

# DIGITAL DEMOCRACY DAY 2018

## Crowdsourcing EU legislation: Taking Decisions With Citizens and Not For Them!

27 February 2018 | Brussels



**DIGITAL DEMOCRACY DAY 2018**  
CROWDSOURCING EU LEGISLATION:  
TAKING DECISIONS WITH CITIZENS AND NOT FOR THEM!  
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- REPORT -

# Agenda

- 9.00 – 9.30** Registration
- 9.30 – 9.45** Keynote Speech
- **Gilles Pelayo**, Head of Unit, Europe for Citizens Programme, European Commission
- 9.45 – 11.15** Panel 1: Let's Crowdfund! - Lessons Learned From Citizens at the National Level  
Moderator: **Simon Delakorda**, Executive Director, Institute for Electronic Participation (INePA), Slovenia
- **Imants Breidaks**, Director, ManaBalss, Latvia
  - **Nicolas Patte**, Parlement & Citoyens, France
  - **Alexandros Tzoumas**, Technical Manager, Science For You (SciFY), Greece
  - **Josien Pieterse**, Netwerk Democratie, Netherlands
- 11:15 – 11:30** Coffee break
- 11:30 – 12:50** Panel 2: Building Our Future Together! - Towards a Crowdfunding Pilot at the EU Level  
Moderator: **Assya Kavrakova**, Executive Director, ECAS
- **Elisa Lironi**, Digital Democracy Manager, ECAS
  - **Anthony Zacharzewski**, Director, Democratic Society
  - **Serge Novaretti**, Policy and Programme Manager, DG CONNECT, European Commission
  - **Aline Muylaert**, Co-Founder, CitizenLab
  - **Stefan Schaefer**, Head of European Affairs, King Baudouin Foundation
  - **Rasmus Øjvind Nielsen**, Researcher, Danish Board of Technology Foundation
- 12.50 – 13.00** Concluding remarks
- 13:00 – 14:00** Lunch

On 27 February 2018, ECAS held its fourth annual Digital Democracy Day - *Crowdsourcing EU Legislation: Taking Decisions With EU Citizens and Not For Them!* – focused on national examples of crowdsourcing practices and proposing several concrete solutions for an EU level platform.

The event represented the final conference of the EUCrowd project, a partnership between ECAS and seven other organisations, in order to explore and test out different ways of engaging citizens in the EU's democratic life. Over 70 participants from 20 different countries took part in the conference and the event has been viewed over 1,000 times online.



**E-Democracy is a window of opportunity, now more open than ever at the EU level**

**Gilles Pelayo**, Head of Unit in charge of the 'Europe for Citizens' programme at the European Commission, opened the conference by delivering a keynote speech on the challenges of the perceived democratic deficit in the European Union and the need to fix the causes of this perception by being more open to democratic innovation and by developing a more responsive, transparent and participatory decision-making process.

Mr Pelayo began by introducing the Europe for Citizens Programme, or as he called it Europe by Citizens Programme, which represents a bottom-up initiative across the Union for organising society, from local authorities that work on the hottest topics on the European Commission's agenda.

He affirmed that the EUCrowd project has been supported by the European Commission because one of its objectives is to increase citizens' understanding of, and participation in, the EU policy making process.



He continued by saying that tools of e-participation are present throughout all the EU institutions and crowdsourcing represents a new and effective tool with great potential as it generates multiple democratic benefits such as enhancing citizen participation in policy-making and increasing the political legitimacy that is so dearly needed at the European level.

He added that ECAS' study "Toward a Crowdsourcing Pilot at the EU level: Taking Decisions with Citizens and Not for Them" has been a milestone in discussions on the subject. Mr Pelayo said "E-Democracy is a window of opportunity, now more open than ever at the EU level", especially because of the crisis that the EU has been facing, and these innovative tools are necessary to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU thanks to the "wisdom of the crowd" principle.

He concluded his speech by saying that there is still a lot to learn from the national experiences that can improve the participatory process at EU level.

### **Panel 1: Let's Crowdfund! – Lessons Learned From Citizens at the National Level**

Following the keynote speech, **Simon Delakorda**, Executive Director of InePA, introduced the topic of the first panel and the speakers were invited to share their knowledge and experience in the field of crowdsourcing as well as identify the challenges that need to be addressed in order to promote a pilot at EU level.

Before giving the floor to the speakers, Mr Delakorda gave a general presentation of the EUCrowd project. The project's main aim was to raise awareness of crowdsourcing, defined "As an open call for the crowd to participate in a policy-making process by submitting their ideas, knowledge or opinions" through the organisation of 8 events in 8 different states, introducing it as a tool for democratic participation.



He added that an online repository on ECAS' website – the Crowdsourcing Knowledge Centre – with more than 100 resources, provides the opportunity for everyone to deepen their knowledge on the subject. The second aim of the project was to identify the expectations of citizens on crowdsourcing and it was found that citizens expect to be engaged on crowdsourcing in the areas of policy-making that affect their daily lives, but also that they are concerned about the transparency of the process, want their contributions to be taken into account and that the platforms should be user friendly.

Mr Delakorda also presented the results of the national events on a possible EU level pilot on crowdsourcing, lining up 4 main topics:

- Healthcare;
- Environmental issues;
- Citizens' education;
- Constitutional design of the EU.

He added that the process should start at the beginning of the policy-making process.

In conclusion, Mr Delakorda underlined the main challenges that citizens face regarding their impact on the policy-making process and the top down approach of the EU institutions but believes the outputs of the EUCrowd project are of value in finding a balance between different models of democracy that can be institutionalised at the EU level.

**Imants Breidaks**, Director at ManaBalss, focused his speech on the Latvian national crowdsourcing platform called Manabalss (My Voice), introducing the successful platform and the challenges that need to be overcome. The platform is open to anyone who wants to propose a new law and, after a quality control process, the proposal is published. If a proposal collects 10,000 signatures, it has to be discussed and voted on by the Parliament. The success of the platform is demonstrated by the engagement of 70% of the population as visitors and 50% of the electorate as voters on the platform. Mr Breidaks underlined the non-governmental profile of the organisation, which gives it a major interest in actively seeking out and engaging

the audience and providing concrete results.

Mr Bredaks also presented the challenges that the organisation is facing, especially regarding to the Russian allied groups and fake news on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the challenges of funding and international growth. Nevertheless, according to him, ManaBals represents a very good example of effective crowdsourcing that can be used for an EU level pilot.

Mr Bredaks concluded by saying that the possible pilot at EU level:

- Should have a national basis;
- Citizens shouldn't be expected to be legal experts;
- Should be addressed to all EU institutions - Parliament, Commission and Council - to guarantee a bottom-up approach.

**Nicolas Patte** of Parlements & Citoyens started his speech by addressing the main challenges that French society is currently dealing with: the lack of confidence in representatives, inefficiency of the law and lack of accountability. He continued by introducing the Parliament & Citizens platform, which enables citizens to collaborate with representatives on a specific draft law using the "wisdom of the crowd" principle.

Mr Patte added that the higher or lower number of people contributing to the draft law is not a determining fact for the success or failure of the initiative, the most important aspect is the diversity of solutions brought to the table. Although he added that there are also challenges that need to be tackled, such as the scepticism of the people and the challenges of coming up with an offline strategy for greater inclusion. In addition, Mr Patte stated that all the necessary tools to improve democracy exist and there is just the need for political motivation.

Mr Patte concluded by saying that "Like in Ljubljana, or in Athens, like in Riga or London, like in Amsterdam or Paris, here in Brussels there is no love, there is just evidence of love".

**Alexandros Tzoumas**, Technical Manager of Science for You, started his speech by describing the mission of the organisation to improve the public consultation process in Greece. He continued by making a comparison with the official governmental platform and the problems it encounters, especially in terms of impact. The DemocracIT platform is an improved version of the government's platform and also combines other tools for raising participation levels of citizens, such as pilots with other NGOs and the use of crowdsourcing tools.

Mr Tzoumas recognised that, in order to make the policy-making process more effective, transparent and inclusive, a continuous improvement of the consultation process is needed.

He then summarised the Athens national event under the EUCrowd project, highlighting the main points of the crowdsourcing process.

Mr Tzoumas concluded his speech by underlining the importance of the existence of open source platforms.

**Josien Pieterse**, Director of Netwerk Democratie, began her speech by introducing the organisation and the successful previous projects. She continued by presenting their new collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which has recently been renewed for the next two years. The project involves the local municipalities and directly connects them to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the process of policy-making, implementation and evaluation. Ms Pieterse described the potential of platform and the combination of different tools to reach a maximal involvement of municipalities and citizens.

Ms Pieterse stated the importance of educating citizens so that they can have a bigger impact and, through a series of conversations on the platform called New Democracy, there is a potential of creating a community

that possesses sufficient knowledge for this to work.

Ms Pieterse concluded by emphasising the importance of open source platforms and the democratic values that should underpin them.

#### Q&A:

The panel finished with a question and answer session, with the participants asking about the issues such as a possible crowdsourcing pilot on a financial perspective, fake news, political accountability, the transparency of quality control processes and the issue of involving governments.

In response, Imants Breidaks underlined the importance of charismatic figures in society. Politicians need to be charismatic and be effective orators. It is not against democracy to use popular means of communication. Popular democracy and elements of populism are required in a successful democracy; they shouldn't be forbidden or rejected.



#### Panel 2: Building Our Future Together! - Towards a Crowdsourcing Pilot at the EU Level

**Assya Kavrakova**, ECAS' Executive Director and moderator of the second panel, opened the second round of discussions inviting the speakers to express their opinion on the most suitable policies that could be crowdsourced at EU level, the most appropriate stages in the policy-making to carry out a crowdsourcing process as well as the best e-participation tools to collect citizens' ideas.



**Elisa Lironi**, ECAS' Digital Democracy Manager, started her speech by talking about the research carried out by ECAS in order to explore the potential of various e-participation tools in engaging and bringing citizens closer to EU decision-makers. In particular, she described how an analysis of different crowdsourcing experiences implemented at national level for legislative and policy purposes led ECAS, in 2016, to think about the possibility of establishing a crowdsourcing pilot at EU level. However, the information collected at that time did not make it possible to identify some critical factors, such as the ideal policy for an EU crowdsourcing pilot, the most appropriate timeframe of the policy cycle to start collecting citizens' ideas and the most suitable online platform to use.

Ms Lironi then explained how those issues had been addressed in the framework of the EUCrowd project and presented the results that emerged from a series of national events organised by the partners of the project.

Seven national reports drafted as part of the EUCrowd project outlined that:

- Citizenship, education, constitutional issues, environment and health are among the most interesting issues citizens would like to be consulted on;
- Crowdsourcing experiments could lead to better results if implemented in the first stages of the policy process because citizens' ideas are better collected at the beginning of the policy cycle.
- National platforms represent online tools that citizens can easily access in their own language, but an EU platform would be a better solution if the final goal is to carry out a crowdsourcing experiment at EU level on a specific topic.

After presenting the findings of the EUCrowd project, Ms Lironi presented to the audience a concrete proposal for an EU crowdsourcing pilot elaborated by ECAS on the basis of the information collected during the project:

- Considering that environment and health are both competences of the EU and concern citizens'

daily lives, Ms Lironi suggested that a crowdsourcing experiment at EU level should be carried out on a subject able to encompass those two topics - namely, **air quality**.

- With regard to the best timeframe in which the crowdsourcing exercise should take place, Ms Lironi affirmed that citizens' ideas should be collected during the first two stages of the policy process (Identification and Policy Formulation), asking citizens to first identify the problems they face in their daily lives because of air quality and then suggest how decision-makers should tackle those problems at EU level;
- A crowdsourcing pilot at EU level on air quality should collect ideas through an EU platform.

Ms Lironi concluded her speech by saying that civil society organisations, as well as businesses, active in the environmental field have a crucial role to play in helping us to identify the questions to ask citizens during the crowdsourcing process.

**Anthony Zacharzewski**, Director of Democratic Society (Demsoc), stated that we know how to make the crowdsourcing process work from a technical perspective but the real challenge is how to make crowdsourcing a successful tool.

Events like the Brexit referendum, indeed, have led to the emergence of new forms of scepticism about the idea of participation and provoked a shift in favour of representativeness.

According to Mr Zacharzewski, we need both representativeness and direct democracy in order to allow citizens to provide their ideas on specific topics and contribute to the decision-making process.

The use of digital tools in a motivated way, however, may lead to the risk of driving peoples' opinion into a particular perspective and losing all the variety of ideas resulting from the crowdsourcing process.

The idea of a crowdsourcing pilot at EU level is very important but, according to Mr Zacharzewski, it must be complementary to other tailor-made forms of engagement implemented at national level through face-to-face conversations. The number of people interested in EU policy is quite limited so we need to collect citizens' ideas on the basis of a network approach able to look at the same topic from different angles (local, national and European).

Finally, Mr Zacharzewski described how Demsoc is trying to implement a new project of Open Government at EU level, aimed at promoting a better conversation between citizens, institutions and organisations, and how an EU crowdsourcing pilot may be used to create a new positive forum for democracy.

**Serge Novaretti**, Policy and Programme Manager at the Commission's DG for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, was called upon to provide his professional perspective on the proposal to establish a crowdsourcing pilot at EU level. He started his speech by mentioning some e-Participation projects and tools that have been implemented in recent years at the European level, such as the e-Government declaration signed by the Ministers of all EU Member States and EFTA countries, the project "Futurium" implemented by the Commission, as well as the experience of the Commission policy labs created to listen to and speak with citizens at national level on specific topics.

In addition to this, Mr Novaretti described the attempts made by the Commission in order to implement e-Participation pilots at EU level as well as the obstacles encountered during the process. According to his experience, e-Participation methods tend to work better in a local dimension while their implementation at European level may require a longer process.

In addition to this, he affirmed that the use of national platforms is preferable to the establishment of a single EU platform in order to avoid the obstacles associated with the use of different EU languages across various Member States.

Finally, he found air quality an interesting, but also very technical, topic on which to collect citizens' ideas. To this end, he concluded by suggesting EU crowdsourcing pilot on a policy subject less technical and more easily understandable for citizens.

**Aline Muylaert**, Co-founder of CitizenLab, gave a brief presentation of CitizenLab, an e-democracy platform designed to provide a connection between governments and citizens and intended to help local governments reach out to more citizens, set up and manage efficient participation processes, as well as improve policy decisions in real-time. The platform is currently used by 65 governments' worldwide active at local, regional and national level.

According to Ms Muylaert, citizen empowerment processes are effective when they combine top-down and bottom-up ways of participation. In particular, she highlighted the importance of focusing e-participation methods on specific issues and seeing how these issues are perceived by citizens in their local dimension.

She then explained the difficulties emerging from the use of a single multilingual platform and suggested the creation of e-participation tools that citizens can personalise on the basis of their interests.

Finally, with regard to the most suitable timeframe in which to implement the crowdsourcing process, Ms Muylaert stated that it would be better to start the collection of citizens' ideas as early as possible and make a connection with the local decision-making process in order to have a commitment at both local and European level.

**Stefan Schaeffers**, Head of European Affairs at the King Baudouin Foundation, started his speech by talking about the work and the involvement of the King Baudouin Foundation in citizen participation issues.

In his opinion, a subject that could be tested with a crowdsourcing pilot at EU level must concern a policy falling within the competences of the EU and, in this sense, the air quality topic identified by ECAS for its crowdsourcing pilot is wisely chosen. However, according to Mr Schaeffers, it is also important that the subject identified for the crowdsourcing experiment concerns a topic on which European citizens would like to express their opinion and be consulted.

In case the consultation is requested at EU level, it is necessary to give guarantees that the process is taking place and provide citizens with feedback.

He concluded his speech by affirming that linking the crowdsourcing subject to a topic already addressed to a European Citizens' Initiative (such as air quality) is a good practice and could confer more credibility to the collection process of citizens' ideas and ensure that the crowdsourcing platform is not used by an interest group, but represents all the ideas submitted by the citizens.

**Rasmus Øjvind Nielsen**, Researcher at the Danish Board of Technology Foundation, presented the findings of an e-democracy study he co-authored and which recommends crowdsourcing processes at EU level. In particular, he explained that the purpose of the study was to identify the conditions under which digital tools can successfully facilitate different forms of citizen involvement in decision-making processes.

By analysing 22 cases of e-democracy experiments implemented at national level, the study identified six criteria that can help to evaluate the impact of e-participation practices: link to a formal agenda or decision; clarity on participatory process and goals; feedback to participants; sustainability of the tool; voting for consultation or decision; mobilisation strategy.)

It emerged from the study that e-democracy experiments currently carried out at EU level:

- Lack impact on decision-making as well as of transparency, publicity and responsiveness;
- Offer rare opportunities for deliberation and exchange of thoughts at a transnational level;
- Focus mainly on civil society organisations, while average citizens are underrepresented.

As a consequence of this, the study identified some new e-participation tools and practices that could be implemented on a European dimension, including crowdsourcing processes aimed at collecting citizens' ideas for the Commission.

According to Mr Nielsen, however, pilots are intrinsically built for not working because they sandbox democracy and limit the actual participation and level of commitment. It would be better, therefore, to have a limited, but real, commitment from decision-makers to seriously consider the outcome of the crowdsourcing process.

Finally, Mr Nielsen pointed out that, even if crowdsourcing is the right tool, it also represents a potential channel for fake participation and purely online dialogue. In order not to miss the deliberative moment of exchanging perspectives that we can have only by using offline tools, he suggested blended participation methods, which he considers necessary for improving EU e-democracy.

#### Q&A:

The second panel was followed by a Q&A session during which the participants and the panelists explored the following topics:

- The reasons and the incentives for citizens to take part in democracies and, specifically, in crowdsourcing processes;
- The policy sector and people that a crowdsourcing process should address at EU level;
- The reasons that justify the use of an EU platform rather than national platforms or a mix of the two.

