



Citizens challenge the EU political leaders A new design for better results!

Statement presented by

Pat Cox, President of the European Movement International

The European Union is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year. Since 1957 it has progressed from economic cooperation to a political Union that affects the lives of almost 500 million citizens. This evolution also brings responsibilities for the political leaders of Europe. The permissive consensus that existed at the beginnings has to be turned into an actively earned consensus in dialogue with the European citizens. Plan D launched by Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström responded to this challenge in a novel manner. It financed a series of projects to learn how ordinary citizens can be involved in the EU decision-making and how they view EU's future. This exercise responds to a basic value of the EU in the 21st century: active citizenship.

1. Results of consultations

The European Movement International, Deutsche Gesellschaft, European House Hungary and Notre Europe with a large network of partners across Europe have engaged actively in Plan D. A series of grass-roots debates, consultations, polls and events aimed at consulting citizens on their visions of Europe have been carried out by the first three, while Notre Europe is preparing the first-ever trans-national deliberative poll, which will take place next fall, probably in the midst of an Intergovernmental Conference.

So far, **the message from citizens is clear and ambitious**: they want a EU that leads the world on environmental issues, especially in policies fighting climate change and promoting a sustainable use of energy. They want a stronger voice for the EU in world affairs, on questions of peace, security and development.

They want the EU to be stronger in policies concerning equal opportunities and family care. They ask for higher standards in child protection, in policies for the elderly and cross border access to medical assistance.

There are, not surprisingly, issues where citizens have divided opinions. Some expect the EU to be more than a single market and to secure harmonised social as well as economic policies. On the other hand, there are those who are anxious about more harmonisation. The same diversity is present in the debate about the use of nuclear energy. Doubts also have been expressed on issues of governance, in particular about which level is best suited to addressing a whole series of practical issues.

Nevertheless what emerged during the debates is that they are clearly asking for "more Europe" in many cases, as several examples cited above illustrate. Additionally, citizens have shown a clear appetite for the development of a **more direct dialogue with the decision-makers**, stressing more connection between EU institutions and themselves, and emphasising the indispensable role of a free and independent media, as much as an increased flow of information about what Europe has done and what it proposes to do in the future. Around the world, citizens want to be heard, and political leaders are seeking new forms of dialogue. Europe has to show the way to a trans-national healthy and democratic deliberation.

Some even suggested having a permanent Plan D for on-going dialogue and debate while others called for Europe-wide referendums to approve institutional reforms.

2. Citizens' main expectation

There is however an even more substantial message from the numerous debates – **citizens are not interested in systems design, they have pointed clearly to preferred EU policy outcomes and destinations – they are not especially interested in the car engine but rather are more focused on its ability to travel to the desired policy destinations. In short, they are results and not process oriented.** They want results that correspond to their expectations and they expect delivery from Europe's politicians. In their turn, politicians, faced yet again with the challenge and dilemma of systems design, had better get the design of the car engine right this time. The European Union, its institutions and its decision-making procedures have to be fit for purpose. This is a necessary pre-condition for realising new and ambitious European policy objectives for the 21st century.

3. Appeal to the EU political leaders

The German EU Presidency has undertaken the burden of political responsibility to set a calendar and to rebuild a consensus on the broad lines of necessary institutional reform. The political stakes are high for the June 2007 European Summit and for the subsequent Portuguese Presidency and those that follow.

We call upon the EU Heads of State and Government to avoid a low-level compromise that would significantly dilute the existing Constitutional text. We believe that it is essential to design the new European Union fit for our times and capable of fulfilling the expectations of its citizens.

There is a number of **essential elements for the EU to become more efficient and more democratic**: the extension and simplification of the majority voting in the Council with an even stronger role for the European Parliament; the reduction of the use of national vetoes on future EU action; the right for 1 million EU citizens to influence the legislative agenda (in the form of the Citizens' Initiative); the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; the abolition of the pillar structure. We also believe in the strengthening of EU's capacity to act in world affairs, in the possibility for it to conclude international agreements and in the introduction of a more stable Council Presidency. These issues are more important in terms of substance than name.

Associating citizens to the European construction, however, remains a fundamental issue. Political leaders should not be short-sighted. If we don't want the citizens to desert once more the European elections in 2009, **political leaders need to regain citizens' trust and confidence in the European project** and show they care about citizens' involvement in the decision-making machine.

Ultimately, if we want to match citizens' expectations on delivery we feel these are the essential organisational components for the future success of the European Union. **In terms of energy to act on what the Summit must do is to refuel and not dilute the Union's prospects.**

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

European Movement International is the main coordinator of the project *“Speak up Europe”*. Notre Europe runs the project *“Tomorrow's Europe: Pan-European Deliberative Polling for Plan D”*. The Deutsche Gesellschaft runs the project *“Our message to Europe”*. Európa Ház Egyesület runs the project *“Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution”*. The four organisations have received financial support from the DG Communication, European Commission in the framework of the Plan D - Democracy, Dialogue and Debate.

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Európa Ház Egyesület: <http://www.europeanhouse.hu/>

Speak up Europe: <http://www.speakupeurope.eu>

Tomorrow's Europe: <http://www.tomorrowseurope.eu>

Our message to Europe: <http://www.deutsche-gesellschaft-ev.de/our-message-to-europe/>



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