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Citizen Z

*Strengthening the participation of young citizens
in democratic and civic life*

D12.1 Event Report

August 2024



26-08-2024

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EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	1 - Plateforme de Dialogue Interculturel (IDP)
PIC number:	903200660
Project name and acronym:	Citizen Z: Strengthening the participation of young citizens in democratic and civic life – Citizen Z

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	12
Event name:	Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections.
Type:	Panels, Workshops, Roundtables
In situ/online:	in-situ
Location:	Belgium, Brussels
Date(s):	April 9, 2024; April 30, 2024; May 6-7, 2024
Website(s) (if any):	
Participants	
Female:	43
Male:	34
Non-binary:	0
From country 1 Belgium:	56
From country 2 Italy:	5
From country 3 Netherlands:	5

From country 4 Croatia:	1		
From country 5 Spain:	1		
From country 6 Poland:	2		
From country 7 Slovakia:	1		
From country 8 UK:	2		
From country 9: Romania	1		
From country 10: Bulgaria	1		
From country 11: Ukraine	2		
Total number of participants:	77	From total number of countries:	11

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

I. Short Description and Aim of the Events

Under this work package, three separate events, consisting of panels, workshops and roundtables were organized. The first two events occurred on April 9 and April 30, 2024.

Indeed, as previously requested by participants, IDP organized panel discussions and roundtables with EP candidates for the 2024 EP elections. These discussions were originally planned for March 4-5 but were postponed due to constraints beyond the organizers' control. This extension provided further opportunities for dialogue and engagement with key stakeholders amidst the electoral process. The panel on April 9 took place at STAM Europa, while the roundtable on April 30 was held at IDP's offices.

The third event, titled "Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections", took place on May 6-7, 2024, at InfoHub at the European Parliament. Building upon the themes of the first event, it aimed to mobilize youth participation in the 2024 European Parliament elections.

This two-day event aimed at strengthening young people's participation in democratic life through deliberative practices. The event was designed to emphasize the crucial role of the upcoming European elections in shaping the democratic landscape while acknowledging the achievements and persistent challenges Europe faces today.

The event aimed to achieve two primary objectives: firstly, to analyze and deliberate upon the preliminary findings resulting from the second rounds

of deliberative practices within the EU-funded Citizen Z project, encompassing Croatia, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Secondly, it strived to foster an inclusive dialogue among young individuals, activists, policy experts and fact-checkers, addressing prevalent challenges to European democracies while also exploring actionable solutions to shape the future of Europe in the run-up to the European elections.

The comprehensive two-day program featured a diverse range of activities, including panel discussions, presentations, workshops, and networking opportunities. This event aimed for the participation of first and foremost youth and also civil society organizations, practitioners, researchers, journalists, fact-checkers, academics engaged in democratic innovations, young individuals, youth associations and representatives, youth workers, policy experts, policymakers, and public authorities representatives.

II. Detailed Description

A. Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue

The Intercultural Dialogue Platform and the Citizen Z project partners, together with Stand Up for Europe, organized a political debate entitled “Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue” at Stam Brussels on April 9, 2024. This two-hour session gathers 6 EP candidates and many European youths to discuss the future of Europe.

This political dialogue drew over 33 participants. The vibrant assembly included young individuals, civil society organizations, activists, youth associations and EP candidates.

The panel discussion, hosted by Olivia Gheyselinck, a collaborator on the Citizen Z project, commenced with each of the six EP candidates providing brief introductions about themselves, their work, and their priority topics. The discussion was carefully structured to foster dynamic dialogue among participants. Attendees were encouraged to pose questions to the EP candidates and engage in follow-up discussions, resulting in a lively exchange of ideas.

The Q&A session sparked dynamic exchanges between participants and candidates, with discussions spanning a broad spectrum of topics. Subjects such as climate action, youth empowerment, international relations, defense policies amid the conflict in Ukraine, the need for EU institutional reform, housing crises, inflation, economic stability, social justice, budget allocation, education, and mental health resonated strongly with the youth attendees.

Following the panel discussion, participants and EP candidates reconvened for an informal gathering over tea and coffee, further enriching the dialogue in a relaxed setting. This informal setting provided an invaluable opportunity

for deeper engagement and understanding between candidates and the electorate.

The session provided an inspiring and informative platform encouraging participants to actively and critically engage with the EU elections. It demonstrated the commitment of organizations and individuals working towards creating a more inclusive and participatory society where youth have a genuine voice and role to play.

B. Meet your Future Policymakers: Dialogue for Europe's future: Insightful conversations with EP candidate Bram Van Hecke

On Tuesday, April 30, 2024, the spirit of engagement and dialogue that began at STAM Europa on April 9 continued to flourish as the Intercultural Dialogue Platform (IDP) hosted a follow-up event. This time, the setting was the intimate surroundings of IDP offices, with 15 participants, providing the perfect backdrop for a candid conversation with Mr. Bram Van Hecke, a 28-year-old Belgian candidate running for the European Parliament under the EPP banner with the CD&V party. The event aimed to delve deeper into Mr. Van Hecke's vision for Europe and allowed for lively discussions between him and the audience.

The event series initiated earlier exemplified a critical effort to bridge the gap between aspiring European Parliament candidates and the vibrant voices of youth representatives. Titled "Meet Your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue," it underscored the importance of direct engagement in the lead-up to the pivotal 2024 European Elections.

The discussion commenced with Mr. Bram Van Hecke sharing his vision on two pressing European issues close to his heart. The first issue he passionately addressed was the challenge of reconciling the EU's Agricultural policy with its environmental protection goals. As the son of a farmer and a graduate in agro-engineering, Mr. Van Hecke emphasized the importance of ensuring that farmers are adequately consulted and supported. He highlighted the current inadequacies in handling this issue and stressed the necessity of finding solutions that balance environmental sustainability with the livelihoods of farmers. Transitioning to another crucial topic, Mr Van Hecke underscored the urgent need for European defense reform. He advocated for the formation of a unified European army by pooling resources, citing potential efficiency gains and enhanced geopolitical positioning for the EU.

Furthermore, the discussion delved into the rise of extreme right parties in Europe, particularly in Belgium, and the imperative for center-right parties like Mr Van Hecke's own to counteract this trend. Youth representation in politics emerged as another critical theme, with Mr. Van Hecke advocating for increased participation and listening to the concerns of younger generations. As the former president of Groene Kring, an organization

advocating for young farmers in Flanders, he highlighted the importance of consultative bodies like theirs in amplifying youth voices and shaping policy.

In addition, topics such as youth mental health, affordable housing, the free market and imports were addressed, with all participants having at least one chance to ask questions and share their observations or concerns.

The final point discussed before closing the discussion centered on the necessity of internal checks-and-balances mechanisms to uphold integrity in politics. When prompted by a question from the moderator, Mr. Van Hecke addressed this issue, emphasizing the importance of surrounding ourselves with a social circle ready to challenge us and, through his personal philosophy of up-or-out, stressed the need for periodic renewal of political actors, including the MEPs.

In essence, the dialogue with Mr. Van Hecke provided valuable insights into his policy priorities and strategic vision for Europe. His perspectives underscored the complex challenges facing the EU and the importance of proactive and collaborative approaches in addressing them.

As the evening drew to a close, we were reminded of the importance of events like these in shaping the future of our continent. The intimate setting of IDP offices facilitated not just a dialogue but a genuine exchange of ideas, aspirations, and concerns between Mr. Bram Van Hecke and the audience. It showcased the power of direct engagement in fostering understanding and driving meaningful change.

C. Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections

On May 6-7, the Dialogue Platform organized in collaboration with partners from the Citizen Z project and Stand Up for Europe, and in partnership with the European Parliament, a 2-day event. This gathering provided a space for contemplation, discourse, and proactive engagement leading up to the European elections. The 2-day event drew over 45 unique participants from many countries. Attendees came from Belgium, Italy, Croatia, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Slovakia, and the UK, underscoring the pan-European significance of the discussions and initiatives undertaken.

The event kicked off with Albrecht John, from the Civil Society Outreach Unit at the EP, giving an opening address. He provided key election updates and introduced the newly released EU Elections Campaign Video. The program continued with a thought-provoking panel discussion titled "Navigating Democracy in Times of War and Peace", delving into the complexities of democratic governance amidst global challenges. Following the panel, attention turned to the pervasive issue of misinformation and fake news. A consortium of journalists, researchers, and media experts lead discussions on strategies to combat disinformation, emphasizing the critical role of media literacy and responsible independent journalism in safeguarding democratic

processes. The first day ended with an interactive workshop aimed at empowering youth voices. Participants collaborated on the launch of a youth-authored video campaign designed to inspire active engagement in the upcoming European Elections, underscoring the significance of youth democratic participation.

On the second day, activities kicked off with a workshop designed to collaboratively craft a European Citizens' Initiative centered on implementing a universal Public Transport Pass throughout the EU. Towards the conclusion of the session, participants shared brilliant and concrete ideas, reaffirming that collaboration and collective intelligence can yield outstanding results even in a short time. The program continued with a panel discussion highlighting the initial findings from the second round of deliberations in participant countries of the Citizen Z project, including Croatia, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Preliminary findings revealed that young people are primarily interested in equality and justice issues, with their recommendations demonstrating a high level of insight and intuition, despite the common perception that young individuals lack experience.

The event concluded with an intellectual prize. As part of a Europe Day celebration, participants tested their knowledge and understanding of European history, values and institutions through an engaging European quiz.

III. Detailed Program

A. Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue

Panel Structure

Moderator: Olivia Gheyselinck, Event and Project Manager at the Intercultural Dialogue Platform

I. 1st intervention of each speaker – approx. 5 minutes to briefly present themselves and the policies they are working on/interested in (30 minutes)

Speakers:

Suzana Carp, EP Candidate (Belgium), European Climate Policy Specialist, representing Volt (Group of Greens)

Laura Hidalgo, EP Candidate (Belgium), President of the Young MR, representing the Reformist Movement (Renew Europe)

Chelsea Nshuti, EP Candidate (Belgium), Board Member of Jong CD&V, representing Christian Democratic and Flemish (EPP)

Léa Charlet, EP Candidate (Belgium), Youth Sector NGO Director and Strategic Analyst, representing ECOLO (Group of Greens)

Bram Vandeninden, EP Candidate (Belgium), Scientist and Policy Planning, representing Volt (Group of Greens)

Marta Barandiy, EP Candidate, Founder of Promote Ukraine, representing the political movement Voor U

II. Q&A with the audience

The participants and youth representatives are invited to ask their questions to the EP candidates (approx. 90 minutes)

B. Meet your Future Policymakers: Dialogue for Europe's future: Insightful conversations with EP candidate Bram Van Hecke

Panel Structure

Moderator: Ludmila Malai, EU Project Manager at the Intercultural Dialogue Platform

- *1st intervention of the guest speaker – approx. 10 minutes to briefly present himself and the policies they are working on/interested in*

Guest Speaker:



Bram Van Hecke, EP Candidate (Belgium), Former chairman of the Groene Kring, representing Christian Democratic and Flemish party (CD&V; EPP)

- Q&A with the audience

The participants and youth representatives are invited to ask their questions to the EP candidate Bram Van Hecke (approx. 75 minutes)

C. Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections

Day 1: Navigating Democracy: Citizen Participation, Fake News, and Resilience in Times of Conflict

Monday, May 6 | European Parliament, InfoHub, Brussels

13:00 – 13:30 Arrivals and registration | Get your badge

Welcoming and registration of the attendees.

13:30 – 13:45 Opening Speech, EP, Partnership Teams, Civil Society Outreach Unit | Use your vote

Albrecht John, Engaging with multipliers at Civil Society Outreach Unit, EP

Presentation of the EU Elections 2024 Campaign Video

13:45 – 15:00 Panel discussion | Navigating Democracy in times of War and Peace

In light of the numerous conflicts erupting worldwide in recent years, democracy faces unprecedented threats. In this panel discussion, our objective is to delve into tangible examples illustrating how democracy is impacted during times of war, and explore the various forms of civic participation available during periods of peace. We will examine the early indicators of democratic backsliding and identify strategies for defending and strengthening democracy and its institutions amidst the ongoing war in the European vicinity.

Moderator: Ludmila Malai, EU Project Manager at IDP and Coordinator of the *Citizen Z Project*

Speakers:

Luca Tomini, Research Associate Professor of political science, ULB,

Early signs of backsliding democracy

Suzan Gibril, Post-Doctoral Fellow at CEVIPOL, ULB

Exploring the constraints on citizen participation in autocratic regimes: A case study Analysis

Martin Deleixhe, Professor at ULB and Associate Researcher at CReSPo

Reassessing European Citizenship Amidst Evolving Geopolitical Realities in Europe

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break | Refresh and Network

Enjoy your coffee and meet new people!

15:30 – 16:45 Panel discussion and Interactive Workshop | Building Resilience: AI, Disinformation, Fake News, and Election Integrity

This panel and workshop format combines group activities and interactive discussions to provide participants with a comprehensive and practical understanding of the issue. It encourages collaboration and aims to equip participants with actionable insights for tackling the challenges posed by AI and fake news in the context of the upcoming European elections.

Moderator: Olivia Gheyselinck, EU Project and Event Manager at the Intercultural Dialogue Platform

Speakers:

Ahmed Kaya, Researcher and Social Media Expert; Project Manager at Platform INS, Owner of the Meer Meer Meer company (the Netherlands)

Navigating Fact-Checking: Processes, Methods, and Real-Life Examples

Michele Calamaio, Journalist at MAREA Media (Italy) and **Lorenzo Di Stasi**, Freelance Journalist (Italy)

The role of independent media in combating misinformation and understanding fake news during investigations

Alessia Melchiorre, Journalist at MAREA Media (Italy)

Tangible Threats: The Impact of Fake News and Misinformation on the Upcoming European Elections

16:45– 17:45 Follow up on the Youth Campaign | Youth vote

Building on the insights gained from the third edition of the Deliberative Democracy Days, held on March 4 and 5, 2024, this workshop will enable young people to refine their concepts for running a peer-to-peer campaign aimed at motivating youth participation in upcoming elections and encouraging active engagement in civic and democratic life. A promotional

spot will be launched following the event and strategically disseminated on social media platforms, with the aim of sparking a viral online momentum specifically designed to resonate with young people.

Facilitated by Silvestar Petrov, Youth Worker and President at Udruga Prizma

Day 2: Democracy in Action: Youth Engaging and Participating in EU Policymaking

Tuesday, May 7 | European Parliament, InfoHub, Brussels

9:00 – 9:30 Arrivals | Welcome

Welcoming and registration of the attendees

09:30 – 11:00 Workshop | European Citizens Initiative

Throughout this workshop, leveraging the insights from the proposals generated during the third edition of the Deliberative Democracy Days on March 4-5, 2024, young participants will refine a purposeful European Citizens Initiative, preparing it for potential submission. Of the four proposals unveiled in March, the one that generated the most interest will be further refined and meticulously developed.

Facilitated by Sebastian Berchesan, Executive Secretary at Stand Up for Europe

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break | Refresh and Network

Enjoy your coffee!

11:30 – 12:30 Panel discussion | Deliberative practices with youth – preliminary findings

This panel discussion will examine the initial conclusions and recommendations from the second round of local deliberations in Croatia, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. The focus will be on synthesizing and elucidating common concerns that have emerged as key for young people in these different EU countries (e.g. environmental sustainability, climate action, public transport, educational programs, social justice and the fight against gender-based violence). In addition, the discussion will extend to exploring the relevance of the identified issues at the EU level, striving to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the interconnected concerns that unite young people across borders, and thus lay the foundations for informed and collaborative efforts at both local and European scales.

Moderator: Ludmila Malai, EU Project Manager at IDP and Coordinator of the *Citizen Z Project*

Speakers:

Kamila Boukfouz, Project Manager at Platform INS (the Netherlands)

Silvestar Petrov, Youth Worker and President at Udruga Prizma (Croatia)

Fatih Cengiz, Project Manager at Fedactio (Belgium)

12:30 – 13:15 Harmony Across Borders for Europe Day: Let’s celebrate Europe!

The session will kick off with an exciting short video. Following that, all attendees will be invited to dive into an engaging European Quiz, covering a wide range of topics including general knowledge, geography, history, music, literature, movies and TV shows, food, sports, travel, and famous landmarks. Participants with the most correct answers stand a chance to win a fantastic gift. Let's test your knowledge and have some fun!

Moderators: Nisa Yildirim and Esra Tekinkaya, Members of the Youth Advocacy Team for the *Citizen Z project*

IV. Participants

A. Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue

On April 9, the event, "Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue" attracted over 33 attendees.

The participants' age distribution showed a balanced representation, with half the attendees, 18 individuals, falling within the 15-25 age range, emphasizing the event's appeal to a younger demographic. Moreover, the youthful composition of both the attendees and the candidate MEPs, all in their twenties, thirties, or, at most, early forties, contributed to a vibrant and dynamic dialogue. Finally, 15 participants aged 26 and above provided a multi-generational perspective.

Gender diversity was quite apparent at the event, with 19 female and 14 male participants.

The event, "Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue", consisted of over 50% of participants younger than 26, underscoring the importance of engaging and empowering the younger generation in shaping European policies and priorities.

B. Meet your Future Policymakers: Dialogue for Europe's future: Insightful conversations with EP candidate Bram Van Hecke

The round table discussion on 30 April brought together a group of 15 participants. Participants fell into two age categories: 9 people aged 26 and over and 6 participants in the 15-25 age group. Gender representation was well balanced, with 7 male and 8 female participants contributing to the dialogue.

C. Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections

The 2-day event drew over 45 participants from a diverse array of countries, reflecting the multicultural fabric of Europe. Attendees came from Belgium, Italy, Croatia, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Slovakia, and the UK, underscoring the pan-European significance of the discussions and initiatives undertaken.

The age distribution of the participants showed a balanced representation, with 23 individuals falling within the 15-25 age range, emphasizing the event's appeal to a younger demographic. With 20 male participants and 25 female participants, indicating a relatively well-balanced representation across genders. This inclusive participation contributed to a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives.

The online dimension of the event further expanded its reach, with Twitter and YouTube Livestream garnering significant attention. The opening speech recorded 46 views, the first panel “Navigating Democracy in times of War and Peace” garnered 86 views. Further the Panel “Building Resilience: AI, Disinformation, Fake News and Election Integrity” garnered 82 views. Finally, the panel “Deliberative Practices with youth- preliminary findings” garnered 10 views, resulting in a total of 224 views on YouTube and Twitter. This online presence underscored the event's accessibility and its ability to resonate with a broader audience beyond the physical participants.

Furthermore, the turnout of young participants exemplified their active investment and enthusiasm in the program and its keynote speakers. Hence, the success of the event was further accentuated by the enthusiastic participation of the younger demographic, showcasing their keen interest and dynamic engagement in the panel conversations and interactive sessions.

V. Participants' feedback

A. Meet your Future Policymakers: Youth and EP Candidates in Dialogue

The youth participants in the panel on April 9 with EP candidates highly valued the chance to interact directly with their potential future representatives. They appreciated the opportunity to pose questions on various topics of concern and to hear the candidates' visions for addressing these issues. The presence of representatives from diverse parties enriched the discussions, and attendees expressed a desire to attend similar events featuring candidates from different political backgrounds. Consequently, IDP decided to continue the series, providing young people with the opportunity to engage with a wide range of candidates before the elections scheduled for June 6-9. In particular, attendees praised the insights shared by candidates Suzana Carp and Lea Charlet, noting their well-informed discourse on various topics.

B. Meet your Future Policymakers: Dialogue for Europe's future: Insightful conversations with EP candidate Bram Van Hecke

The roundtable event featuring EP Candidate Bram Van Hecke on April 30 garnered exceptional satisfaction among its participants. According to survey responses, all attendees expressed utmost satisfaction, rating the event 5 out of 5 for its organization and execution. Feedback on potential improvements varied, with some praising the event's excellence while others suggested integrating a hybrid format to enable online followers to pose questions to the candidates as well.

Reflecting on the event, participants highlighted their admiration for the young EP candidate's fresh perspectives and potential contributions to the European Parliament if elected. They also commended Bram Van Hecke's stance on reforming the current system, emphasizing the need to address issues of overproduction, overconsumption, and waste while prioritizing citizen interests.

In terms of overlooked topics, attendees underscored the importance of discussing the flaws in the current economic system, challenges in education, housing issues, and the struggles of young people entering the job market. Additionally, concerns regarding urban crime, including theft and burglaries, were raised as significant topics deserving attention.

In closing remarks, several participants offered words of encouragement to the organizers, urging them to maintain the quality of their work and continue the series with other EP candidates.

C. Shaping the future of Europe - Deliberating with young people in the run-up to the European elections

For the event on May 6-7, the survey respondent expressed overall satisfaction with the event but highlighted areas for improvement, particularly emphasizing the need for panellists to articulate their thoughts within allotted time and for moderators to manage time more effectively. They praised the venue, InfoHub, finding it pleasant and comfortable.

Among the speakers, Suzan Gibril stood out for delivering a great presentation during the panel: Navigating Democracy in Times of War and Peace.

Participants appreciated the event's ability to showcase a European Citizens Initiative and fruitfully engage with the bright minds of youth within a short timeframe. Looking ahead, attendees suggested future events could include simulations of decision-making processes in the European Parliament.