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**ACTIVEU “Let’s get active! Incentives for citizens active participation in the democratic life of the European Union”**

## **NATIONAL CITIZENS FORUM**

Nicosia 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**National recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation/  
introducing incentives for becoming an active citizen:**

**Updated by:**  
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## **1. Thematic area 1: Main reasons and root causes of not participating in the democratic life of the European Union**

*/Goal: Deepened understanding of the reasons/ root causes of not participating in the EUs democratic life in respective countries./*

The event started with a speech from Dr. Kalliopi Agapiou-Josefides. Dr. Josefides empathized the importance of participation in the democratic life and underlined the importance of people having access to the means and tools that enhance participation. Next, Mr. Stelios Kythreothis talked about the issues that occurred daily from the lack of interest to participate in the democratic processes and discussed with the audience the potential causes that lead to this outcome on a local, national and EU level.

Local and National Level: The root causes were grouped into 2 main categories: bureaucracy and the lack of transparency. The three categories were subsequently interlinked with the lack of communication between institutions and citizens and the lack of trust to the system as a whole.

Specifically, participants expressed that bureaucracy is directly linked with the lack of respect from the state to the citizens. The lack of transparency was another important issue which was directly link to the luck of trust towards the system and the low participation in the democratic processes.

European Level: Participants expressed that EU is de-attached from the local and national context of the member states. They felt that cannot influence the decisions of the EU and that they are unaware of the tools that exist and expressed that they feel the need to know more.

## **2. Thematic area 2: The possible incentives, that could encourage the citizens to participate in the European Union's policies shaping.**

*/Goal: Deepened understanding of the possible incentives for the citizens to play a full part in the EU development and policies shaping in respective countries./*

Dr. Yiannis Laouris, who was the third speaker of the event, has highlighted the importance of the participation in the democratic processes and the impact that people could have with different actions (campaigning, publishing, advocating, meetings, discussions and other).

The audience discussed together with the speakers about the different ways that they could affect the decisions taken on a local and a national level and an EU level.

The participants have had the opportunity to discuss the results of the on-line research. The main goals of the EU should pursue during the *EU development and policies shaping* were summed as the following:

- ✚ to ensure peace, security, sustainable and people development, the human rights protection;
- ✚ to promote peace and the well-being of people;
- ✚ to provide European citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without borders;
- ✚ to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

Participants expressed the need for grassroots democracy and participating in groups and community discussions and events and create platforms that could work towards bringing people closer to national and European institutions and thus increasing cooperation and communication.

Moreover, they have discussed the need to have more opportunities to participate in trainings and educational events that are organized by the EU expressed that they do not have enough information on the different opportunities offered by the EU.

### **3. Thematic area 3: Recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation (propositions & ideas)**

*/Within the 4 topics of the on-line research:*

- 1) *Get involved*
- 2) *Get active*
- 3) *Elections and participation*
- 4) *EU and participation/*

The recommendations that were heard from the participants were directly linked with reducing the root caused identified in thematic are one (bureaucracy and transparency):

- a) Expectations from public figures should be published in newspapers in the form of a “role description”. In that way, standards will be created on what the citizens expect from a public figure.

- b) More emphasis should be given to the positive action taken by public figures and not just to their negative actions. Transparency is not only there to punish persons but also to praise them when they perform their job well.
- c) Citizenship Education is a very important element for the encouragement of citizens to participate in public affairs.
- d) The issue of citizen participation must be handled in a systemic way and everyone has to wonder “what is my role”? “what can I do as a citizen?” We should not tolerate, we have to react.
- e) We should look into the good practices of other countries and get inspired.
- f) The problem with direct democracy is that conversation could get diverted into a different topic
- g) Political leadership is dealing too much with the Cyprus problem and neglects important issues
- h) We have to acknowledge that there have been a lot of changes already, in a gradual way, and that the important moment of change will come slowly. Without small gradual changes we cannot achieve the big change.
- i) Horizontal line voting should be permitted.
- j) Creation of a platform that will give people the opportunity to be heard.
- k) Bureaucracy should be minimized (suggestion: by recording bureaucratic events and uploading them online).
- l) The political cultural should not allow issues to occurred.
- m) Transparency between all levels of authority

**4. Thematic area 4: Recommendations for introducing incentives for becoming active citizen (propositions & ideas)**

*/Within the 4 topics of the on-line research:*

- 1) Get involved*
- 2) Get active*
- 3) Elections and participation*
- 4) EU and participation/*

The ideas were summed up in the following categories:

- The state authorities and the EU should support NGOs and local communities in order to increase participation and minimise the gap of communication.

- The state should promote justice. Everyone should be treated the same way.
- Foster awareness on the different tools and mean of active citizenship and participation in the life of the EU.
- The state authorities and the EU should promote transparency and liability. People should have access to information.

**5. Proposition: an additional thematic area –5:**

**What role the Non-governmental organisations could/ should play in fostering democratic participation of the citizens on the EU level (ideas & recommendations)?**

**The opinions/ experiences/ideas regarding using the direct democracy tools, especially on the European Unions' level:**

- Petition to the European Parliament;
- European Citizens' Initiative (ECI);
- Complain to the European Ombudsman;
- Referendum on the European level;
- Others

Most of the participants showed that they were not aware of some of these tools and they would like to know more about the use and the effectiveness of the tools.

However, they expressed the importance of the work that NGOs do and that they should be used to bridge the communication gap between the citizens and the state/EU. Moreover, they have highlighted the importance of organizing and implementing projects and events that aim to bring people together in an effort to create joint solutions and projects.

They have also expressed that they felt empowered by joining similar events organized by NGOs and felt that these events should be continued in order to strengthen the outcomes of the events and motivate people to take action.

## THE SUMMARY

### Activity 3. The National Citizens' Forums designing, conducting and summing-up

#### The summary of the event

**Participation:** The event involved 25 citizens, including participants from the city of 24 Nicosia and 1 from Paralimni (Cyprus)

**Location/ Dates:** The event took place in Nicosia, Cyprus from on the 07/09/2015

**Short description:**

The aims of the event were:

1. To sum-up and discuss the results of the open on-line research;
2. To group these results into the main thematic areas;
3. To develop national recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation/ introducing incentives for becoming an active citizen.

The event was hosted at the Bank of Cyprus Cultural foundation on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September and it took the form of a panel discussion. The panel included Dr. Kalliopi Agapiou-Josephidou (Professor of Human Rights and Democratization at the University of Cyprus), Mr. Stelios Kythreotis (off-site newspaper) and Dr. Yiannis Laouris (chair of the board at Future Worlds Center and one of the pioneers of the Structured Democratic Dialogue methodology – SDD).

The event started with the presentation of the results of the on-line research. Moreover, the discussion moved to the panel and each speaker made a speech on the area of expertise. Furthermore, the audience discussed together with the speakers the root causes that lead to low participation and have worked on identifying incentives that could encourage them in participating in shaping the EU policies. Finally, they proposed solutions that could diminish the obstacles of low participation and made recommendations and suggestions for active citizenship.

**Attachments:**

1. List of the participants
2. Promotion & impact information + Links to some publications/printscreens/scans; including leaflets, posters, press releases etc.