

CITIZENS' SUMMARY

Debate Europe

Building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate

What is the objective?

The Commission wants to

- create a citizens' ownership of EU policies, to make them understandable and relevant, and to make EU institutions accountable and reliable to those they serve;
- stimulate a wide and permanent debate on the future of the European Union between the democratic institutions in the EU and people from all walks of life, both at country and EU level;
- empower citizens by giving them access to information so that they may be in a position to hold an informed debate on EU affairs.

Debate Europe puts into practice the Commission's new communication approach: "listening better, explaining better and going local". Citizens who are consulted by the EU institutions should be able to debate with policy makers. It should be easy to trace the impact of their views throughout the EU decision-making process.

Debate Europe will promote closer cooperation between the EU institutions and greater synergy between existing Commission programmes. This will facilitate the emergence of a cross-border European public sphere.

Why is this important – what is the problem today?

Many decisions have moved to the EU level, but the dialogue and debate has not followed suit.

Today's common perception of national and European political scenes is that they are separate. Few people are aware that many "national" political issues which affect their day-to-day life (e.g. the price of agricultural products) or which relate to the great challenges of our times (e.g. climate change) are in fact dealt with at EU level. Few are aware of the crucial role their elected members of the European Parliament play in the EU decision-making process. Even fewer realise that their national government and parliament, the president of their region, their local mayor, trade unionists and employer representatives equally have an important role to play in steering the way for Europe.

As a result, most people find it difficult to play an active role in the EU policy making process. This general feeling of lack of influence has possibly contributed to decreased voter turnouts in European election.

What are the actions and next steps?

In concrete terms Debate Europe will

- **co-fund** pan-European citizens' consultation projects. The projects will be managed by civil society organisations in partnership with think-tanks, research organisations and universities, political parties and foundations;

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- **promote** actions at country level enabling citizens from all walks of life to debate, synthesise their views and discuss them with policy makers, involving the media in the process;
- **complement** other European Commission programmes and events which promote active European citizenship;
- **offer a framework for cooperation** between all the EU institutions in reaching out to the citizens at large and breaking the divide between European and national politics;
- **contribute** to the launch of on-line networks which will bring together European, national and regional parliamentarians, journalists and other European opinion-makers to share information, knowledge and ideas on the EU (Pilot Information Networks);
- **develop** European Public Spaces in the capital cities of the Member States, where the Commission and European Parliament offices will join forces to accommodate exhibitions, debates, seminars and training sessions on EU matters;
- **increase** the potential of the "Debate Europe" website for debate on topical EU issues, with the participation of the Commission offices in the Member States.

Debate Europe will also make the European Commission go even more local. It will further promote events involving individual members and officials of the EU institutions in the Member States. This should not only be done in the capitals, but by reaching out to regional and local authorities, local media and civil society organisations.