

More deliberation, more impact? Connecting the ECI and European Citizens' Panels

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Organised by: Carsten Berg (The ECI Campaign), Angela Jain (Bertelsmann Stiftung), Andrey Demidov (Bertelsmann Stiftung)

Report

Speakers:

David van Reybrouck - Renowned Belgian writer and organiser of G1000

Prof. Graham Smith - University of Westminster

Marlene Engelhorn, an Austrian multi-millionaire heiress and tax justice advocate

Prof. Paul Blokker - University of Bologna and Citizens Take Over Europe (CTOE)

Prof. Kalypso Nicolaidis, EUI Florence, Democratic Odyssey

Moderator: **Angela Jain**, Bertelsmann Stiftung

Organized jointly by the ECI Campaign and Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Panel brought together prominent speakers to discuss the important question how to improve citizen participation in the EU further and could integration of existing instruments be the next step towards that goal? Why could connecting the largest EU participatory tool, ECI, with the most recently introduced, European Citizens Panels, be worth considering? How could it make both instruments more impactful and how could it be realized in practice?

All panelists agreed that linking ECIs and European Citizens' Assemblies is the next logical step in enhancing citizen participation in the EU. Not only can such integration make both instruments more impactful and ensure better institutional response. When the EU is confronted with big, politically sensitive and pressing issues such as climate crisis, reform of taxation or even constitutional reform, a larger citizen buy-in is needed even more. The discussed integration lays the groundwork for this endeavor: where ECI offers its large-scale citizen mobilization potential and more established legal framework, the European Citizens' Panels can offer in-depth deliberation for better solutions.

Concrete formats and models of such integration can vary, provided that they 1) empower citizens, 2) create wider publicity around citizens' initiatives and deliberations, and 3) result in concrete follow-up. In principle, this integration should also be open to other direct and participatory democracy instruments such as referenda. The result of such inter-connections is the increase of the visibility and impact of citizens' engagement.

However, the biggest challenge is no longer justifying 'why' to link both (and other) instruments but rather how this model should be integrated into existing institutions and supplied with a solid legal basis. Existing systems and decision-makers still demonstrate rigidity when it comes to improving and advancing citizen participation instruments, let alone taking citizens' input into account. Here, a powerful bottom-up social impulse from a wider social movement and citizen participation activism could help: to push for a better use of each instrument and for an effective integration between both.

The debate on citizen participation in the EU has remarkably evolved. The EU has a developed and diverse kit of participatory tools. The next step is to better connect them and build a working participation infrastructure.