



# Evaluation of the Cross-Border EU Citizens' Dialogue

on May 17, 2019 in The Hague

The Citizens' Dialogue was conducted by the European Commission  
in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung



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# The EU Cross-Border Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague

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## Three Innovations

In cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Commission staged a cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague on May 17, 2019. 120 citizens from the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France and Ireland discussed the future of Europe, focusing mainly on Social, Digital and Global Europe.

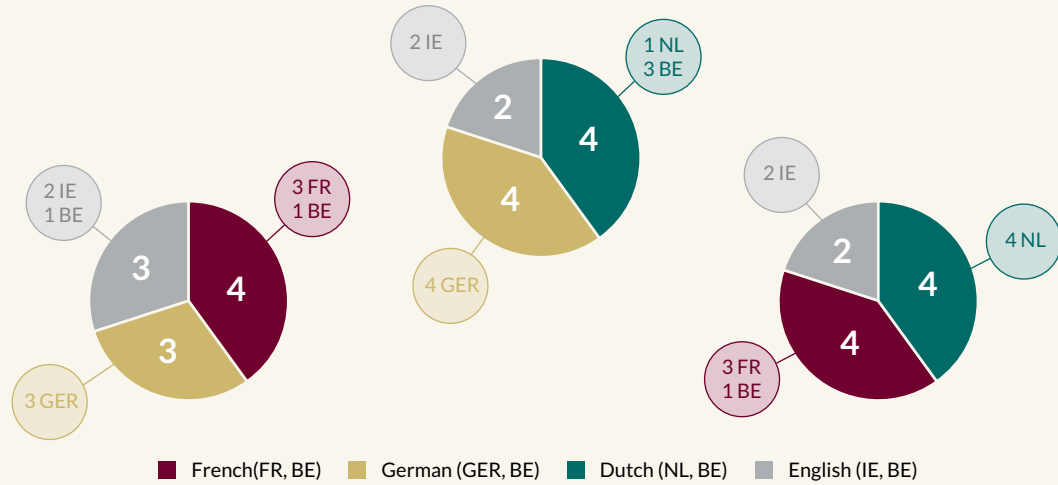
The EU Commission initiated the EU Citizens' Dialogue events in order to improve understanding between the political elite in Brussels and EU citizens at grassroots level. Some 1,100 Dialogues were held across Europe between January 2018 and April 2019. The traditional format of an EU Citizens' Dialogue was that individual participants asked questions which were answered by the EU Commissioners present. In general, participants were interested pro-EU citizens from one region of Europe.

The event in The Hague was the first cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue with participants from five European countries. Three innovative elements were added to the "classic" dialogue format: random selection of participating citizens, a new interpreting procedure for multilingual discussions at the tables, and an enhanced interactive dialogue using the "World Café method".

**Random selection of participants for more diversity:** The citizens from five countries were selected at random and put together in multi-lingual, multi-cultural groups, thus ensuring that a healthy mixture of young and old, academics and apprentices, Eurosceptics and Europhiles took part in the discussions.

**New simultaneous translation procedure for better understanding:** discussions took place between 120 citizens divided into twelve table groups. Thanks to the new translation procedure, communication in three languages was possible at the tables – every word of the discussion was translated simultaneously by trained interpreters. Participants were able to speak in their respective native languages and hold discussions with participants from three other European countries.

FIGURE 1 Mixed-nationality groups: Example for distribution of participants at the discussion tables



Source: Own presentation

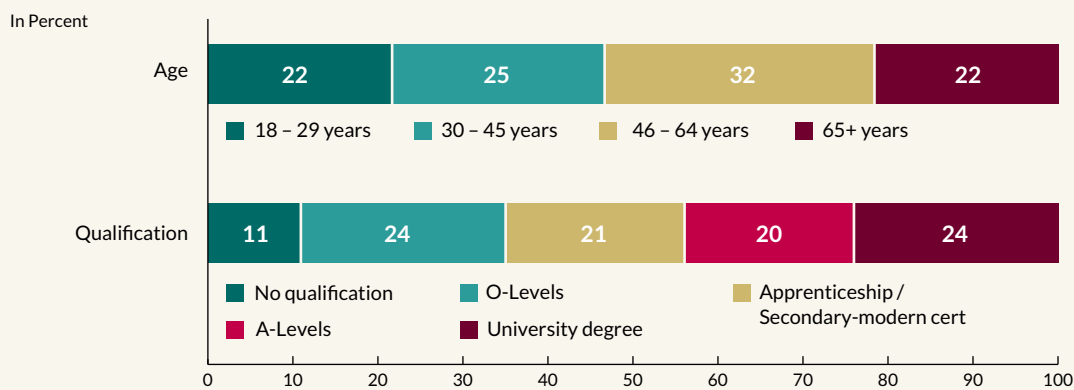
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**Enhanced interactive exchange among the citizens and between citizens and politicians:**

The citizens first met in small, mixed table groups to discuss their own experiences, ideas and suggestions for the future of Europe. Each of the twelve tables developed a recommendation to the EU. Those recommendations were later dis-

cussed with one EU expert on each table and with Ann Mettler in a plenary session. The emphasis of the discussion with policymakers was not on the individual opinions of a few citizens, but on topics and issues that had been agreed on and classified as important by groups of citizens from different countries.

FIGURE 2 Diverse participants: Distribution of participants by age group and educational qualifications



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Own presentation

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## Program and Procedure

The 120 participants met at a get-together event on the evening before the Citizens' Dialogue, where they were also informed about the procedure for the following day. The Citizens' Dialogue on May 17 began with discussions between citizens at twelve table groups of ten citizens.

Each table group was assisted by a moderator and two simultaneous interpreters. Four tables dealt with the topic of Social Europe, four with Digital Europe and four with Global Europe.

There were three rounds of discussion at each table group: In the first round, mixed groups of citizens spoke about their experiences and collected ideas. In the second round, they reflected on their ideas and discussed them in more depth in national groups. The third round was spent in mixed table groups drafting proposals and questions to be put to the EU politicians.

The citizens then discussed their most important proposals and questions at the tables with twelve EU experts, including ambassadors and representatives of the EU Commission. The Citizens' Dialogue ended with the presentation and discussion of concrete proposals in plenary session with Ann Mettler, Director-General of the European Commission's European Political Strategy Centre.



## SCHEDULE

### Friday, May 17, 2019 in The Hague

08:00 Arrival and registration

08:30 Plenum: Welcome and introduction to the Citizens' Dialogue

#### 08:40 – 10:45 Citizens-only dialogue

08:40 At the tables: Personal introductions and getting to know each other

08:50 First citizens-only table discussion round in mixed-nationality groups:

##### Exchange of experiences, information and compilation of ideas

- As a citizen of my country, how do I experience the situation?
- What challenges do I see facing the Europe of tomorrow?
- What needs to change or be changed?

Factsheets with objective information about the topic supplement personal experiences. Ideas are compiled on posters.

09:30 Second citizens-only table discussion round in national groups:

##### Reflection and in-depth discussion

- What topics are important for citizens of our country, what topics are important for citizens of other countries?
- What do we have in common, what differences are there?

09:50 Third citizens-only table discussion round in mixed-nationality groups:

##### Discussion and prioritization of ideas, drafting of proposals and questions

- Which topic is particularly important for us here at this table?
- Which topic can we agree on?
- How should the EU promote this topic?
- What suggestions do we have for implementing it? What do we want to ask the politicians?

Concrete suggestion and question to be written on the poster.

10:45 Break

#### 11:15 – 14:45 Citizens' Dialogue with EU experts

11:15 Welcome of new guests

11:20 Citizens' **table discussion** with EU experts

Presentation of their experiences, ideas and suggestions, discussion with the table guest: a representative of the EU Commission or an ambassador

12:00 Lunch break

13:00 **Plenum discussion** with Ann Mettler, Director-General of the European Commission's European Political Strategy Centre

- Presentation of four citizens' suggestions and questions to each of the three topics Social, Digital and Global Europe
- Ann Mettler's responses, followed by discussion
- Opinion poll of the entire group via digital voting and question cards

14:45 – 15:00 Evaluation and farewell

# Citizen Feedback

## Evaluation Methods

A total of 120 European citizens took part in the Citizens' Dialogue. There was an equal number of participants coming from 5 different countries: Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Ireland.

The citizens were the main focus of the evaluation. A mixture of different methods (advance survey, feedback survey and follow-up survey) was used to determine the expectations and evaluations of citizens before and after the Citizens' Dialogue, and to obtain feedback on

the event itself. In total, 117 participants filled in the Feedback Questionnaire at the event. Since the response rate for the Feedback Questionnaire was 98 percent, the survey can safely be seen as a valid reflection of the evaluation of the Citizens' Dialogue by the citizens.

### EVALUATION METHODS

- Upfront survey: Survey with 120 participating citizens
- Feedback survey at the event: 117 citizens (98 percent response rate)
- Feedback survey: 12 table moderators, 13 interpreters
- Follow-up survey: Survey with 25 citizens

The surveys contained both closed and open questions

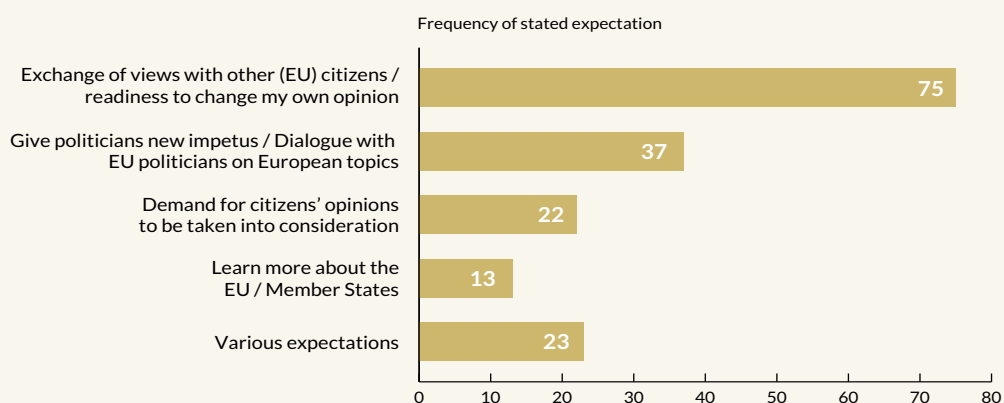




# What citizens expected from the EU Citizens' Dialogue

The survey taken upfront with the 120 participants show citizens' expectations of the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue. Citizens' expectations appear to be similar across EU borders. The diagram gives an overview of these expectations.

FIGURE 3 What do you expect from the EU Citizens' Dialogue?



Source: Own presentation

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## High expectations of the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue

Citizens had high expectations of the EU Citizens' Dialogue. To some extent, these expectations reflect the information they received in advance along with their invitation to the event. However, some citizens expected the results of the dialogue to be considered in a subsequent political process even though no such promises were made by the organisers.

The expectations that citizens stated most frequently can be assigned to the three categories below. These expectations are formulated without reference to the citizens' respective countries of origin.



## Participants expecting an open exchange of opinions with EU citizens from other European countries

75 citizens had this expectation. What is important for them is to hear different experiences and opinions of citizens from various countries, to voice their own opinions, discuss pros and cons, and to share ideas.



*"I am interested in exchanging views with other citizens, in hearing what they think. I would like to understand them better."*

*"My expectation is a dialogue that will bring us closer together. It is more important to be considerate and to take the interests of every community into account."*

*"An open dialogue about our common home: Europe. I am genuinely interested in opinions, backgrounds and problems."*

*"I find it extremely interesting to hold conversations about the European Union in the context of the Citizens' Dialogue, and to find out more about other people's attitudes towards the EU. That is enriching."*

*"I am interested in having discussions with other people who believe in European values, as well exchanging views with people who don't believe in them so much."*

*"What interests me is listening to citizens of other countries to find out what works in their communities and what doesn't."*

Quotes from citizens

## Citizens want a direct dialogue with EU policymakers which includes the citizens' and the politicians' perspective

51 citizens expect a direct dialogue with policymakers. On the one hand, this should include a discussion about the citizens' views and suggestions, and on the other they want to engage in direct dialogue with EU politicians to find out more about the EU.



*"My wish is for a refreshingly open dialogue between politicians and citizens, which I hope will result in a win-win situation for both sides."*

*"I hope that the dialogue will give the politicians a better impression of what is important for the citizens and why."*

*"It is important for politicians to get new impulses from the people affected by their policies. As a citizen, I would like to give the politicians, and with them the European Parliament, some new impulses."*

*"I hope to find out more about the working methods, future and plans of the EU."*

*"I would like to find out more about what the EU does for us and how we can create greater awareness of the benefits we enjoy."*

*"My impression is that ordinary citizens are more European-minded than many politicians. Citizens are more open towards more harmonization than policymakers. When politicians sit down together with citizens, they realize that citizens put European ideals first, rather than getting bogged down in day-to-day political routine. I am sure this event will be an inspiration."*

*"I hope that we will take a critical look at whether we are on the right track in Europe. What must be made to prepare us for the next 25 years?"*

Quotes from citizens

The participants are hoping for a political culture that is closer to the people, pays more attention to citizens and takes their opinions into account

22 citizens would also like politicians to listen to citizens' views and integrate them into the policymaking process after the Citizens' Dialogue.



*"I would like the politicians to listen to the various citizens' concerns, take them seriously, and try to put them into practice."*

*"I expect the politicians to pay more attention to citizens and take their views into account more; I expect more grassroots positive action in problem areas, rather than ivory-tower policies that do not reflect reality."*

*"I expect policymakers to pay more attention to the interests and suggestions of citizens. I would like to see citizens given more participation in democratic decision-making processes and policymaking in general."*

*"I hope that the focus of the event will be more towards grassroots democracy and that the will of the voters will be taken into account again."*

Quotes from citizens



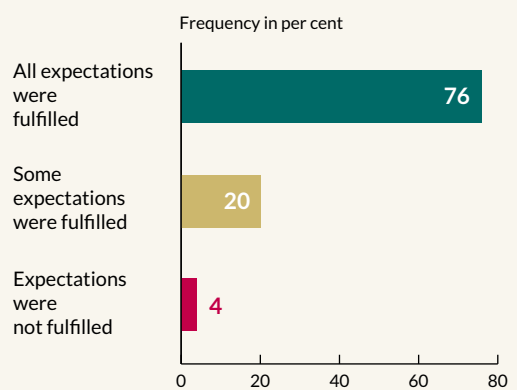
# Most of citizens' expectations were fulfilled

Citizens' expectations regarding the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue were mostly fulfilled, as shown by the follow-up survey among 25 citizens. 76 percent of those polled said that their expectations had been fulfilled.

The following three points can be deduced from a comparison of the results of the follow-up survey with the three main expectations expressed by citizens in the advance survey:

- The cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue gave citizens the desired opportunity for an open exchange of views between EU citizens. Citizens particularly appreciated receiving "first-hand" information and learning about the specific experiences of their European neighbors.
- The dialogue format fulfilled citizens' wishes for a direct dialogue with EU politicians, as it ensured that the viewpoints of both citizens and politicians were discussed.
- Citizens' wish for politicians to be made aware of citizens' opinions was fulfilled. It was not clear to what extent citizens' opinions would be taken into account in the long term, so there was also some criticism from citizens.

FIGURE 4 Did the Citizens' Dialogue fulfil your expectations?



Source: Own presentation

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"Yes, all my expectations were fulfilled. Very well organized, very good set-up, and some very interesting input by the other European citizens. I really enjoyed the event, which was very interesting because we were able to speak to other Europeans and I had an opportunity to get involved. I think that was the aim of the event."

"Yes, fulfilled. We had different nationalities, different backgrounds and diverse viewpoints."

"I am a bit disappointed that it was not always possible to express our opinion on topics that were important for us."

Quotes from citizens

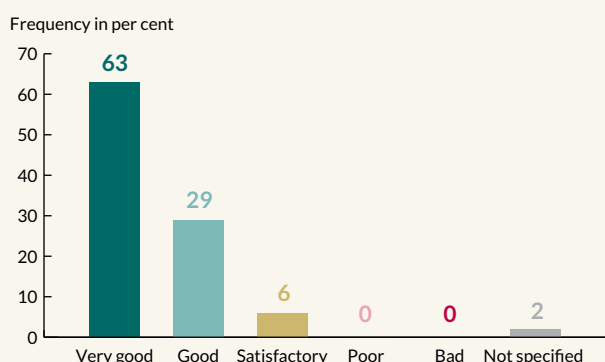


# How citizens rate the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue

The EU Citizens' Dialogue was a success. The exchange of ideas between citizens, the dialogue with politicians, the choice of topics and the interactive methods were all rated positively by citizens. There was particularly high praise for the cross-border character of the event.

The first Citizens' Dialogue with participants from five European countries was a great success from citizens' point of view: Over 90 percent rated the Citizens' Dialogue "very good" or "good".

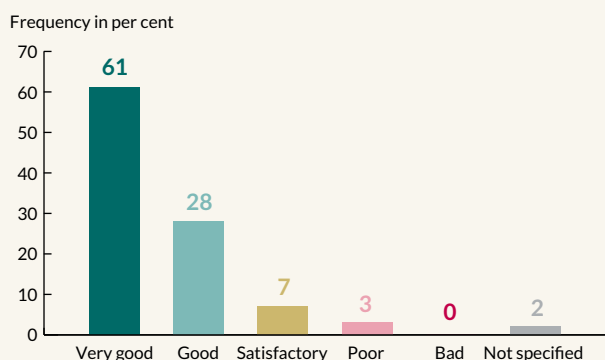
FIGURE 5 How do you rate the event overall?



Source: Own presentation

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FIGURE 6 How do you rate the cross-border character of the event?



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Own presentation

| BertelsmannStiftung

*"Very good, informative, a unique experience."*

*"Organized with great care, committed, factual, very promising."*

*"A very good opportunity to speak to people from different countries. Good for getting a better understanding of the topics the EU is concerned with."*

Quotes from citizens

The cross-border character of the event was rated "very good" or "good" by 89 percent of participants. The chance to hear the views and opinions of citizens of other countries was seen as very positive.

*"It was good to meet people from different countries and discuss common topics and issues with them."*

*"I liked the fact that citizens of every Member State could express their country's attitude towards the EU."*

*"We had different nationalities, different backgrounds and standpoints."*

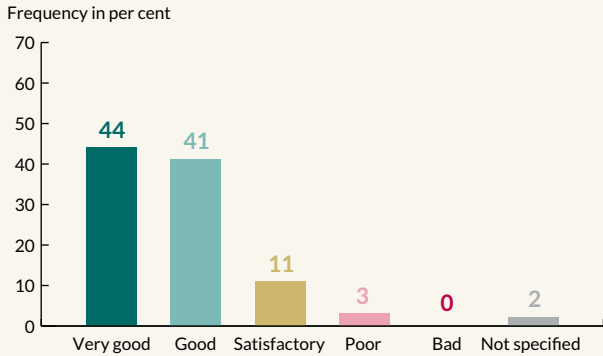
*"It was very interesting to hear the views of other people who don't relate to the EU so much. I was also greatly surprised to hear negative views of the EU. I'm not sure to what extent people were able to convey that to the politicians."*

*"We all had reservations of various kinds, and the Irish are suffering more because of Brexit. It was great to hear different people's visions."*

*"I could share new values with the various participants. I also discovered that other people had the same ideas as me, especially regarding employment."*

Quotes from citizens

**FIGURE 7 How do you rate the opportunity to exchange views on important cross-border issues?**



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Own presentation | BertelsmannStiftung

Citizens are very appreciative of the opportunity to exchange views on important cross-border issues.

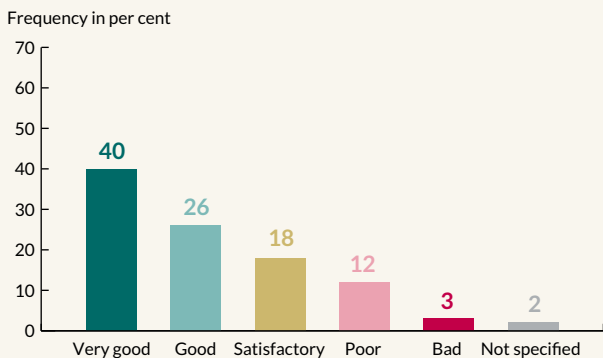
*"Everyone was able to say what he or she wanted, and the issues were all highly relevant."*

*"I really appreciated having the chance to express my opinion, to hear the opinions of people from other countries, and to gain a better understanding of the issues facing Europe."*

*"All the topics were discussed."*

Quotes from citizens

**FIGURE 8 How do you rate the participation of the politicians in the discussion rounds?**



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Own presentation | BertelsmannStiftung

The discussions between citizens and politicians were enriching. Almost 70 percent of citizens found the direct dialogue with politicians in the discussion rounds "very good" or "good". The plenum discussion with Ann Mettler was frequently praised.

*"The chance to discuss issues directly with a member of the European Commission."*

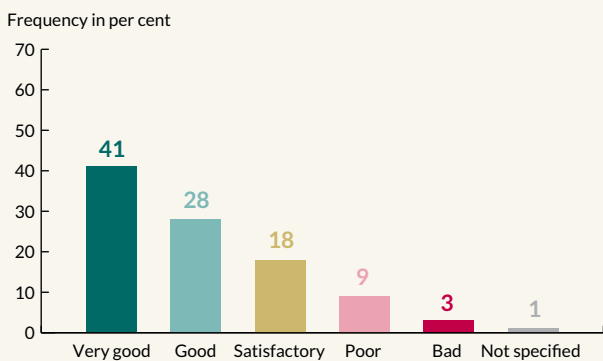
*"Ann Mettler's passionate desire for a better Europe can be clearly seen and felt."*

*"Contact with politicians and exchange of views with citizens of other countries."*

*"Ann Mettler was patient and explained things well."*

Quotes from citizens

**FIGURE 8 How do you rate the politicians' willingness to listen to the citizens?**



Source: Own presentation

| BertelsmannStiftung

The politicians' willingness to listen to citizens was rated "very good" or "good" by almost 70 percent of respondents. Some citizens expressed criticism and a desire for their opinion to be taken into account.

*"Discussions with politicians were possible, some were not as receptive as others, but most were very receptive."*

*"Everything OK - I hope the paid MEPs will take it into account and listen to us!"*

*"The attitude of the political representatives here was simply to listen to the opinions expressed, and that was it!"*

Quotes from citizens

# Key outcome: Citizens are more satisfied with the European Union

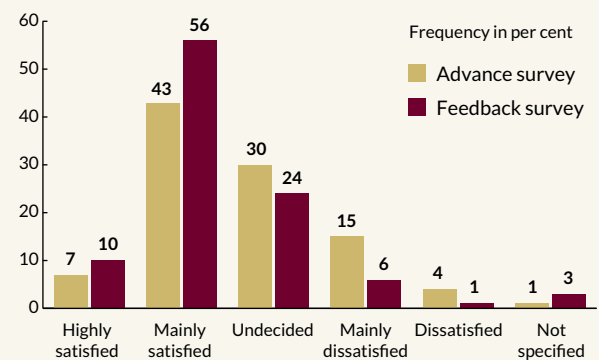
The attitude of citizens towards the EU has improved as a result of the cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue. Citizens are more satisfied with the European Union and EU politicians after participating in the event.

The advance survey reveals a wide range of different attitudes—some of them skeptical—towards European politics. A comparison between the advance survey (120 participants) and the feedback survey (117 participants) shows the change of attitude clearly. Whereas only 50 percent of citizens were “highly satisfied” or “mainly satisfied” with the European Union before the Citizens' Dialogue, this figure rose to 66 percent after the Citizens' Dialogue. Before the Citizens' Dialogue, 19 percent were “mainly dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied” with the European Union, but only seven percent after the Citizens' Dialogue.

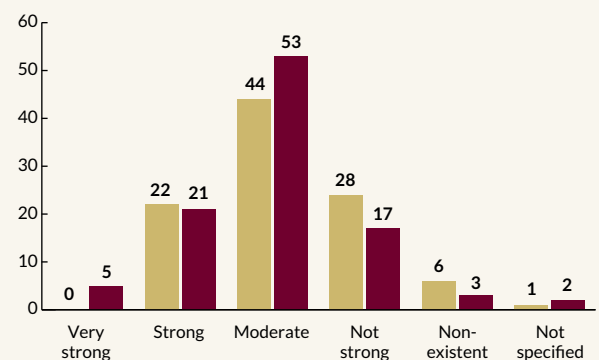
The attitude of citizens towards politicians was also improved by the Citizens' Dialogue. Whereas 34 percent of participants stated before the Citizens' Dialogue that politicians' interest in citizens' issues and concerns was “not strong” or “non-existent”, only 20 percent of participants still made this claim after the Citizens' Dialogue. While 66 percent of citizens stated before the Citizens' Dialogue that the interest of politicians in citizens' issues was “strong” or “moderate”, 79 percent of participants stated after the Citizens' Dialogue that the interest of politicians in citizens' issues was “very strong”, “strong” or “moderate”.

In the follow-up survey, participants mentioned their increased knowledge about the EU and better understanding of the complexity of the EU's decision-making structures. As a result of the Dialogue, some citizens changed their original intention not to vote in the European elections.

FIGURE 10 How satisfied are you with the European Union?



In your opinion, how strong is politicians' interest in citizens' issues and concerns?



Note: The sum of all categories may differ from 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Own presentation

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“The event showed me that the European Union is present, that it is there to help us with any problems we may have in our respective countries. It is there to listen to everyone's wishes. To sum up, this conference cemented my decision to vote in the elections. Before the event I was not really intending to vote at all.”

Quotes from citizens

# Five countries, four languages, one Dialogue – ten lessons

## 1. The cross-border, interactive format of the EU Citizens' Dialogue is successful

The first cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue with citizens from five European countries, in four languages and using interactive methods showed that new deliberative forms of the Citizens' Dialogue can be carried out successfully at European level. The exchange of ideas between citizens, the dialogue with politicians, the choice of topics and the interactive methods were all rated positively by citizens. The cross-border character of the event was the most popular aspect for participants. Citizens' high level of satisfaction proves that cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue are a good response to European citizens' demands for more dialogue and participation.

## 2. High level of diversity: Random selection of participants guarantees a Citizens' Dialogue with a wide variety of people and opinions from Europe

Random selection is a good way of ensuring an inclusive, broad involvement of citizens in democratic processes. When citizens are selected at random, the organizers can reach people who would not normally take part in Citizens' Dialogues—above all, citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds or with a lower level of formal education. Random selection also ensures that the Dialogue includes a broad range of different interests and viewpoints. If service providers are engaged to recruit participants by a process of random selection, the resulting costs must be included in the calculation of the overall costs for the Citizens' Dialogue.





### 3. Despite its complexity, the translation technology ensures excellent communication and high discussion quality

The fact that not all participants speak the same language is not an obstacle for the Citizens' Dialogue, but quite the opposite. Firstly, participants are very open towards citizens from other European countries, which also entails a willingness to listen to and learn from each other. Secondly, the special translation technology and procedure ensured excellent communication in three languages between participants at the tables.

In fact, the technical set-up is an advantage: Everybody has to speak into a microphone, so the atmosphere is automatically quiet and enables intense concentration. Participants conduct a disciplined, factual debate with no raised voices or loud arguments caused by impulsive, spontaneous reactions. The Table Moderators also encourage a culture of mutual respect and fairness among participants.

Table Moderators rate the quality of the discussion very highly: In their view, participants substantiated their respective viewpoints (100 percent), minority opinions were not neglected or ignored (90 percent), and the participants were willing to compromise (80 percent).



*“The fact that translation is required slows the discussion down and demands discipline and mutual consideration from the participants—both of which are positive aspects.”*

Quote from a Table Moderator

It must be considered that the multilingual setting of Citizens' Dialogues results in additional costs, especially for the special translation technology and the interpreters.

### 4. High quality of factual discussion in groups composed of citizens from different European countries

The participation of citizens from different European countries enriches the quality of the discussion. Participants contribute a variety of personal experiences, cultural characteristics and country-specific backgrounds to the discussion of a topic, which offers a greater variety of additional perspectives to the discussion. As a result, controversial topics can be discussed in a respectful atmosphere. 81 percent of participants give the factual content of the discussions the rating “good” or “very good”.

*“Experiences based on their culture- or country-specific context gave the discussions added depth.”*

*“I noticed that people behaved more modestly than when they were only speaking to their compatriots.”*

Quote from a Table Moderator

### 5. Deliberative methods are an effective tool in multilingual EU Citizens' Dialogues, but discussions must be properly structured and moderated

Many people are not used to conversing directly and personally, or discussing politics, with people who come from completely different social milieus and countries of origin. Processes in multilingual groups must be carefully structured and accompanied by a professional moderator. The "World Café method" is a good way of structuring discussions. As communication is tiring for all concerned, individual discussion phases must not be too long and must include appropriate breaks.

### 6. Structured dialogues between EU citizens prepare the way for discussions with EU politicians

Structured dialogues with intensive discussions in small groups are good preparation for a Citizens' Dialogue with EU politicians. Politicians hear first-hand what is important for citizens, and are given inspiration for their daily work. The reason for the high quality of the discussion is that it is not the opinions and questions of individual people that are discussed, but the topics previously agreed on as important by all the members of the table groups.

### 7. The success of cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues depends on the quality of the preparation and execution. Openness and professionalism are essential conditions

The key to the success of cross-border Citizens' Dialogues is that they are organized, staged and moderated by qualified professionals and organizations. Receptiveness and openness are important for all participants, as well as adequate preparation by all concerned—initiators, participating citizens and politicians.

The quality of the event also depends on good expectation management, favourable framework conditions, the provision of adequate human and financial resources, and careful process design by qualified personnel. Ideally, the initiating EU institutions, the organizers and the moderators should already possess deliberative competency.

### 8. Face-to-face dialogue with citizens from a number of EU Member States reinforces identification with Europe

A cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue is an ideal opportunity for citizens to gain first-hand experience of Europe. The exchange of ideas between citizens of different countries broadens participants' horizons and enables them to change their perspective. Direct personal contact with citizens of other European countries reinforces an individual's identification with Europe. What characterizes the proposals for the future of Europe, drafted jointly by citizens in a multicultural setting, is that most of them demonstrate a commitment to a strong Europe and an intensified harmonization of European politics.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue has an impact on more people than actually took part. On average, every participant of the event in The Hague told 15 people about the Citizens' Dialogue, so 1,800 people were aware of it. This could be multiplied many times over by using supplementary online formats.

## 9. Changing attitudes: A direct dialogue with policymakers improves communication and creates a better understanding of European politics

The direct personal exchange between European citizens and committed EU politicians is invaluable for mutual understanding. Direct discussions with politicians give citizens a greater understanding of political processes and decision-making in the EU. There is a positive shift in their attitude to the European Union and EU politicians.

## 10. Added value: cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogues enrich European democracy

The positive feedback from participating citizens is impressive proof that this form of EU Citizens' Dialogue greatly enriches European democracy. There is more trust, understanding and identification with Europe by its citizens, while politicians gain a first-hand insight into the views of European citizens regarding major topics relevant to the future of the EU. The result is immense added value for citizens and politicians alike.

Not only should there be more of these deliberative EU Citizens' Dialogues, but their further development and their integration into the EU's political decision-making processes is a highly worthwhile undertaking.

### Imprint

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### For a video about the EU Citizens' Dialogue see

<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/media-center/media/mid/eu-buergerdialog-in-den-haag-1/>

### Further information can be found on

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/citizens-dialogues/transnational-participatory-citizens-dialogue-hague-ann-mettler-head-european-political-strategy-centre-epsc-european-commission-2019-may-17\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/citizens-dialogues/transnational-participatory-citizens-dialogue-hague-ann-mettler-head-european-political-strategy-centre-epsc-european-commission-2019-may-17_en)

<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/demokratie-und-partizipation-in-europa/projektnachrichten/eu-gipfel-mal-anders-buergerdialog-in-den-haag/>

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