

Professor Danuta Hübner

“Citizens at the center – towards a more inclusive Europe”

Citizen participation at the EU level: Where next after the European Citizens’ Panels?

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I understand you have had a thorough discussion in the first panel about different forms, ways and means to engage citizens in the process of shaping Europe, giving opinions and deciding on the future of Europe. Franco-German paper accepts institutionalisation of this process.

This would be good for raising accountability and legitimacy of the European project. It would allow to exploit the independence and political courage of citizens. They are more courageous than politicians, citizens have no problem with hyphenated identity, they are less paralyzed by national interests. They are also more eager to talk about issues and concerns which politicians do not always hear or want to hear.

I think that citizens more often focus on long term vision, citizens ideas about Europe would not have political cycle length perspective, but a long term relevance and meaning. So having this citizen stream work would protect the European project from sensitivity to political fluctuations, short-term anti European anomalies. I am convinced more can be done to have Europe by citizens.

But what I think is equally crucial is to have a citizen angle more present in policies, legislation, impact assessments. This must not be lost as a political priority.

We have ahead potentially treaty change. European parliament has been working since COFE. Ursula von der Leyen announced in her State of the Union speech a review of policies to be done by the Commission, soon, in the context on new

political cycle. But she only mentioned citizens in the context of migration, AI and social policies.

Franco-German paper talks about reorienting existing policies. We have a huge opportunity linked to preparing for a bigger Union which opens a potential for refocusing Union, use this opportunity to deliver on what I called a citizens angle to be added to European pivot to a new global world.

It would be Europe for citizens.

And third dimension to be added to Europe for and by citizens is related to the fact that there are in Europe home grown humongous damages to European democracy. I think here of Poland and Hungary, but not only, we must be prepared for what we might see and not like after next year elections, and October elections in Poland.

The far right anti European populists damage the citizens rights at national level, we face situation where we have in individual member states European citizens with different level of human rights, different access to European policies, limited or no access to European financing due to lack of respect of rule of law by governments. So it would be useful to work on these aspects as well, not only on new forms of participation in European decision making.

Article 7 to be effective requires more ECJ, more efficient budgetary transfers conditionality mechanism but as a preventive instrument, early warning mechanism could also envisage a role for citizens.

And allow me to mention some flashbacks.

The first one is about Brexit. Brexit was a game changer in the dialogue on European citizens. Many Europeans discovered their citizenship and rights.

Withdrawal Agreement related debates were dominated by the determination not to make citizens victims of Brexit.

We had for the first time public debates on how to protect EU citizens, both the EU 27 who made their choice to remain in the UK and the British nationals who after the unwise decision of their authorities decided to stay in the EU. The importance of the EU in the life of its citizens was appreciated by the Withdrawal Agreement.

And the second about the EPC. I remember discussions in the EPC, some even in this room, years ago , about the future of Europe, when the issue of awareness raising among citizens seemed pivotal.

EPC vision for Europe was then travelling through member states because in our conversations on the future of the European integration we were looking for ways and means to raise awareness of Europe.

We talked about this in our discussion on cohesion in Europe. We talked about differentiated integration, about whether Europe has instruments to deliver. But I always had this impression that we left those concerns we had half baked. We saw the need of adding citizen angle here and there.

Even if one day we added Europe by citizens, we were shy. And then, came Conference. Of course, it did not emerge out of nowhere, by accident. Our earlier reflections created foundations. Citizens today are different than those 10-20 years ago and we have to understand better what is it that shapes the trust of citizens. And it is worth remembering that citizens themselves have contributed to building the paradigm of Europe by and for citizens, and we have no choice but to deliver.