

Forum on New Forms of Democratic Engagement

Event summary

1-2 June 2022

The *Forum on New Forms of Democratic Engagement* took place in Brussels, Belgium and was opened by the ENoP Network Coordinator Denis Schrey and the Vice President of Assembly of European Regions (AER) Jean-Luc Vanraes. The objective of the event was to exchange experience and best practices of deliberative democracy and to find new forms to improve political trust and reinforce citizens' engagement.

At the beginning, the MEP Brando Benifei held a keynote speech in which he shortly outlined the Opportunities and Challenges of Deliberative Democracy and provided some general knowledge about the topic. On this basis, there was held the panel discussion in which the four speakers from different backgrounds were talking about fostering deliberative policies in regions and on national level to enable institutions to implement them into the Conference of Europe. The main outcomes of the discussion were about the importance of civic education and involving different groups of society, as well as the need for the EU to improve their communication with civil society.

After this, there were presented two successful projects on a national level, which are the 'Irish Citizens' Assembly Project' and the 'French Citizens Convention on Climate'. Afterwards, these two case projects were evaluated and compared to each other. Magnus Berntsson, President of the Assembly of European Regions, gave some ideas about how to promote and defend democracy and good governance.

The President of the German-speaking community of Belgium continued then with the Belgium project on the regional level which is especially successful thanks to the institutionalization of deliberative democracy. The other regional example came from Zurich, Switzerland, where direct democracy is a common practice. Prof. Daniel Kübler portrayed three Pilot programs on citizen assemblies on climate policy which can be according to him a valuable complement traditional institutional democratic process.

The second day started with an opening speech of the MEP Lucas Mandel about diversity in European Regions, current threats and the future of democracy. In order to know how Europe can support civic participation in different parts of the world and strengthen democracy, two representatives from the local level were invited to present their projects. Firstly, Mehdi Rais, President of Innovative Development Initiatives from Morocco talked about the initiative 'Citizen's office' which was introduced in March 2019 to facilitate to the citizens their access to information and support them in administrative affairs.

This was followed by the Slovenian Maja Cimerman, General Manager of Today Is A New Day, who introduced two examples that have according to her most potential for implementing deliberative practices and are an innovative response to a lack of official effective deliberative methods. They both have in common that they are self-organized and follow the bottom-up principle. In addition, they contribute to strengthening the community and to build infrastructure for citizen's participation.

In the afternoon, the participants split into two working groups, in which they discussed opportunities and challenges of Deliberative Democracy. At the end, those findings were presented and discussed in the plenum and key recommendations were formulated for the EU to improve deliberative policies and practices.

The event was closed by the President of the Assembly of European Regions Magnus Berntsson as well as by the ENoP Network Coordinator Denis Schrey.

