatures. The initiative was submitted to the Commission in December and a hearing was organised at the European Parliament for February 2014[21].

[21] http://www.euractiv.com/sustainability/eu-citizens-force-water-debate-a-news-53273

Main features:

Top-down or bottom-up? Bottom-up	It is a fully bottom-up participation mechanism. Citizens and their organisations can propose legislation on any field where the EU has a legislative competence.
Level of engagement E-engaging E-empowering	It is for empowering, since a successful initiative can have a direct impact on EU legislation. It is also e-engaging, since it is based on a broad participation (1 million people).
Stage of policy making Agenda-setting, agenda creating	Via citizens' initiative, new agendas can be offered to the European Commission.
Time and duration Any time	An initiative can be launched at any time, based on the regulation. Since the registration of a new initiative, it takes max. 21months to go through the whole process.
Actors European Commission, 1 million EU citizens	The initiatives are accepted and maintained by the European Commission. At least 1 million signatures from at least 7 EU member states are needed to be collected for a successful initiative.
Technology used Online 'referendum'	An online collection system must be launched followed by the given rules. This needs to be certificated by the Commission. After setting it up, 12 months are allowed to collect the 1 million valid signatures.
Language Multi-lingual	All EU languages are accepted (also, the website works in all EU languages).
Accessibility	http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome
Rules of engagement	A detailed regulation has been set up concerning: ▪ the topics/policy areas involved ▪ the citizens (achieving voting age) ▪ the number and composition of signatures ▪ the online collection system ▪ the timeframe etc.
Feedback	The Commission controls and evaluates each step, from the registration of a new initiative through the certification of the online collection system and the verification of statements to the examination of the results.

What is the procedure?

The process consists of 7 steps and should be finished in a maximum of 21 months. However, it is possible to collect the required number of signatures in a much shorter period.

What can be proposed as a citizens' initiative?

A citizens' initiative is possible in any field where the Commission has the power to propose legislation, for example environment, agriculture, transport or public health. The full list of concerned policy areas is available on the website[22].

What is the citizens' committee?

A citizens' initiative has to be proposed by a citizens' committee composed of at least 7 EU citizens old enough to vote in European Parliament elections and living in at least 7 different member states. They do

[22] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/competences

not have to be nationals of 7 different member states although they do have to hold the nationality of a EU member state. The minimum number of signatures from each country (proportionately to the population in 2014) can be found on the site[23].

This committee is considered as the official 'organiser' of the initiative and is responsible for managing the procedure. The committee must designate among its members a representative and a substitute to speak and act on their behalf.

How to register an initiative?

Before organisers can start collecting statements of support from citizens, they have to request the registration of their proposed initiative on this website. In order to register a proposed initiative, organisers have to provide the following information in one of the official EU languages:

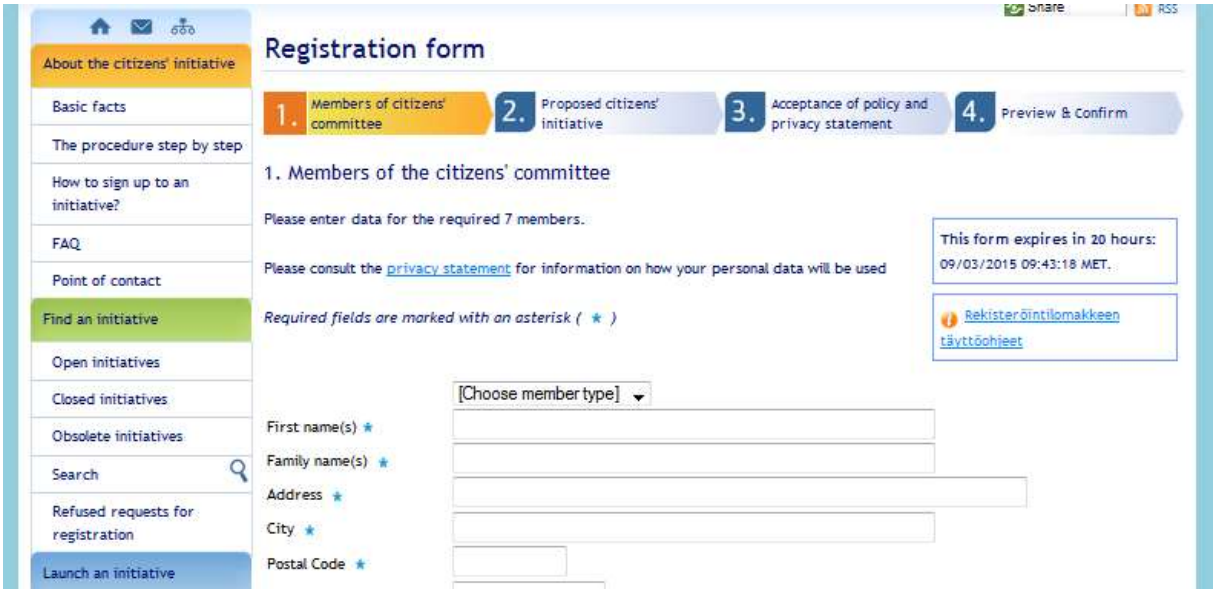
- title (maximum 100 characters)
- subject-matter (maximum 200 characters)
- objectives (maximum 500 characters)
- provisions of the Treaties relevant for the proposed action
- personal details (and documents that prove them) of the 7 required committee members indicating the representative and substitute
- all sources of funding and support for the proposed citizens' initiative worth more than €500 per year and per sponsor.

Optionally, they may provide:

- the address of their website for the proposed initiative (if any)
- an annex (maximum 5 MB) with more detailed information on the subject, objectives and background to the proposed citizens' initiative
- a draft legal act (maximum 5 MB).

The online registration form is available[24] via the website.

[23] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/signatories
[24] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/registration/



How to set-up an online collection system?

Organisers who wish to collect statements of support online must build an online collection system, accessible through their website, that responds to the broad security and technical requirements set out in the Regulation on the citizens' initiative and to the detailed technical specifications set out in a specific regulation**.**

Once the online collection system is set up and fully complies with the requirements mentioned above, organisers should request the competent national authority[25] of the member state where the data will be stored to certify their system. The Commission provides a technical support to those online systems, which had been certificated already[26].

What to do after collecting the signatures?

Once organisers have collected the necessary statements of support, they must ask the competent national authorities in each member state where they have collected statements of support to certify the number of valid statements of support collected for that country. The national authorities have **3 months** to certify the number of valid statements of support. They will use appropriate checks to verify the statements, which can be based on random sampling.

[25] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/authorities-online-systems
[26] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/prepare-system

How to submit the initiative?

Once organisers have received the certificates from the competent national authorities (at least 7) demonstrating that they have collected the required number of statements of support (1 million overall and the minimum numbers reached for at least 7 member states), they can submit their initiative to the Commission – together with the information on the support and funding they have received for the initiative.

What happens after submitting the initiative?

In the 3 months following the submission of the initiative:

- Commission representatives will meet the organisers so they can explain in detail the issues raised in their initiative
- the organisers will have the opportunity to present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament
- the Commission will adopt a formal response spelling out what action it will propose in response to the citizens' initiative, if any, and the reasons for doing or not doing so.

How to sign up an existing initiative as a citizen?

The website provides detailed information about closed, open, obsolete and refused initiatives.

To be able to sign up to a European citizens' initiative you need to be EU citizen (national of a member state) old enough to vote in European Parliament elections (18 except in Austria, where the voting age is 16).

In order to do so, you have to fill in a specific statement of support form provided by the organisers of the initiative, on paper or online[27] (if the organisers have provided a website for that purpose).

What initiatives are available on the website?

By using the main menu on the left side of the webpage, we can find detailed information about the initiatives ('Find an initiative'):

- **Open initiatives**
- **Closed initiatives**
  - ***Collection closed*** *(initiatives for which the collection is closed and which have not (yet) been submitted to the Commission. The*

[27] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/how-to-signup

Commission does not have any information about whether the organisers managed or failed to collect the required number of statements of support)

- ***Submitted to the Commission*** *(initiatives that have reached the required number of statements of support and for which the Commission's answer is pending)*
- ***Answered by the Commission*** *(initiatives for which the Commission has already presented its conclusions)*

- **Obsolete initiatives**
  - ***Withdrawn*** *(by the organisers)*
  - ***Insufficient support*** *(initiatives which did not gather the required number of statements of support within the 1-year time limit)*

Open initiatives

Currently there are 3 open initiatives available. For each initiative, we can find in which languages they are provided, the registration date and number and the deadline for collection.

At present (March 2015), the following initiatives are collecting signatures from citizens:

'On the Wire': Strengthening communication privacy between private individuals by law and namely wiretapping of lawyer-client communications. A pre-requisite for the rights of defense

'For a socially fair Europe! Encouraging a stronger cooperation between EU Member States to fight poverty in Europe': Encouraging cooperation between Member States in fighting social exclusion through the common aim of insuring that less than 3% of people live below the poverty line in the EU.

'An end to front companies in order to secure a fairer Europe': Introduction in a legal instrument in the company law area, of measures to ensure the transparency of legal persons and legal arrangements.

By clicking on any of these initiatives, the following information can be found:

- Current status
- Deadline for collection
- Subject matter (short description)
- Main objectives (main policy targets, concrete expectations defined by the organisers, what should be changed concretely)
- Provisions of the Treaties considered relevant by the organisers
- Organisers / Members of citizens' committee
- Website
- Annex
- Draft legal act (if applies)
- Sources of support and funding (if any kind of financial support was used to set up the collection)

Closed initiatives

Collection was closed for the 3 initiatives in the history of the ECI:

'Weed like to talk': About legalizing cannabis. The ECI Weed like to talk aims at making the EU adopt a common policy on the control and regulation of cannabis production, use and sale.

'For a socially fair Europe! Encouraging a stronger cooperation between EU Member States to fight poverty in Europe': Protecting media pluralism through partial harmonisation of national rules on media ownership and transparency, conflicts of interest with political office and independence of media supervisory bodies.

'ACT 4 Growth': This ECI has 4 concrete proposals for policy intervention to develop female entrepreneurship as a strategy for sustainable economic growth in Europe.

One initiative has been submitted to the Commission:

'Stop vivisection': Proposing a European legislative framework aimed at phasing out animal experiments.

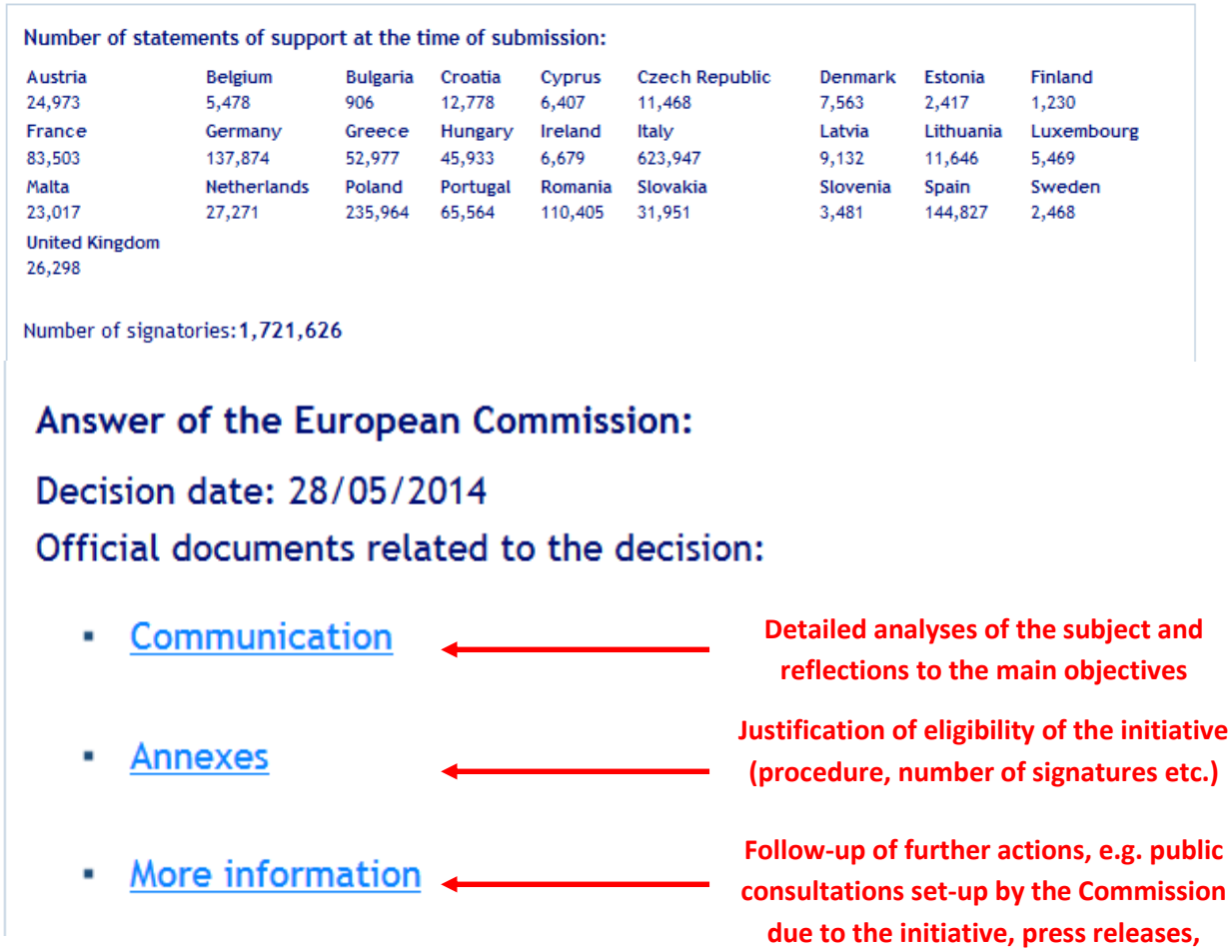
At present, two citizens' initiatives have been answered by the Commission:

'One of Us': Juridical protection of the dignity, the right to life and of the integrity of every human being from conception in the areas of EU competence in which such protection is of particular importance.

'Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!': To propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation as recognised by the United Nations, and promoting the provision of water and sanitation as essential public services for all.

What can be achieved through an initiative?

Here, we can find the detailed distribution (composition) of signatures by participating EU member states, also the answer given by the Commission.



Number of statements of support at the time of submission:

Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Croatia	Cyprus	Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia	Finland
24,973	5,478	906	12,778	6,407	11,468	7,563	2,417	1,230
France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Ireland	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania	Luxembourg
83,503	137,874	52,977	45,933	6,679	623,947	9,132	11,646	5,469
Malta	Netherlands	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden
23,017	27,271	235,964	65,564	110,405	31,951	3,481	144,827	2,468
United Kingdom								
26,298								

Number of signatories: **1,721,626**

Answer of the European Commission:

Decision date: 28/05/2014

Official documents related to the decision:

- Communication ← **Detailed analyses of the subject and reflections to the main objectives**
- Annexes ← **Justification of eligibility of the initiative (procedure, number of signatures etc.)**
- More information ← **Follow-up of further actions, e.g. public consultations set-up by the Commission due to the initiative, press releases, meetings etc.**

Communication: The Commission provides detailed analyses of the subject background (what actions have been made earlier, what should be done to improve the situation) and lists all the future actions.

When the Commission provides an answer, they reflect on each main objective defined by the organisers. These are the concrete requests by the organisers that are aiming at changing policy orientations, legal frames, legal texts etc.

In its analysis, the Commission examines whether the current regulation and past endeavours provide answers for the citizens' requests already or if there is a gap somewhere that allows a space for the problems to appear. The Commission examines if the problem represented by the citizens' initiative belongs to the EU level. Finally, in case further actions are needed due to the equity of the initiative, the Commission describes how and when these actions will be done.

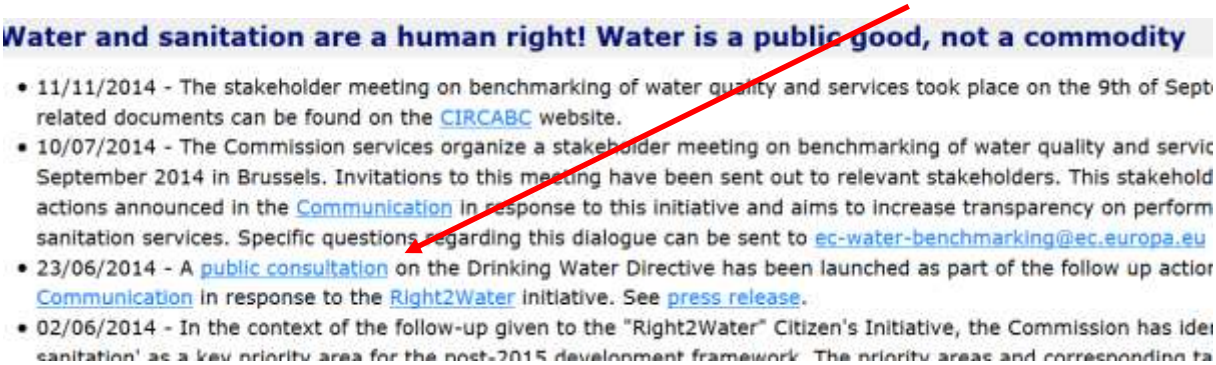
As a result, it is possible that the Commission will set-up a **'Public Consultation'** (see next chapter) on the issue and will open it for a wider

and more professional debate. It happened for instance in case of the 'Water and sanitation' initiative.

Annex: In the Annex, the Commission gives a short justification about that the citizens' initiative was following the rules and the final number of signatures as well as the composition by countries was eligible.

More information: In this section, we can follow all the actions made by the Commission after its official answering. Here, we can find press releases, legal drafts (if apply), meetings, public consultations etc.

Due to the Citizens' Initiative, a Public Consultation was set-up for 'Water and sanitation' topic by the Commission.



Obsolete initiatives

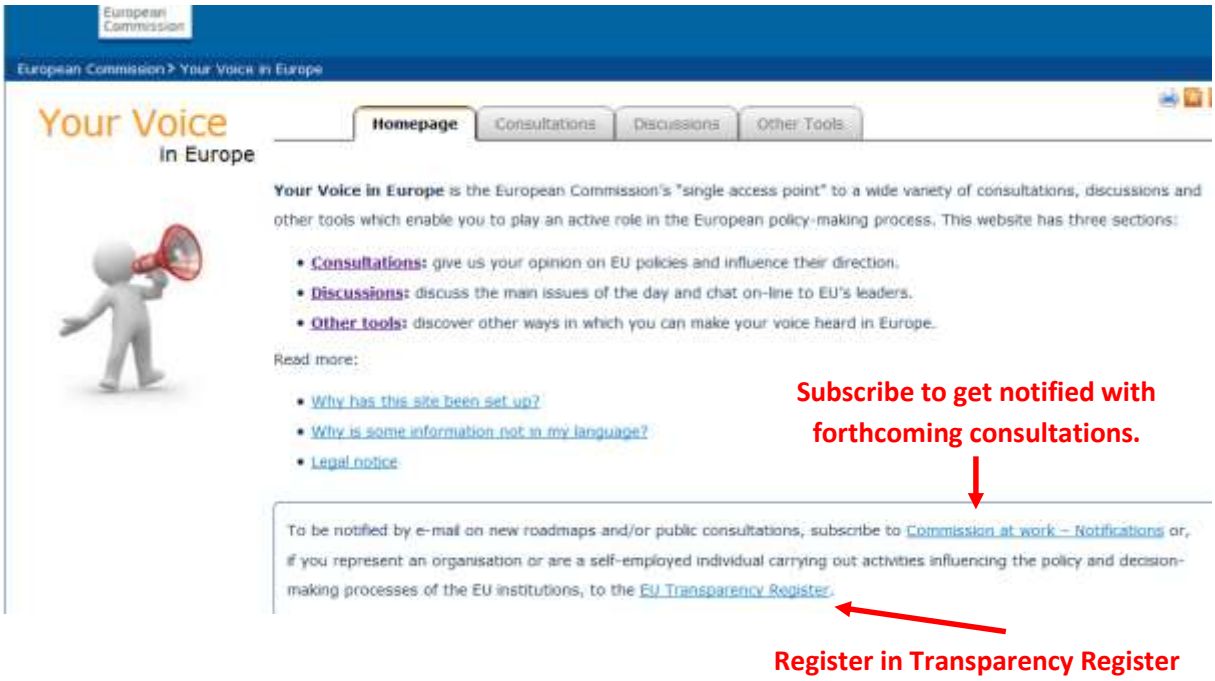
Obsolete initiatives can give good ideas why initiatives may fail. Some initiatives fail because the organisers decide this way. Others were not eligible after submission. Considering the number of successfully submitted initiatives according to the started ones, we can say that only a few come to a submission and then to an answer by the Commission.

Citizens' Initiative indeed needs a wide international co-operation, a proper identification of the topic and sometimes, some financial support to the implementation (e.g. creating the website, communication etc.).

2. European Commission Public Consultation: Your Voice in Europe

The European Commission provides various types of electronic participation in regulation: consultation, discussion (blogs, social networks) and other (social media, chat etc.) opportunities.

See http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/index_en.htm



Participation is possible in different ways:

- as an individual
- as a representative of an organisation (public, civil etc.) or a self-employed.

Consultations can be followed via this website. It is also possible to subscribe and get notifications about current or forthcoming consultations.

If you are a representative of an organisation or self-employed, it is advised to register in the **EU Transparency Register**. It has been set up to answer core questions such as what interests are being pursued, by whom and with what budget. The system is operated jointly by the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The Register is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do?locale=en#en

Public consultations

By clicking on consultations, we can see the following structure:

- on-going (open) consultations
- closed consultations
- planned consultations and
- consultations by policy area.

There is no 'search' option here, therefore in case we are looking for a specific consultation, we need to know whether it is: opened, closed, which year or policy area it belongs to.

The consultation process has an easy-to-follow logic. If we open a consultation, we can find the following information *(here, as a sample, we opened the first in the list, 'Energy: Consultation on the list of proposed Projects of Common Interest in the field of Smart Grids'*[28]*)*:

- target group(s)
- policy field(s)
- objective of the consultation
- consultation period

[28] https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/consultations/consultation-list-proposed-projects-common-interest-field-smart-grids

- contact details
- specific privacy statement
- consultancy document (and/or a smart grid, if relevant).
- how to submit your contribution

This general information is available for each open consultation, however, the way to submit your contribution may differ. It is possible to add your opinion in a number of ways:

- in a structured or semi-structured online questionnaire
- as a 'free narrative'
- or a mix of them. *(Links to it are placed at every consultation site)*

If relevant, a smart grid will be also available and in the web questionnaire, you will need to select to which policy category you would like to contribute. Therefore, consultation documents need to be checked.

If you are an individual (not registered), your opinion will be published separately (as a citizen). In case you registered in the EU Transparency Register, you will be 'identified' or even invited in consultation. Sometimes, there are separate options for registered and non-registered users.

There is no direct feedback on the site about the results of a consultation. Upon submission, you will get a confirmation (via e-mail etc.) that your contribution was successfully registered.

The second option 'Discussions' obviously provides several ways to go after the information.

Discussions

Under 'Discussions', we can find some EU blogs, social networks and other contact information.

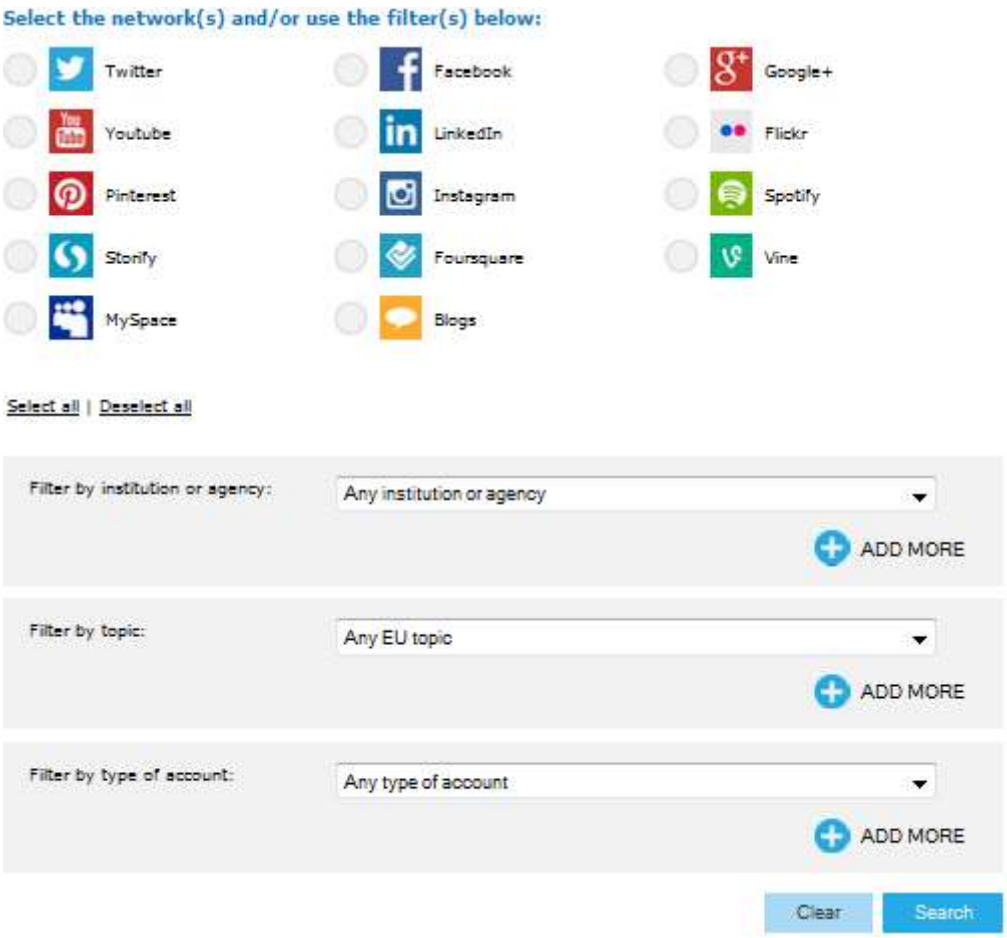
See: http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/discussions/index_en.htm

EU blogs (http://europa.eu/contact/social-networks/index_en.htm)

Here we can check *which* EU institution or agency is has an *account* in a given topic. Therefore, in case we have specific accounts in some social media sites, we can check whether specific issues/agencies are presented there and we can follow and participate; or if we want to follow an agency or a debate, we will know where to create an account.

The same can be seen by clicking on **'Connect with EU in social networks'**.

EU blogs OR Connect with EU in social networks:

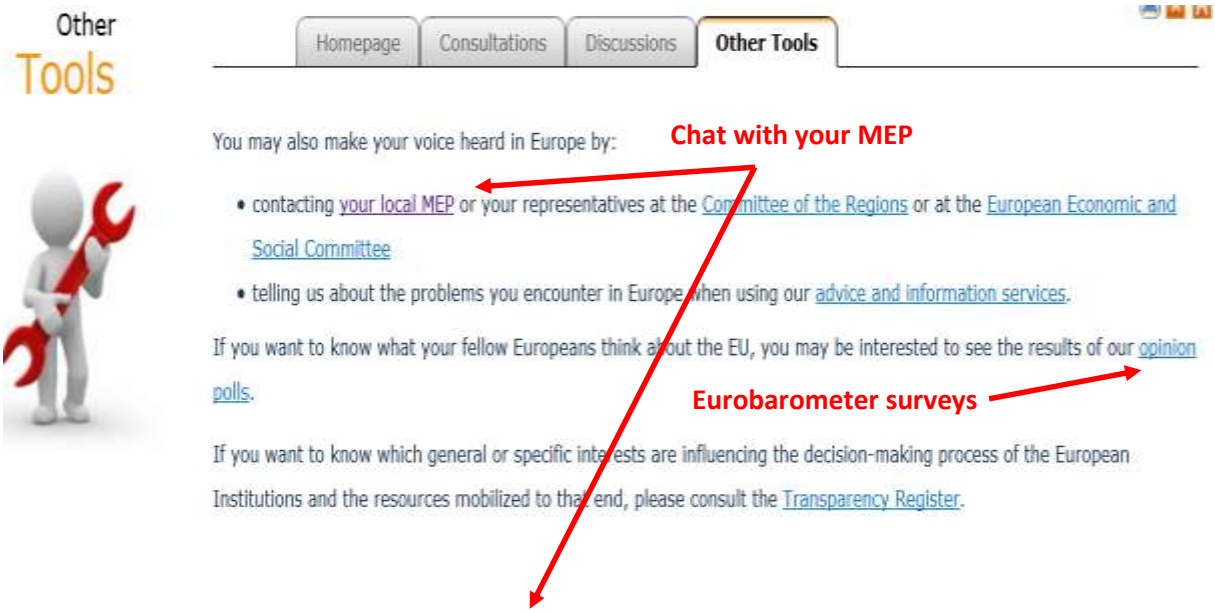


'Read more' option (http://europa.eu/contact/index_en.htm)

The third menu is for other contacts:

Other tools (http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/usefullinks/index_en.htm)

In other tools, you can find some additional e-participation opportunities. First, you can be directed to the **website of MEPs** and their personal contact info. Then, you can check the **Committee of Regions** and the **European Economic and Social Committee**. Finally, you can find the results of **Eurobarometer surveys** to get more informed about EU issues.



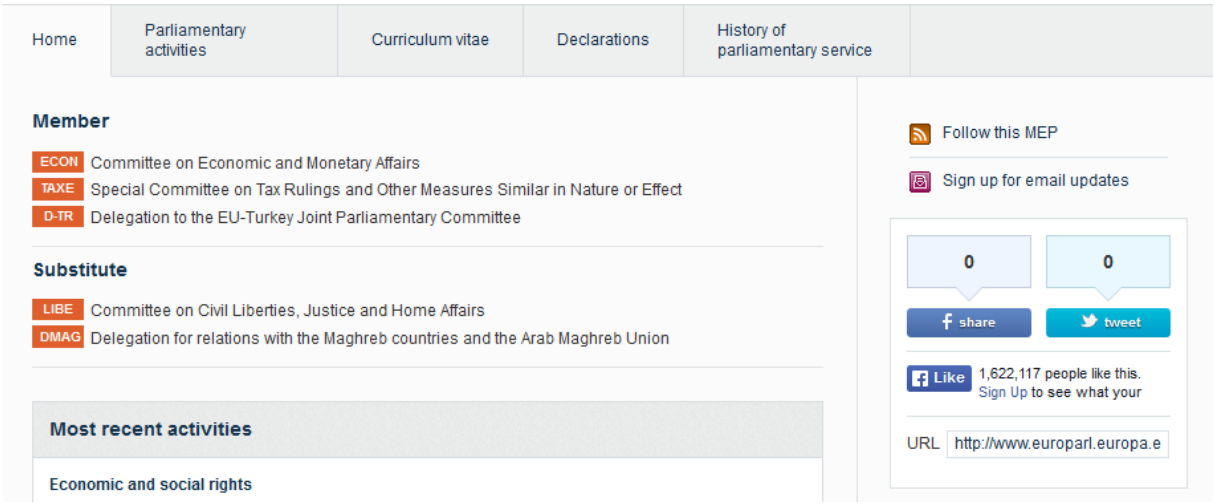
European Parliament / MEPs:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

After selecting the country that applies to you, the full list of MEPs will be listed with a photo and the political party the MEP belongs to.

By clicking on the MEP's profile, we can find:

- which committees/delegations the MEP is member of
- the most recent activities of the MEP
- all contact information (e-mail, website, sign up for email updates, postal address, assistants).

Parliamentary activities, CV, declarations and history of parliamentary services are also listed.



Following a MEP's activity can be the most personal way to watch and follow how national politicians are working in the EU and also can help with navigating in EU policy- and decision-making processes.

Features of Public Consultations:

Top-down or bottom-up	It is a top-down e-participation tool, since the materials are open for a consultation by the European Commission.
Top-down	Contributions can be made (or feedback can be asked) in a number of ways: in online consultation, social media, phone, e-mail etc.
Level of engagement	It is mostly enabling, since it provides detailed information on topics lying on decision-makers' tables. It provides an in-depth review in specific topics.
E-enabling	
Stage of policy making	It is used for agenda-setting, review or monitoring (however not really for creating an agenda, since bottom-up opportunities are not provided here).
More	
Time and duration	The timeframe given for a consultation is fixed and indicated on the site.

Fixed	
Actors	This is a dialogue between the European Commission and the relevant stakeholders (civil, business or public organisations) however individuals also can contribute opinions.
European Commission, EU citizens, organisations	
Technology used	Consultation is based on online consultation but complementary solutions (participate via social media, chat) or direct contact (phone, e-mail) is also available.
Multi-method	
Language	The website is available in all official EU languages. However, some materials (related to specific topics) might work only in specific languages (as relevant).
Multi-lingual	
Accessibility	http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm
Rules of engagement	Rules are available at the website and privacy statements are provided.
Feedback	Direct feedback is not provided for consulted topics however information can be asked in many ways (social media, direct contact).

What are the forthcoming consultations regarding Information Technology?

Finally, here we present the list of the currently open and the forthcoming public consultations in the topic of 'Information Technology' that might interest Telecentres the most in the near future.

By clicking on a topic, the expected time of opening the consultation can be seen. After opening/start date, relevant information and background materials will be also available for the public.

Open consultation

SHARE THIS

Public consultation on the Lamy Report: future use of the UHF TV broadcasting band

Future consultations - express your interest

Public consultation on a new eGovernment initiative

Public consultation on a Green Paper on "Trust & cloud computing in Europe" (to be confirmed)

Public consultation on the review of the scope of universal service

Public consultation on the priorities of the data public-private partnership

Public consultation on the Second Radio Spectrum Policy Programme

Public consultation on the Review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications networks & services

Public consultation on the functioning of the Roaming Regulation

The web portal Your Voice in Europe sets out all consultations currently underway across the Commission.

3. PETITIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The right to petition

The objective of the petitions to the European Parliament (EP) is to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to communicate with the Parliament and exercise their right to petition, which is one of the fundamental rights of all European citizens and residents, enshrined both in the Lisbon Treaty and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights:

> *'Any citizen, acting individually or jointly with others, may at any time exercise his **right of petition** to the European Parliament under Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.*
>
> *Any citizen of the European Union, or resident in a Member State, may, individually or in association with others, submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject which comes within the European Union's fields of activity and which affects them directly. Any company, organisation or association with its headquarters in the European Union may also exercise this right of petition, which is guaranteed by the Treaty.*
>
> *A petition may take the form of a complaint or a request and may relate to issues of public or private interest.*
>
> *The petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter. Such petitions give the European Parliament the opportunity of calling attention to any infringement of a European citizen's rights by a Member State or local authorities or other institution.[29]'*

Petitions allow the EP, through its Petitions Committee, to conduct an on-going reality check on the way European legislation is implemented and measure the extent to which European institutions are responding to citizens' concerns.

The objective of the Petitions Committee is to provide a response to all petitions and, when possible, to provide a non-judicial remedy to legitimate concerns, which petitioners raise.

[29] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00533cec74/Petitions.html

The Petitions Web Portal

The Petition Web Portal has been established to provide an electronic way of sending petitions to the European Parliament.

The petition process includes the following steps[30]:

Who can submit a petition?

You can submit a petition if you are:

- a citizen of the European Union,
- a resident in a European Union Member State,
- a member of an association, company, organisation (natural or legal person) with its headquarters in a European Union Member State.

What subjects can your petition deal with?

The subject of the petition must be concerned with issues of European Union interest or responsibility such as:

- your rights as a European citizen as set out in the Treaties,
- environmental matters,
- consumer protection,
- free movement of persons, goods and services, internal market,
- employment issues and social policy,
- recognition of professional qualifications,
- other problems related to the implementation of EU law.

How to start a petition?

It is possible to submit a petition in paper form or electronically. With regards to a paper form, there is no form to be filled in or standard format to be followed. However, a petition must:

[30] http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/main

- bear your name, nationality and permanent address (in the case of a group petition, it must bear the name, nationality and permanent address of the presenter or, at least, the first signatory),
- be signed.

It may include attachments, including copies of any supporting documents you may have.

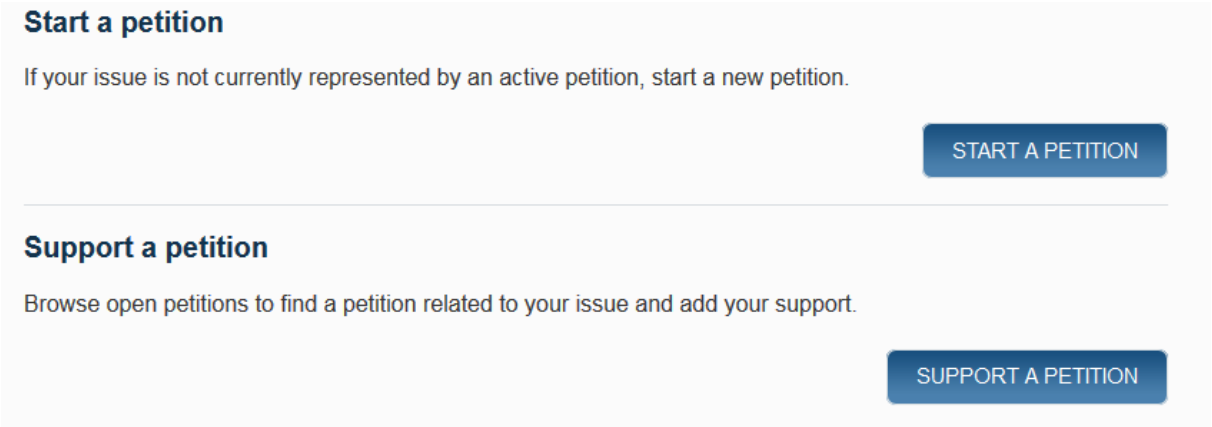
The address, where it should be sent can be found on the home page:

http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/main

Launching an electronic petition needs registration. After having a user account, a petition can be formulated (by following a few standards like petition summary, details, attachments etc.). Ideas on how to draft it can be collected through checking existing petitions.

How to support a petition (or 'View Petitions')?

Through the main page, you can not only start but also join and support a petition:



Here, you can search through petitions by keyword, year, status and country (check if the selected petition can be supported):

A quick search is also available.

What action is taken in the case of admissible petitions[31]?

The petition will be declared admissible by the Committee on Petitions[32]. It will decide what action should be taken and give feedback to the petitioner. The Committee meets every month (excl. August). The EP can:

- ask the European Commission to conduct a preliminary investigation and provide information regarding compliance with relevant Community legislation or contact **SOLVIT** *(see next chapter)*;
- refer the petition to other European Parliament committees for information or further action (a committee might, for example, take account of a petition in its legislative activities);
- in some exceptional cases, prepare and submit a full report to Parliament to be voted upon in plenary, or conduct a fact-finding visit to the country or region concerned and issue a Committee report containing its observations and recommendations;
- seek to cooperate with national or local authorities in Member States to resolve an issue;
- or take any other action considered appropriate to try to resolve an issue or deliver a suitable response to the petitioner.

NOTE: The Petitions Committee cannot, however, override decisions taken by competent authorities within Member States. As the European Parliament is not a judicial authority: it can neither pass judgement on, nor revoke decisions taken by, the Courts of law in Member States. Petitions seeking such courses of action are inadmissible.

What SOLVIT is and why is it important?

SOLVIT is a service provided by the national administration in each EU country and in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It is **an online public service**. Although there is a SOLVIT centre in each country, the best way to contact them is via this website. SOLVIT is available here: http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/index_en.htm

SOLVIT aims to find solutions within **10 weeks** – starting on the day your case is taken on by the SOLVIT centre in the country where the problem occurred. SOLVIT can help you when:

- your **EU rights as a citizen** or as a **business** are breached by public authorities in another EU country and
- you have not (yet) taken your case to court (*although we can help if you've just made an administrative appeal).*

[31] http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/howAndWhy
[32] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/peti/home.html

What are the main types of problems SOLVIT can help with?

- recognition of professional qualifications
- family benefits
- pension rights
- goods and services
- unemployment benefits
- taxation
- vehicles and driving licenses
- visa and residence rights
- health insurance abroad
- discrimination.

How SOLVIT works?

Once you've submitted your problem to SOLVIT, the **home centre** will:

- contact you within 1 week and, if necessary, ask you for further information
- check whether or not your problem falls within SOLVIT's remit
- prepare the case and send it to the lead SOLVIT centre.

You will be regularly informed on the progress of your case by the home SOLVIT centre. Feel free to contact them if you need an update on how your case is progressing.

When it receives the case from your home SOLVIT centre, the lead SOLVIT centre will:

- confirm within 1 week whether or not they will accept the case
- try to find a solution to your problem together with the responsible authority.

The target deadline for solving problems is 10 weeks from when the **lead SOLVIT centre** accepts your case.

Features of e-petitions to the EU:

Top-down or bottom-up	Citizens, public, business or civil organisations can write and submit petitions.
Ground-up	
Level of engagement	It is a classical e-empowering e-participation tool, since issues are based on and linked with the everyday issues of potential petitioners and is raised from their circumstances.
E-empowering	
Stage of policy making	Theoretically it can be a tool to any stage of policy-making since it can give a sense about how 'life is working' regardless if the main issue had been regulated or should be changed. The problems that are appearing here can give ideas to decision-makers to review regulation.
Any	
Time and duration	Petitions can be submitted continuously.
Any time	
Actors	Directly, the Committee on Petitions is concerned at the EU level, however, the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU agencies, national or local authorities can be also involved if relevant to the case. On the other side, citizens, representatives of public, civil or business organisations can submit petitions.
Committee on Petitions, EU citizens, organisations	
Technology used	Petitions can be submitted in paper form or in electronically, for registered users.
Online 'petition'	
Language	Available in all official EU languages
Multi-lingual	
Accessibility	http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/hu/main
Rules of engagement	Well-detailed rules are available.
Feedback	Feedback is provided directly to the petitioner. Former petitions are available.

A few samples for petitions in topic of Information Society

A full overview of petitions' life needs a registration to the website, here we would like to give a few simple examples on what topics citizens submitted already specifically in Information Society?

These samples can be exemplary for citizens and they can show how a citizen's local problem can be turned into a EU level petition.

SAMPLE 1

Petition 0640/2013, by M. L. (German) on alleged discrimination against inhabitants of rural areas with regard to access to news and information via the Internet *(Status: closed)*

The petitioner states that the Internet - which has been declared a basic need - ought to be technically and legally organised in such a way that members of the public can genuinely use it. According to the petitioner, people have the right and the duty to obtain information about political and social life. The new media are playing an ever-larger role in this. Public-service broadcasters/news services are providing more and more information over the Internet. For people who, like the petitioner, live in the countryside, however, access to this information is limited due to the technical and legal conditions for Internet access imposed by providers. The petitioner therefore considers that there is discrimination. In many cases, residents of rural areas can only gain access to the Internet via wireless technology. However, this means that there are limits to the speed and data volumes in comparison with the cable access available to town-dwellers. He observes that nowadays many things, such as taxes, insurance, banking transactions, etc. can virtually only be deal with over the Internet. However, this requires a fast Internet connection. The petitioner says that the wireless technologies available in rural areas are inadequate for the modern-day data-intensive Internet services. Moreover, in comparison with the cable Internet, they are disproportionately more expensive and, because of the volume conditions, only usable to a limited extent and not always reliable.

Source:
http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/0640%252F2013/html/Petition-0640%252F2013%252C-by-Matthias-Ludwig-%2528German%2529-on-alleged-discrimination-against-inhabitants-of-rural-areas-with-regard-to-access-to-news-and-information-via-the-internet

SAMPLE 2

Petition 0791/2013 by K.T. (German), on amending the directive on bank transfers *(Status: closed)*

The petitioner points out that, as a result of Directive 2007/64/EC on payment services in the internal market, banks have changed their general conditions and are no longer required to check the name and account number of the recipient when a transfer is made. The petitioner considers that this constitutes very poor customer service and entails risks for the account holder. She does not understand why this check has been abolished and points out that, particularly in these days of modern information technology, this is something which should be relatively simple to computerise. She asks for the directive to be amended with a view to reintroducing mandatory checks on name and account number.

Source:
http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/0791%252F2013/html/Petition-0791%252F2013-by-K.T.-%2528German%2529%252C-on-amending-the-directive-on-bank-transfers

SAMPLE 3

Petition 2289/2013 by A. L. (Greek), on the downgrading of the subject of Information Technology in middle and upper secondary schools in Greece *(Status: not admissible)*

With regard to the new Greek law on upper secondary schools, the petitioner complains about the downgrading of the subject of Information Technology in Greece. Given the importance of IT at both the global and European levels, the need for qualified IT experts, and the fact that IT underpins the economic growth of Europe and the member states, he asks that IT should be made a stand-alone mandatory course, included in those courses examined at upper secondary level in Greece, irrespective of stream, and that it be a subject included in the university admission examinations with an increased weighting factor.

Source:
http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/2289%252F2013/html/Petition-2289%252F2013-by-Aris-Louvris-%2528Greek%2529%252C-on-the-downgrading-of-the-subject-of-Information-Technology-in-middle-and-upper-secondary-

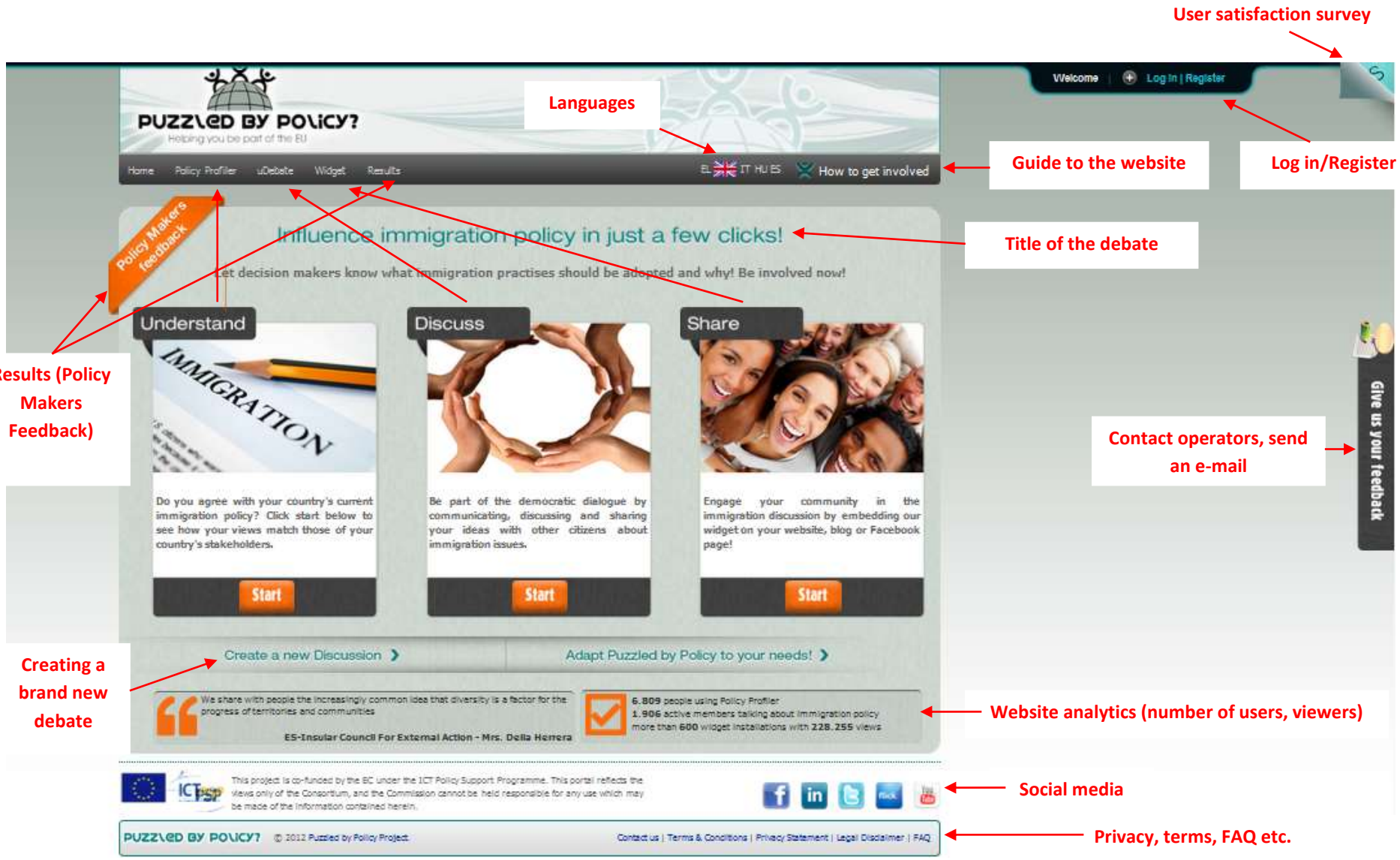
4. PUZZLED BY POLICY

The fourth e-participation tool that we introduce here is called 'Puzzled by Policy' launched in a project co-funded in 2012 by the European Commission in frame of the ICT Policy Support Programme. This is an interactive site, where EU citizens can take part in currently 'hot' debates at EU level. The issues for discussion are defined by the European Commission, therefore joining citizens cannot 'toss up' issues by themselves.

How it works? A sample of the 'Immigration' topic

Currently, the 'Influence Immigration Policy' is available on the 'Puzzled by Policy'. Although, the collection of citizens' opinions ended in 2013, registration and comments are still available, as well as the results of the online discussion.

Structure of the Home page – Main options



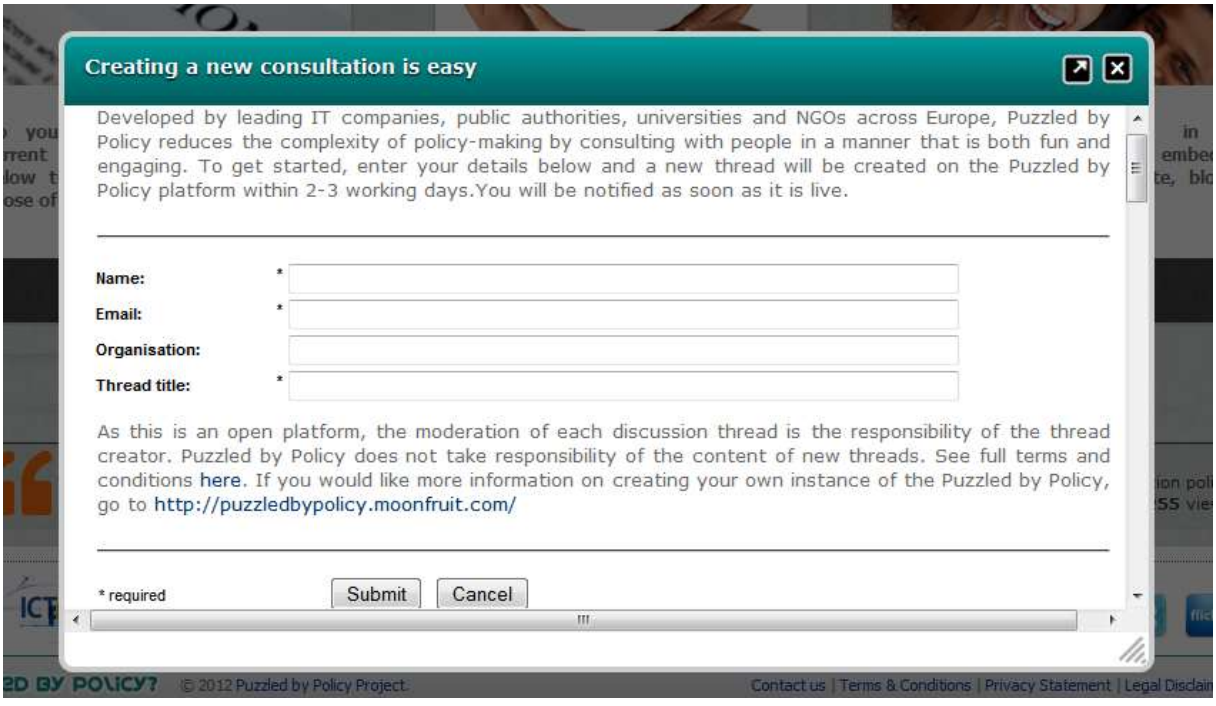
Participation options 1: Create a new debate

You can easily create a new debate by clicking on 'Create a new Discussion' button on the Home page. Here, you need to provide data such as: name, e-mail, organisation and thread title of the debate you would like to open.

Then, in a few days, the operator team will technically set it up and will make the website ready to open the discussion (and provide help to further steps).

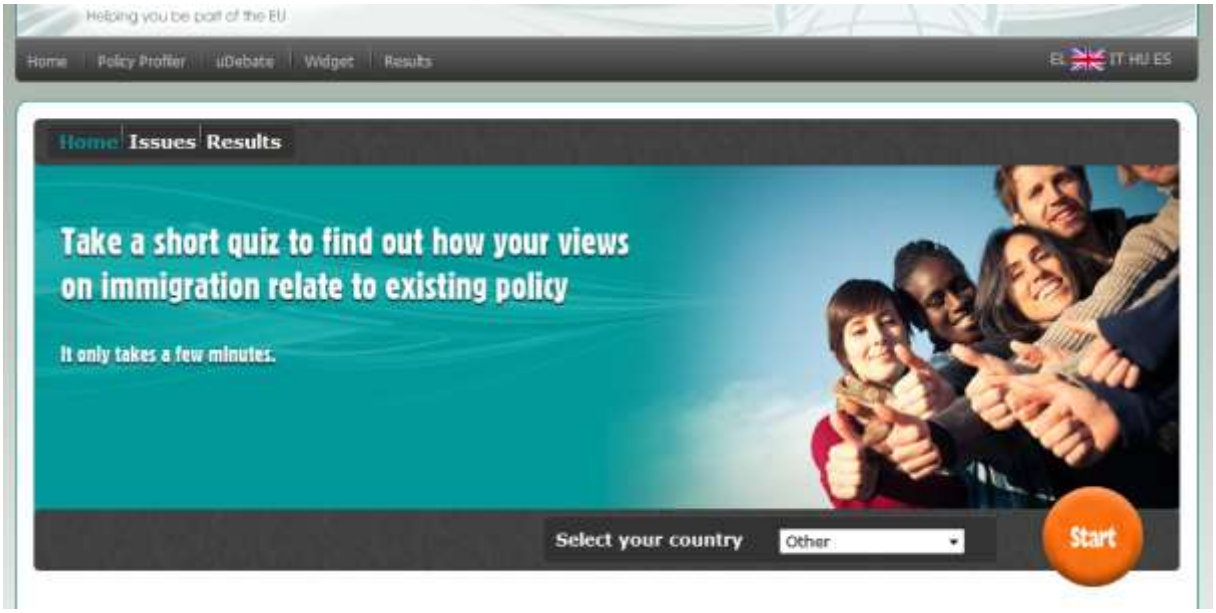
In case your debate is ready and available on the Puzzle, you have more options to announce the debate:

- you can design a **web survey** that participants can attend in **Policy Profiler** (it will appear under 'Understand' menu on Home page) and/or
- you can start **thematic online discussion(s)** via **uDebate** (it will be available via 'Discuss' on Home page);
- finally, you can **analyse the results** (both web survey and content of discussion forums) – it is suggested to do in order to give a proper feedback to participants who contributed to the debate.



Participation options 2: Policy Profiler (see also as 'Understand' on the Home page)

Policy Profiler is a web survey tool option that can applied with setting-up a debate. Through attending the survey, you will see how your opinion relates to existing policy.



How to attend the survey?

- Select a language (right, top) from the available: English, Hungarian, Spanish, Italian and Greek.
- Select your country at the bottom and start the survey.
- When you finished the survey and answered all questions, you will see a short summary of your answers.

If you continue, you can see how opinions in the online debate are sorted by counties, socio-demographic status, politically or in the whole group of participants.

At this point, you are allowed to join the discussion (uDebate) via an opening window at the left.

In case you don't intend to join the online forums, you attend a short survey about the website in order to give a feedback (right, at the bottom).

Participation options 3: uDebate (also see as 'Discuss' on the Home page)

In case you would like to follow the debate, go to the Home page and click on 'uDebate' or 'Discuss, Start' buttons.

If you are not a registered user:

- you can read the thematic online discussion,
- you can sort discussions created in one of the five country and languages) or in the EU

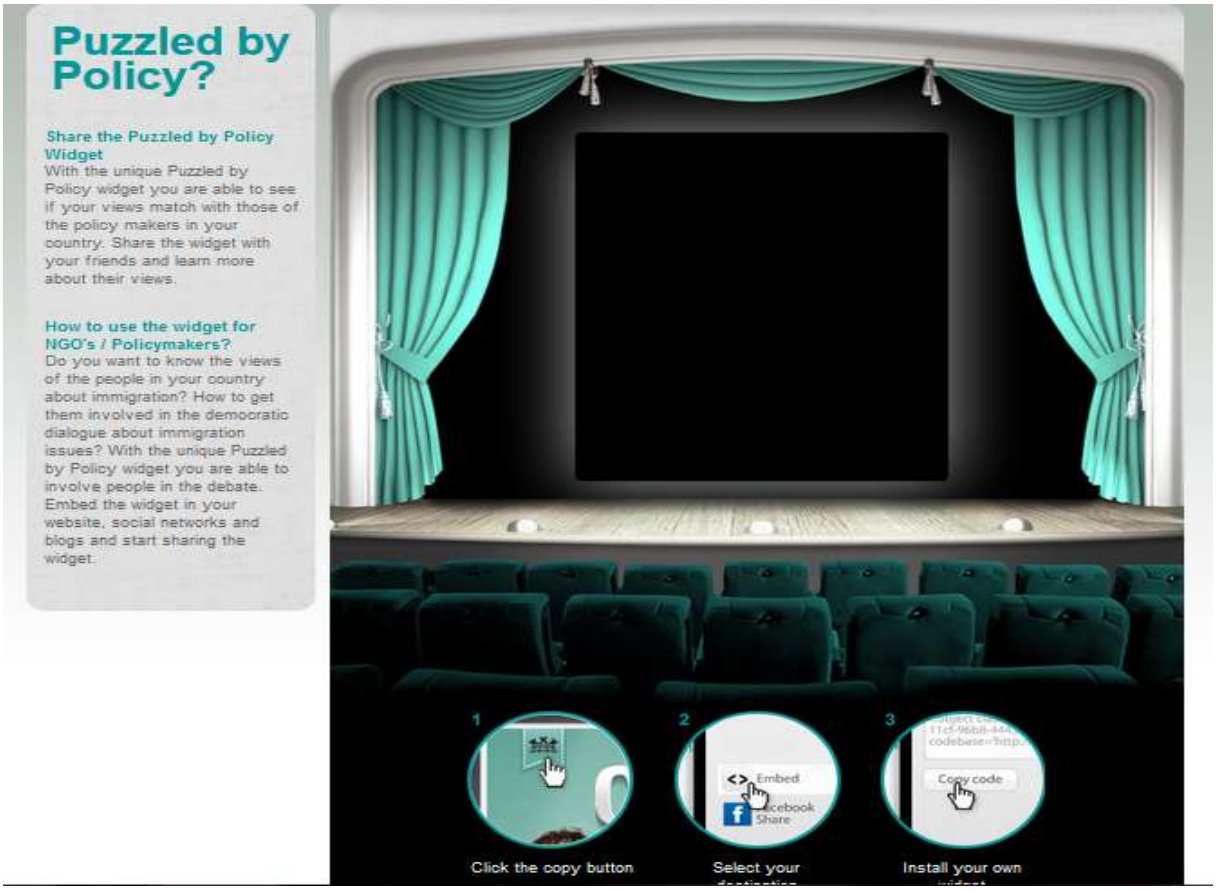
If you are a registered user:

- you can create an own profile and join existing discussion,
- you can start a new discussion,
- you can start a new discussion in any other languages than it is available by using the Microsoft Translator (top, right side).

Participation options 4: Widget (also see as 'Share' on the Home page)

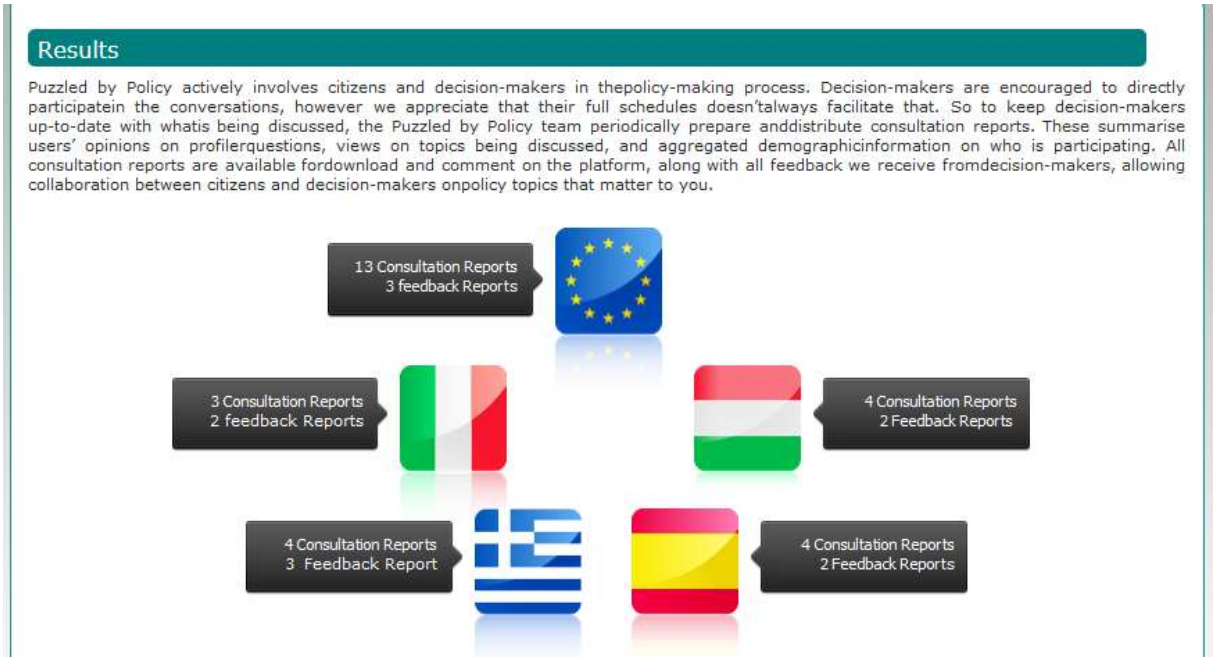
In order to invite more people in the discussion, you can share the debate through several social media tools, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Frickr or YouTube.

'Widget' or 'Share' options are navigating you how to extend the discussion. This option works only if you are a registered user.



Results (also see as 'Policy Makers Feedback' on the Home page)

When a debate is closed, results are available under 'Results' or 'Policy Makers Feedback'. Here, you can find feedback reports (surveys), consultation reports, policy papers made by MEPs as a result etc. These reports are translated into each available language.



Feedback on user experience

Finally, you can attend a survey about your experiences as a user. This option is available in an opening window (a tab-like) at the right, top corner of the site.

Main characteristics:

Top-down or bottom-up	The issues (discussion, main theme) can be created theoretically by any user (individual, group or organisation). The operator of the website is not responsible for the content created (but they can be contacted for help). The issue, currently available ('Immigration') is launched by members of parliaments (national and EU) where they can collect citizens' point of view to formulate their policies, strategies. *(However, there is no technical barrier for a simple user to create and call others into a debate; therefore it can be used as a bottom-up tool, too.)*
Top-down *(possibly bottom-up, too)*	
Level of engagement	It is an e-engaging tool, since the main purpose is to involve and engage a larger number of citizens and have their opinions throughout EU member states. However, it is less an 'e-enabling' tool, since little information is available about the topic therefore, it might needs a further research for information from other sources.
E-engaging	
Stage of policy making	It can be effective at any stage of policy-making, since it is to gather as many citizens' opinion as possible and works as a 'check out' of how the main expected outcomes (convergences, divergences) has been sorted by the participating citizens.
It can be used at any stage	
Time and duration	The time and duration are fixed by the creator of the debate. After a debate has been closed, different kinds of analytics and report are made and they are available on the website. Nevertheless, the online forums are available after the debate has been closed and comments still can be given.
Fixed, determined but provides opportunity to participate after the debate closed	
Actors	Through this platform, the Members of the European Parliament can post their statements, plans and actions related to the EU-defined main topic. They can follow, comment and react on citizens' opinions. On the other hand, any citizen from the EU member states can join the discussion once they registered. However, all the posted information are available even without a registration, the 'sign up' function provides the real participation (join the discussion forums and share comments).
Members of the European Parliament, EU citizens	
Technology used	The website provides more opportunities. First, a short web survey can be created and attended on the topic concerned. Then, we can check how our opinion converge or diverge from the others who participated. ('Policy Profiler' tool) Then, we can join the online discussion forum via 'uDebate' function. We also can open a 'sub'-debate. ('Start a new discussion') Finally, we can share the debate through importing it with the Widget option to different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr and YouTube).
Online discussion forums, web survey	
Language	The website available in five languages: English, Hungarian,

Multi-lingual	Spanish, Italian, Greek.
Accessibility	http://join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/
Rules of engagement	The website provides a detailed safety description at the bottom of the site. The 'How to get involved' option (right side, up) gives a short but detailed guide on how to use the website. It is available in English and in all languages in which the current debate actually goes (have been translated via Microsoft Translator by the national users).
Feedback	The website gives a detailed report and statistics of the results of the online debate. Web survey results are available in 'Feedback Reports' by the participating nations, on national languages and they cover all opinions contributed by the participants. The online discussions (comments by citizens) are also involved in the analysis, the summary of the narrative comments are in the 'Consultation Reports', also in all involved languages. In addition, the exact analytics of visitors, registered participants etc. are shown.

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Enabling European e-Participation