Next level EU citizen participation

Transnational digital dialogue with citizens from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Lithuania

27–30 October 2020 – fully online

A joint project of the European Commission and the Bertelsmann Stiftung

European Commission

Citizens' Dialogues
#EUDialogues

BertelsmannStiftung

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Introduction

The next level of EU citizen participation

In cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Commission held its first fully digital cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue between 27 and 30 October. 100 randomly selected citizens from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Lithuania came together online over the course of three days to discuss the democratic, digital and green future of Europe. Representing the diversity of society, they engaged with one another in their mother tongue from the confines of their home, supported by simultaneous interpretation in five languages. They learned from experts and jointly developed a number of ideas and proposals that were discussed during a livestreamed closing session with the EU Commission's Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius.

Since 2012, the European Commission has organised over a thousand citizens' dialogues aimed at bringing political leaders from Brussels into direct contact with citizens from across Europe. The first dialogues were open events with participants from a single country, following a question and answer format between politicians and citizens. Already in 2018, the European Commission teamed up with the Bertelsmann Stiftung in order to make this format more participatory, inclusive, deliberative and transnational. Through three innovative dialogues in Frankfurt-Oder, Passau and The Hague, the Commission and the Stiftung demonstrated that citizens' dialogues can be run differently. To increase their diversity, random selection was introduced over open invitation, to increase their Europeanness, citizens from several EU countries were invited and simultaneous translation was provided, and to increase their deliberativeness, the Q&A format was replaced with a "world-café style" approach.

In 2020, the EU has reached a pivotal moment. The upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe shows the growing consensus to involve citizens more in shaping the future of Europe. Yet with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, physical meetings, a cornerstone of previous citizens dialogues, have become impossible for the foreseeable future. This is why the European Commission and the Bertelsmann Stiftung teamed up again to push the citizens' dialogue format to the next level, by taking it out of the town-hall and putting it online.

All previous innovations were taken on board in the digital dialogue. Participants were **randomly selected** and put together into multilingual and multinational groups. Random selection ensured that all countries were represented in their full diversity by accounting for gender, age, and socio-economic balance. All citizens were divided into nine virtual table groups, all with their very own customized set of **simultaneous translation**. Up to four interpreters on each virtual table, working simultaneously across great distances, ensured that all participants could communicate and deliberate in their own mother tongue. Each table group included a **professional moderator**, steering the group over the course of three days from the development of initial ideas towards concrete questions and proposals. The entire dialogue was staged on an **online video discussion** platform. Having received a basic online discussion training, participants of all ages and from all backgrounds moved seamlessly through virtual panels, topic and table groups to deliberate with their European peers. In table groups, citizens discussed in depth and at length **Europe's Democratic, Digital and Green Future**. In topic groups, they received input from leading experts in those fields and in the final plenary session they presented their ideas and proposals directly from Vilnius, Dublin or Milan to the EU Commission's Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius in Brussels.

Our new format shows: Citizen participation with randomly selected citizens from several countries in different languages is possible – not only offline, but also online. And it has added value: participants get to know other European perspectives, they move beyond their national confines, demonstrate real European thinking and find common ground. This usually happens much faster than generally assumed. The process is undoubtedly complex and time- and resource-intensive: from the technical set-up to the training of interpreters and moderators. The parallel nature of group work requires detailed planning and effective coordination. But it is worth it.

For the EU, this means that it can go beyond aspiring to the next level of civic participation. It can actually make it happen. The Conference on the Future of Europe is the perfect opportunity to do so.

We hope you enjoy the read.
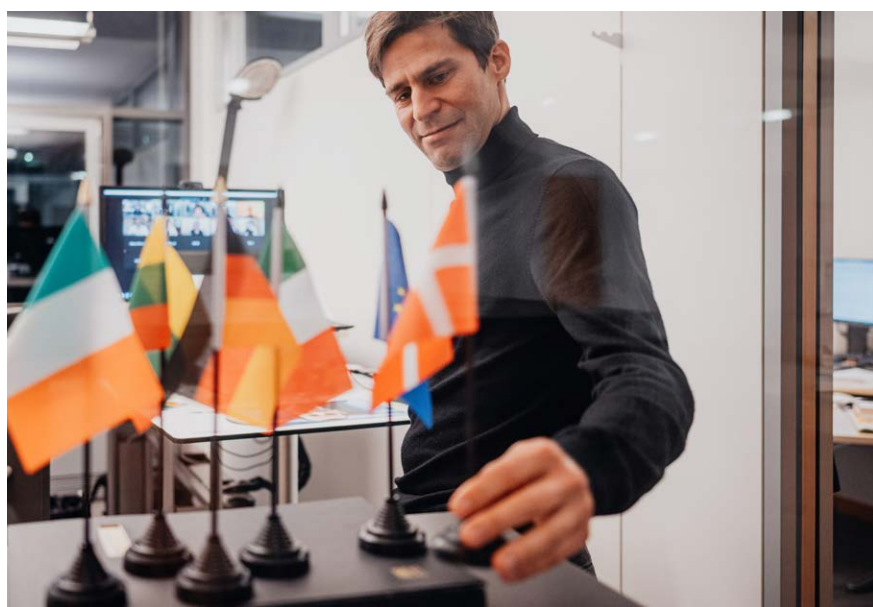
Zooming in

A glance at the first transnational and digital EU Citizens' Dialogue

Paul Hockenos

On the evening of October 27, just as the digital cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue was getting underway, one-by-one the 100 participants from five countries – Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Lithuania – began joining the event online, new faces popping up on the Zoom screen. Although eager, many seemed a bit doubtful that the tech side of the sessions would come off. After all, how many times has just about everyone experienced technical flops with Zoom or Skype meetings? And not everyone in this mixed bag of randomly chosen EU citizens had ever been in an online video meeting. This first-ever event, with people from so many countries participating and interpreters doing simultaneous translation over three days… something just had to go wrong.

And there were glitches. But from the word go, the cross-border Zoom conference, organised by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and European Commission, worked better than anybody could have expected, in more ways than one. The links provided got participants into the right sessions and the translation happened smoothly, too. Where some participants had trouble – say with the unfamiliar Zoom functions – the moderators or other participants from different countries jumped in right away to help them.

Studios in Gütersloh, Madrid, and Brussels

"We had four or five practice runs earlier in the month," said Dominik Hierlemann from the Bertelsmann Stiftung. He admits that none of them went really well. But when it counted, the two technicians in the Gütersloh studio, 13 moderators, a ten-person team in Madrid, 26 interpreters, and then the Brussels tv studio pulled it off.

This spirit of cooperation and patience grew deeper from the first sessions to the last, and made the dialogue a success. Hierlemann's grins reflected the good will all around as the event progressed from one session to the next, the dialogue growing richer by the session.

The object of the exercise was to explore a new means to bring civil society – laypeople from across Europe – together to hammer out proposals from below on Europe's democratic, digital, and green future. On the final day, they would present the ideas to two EU Commissioners: the Commission's Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager, responsible for competition and digital issues, and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, who oversees the environment, oceans, and fisheries portfolio. Along the way, EU experts sat in on sessions to provide advice and pertinent information about the issues.

Kandinsky paintings and Terminator posters

But before the real business got started, the nine table groups – three per topic – split off to get to know one another and size up expectations. The diversity of citizens reflected their arbitrary selection: students and retirees, craftspeople and taxi drivers, engineers and secretaries. Some were in their early twenties and others septuagenarians; they hailed from cities and the countryside. On their walls behind them, one could see Kandinsky paintings and Terminator posters, plants and bottles of soft drink, book-lined walls and kitchen supplies. Some had migration background. There was an equal share of men and women. Their common denominator: all were EU citizens who cared about the future of Europe.
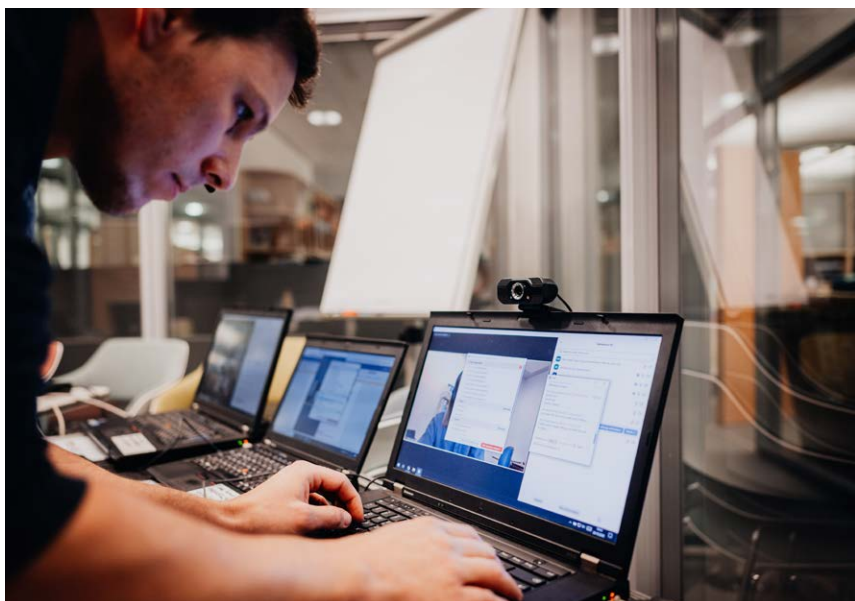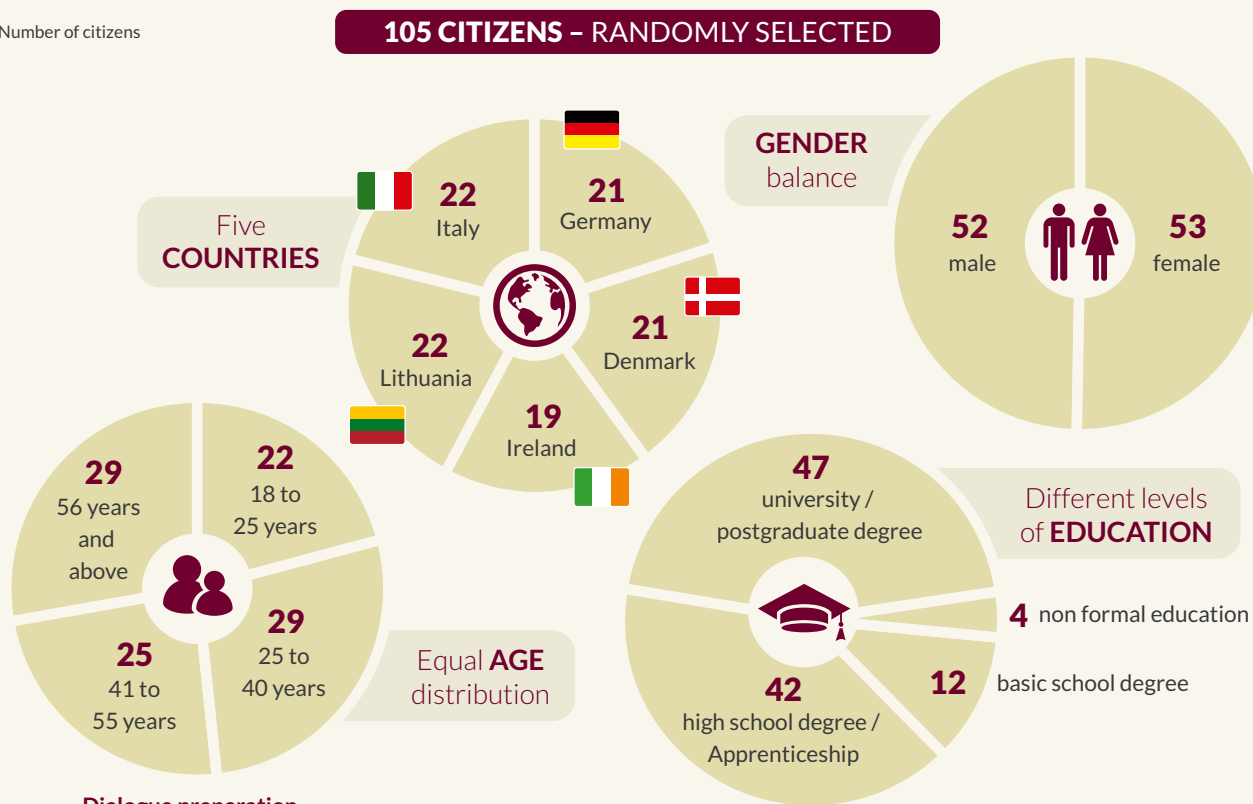

FIGURE 1 **Recruitment and participant selection**

Number of citizens

105 CITIZENS – RANDOMLY SELECTED

Five **COUNTRIES**

22 Italy
21 Germany
22 Lithuania
21 Denmark
19 Ireland

GENDER balance

52 male
53 female

Equal **AGE** distribution

29 56 years and above
22 18 to 25 years
25 41 to 55 years
29 25 to 40 years

Different levels of **EDUCATION**

47 university / postgraduate degree
4 non formal education
42 high school degree / Apprenticeship
12 basic school degree

Dialogue preparation

- **Substantive preparation:** participants are informed about the purpose, the content and the process of the dialogue.
- **Online preparation:** participants are introduced to the basics of online video-calling to facilitate their participation.

Source: Own results

BertelsmannStiftung

Their comments and the impromptu surveys carried out by the moderators online showed that most of them appreciated the EU – and were rather optimistic about it (77%) – but felt uninformed about the Union (55%) and distant from its workings. "I don't get the feeling that the EU cares about me," said one Lithuanian. "What contribution can I make to make a better Europe?," asked a German woman. A Dane's comment reflected those of other participants: "Nations give up their sovereignty and the Commission takes all of the decisions. We can't control them as we do our politicians at the national and local level." "Why can't we vote these people out of office if we don't like what they do," said a Lithuanian man. "The EU's not a real democracy." "It sounds like I'm not the only one who feels uninformed about the EU," said a Danish woman.

These opinions we know are commonplace in the European Union, and one of the reasons for the rise of Eurosceptic parties and general disenchantment with the Union. Brexit is the most radical expression. Voter participation in elections to the European Parliament declined steadily from the first vote in 1979 to that in 2014. In the 2019 election there was an uptick in voter turnout: 51 percent.

Citizens can engage directly

The EU is obviously aware of this, as the experts, such as a think tank analyst in Brussels, explained to the Democratic Europe topic group: "Since the 1990s, as the EU grew more complex and its competencies expanded, distrust grew about EU decision making." And the EU has, at least in part, responded, she pointed out. The European Parliament (EP), the institution elected by the EU demos, has accrued ever more responsibility and clout, she said. And citizens can engage directly through mechanisms such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which enables one million EU citizens residing in one quarter of the Member States to invite the European Commission to submit a proposal for a new law. But, alas, she noted: this has never actually happened. The EU is very much a top-down organisation, she admitted.

In all Democratic Europe groups, dialogue was engaged, to-the-point, and enthusiastic. Everyone listened carefully to their peers and, when they commented on the statements of others, they did so in a respectful way. They expressed their desire for more information about the EU, better communication between the EU and its citizens, and a will to improve direct participation.
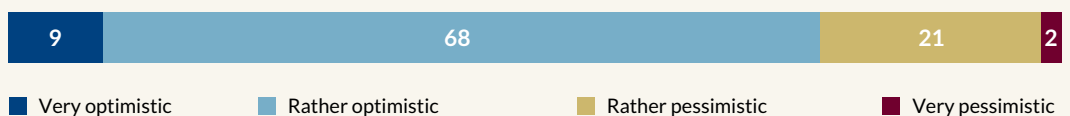
FIGURE 2 **What participants said at the beginning of the event**

in percent

How well are you informed about EU politics?

5	40	47	8

■ Well informed ■ Rather well informed ■ Rather uninformed ■ Very uninformed
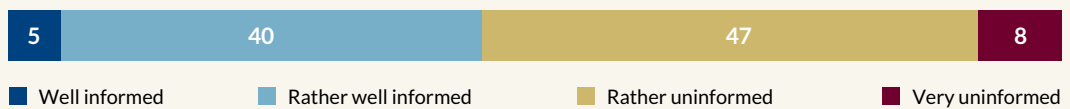
Thinking about the future of the EU, how optimistic are you?

9	68	21	2

■ Very optimistic ■ Rather optimistic ■ Rather pessimistic ■ Very pessimistic

Source: Own results

BertelsmannStiftung

FIGURE 3 **Topics and settings of the online dialogue**

THREE **TOPICS**

1.

DEMOCRATIC
EUROPE

2.

DIGITAL
EUROPE

3.

GREEN
EUROPE
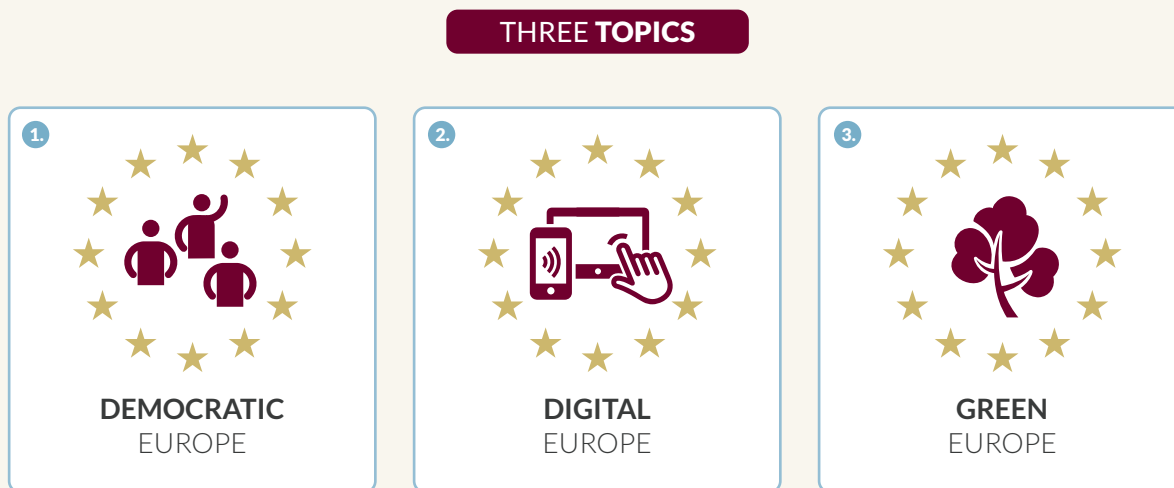
THREE **SETTINGS**

1 PLENARY

All citizens in **one** group.

2 TOPIC GROUPS

The groups in which citizens discuss with experts on one of the **three** topics.

3. TABLE GROUPS

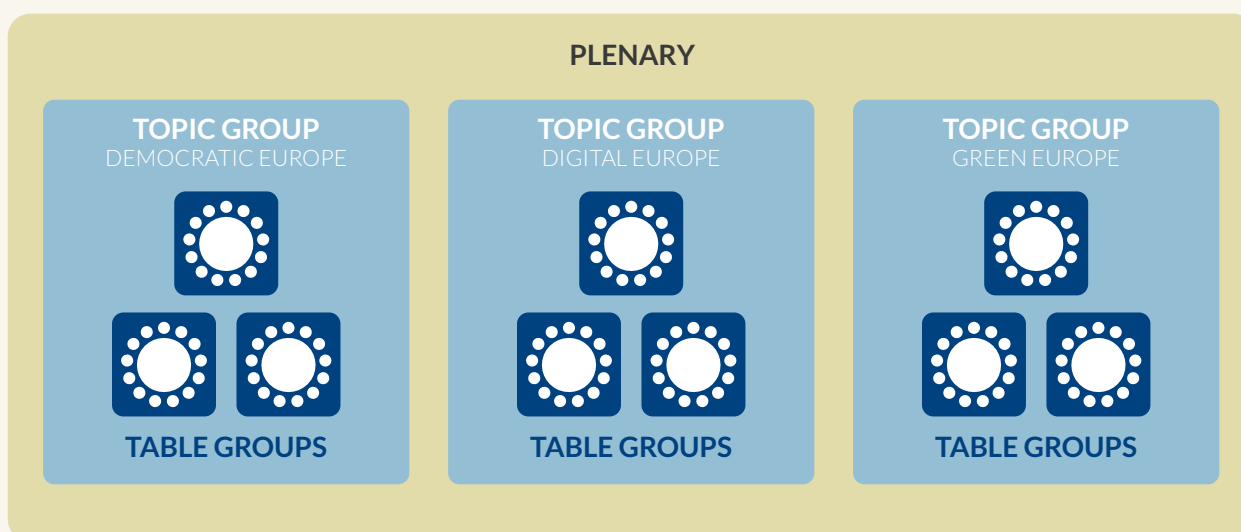The groups in which citizens discuss their topic among themselves.

PLENARY

TOPIC GROUP
DEMOCRATIC EUROPE

TABLE GROUPS

TOPIC GROUP
DIGITAL EUROPE

TABLE GROUPS

TOPIC GROUP
GREEN EUROPE

TABLE GROUPS

Source: Own results

BertelsmannStiftung

FIGURE 4 **Interpretation setup**

INTERPRETATION SETUP
In order to ensure simultaneous translation throughout the event, we use several different translation setups, such as the ones below:

Citizens from:
Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania

Spoken languages:

Danish **German** **English** **Italian** **Lithuanian**

TABLE GROUPS
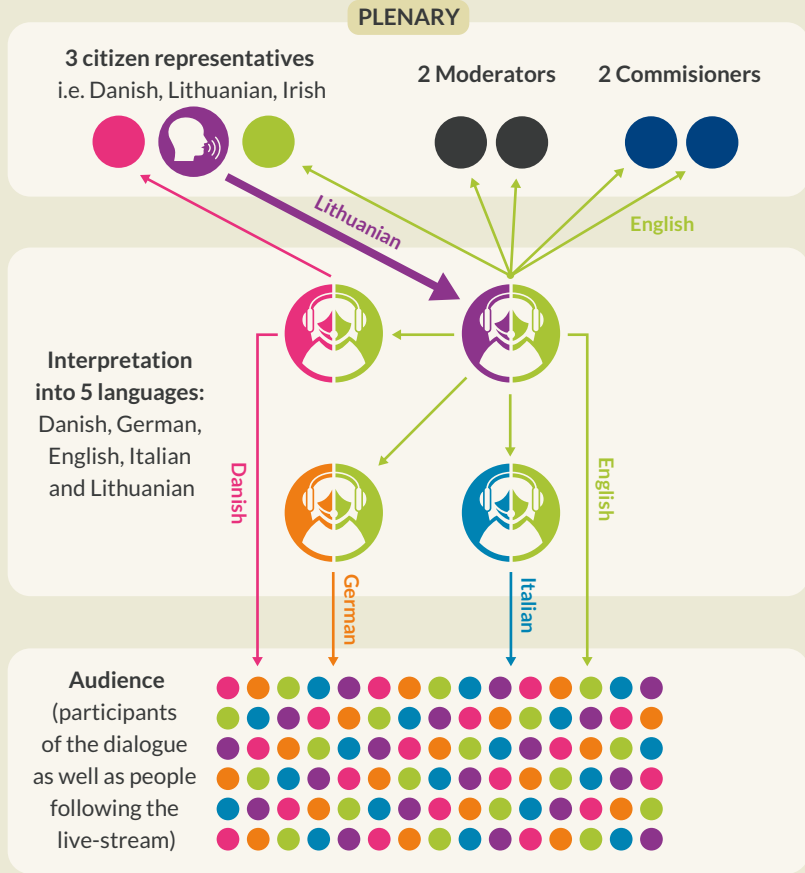
3 languages with interpretation
The system we use on six out of nine tables, where one of the languages spoken on the table (mostly English) acts as a relay. When Italian is spoken, both interpreters directly translate into the two other languages. If one of the other languages is spoken, one interpreter first translates into English and the other one into the third language.

TABLE GROUPS

Italian

English

English

Danish
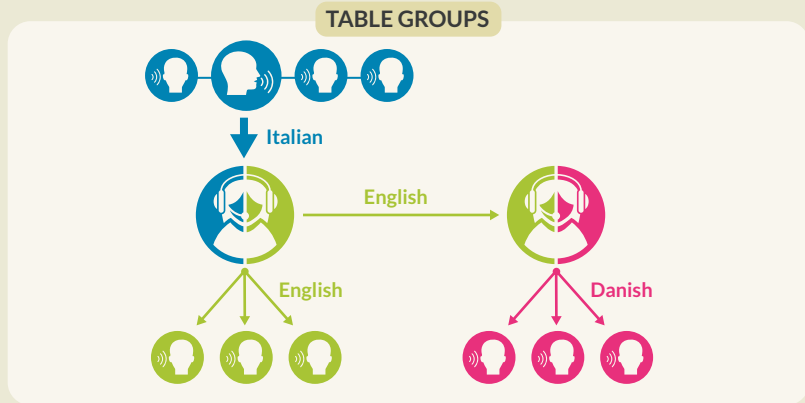
PLENARY,
discussion with EU Commissioners

5 languages with interpretation
For the final plenary setup,
2 moderators and the two Commissioners form a panel with three citizens at a time. English acts as a relay-language. When English is spoken, all interpreters translate into the four other languages. When any of the other languages is spoken (in this case Lithuanian), the interpreter of that language translates into English and all other interpreters translate into the other three languages.

PLENARY

3 citizen representatives
i.e. Danish, Lithuanian, Irish

2 Moderators   **2 Commisioners**

Lithuanian

English

Interpretation
into 5 languages:
Danish, German,
English, Italian
and Lithuanian

Danish

German

Italian

English

Audience
(participants
of the dialogue
as well as people
following the
live-stream)

Source: Own results

Bertelsmann**Stiftung**

"If people were to understand better," said one of the Lithuanians, "then they could participate better." A German man said that unless the EU did a better job of communication there was the danger that people without higher education could get dragged into the far right.

Another group, working on Digital Europe, began by voicing their concerns about Europe's digital development and quickly began to come to a consensus. Several participants expressed their unhappiness with the fact that the US digital giants don't pay taxes in Europe. Others were frustrated that rural regions in northern Europe and regions across southern Europe, such as the Mezzogiorno, have such poor-quality Internet connections. An Italian woman said that IT presents seniors with particular problems. And everyone agreed that fake news was an issue that the EU could and should get tougher on.

From own concerns to mutual understanding

As the sessions continued over the three days, Hierlemann and the other moderators explained that the goal was to gradually narrow down their concerns and proposals so that they could be presented to the Commissioners at the final session. And this focusing happened, impressively

so. Very seldomly did a moderator have to interrupt a speaker who went on too long. Every participant had ideas and critiques that were, by and large, constructive. When, on Friday morning, Hierlemann asked whether the citizens liked best "getting closer to other Europeans," "having the opportunity to share ideas," or "learning something about the EU," the responses were roughly equal across the board.

At the penultimate session, representatives from the nine tables presented their draft proposals. The Green Europe groups zeroed in on food waste and superfluous packaging. How, they asked, could organic food be made available to poorer people? "In Italy," said an Italian woman, "there are many people who can't afford such products." There should be better food awareness and healthier diets in southern Europe, she said. Another Italian woman said that her group wanted to better food awareness in Europe but also in non-EU countries outside of Europe. She thought that this should start in the schools but extend to adults, too. A Danish representative said her table would like to see food waste curbed. In Denmark, she said, products are labelled not with only with expiration date but an additional date that indicates a later date for consumption. Perhaps this best practice could extend to all of EU Europe, they agreed.

FIGURE 5 **The Citizens' Dialogue – Process**

PROCESS

1. TUESDAY
OCTOBER 27th

PLENARY
Welcome & Introduction
🕐 **45** minutes

1st **TABLE GROUP** meeting
1st exchange: How we look at Europe today?
🕐 **45** minutes

2. THURSDAY
OCTOBER 29th

Meeting in **TOPIC GROUPS**
with 2 experts each – Q&A
🕐 **45** minutes

Work in **TABLE GROUPS**
Developing ideas
🕐 **90** minutes

3. FRIDAY
OCTOBER 30th

PLENARY
Exchange of interim results
🕐 **30** minutes

Work in **TABLE GROUPS**
Drafting of final ideas, proposal, questions
🕐 **90** minutes

Final meeting in
TABLE GROUPS
🕐 **30** minutes

PLENARY
Raporteurs present results to representatives
of the EU Commission + Feedback
🕐 **45** minutes

4. FRIDAY
OCTOBER 30th

PLENARY
Dialogue with
Executive Vice-President Vestager
and
Commissioner Sinkevičius

DEMOCRATIC EUROPE
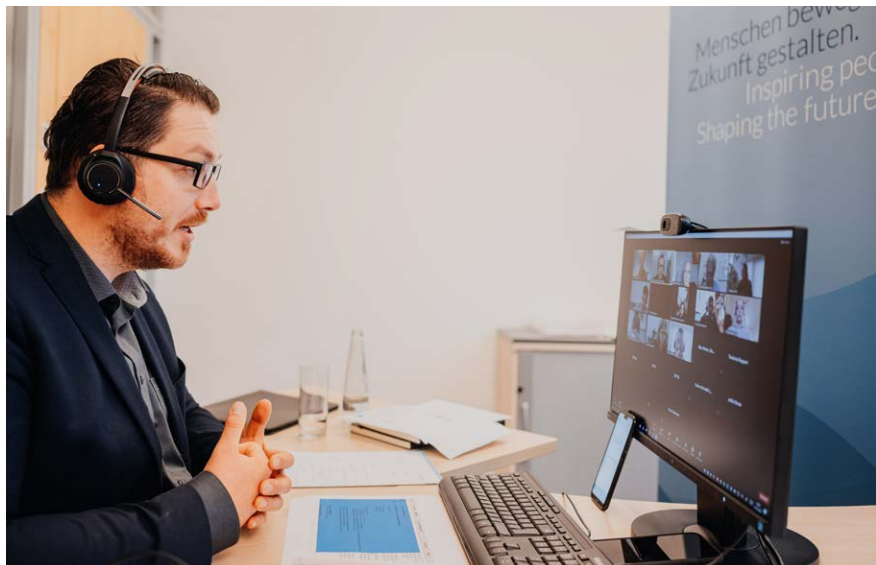
DIGITAL EUROPE

GREEN EUROPE

- **Rapporteurs present table group results**
- **Feedback from Commissioners on the results**
- **Input from social media**

🕐 **60** minutes

🕐 **XX** minutes
Net meeting time excluding
technical setup and preparations

Source: Own results

BertelsmannStiftung

An online platform with an app

The Digital Europe tables proposed an EU-run oversight board that would monitor the tech giants. The board should be made up of experts, academics, and normal citizens. One way or another, these firms must pay taxes, just as ordinary people do. It also agreed that there should be minimal connectivity standards across the EU. A German woman said her table group wanted better rules for addressing fake news – a particularly important topic in the age of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Democratic Europe group wanted the Commission representative who exists in every country to be more visible and accessible. The EU should go to schools and talk face-to-face with pupils. One proposal was that citizens from every Member State should elect a normal citizen to act as an ambassador of civil society in the EU. These ambassadors would sit in on sessions of the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament, bringing the opinions of citizens to Brussels. Moreover, there should be an online platform with an app that informs citizens about the business of the EU, participation options, perhaps something with quizzes, games, and prices. It should be interactive in order to foster a transnational discussion with the ordinary person on the street.

Ordinary people care about Europe

Indeed, there was quite a lot of bonhomie among the greater group by the last session. "I liked seeing that people from other countries think very much like I do," said a Lithuanian woman. Another Lithuanian, an older woman, said: "At first I saw all of the young people present. But our interests are much the same: we all care about Europe. We're of different ages and from different countries but we're not really all that different." "It all came off seamlessly," said a young German man. "I'd like to have it to take place more often." The event, said a young Dane, "shows that ordinary people care about Europe too, not just high-brow types. This creates less scepticism toward the EU."

There was some critique, too. A Danish woman felt that the topics were too broad several people said that they thought the groups should be smaller. The organisers acknowledged that group size was higher than foreseen. In order to get 90 participants, they recruited 110. But the drop-out rate was very low.

Two Commissioners, many ideas – and a way forward

In the very last session, Commissioners Vestager and Sinkevičius appeared in the Brussels tv studio. The event, broadcast live on the Commission's social media platforms, had a moderator who called on representatives of the citizens' dialogue to speak to the commissioners and also took questions sent independently of the citizens' dialogue from Twitter and other social media. Vestager agreed wholeheartedly with the need for better communication. "Obviously it's difficult to engage with something that you don't know about," she said. She spoke about the EU's plans to expand connectivity and welcomed "everyone to Brussels, once the corona pandemic is over, to see how the EP works." Vestager said that an instrument similar to the proposed tech oversight board was already in the works. The EU recovery funds will be going to help citizens with basic digital skills and peer-to-peer learning.

Sinkevičius expressed his concern about food waste, noting that in Europe 88,000 tons of food a years ends up in the waste bin. As for packaging, 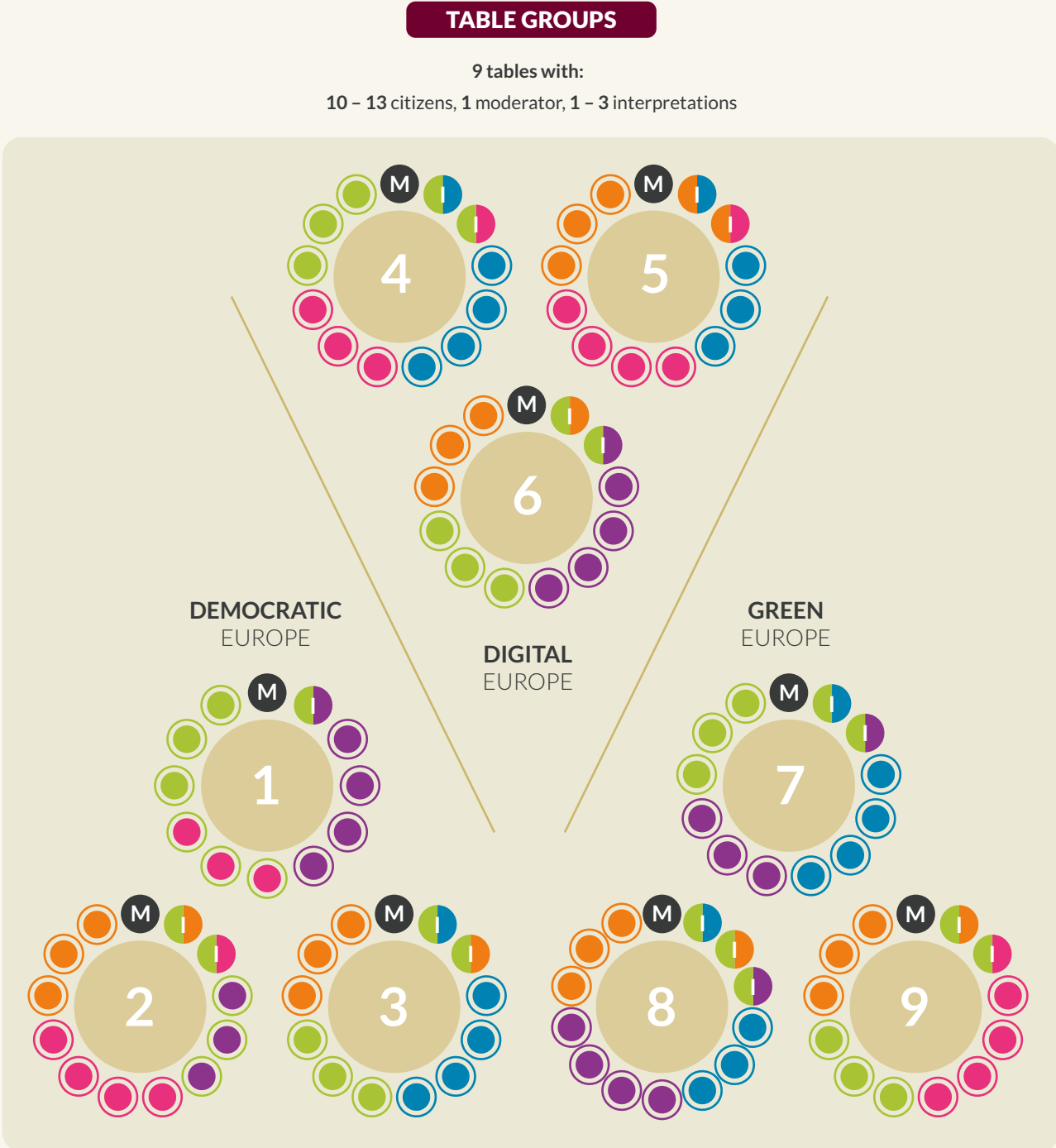the EU is devising a legally binding target to kick in in 2023 to reduce plastic waste. Organic food is also a priority, which the EU is addressing in its farm-to-fork program. By 2030, he said, 25 percent of all EU produce will be organic. "We want to make it easier for small farmers to go organic," he said. In line with the European Green Deal, the Common Agriculture Policy is being greened, he said.

The hour-long discussion went quickly. Although the Commissioners didn't directly address all of the citizen proposals, their offices will receive them, say Dominik Hierlemann and Anna Renkamp, who jointly head the Stiftung's Democracy and Participation in Europe project. The most important upshot of the event, according to them: "We've shown that this kind of citizen forum can work. It's a method that we can actually combine with the EU decision-making process. We're sure it's possible to bring together Europeans from all Member States."

One of the Irish participants concluded: "It was the first time I felt like an active citizen and real European." "This may have been the first transnational and digital EU Citizens' Dialogue", says Joachim Ott from the European Commission, "but it won't be the last".

FIGURE 6 **Table Groups – the Setup**

TABLE GROUPS

9 tables with:

10 – 13 citizens, **1** moderator, **1 – 3** interpretations

DEMOCRATIC
EUROPE

DIGITAL
EUROPE

GREEN
EUROPE

Citizens from:

Denmark Germany Ireland Italy Lithuania

Spoken languages:

Danish German English Italian Lithuanian

M Moderator interpretations English | Lithuanian English | German English | Danish

English | Italian German | Italian German | Danish

Source: Own results

Bertelsmann**Stiftung**

Results

Citizens' Proposals for a Democratic, Digital and Green Europe

DEMOCRATIC EUROPE

Question discussed

What is important for us to safeguard the protection and development of European democracy and ensure that citizens' voices are heard?

Challenges identified

The three table groups developed a similar under-standing of the challenges the EU faces in terms of democracy. In their discussions, participants agreed that: the EU is very complex and difficult to understand, there is a lack of knowledge about the EU among the wider population and citizens consume information about the EU only through a national lens. This results in a gap between the EU and its citizens, and a perception that interests of lobbyists and EU insiders matter more than the voices of ordinary citizens.
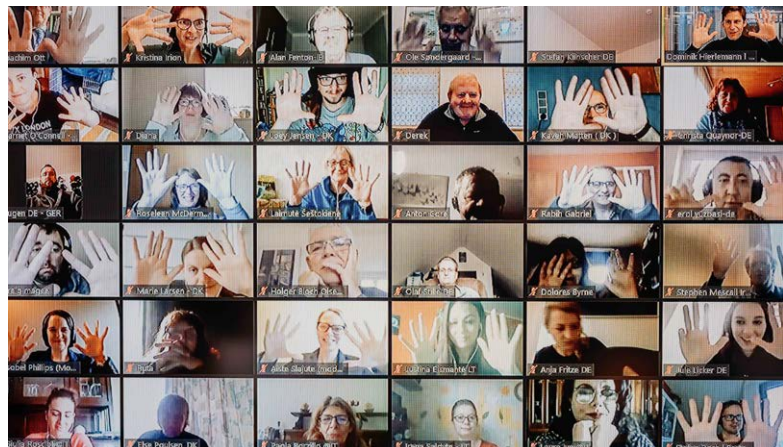
Ideas and proposals developed

The groups' proposals were targeted to address these challenges. They aim to ensure that information about EU politics reach ordinary citizens directly, and that the voices of ordinary citizens are heard more by the EU institutions. The following proposals were made:

- To improve **education** about the EU in schools, through: representatives of EU institutions visiting schools, online dialogues and exchange among school classes from different EU countries, video and simulation games about EU decision-making processes. Additionally, there should be educational programmes for older people that may be hard to reach.

- To provide citizens with more **direct information** from and about the EU, including about opportunities for citizens to participate in EU affairs, such as online consultations and citizens' forums and dialogues.

- To create an easily accessible and interactive **online platform** that contains concise information on ongoing political decision-making processes in the EU and offers opportunities for participation and interaction, such as citizens' dialogues, online consultations, polls and quizzes (with prizes, e.g. trips to Brussels and Strasbourg).

- To establish a **European television broadcaster** organized by the EU Commission that is neutral, independent and oriented towards the common good. Cooperation with national broadcasters should ensure that the programs are broadcast in all languages. This channel should report on EU political decision-making and the day-to-day work of politicians, but also on the EU's impact on citizens' daily lives and the economy. This should be done in a way that is accessible and entertaining, appealing to both young and old people.

- To establish (more) **EU offices in the member states** that communicate EU issues to citizens and bring issues of concern to the EU institutions, and to make these offices more well-known.

- To have a **direct election** of all EU representatives, not only the Members of the European Parliament.

- To establish an **EU ambassador** in each country who is easily approachable for citizens and who would strengthen communication and collaboration between all EU institutions, so that citizens' voices reach them all.

DIGITAL EUROPE

Question discussed

What is important for us to ensure that all Europeans can participate in and benefit from digital change?

Challenges identified

Citizens at the different table groups were most concerned about the role played by big tech companies. This includes: their influence on governments, governments' lack of control over them, and the problem of corporate taxation, the spread of false content and misinformation on their online platforms (which is particularly problematic in times of Covid-19). One table group identified digital literacy among all generations as a key challenge: how to safely navigate the internet, and how to think critically about the information you receive. Lastly, the inequalities in access to quality internet, both within and between countries, was brought up as an important topic.

Ideas and proposals developed

In order to address the challenges, the table groups made various proposals, focusing on the role of the big tech companies shaping the internet, as well as on citizens' access to and use of the internet. The following proposals were made:

- To set up a **monitoring committee** to control tech companies and to make sure that they act more responsibly. The committee should consist of a mixed group of people: experts, citizens and companies. There should be a rotation principle, so that each person works only for a period of 12 months.

- To ensure that the **same rules** regulating the conduct of big tech companies apply across the EU.

- To develop legislation to ensure that big tech companies pay their fair share of **taxes**, either by means of a European tax or by means of national legislation.

- To introduce **EU-wide minimum standards** for **internet availability** and access, and to use EU funds to ensure that these can be met, including in rural areas.

- To ensure better **control of fake news**, among others by developing a mechanism to mark facts versus opinions, especially on issues like health and elections.

- To make the **Digital Services Act** more well-known, so that citizens know what type of conduct is allowed and what not, and can report violations.

- To ensure that existing regulations are implemented and that violations thereof are sanctioned.

- To improve and **harmonize education for digital literacy** across the EU, e.g. by means of common minimal standards (which already exists for subjects like mathematics), while preventing national curriculum from being dictated.

GREEN EUROPE

Question discussed

What is important for us to ensure that the climate and environment are protected and preserved for following generations?

Challenges identified

Participants identified a multitude of different and often interconnected challenges that Europe, the member states and European citizens are facing when it comes to protecting the environment and the climate. Those include the following: ensuring accessibility and the availability of ecological food-products for society, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on climate change, the role of individuals and businesses in creating a more sustainable Europe, the role of agricultural subsidies, the lack of education and understanding of global warming among the wider citizenry, or the management of food-waste.

Ideas and proposals developed

The participants developed proposals that speak to one or more of the various challenges they discussed:

- To cut **subsidies** for farms that contribute the most to pollution in Europe, such as meat and dairy and to increase subsidies for farming and production that delivers ecological, plant-based produce, or meat alternatives.

- To **help eco-friendly businesses** to be more competitive in the market, and apply stricter regulations and fines on polluting and/or non-compliant businesses.

- To make **more ecological and plant-based food available** and accessible to anyone in Europe.

- To introduce a **better food labelling system** in Europe, particularly in terms of the usage of expiry dates, so less food is wasted.

- To **better regulate large-quantity offers** which incentivize consumers to buy more than they need and can consume.

- To **push supermarkets to offer more fruits, vegetables** and other foodstuffs in biodegradable or recyclable packaging, instead of plastics.

- To **disincentivize unsustainable consumer decisions**, such as choosing single-use plastic bags over more sustainable alternatives.

- To **make food-donation easier** for supermarkets, restaurants and other companies to shelters, refugees, homeless people and the like, to reduce food-waste.

- To a**dapt the EU's foreign policy** towards stronger influencing other counties' environmental policies.

- To **improve education** about global warming and climate change by adding it to formal education programs at schools and universities.
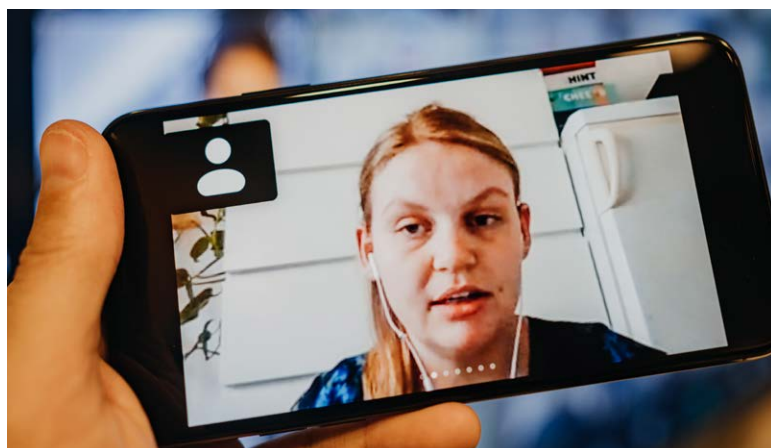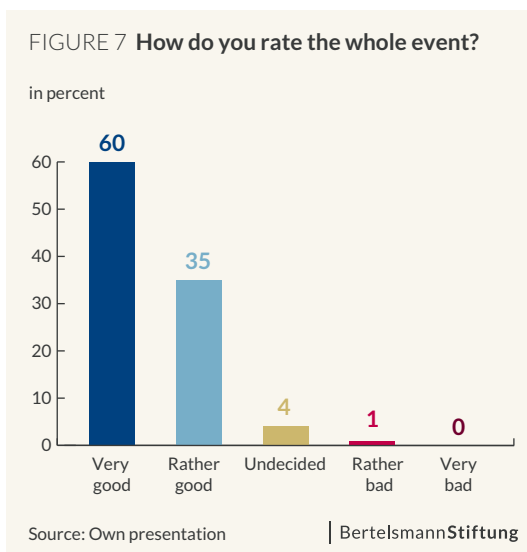
Evaluation

What citizens thought about the digital dialogue

We want to improve transnational and digital participation and deliberation. Europe is not conceivable without cross-border exchange. That is why we asked our participants what they thought about the dialogue and their experiences. They gave an overwhelmingly positive feedback. Their discussions, the technology, as well as the simultaneous translation were rated highly. Nevertheless, the dialogue was an experiment with plenty of innovations and new ground covered. Most went well, some things can be improved.

FIGURE 7 **How do you rate the whole event?**

in percent

Source: Own presentation | BertelsmannStiftung

Participants rated the dialogue overwhelmingly as positive, with only one participant out of 100 left unsatisfied.

"This was the first time I felt like an active citizen."

"It was a pleasure to have participated."

Participant quotes

The digital infrastructure worked well and was rated positively by participants. Though room for improvement remains when it comes to the inclusion of experts and discussions with politicians.

> *"Technology has made it possible for us to exchange information across borders and stay in touch even during Corona times".*
>
> *"Great, how well the translation worked. Discussions could go even deeper if the group was a little smaller."*
>
> *"Too little attention was given to EU Citizens' Dialogue participants' questions by integrating the questions of social media viewers."*
>
> Participant quotes

FIGURE 8 What worked well? (multiple choice)

in percent

Category	Value
The technology	69
The simultaneous translation	70
The work in small groups	74
The cross-border discussions	78
Discussions with politicians	44
Discussions with experts	57

Source: Own presentation

Bertelsmann**Stiftung**
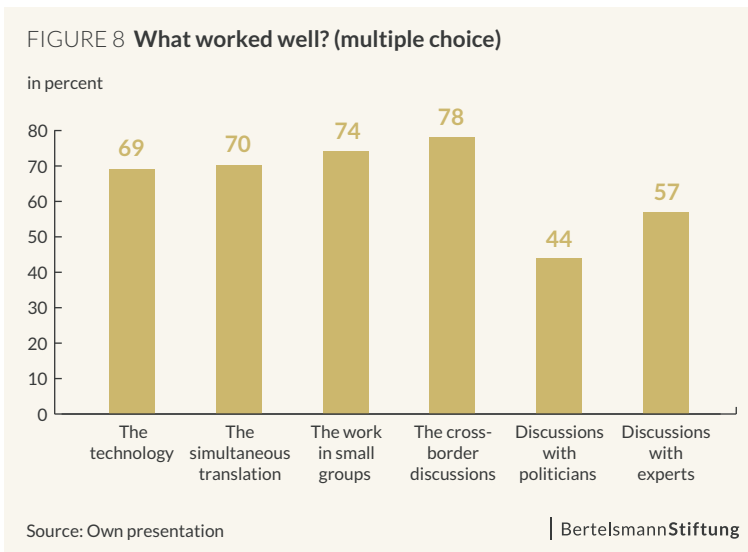
Through being able to directly interact with citizens from several different EU countries, the first time for many, most participants gained a better understanding of what the EU is about and what people from other countries think about the topics discussed.

> *"We come from different countries, but we realised that we have a lot in common. We now feel even more like Europeans."*
>
> *"I loved the fact that I met so many different people from Europe and I could see that many of them felt the same way."*
>
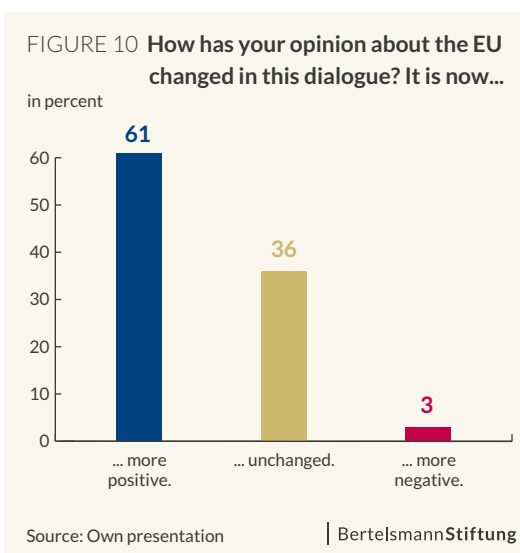> *"I was surprised how creative our group was in coming up with ideas."*
>
> Participant quotes

**FIGURE 9 I now understand more about…
(multiple choice)**

in percent

Category	Value
… the EU.	78
… other countries.	65
… the 3 topics.	62
… other political views.	42

Source: Own presentation

Bertelsmann**Stiftung**
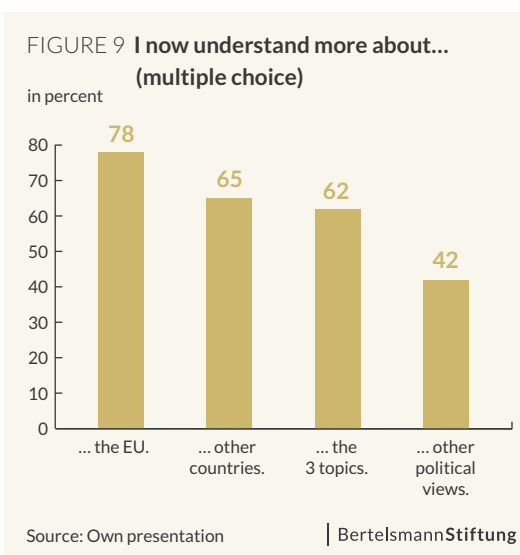
By experiencing the EU through the eyes of other citizens and direct interaction with one another and EU policy makers, a majority of participants gained a more positive image of the EU.

> *"I now understand better how the EU works and why it can sometimes be so difficult to implement something concrete."*
>
> Participant quotes

FIGURE 10 How has your opinion about the EU changed in this dialogue? It is now…

in percent

Category	Value
… more positive.	61
… unchanged.	36
… more negative.	3

Source: Own presentation

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Thanks

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