EuComMeet
DELIBERATIVE SPACES FOR DEMOCRACY

D6.3 – Report on deliberation and identity construction

WP6 - Strengthen European identity

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Executive summary

This report examines the deliberations and formation of European identity at the EuComMeet Main Event. It draws upon ethnographic observations of debates, as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses of participants' messages and structured interviews. The report highlights challenges encountered during the deliberative process, including a low participation rate, translation issues, and relatively shallow deliberations among participants. Despite these difficulties, most participants support the reiteration of this kind of exercise in deliberation, provided that key improvements are made.

With these findings established, the report goes on to elaborate on how deliberation can influence the shaping of European identities. By analyzing a collection of messages from participants, we discern various attitudes toward deliberation and EU involvement. The report offers insights into Europeans' attitudes and expectations regarding participation, as well as the regulatory and financial actions of the EU. In alignment with the literature review presented in section 6.1 of the report (the "Literature Review Report on Identity"), there is no evidence of a European identity emerging from shared cultural, linguistic, or ethnic traits. Further, the participants insistently express the socioeconomic differences between countries. In order to fully adapt public decision-making to local specificity, they ask that decisions are not completely centralized, but distributed between the European, national and local level. Indeed, the report underscores participants' willingness to engage in deliberation and support European initiatives aimed at achieving common goals, particularly in terms of ecological transition. We explore the concept of "deliberative European constitutional patriotism" as a means to address participants' desires and aspirations. Modern devices of deliberation and direct participation could allow Europeans to identify and commit to common aspirations, forming the basis of an inclusive, future-oriented, European identity.

The report fulfills the double purpose to indicate how deliberation can contribute to a positive political European identity, by providing a common space of representation and the identification of common challenges and actions, and to outline how future deliberation events should be improved to do so.

Introduction

EuComMeet Main Event was an experiment in online deliberation between citizens of the European Union. It took place between the 8th May 2023 and the 17th June 2023. The participants came from Poland, Germany, Ireland, France and Italy.

Each subgroup of participant was invited to take part in a series of online text discussions (asynchronous) and video conference meetings (synchronous), gradually moving from local to European scale. The complete process included the following successive steps :

- A one-hour-and-half long video conference meeting, bringing together members from the same urban area (*locale debate*).
- Three days of exchange by chat, bringing together members of the same country (*nation text-forum*).
- A one-hour-and-half long video conference meeting between members of the same country (*nation-debate*).
- Three days of exchange by chat, bringing together members of the five European country included (*EU text-forum*).
- A one-hour-long video conference meeting, bringing together members of the five European country included (*EU plenary*).

We will detail the tasks given to participants at each step in chapter I.3 of this report. The meetings and discussion took place on an Internet platform specially created for that purpose, https://nextcloud.eucommeet.eu. In total, there have been 247 discussions and meetings, spread between the 8th of May and the 17th of June.

Aim of the report

This report aims to analyze the deliberation that took place in EuComMeet' Main Event and their consequences for the identity construction of the participants.

In this report, we define the "identity" as the representation one makes of oneself by integrating and mobilizing one's features (E. Kunnen et al., 2006). One can mobilize differently those features according to the context and ongoing social interactions, which will incentives or sanction these features. In this way, group belonging will alter both personal identity (as an individual) and group identity (as a member of the group). Indeed, there is a "social component of identity", understood as "the part of one's self-concept that is informed by one's membership in groups defined by some shared

attribute, such as language, religion, or race." (Kalin et al., 2018). Thereby, "identity" is constructed and changing, rather than essential and fixed.

In EuComMeet, participants were asked to partake in several groups, each corresponding to a distinct scale of government : local, national and European. We wonder how deliberative practices contribute to the construction of reflexive identities in a multilevel polity such as the European Union. Collective interaction, notably in the context of deliberation, can promote group identification and the affirmation of shared characteristics or goals (Kalin et al., 2018). Exchanging arguments with each other should allow us to identify our common interests and create bonds of attachment, respect and, even, of empathy (Grönlund et al., 2017). How and to what extent did these phenomena unfold in EuComMeet's Main Event ?

The idea of an "integration through deliberation" (Eriksen et al., 2000) appeared at the end of the XXth century. It was concomitantly inspired by the emergence of theories of deliberation and communication (Habermas, 1990) and the rise of notions of post-national and post-ethnic identity (Eriksen et al., 2000).

Following the refusal of the Constitutional Treaty in several European referenda in 2005 and frequent critics on the "democratic deficit" of the European Union, tracing back to the 1970s, the EU has consistently sought "legitimation through deliberation" - to quote again Eriksen and Fossum. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the EU has organized several experiments in participative and deliberative democracy, whose ultimate end if generalized would be to foster European identity and reinforce the EU legitimacy, both as a supra-national entity and as an author of coercive norms, according to (Kies et al. (eds.), 2013).

Among these experiments and initiative, there have been notably the "D plan" (2005), "Meetings of Mind" (2005-2006), "Tomorrow's Europe" (2007) and "European Citizen's Consultation" (2007) (Wojcik, 2011; Boucher, 2009), "Europolis" (2009), the "European Citizens' Consultation" (2018-2019) and the "Conference on the Future of Europe" (2021-2022). Observers and participants have commented on the feeble impact of those repeated attempts, whose recommendations were not binding for public authorities (Kies et al. (eds.), 2013; Boucher, 2009). There was therefore no real stake in the deliberation.

In 2007 the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) enabled collectives to call on the European Commission to propose a new law. Given the high constraints – a collective

has to collect one million signatures in seven EU countries in 12 months – this system has not empowered ordinary citizens, but rather already organized Non-Governmental Organizations and enterprises (Aldrin et al., 2016). In addition, the initiative can be flatly refused by the European Commission, which retains the exclusivity of the initiative of laws in the European Parliament.

The EuComMeet project, cofunded by the EU's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, is a new attempt of direct citizen's deliberation. It includes innovation, such as online asynchronous discussions by chat and automatic translation. Indeed, the European plenaries and text-forum hosts multilingual exchanges, where each participant can express himself in his own language. We wonder if meaningful deliberation were possible in these conditions, a concern we answer in the first section.

This report aims to answer two research question that motivated and underlie the entire EuComMeet project. These questions are essential to the European project and its possible institutional evolution.

First, *to what extent would a deliberative and bottom-up management of community affairs strengthen a European political identity based upon the people's constituent power at a continental scale?* We wonder whether European citizens' own handling of the collective issues they face would enable them to develop a common political identity rooted in popular sovereignty.

Second, *to what extent could the setting up of deliberative procedures favor the emergence of a shared and open identity in which permanent and institutionalized dialogue between the actors of various national histories and ways of life could limit the risk of essentialist antagonisms thanks to the co-production of a common future?* Furthermore, we wonder what specific mechanisms and practices could facilitate this transformation, ensuring that the collective voice and agency of the people are effectively integrated into the broader political framework of Europe.

Report outline

This report is divided into two parts. The first part highlights the *difficulties in the EuComMeet process, hindering the achievement of its objectives*.

We use direct ethnographic observations, structured interviews, and quantitative data to highlight three problems that hampered the deliberation in EuComMeet's Main Event.

These three problems are a low commitment from the participants, which implied a low descriptive representativeness ; difficulties in translation, which hindered and diminished communication between countries ; shallowness of the deliberation process, that did not enable participants to identify, refine and propose precise policy options.

The second part analyzes the *successes of EuComMeet, the manifestation and construction of European identity in exchanges.* These analyses are substantiated by the messages collected in ten EU plenaries and text-forum, which we classified under nine categories. A detailed reading of the speeches of participants enables us to answer the two research questions we introduced earlier.

First, *to what extent would a deliberative and bottom-up management of community affairs strengthen a European political identity based upon the people's constituent power at a continental scale?*

To answer this question, we chose ten International EU Plenary and read all the messages that the participants had exchanged. In total we assessed between 3100 and 3400 messages. From these discussions, we identified 192 messages of interest, which we classified under nine topics :

1. Exchanges with other EU citizens (7 messages)
2. Meeting of different viewpoints and access to new information (17 messages)
3. Deliberation and its outcomes (84 messages)
    1. Deliberation of the citizens opposed to an exclusive decision-making power of politicians (9 messages)
    2. To generate new ideas (40 messages)
    3. Demands for impact and accountability (9 messages)
    4. Demands for referendum and institutionalization (16 messages)
4. Identification of common or different problems among countries (10 messages)
5. Transfer of practices (8 messages)
6. EU regulations (15 messages)
7. EU funding and subsidies (16 messages)
8. Support for local decisions (10 messages)
9. Critics of the process & of the current state of political affairs (25 messages)

We conducted a qualitative analysis on this corpus, identifying the recurrent patterns, attitudes and ideas expressed by the participants. In particular, we assessed the attitude of participants toward deliberation, laying out their support for the practices, the benefits that they perceived from it and their demands of deliberation.

In addition, we quantitatively analyzed the answers given by 31 randomly selected participants to semi-structured interviews and focus groups (following a questionnaire containing open-ended questions). The combination of the qualitative analysis of the messages exchanged in the EU plenaries, and the quantitative analysis of the interview responses, enables us to answer the research question.

Drawing from the numerous messages participants wrote about deliberation, we highlight a strong support for the process, accompanied by important demand for impact, accountability and institutionalization. On the basis of this result, we propose the idea of a "deliberative constitutional patriotism" for the European Union.

Second, *to what extent could the setting up of deliberative procedures favor the emergence of a shared and open identity in which permanent and institutionalized dialogue between the actors of various national histories and ways of life could limit the risk of essentialist antagonisms thanks to the co-production of a common future?*

To answer this question, we again use the qualitative analysis of the corpus of messages we presented earlier and the quantitative analysis of the responses of 31 participants to the semi-structured interviews.

In particular, we assess the attitudes of participants toward the transfers of practices between countries, regions, and municipalities, their support for local and national decisions, their attitudes toward the intervention of the EU through funding and regulation.

We observe important demands for direct involvement of the citizens in deliberation and public decisions, on the one hand, and to leave room for decision-making to countries and municipalities, on the other hand. On the basis of these observations, we propose the basis on which a shared European identity could form.

Methodology and methodological limitations

The deliberation at EuComMeet took place in special conditions : a purely online event, multilingual, designed to generate discussions but not to produce public policy decisions or recommendations.

In total, there have been 247 discussions and meetings, spread between the 8th of May and the 17th of June. Roughly, the Main Event was divided into three "macro-groups", A, B and C. Each followed the complete process as described in the introduction. In addition, each macro-group of participant was divided into subgroups designed to experiment different conditions for deliberation : with Human Moderation (HM) or with Automatic Moderation (AM), between Like-Minded (LM), Polarized (Polar) or mixed participants (Cross-Sec).

The online observation of such a vast event was a challenge. In May, we chose to directly observe Local debates and National Debates in French and Irish groups, whose language the main investigator of the WP understands. Later, we chose to focus on the observation of the European Plenaries, these being more useful to inquiry the formation of European identity in the deliberation process. In the meantime, we tried to archive as much as possible chat conversations at every stage of the Main Event.

In line with current practices, we conduced a multi-methods online ethnography (Wang et al., 2021; Nascimento et al., 2022; Behrendtz, 2011). We used different qualitative methods : non-participant online observation, online document collection – we have archived the text exchanges on the platform – and content analysis of the discussions. We also conducted online semi-structured interviews, using a questionnaire with open questions. The sample was selected by lot among the participants that attended and did not attended to the sessions.

We did not try to characterize the hundreds of observed participants, but tried to analyze the content of their discourses, demands and remarks. We also conduced quantitative research to establish the attendance rates of participants in the different sessions of the Main Event (locale debates, nation text-forum, nation-debate, EU text-forum, EU plenaries) and the effectiveness of the translation system. We conducted a quantitative analysis on the 31 structured interviews, classifying their answers to each of the open questions of the questionnaire.

Before continuing, however, we must warn that the conclusions that we can draw from this experiment are qualified by its limited nature. EuComMeet's experience differs from that of the wider society in three key ways.

First, the deliberations at EuComMeet did not have any decision-making issues. Participants were less motivated to participate and argue, for this reason. The passions expressed were probably less than during real debates taking place in society, outside the framework of this experiment.

Then, and in particular because the deliberations had no decision-making implications, EuComMeet did not give rise to the intervention of mobilized groups. On the other hand, the public space of European societies is animated by lobbies, mobilized political groups, associations, unions, cause entrepreneurs and politicians. These groups enter into rivalry and conflict and participate in the framing and perception of political issues. They thus play a role in the construction or not of European identity through deliberation.

In addition, the number of participants who took part in EuComMeet, and a fortiori, the number of participants who responded to the structured interviews – conducted from a questionnaire with open questions – is meager (31 people). This low number results from the technical and temporal constraints that exerted on the researchers of EuComMeet and their contractor, Teleperformance.

From these interviews, we produced quantitative data. Given the low number of respondents, the quantitative data we collected and analyzed are fragile and display wide confidence intervals.

Unfortunately, we do not have information on the social characteristics of the individual participants, such as their age, sex, social class, level of diploma, etc.). This private data remained inaccessible to the research team, and we do not have anonymized statistics either. We cannot therefore rigorously compare the sociological composition of EuComMeet participants to that of the European population, which further limits our ability to generalize our findings.

Finally, the deliberations at EuComMeet were ad hoc and short-lived. They focused on questions of ecological transition. As we write in this report, we did not observe any speeches at EuComMeet calling for a European identity based on cultural, historical or ethnic similarities between European peoples. But such speeches perhaps have appeared if the subject of deliberations had been, for example, the diplomacy of the European Union towards foreign countries.

For all these reasons, the experience of EuComMeet does not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn on the formation of European identity. Where possible, we have endeavored to complement the results of EuComMeet with those of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This report establishes research directions and interim conclusions that will need to be examined by subsequent work, based on the observation of larger-scale deliberative experiences, involving political stakes, the public and mobilized groups.
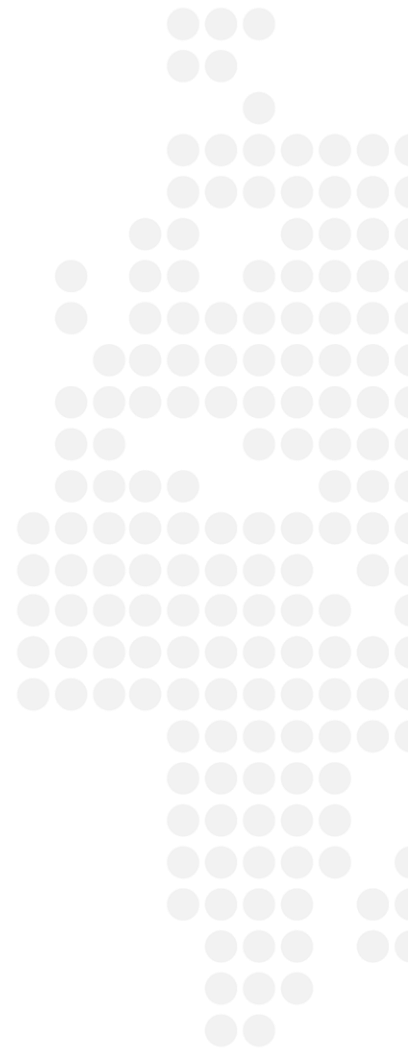
1. Difficulties in the EuComMeet process, hindering the achievement of its objectives

The ethnographic observation and the collection of quantitative data highlight three difficulties that have diminished the quality of the deliberations. These three difficulties are low participation rates, an unsatisfactory translation system and an overly superficial approach to deliberation.

1.1. Low commitment and low descriptive representativeness

Few of the hundreds of participants invited by EuComMeet to take part in the discussions, and text-forum exchanges, actually participated. Such a low participation qualifies the advantages of the event for the formation of European identity. As we will see, we suspect a strong bias in selection, the participants already favorable and interested in Europeans affairs being more susceptible to attend.

Attendance, by the data

EuComMeet's moderators reported on 226 sessions, which we analyzed to produce the tables below. The average number of participants for the entirety of the main event was 6,26 and the estimated average attendance rate was 13.87%.

Type of reunion	Locality	Estimated number of participants invited to attend	Average number of participants that attended (attendees)	Estimated average attendance rate
EU Plenary discussions	European Union	231	27,16	11,76%
Eu Text-forum	European Union	50	5,97	11,95%

Table 1. Participation in the Europeans discussions

The EU plenary discussions had by far the highest number of participants, but the estimated average attendance rate seems to be lower than for local and national

reunions. It did not seem that the opportunity to participate in Europeans deliberations motivated more of the participants to attend.

Type of reunion	Locality	Estimated number of participants invited to attend	Average number of attendees	Estimated average attendance rate
Local debate, discussion	All countries combined	27	5,39	19,98%
Local debate, discussion	France	27	6,18	22,89%
Local debate, discussion	Germany	27	4,66	17,28%
Local debate, discussion	Ireland	27	6,30	23,36%
Local debate, discussion	Italy	27	6,92	25,64%
Local debate, discussion	Poland	27	2,58	9,56%

Table 2. Participation in the local debates

The local debates exhibit the highest attendance rate, which could be explained by a greater proximity with the subject of discussion.

Type of reunion	Locality	Estimated number of participants invited to attend	Average number of attendees	Estimated average attendance rate
Nation-debate, discussion	All countries combined	50	5,90	11,80%
Nation-debate, discussion	France	50	5,7	11,4%
Nation-debate, discussion	Germany	50	4,2	8,4%
Nation-debate, discussion	Ireland	50	5,87	11,75%
Nation-debate, discussion	Italy	50	8,09	16,18%
Nation-debate, discussion	Poland	50	4	8%

Table 3. Participation in the national debates

Across countries, we note that Poland, and, to a lesser extent, Germany, had systematically lowered attendance rates. The attendance rate of France, Italy, and Ireland remained similar to each other's across all types of reunions.

Type of reunion	Locality	Estimated number of participants invited to attend	Average number of attendees	Estimated average attendance rate
Nation text-forum	All countries combined	50	6,2	12,39%
Nation text-forum	France	50	6,45	12,9%
Nation text-forum	Germany	50	4,5	9%
Nation text-forum	Ireland	50	6	11,97%
Nation text-forum	Italy	50	8,16	16,33%
Nation text-forum	Poland	50	4,87	9,75%

Table 4. Participation in the Nation text-forums

As the last two tables show, we do not observe a significant difference in the attendance rate nor in the number of participants whether the reunion is held synchronically, as a discussion, or anachronistically, as a text-forum.

The regrettable implications of low attendance rate : low descriptive representativeness and hindered deliberations

The low attendance rate at the EuComMeet's main event holds two negative implications for its democratic character. First, it decreases the descriptive representativeness of the discussion. Second, it hinders the quality of the discussions.

The "descriptive representativeness" of a democratic event designates the closeness of its sociological composition to that of the society in which it takes place (Pitkin, 1972). An ideally "descriptive" forum resembles the society in miniature : it has the same proportion in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, region of origin, etc. Modern "citizen's assemblies" and "deliberative mini-publics" generally use both random selection and quotas to approach descriptive representation (Curato, 2021; Steel et al., 2020).

However, once a satisfyingly descriptive panel of participants is selected, the lower attendance will be, the lower its descriptive representation will be. The group is

meant to be representative as a whole, whereas its small fractions cannot be. Even if the entire panel of EuComMeet participants was sociologically close to the represented countries – which it was not necessarily – its meetings, in which, on average, only 13.87% of registered participants, could not be.

Given these insufficient participation and representativeness, EuComMeet could not pretend to meaningfully represent the population of the European Union in all its diversity. Further, there was probably an auto-selection bias, insofar as, among the people invited to participate, the citizens interested in the ecological transition and in the activities of the European Unions were more likely to sign in. Indeed, when asked for their reasons to accept, the interviewed mentioned their interest for the ecological transition, and to a lesser extent, for Europe. An auto-selection and possible over-representation of pro-environment participants was observed in a similar experiment, "Ideal-EU", in 2009 (Monnoyer-Smith, 2013).

	Yes	No
% of respondents	**90%**	9,5%
n interviews	**19**	2
95% confidence interval	±12.55%	

Table 5. Results from the structured interviews,
"Were you interested in the topic under discussion?"

The participants themselves identified this issue, some stating that they should be more numerous, diverse and representative, if the event were made to bear authoritative results and recommendations.

When interpreting the observations from EuComMeet, it is worth remembering that the conclusions are subject to different margins of interpretation. The observations that relate to modalities in the event itself - the quality of the platform, translation, the dynamics of discussion - can be considered as accurate without a doubt. However, the observations that relate to European identity and the role of the European Union might be biased by the auto-selection bias. Hence, they should be put in perspective with the literature and other empirical observations made on these topics.

In addition, the lowered participation implied smaller groups that it was planned in the original design. This is important, because the dynamics in conversation changes

with the number of participants involved. With, on average, 6.26 discussants, the exchanges in the Main Event exhibited less diversity of viewpoints, information, interest and contradictory thoughts than it was planned. Previous research on online forums of the European Citizens Consultations (2009) have shown that diversity of opinions correlates with a high level of deliberation among participants (Karlsson, 2010). In EuComMeet, the participants themselves remarked and voiced the lack of contradiction and dissenters to challenge their ideas. As a participant had it :

> "[…] *The discussion would certainly have been more lively if more dissenters had been found.*"
>
> International EU plenary, 02-06-2023, german participant

Was the low attendance caused by the purely online nature of the event ?

The estimated average attendance rate at EuComMeet's main event was no higher than 13.87% (n: 11165 ; 95% confidence interval: ±0.64%). As for comparison, a recent citizen's assembly, the Citizen's Convention on the End of Life, held in Paris from December 2022 to April 2023 maintained an attendance rate close to 100% among its 185 participants. At first glance, the comparison is astounding. Whereas EuComMeet's participants could participate from home and take part in short reunions, the Citizen's Convention on the End of Life asked its members to physically move to Paris for nine three-days weekends. As the Citizen's Convention on the End of Life, most deliberative mini-publics ask its participants to physically move to a place of reunion and take part in long days of deliberation (Curato, 2021). In this regard, they are more demanding than the purely online exercise of EuComMeet, yet they achieve a significantly higher attendance rate. How can we explain this apparent paradox ?

Reasons for low attendance, as by the interviews of participants

Fortunately, the interviews conduced on 31 participants and non-participants made it possible to test hypotheses on participation and non-participation in the event.

When asked, "Is there anything about the project that, if it had been different, would have made you want to participate?", 6 answers "Yes" (85%, 95% confidence interval = ±25.92%) and 1 answers "No" (15%).

What characteristics of the project account for the feeble motivation of EuComMeet's participants to attend, compared to other deliberative mini-publics ? What should have been different ?

The remuneration was perceived as adequate

First, we can rule out that the remuneration at EuComMeet was perceived as too meager. When interviewed, the participants and non-participants alike judged the remuneration offered to be "interesting" and "sufficient". The only complaints were not about the amount but about late payment.

	Yes	No
% of respondents	**77%**	11%
n	**24**	3
95% confidence interval	±11.85%	

Table 7. Results from the structured interviews,

"Did you find the remuneration adequate to the tasks demanded?"

The event was not linked to public decision

Most deliberative mini-public are clearly linked to public decision and must submit recommendations to a specified political authority. On the one hand, the Citizen's Convention on the End of Life that we mentioned earlier, and which attained high participation rate, was expected to significantly influence a future change in legislation ; the stakes were real and high. On the other hand, EuComMeet was not in any way linked to public decision. Quite coherently, most participants did not feel empowered by the event.

	Yes	**No**
% of respondents	36%	**63%**
n	4	**7**
95% confidence interval		±28.43%

Table 8. Results from the structured interviews,

"Did the perception of your ability to change things, to make the difference changed

as a consequence of the participation in this event?"

We asked the participants if an explicit link to public decision motivates the participants to attend. "Would you have had a different attitude (e.g., more active, less active, etc.) if the result of the decision were mandatory for the local authorities?"

	Yes (more active)	No (same attitude)
% of respondents	**74%**	26%
n	**14**	5
95% confidence interval	±19.80%	

Table 9. Results from the structured interviews, "Would you have had a different attitude if the result of the decision were mandatory for the local authorities?"

In addition, when asked, "Would you have participated if the event had more influence on the decision-making process?", 6 answers positively (85%, 95% confidence interval = ±25.92%) and 1 answers negatively (15%).

The interviews indicate that the influence of the event on public decision-making would have encouraged the participants to be more involved in the discussions. This observation is not a surprise ; it was already observed in 2009, in the "Ideal-EU" project, that a "key concern" and motivation of participants is "demonstrable impact of their input on public policy" (Monnoyer-Smith, 2013). Likewise, (Gastil et al., 2005) retained from their observations that "the realistic expectation of influence (that is, a link to decision-makers)" is an indispensable feature of any "successful deliberative initiative".

Note that some participants interviewed voiced their concern that the event would not have been legitimate and representative enough to emit authoritative recommendations. We will turn to this problem in the second part of the report (II.1).

The event conflicted with other activities

On the one hand, participants of most deliberative mini-public know that attendance will be highly demanding. Consequently, only the most willful to attend accepts to participate. The acceptance rate is lower, but once the participants have accepted, most of them keep committed to the process. Furthermore, they are given a schedule in advance, and know that they will have to set aside certain days and weekends for deliberation, for which they are paid and compensated. This preparation can account for high participation rates.

On the other hand, in EuComMeet, the asynchronous discussions by chat occurred throughout the entire day and in the week, what participants who had to work complained about. The synchronous discussions occurred in the evening, but could still conflict with familial or professional obligations.

	Yes	**No**
% of respondents	42%	**58%**
n	8	**11**
95% confidence interval		±22.20%

Table 11. Results from the structured interviews,

"Have you found it challenging to find the time to participate in the various activities of this deliberative process?"

Most participants answered "no" to this last question, but the fact that 42% of citizens were having difficulties finding the time to attend should be read as a concerning figure.

When asked, "Did you had professional or familial obligations", 6 answers "Yes" (75 %, 95% confidence interval = ±30.01%) and 2 answers "No" (25%).

Further, when asked, "Would you have said "yes" if the event had been face-to-face?", 7 answers "Yes" (78%, 95% confidence interval = ±27.16%) and 2 answers "No" (22%). Many participants that answered "Yes" to this last question stressed that, if the event took place face-to-face, all logistics and costs would have to be covered by the organizers.

Finally, when asked, "Would you have participated [more] if the event had been scheduled to last less time?", 5 answers "Yes" (55%, 95% confidence interval = ±32.46%) and 4 answers "No" (45%).

These series of questions point out that while the event was meant to blend easily in the daily life of the participants, attending represented a challenge for a sizable minority of participants.

We would like to add two further hypotheses. First, online events might be perceived as less important, less "serious" than physical meetings. Not going to a physical reunion might be perceived as more uncivil than not connecting to an online event.

Second, a deliberative mini-public that holds physical meetings allows participants to form bonds of friendship and loyalty to the group. EuComMeet, being purely online and short-lived, might have created fewer bonds of loyalty to the group.

The platform was not easy to navigate

EuComMeet's Main Event took place entirely online, on a platform specially conceived for this purpose. It appeared rapidly that the platform was difficult to use for many participants, an intuition confirmed by the structured interviews.

	Easy	**Difficult**
% of respondents	48%	**51%**
n	13	**14**
95% confidence interval		±18.85%

Table 15. Results from the structured interviews, "Did you find the platform easy to navigate? + Did you find the platform easy to work with ?"

However, when asked, "would you have preferred another type of participatory democracy event?" most of the participants answered by the negative.

	Yes	**No**
% of respondents	36%	**64%**
n	5	**9**
95% confidence interval		±25.10%

Table 16. Results from the structured interviews, "would you have preferred another type of participatory democracy event?"

When asked, "Did you expect something different", 6 answers "Yes" (86 %, 95% confidence interval = ±25.92%) and 1 answers "No" (15%).

A simple explanation of these answers lies in the fact that most people participated for the first time in a participatory democracy event (80%, according to the structured interviews). Thus, most had no precise alternatives in mind. This did not prevent them from formulating criticism, as we will see later in this report.

As the second part of this report will demonstrate, empowered deliberations have an important potential to support the formation of European identity. But to do this, we must ensure high participation rates among citizens who have agreed to contribute to the deliberations. We will provide recommendations for this in deliverable 6.4

1.2. Difficulties in translations and multilingual interactions

The EuComMeet project experimented multilingual discussion between European citizens. The diversity of languages is a central feature of contemporaneous Europe. In this part, we will study how this diversity could be integrated to practices of deliberation and contribute to European Identity.

In EuComMeet, participants spoke in their national languages, Italian, French, English, German, and Polish. Respectfully, two Roman languages, two Germanic languages and one Slavic language. Why has this setting been chosen for European deliberations ? How can it be justified ? The European Union aspires to be a functional democracy in which high quality deliberations take place. These are favored by two desirable features. First, a *good* command of language from the discussants, with its vocabulary, expressions and nuances, as to convey sophisticated ideas and feelings. Second, and as far as possible, an *equal* command of language from the participants, no group being disadvantaged in the defense of its rights and interests by an inferior mastery of language. Politics should be "vernacular" that is to say, it should ideally unfold in languages and with references that all can understand and use with ease (Archibugi, 2005; Kymlicka, 2001).

To create deliberations among its citizens, the European Union is faced with two options : either use a *lingua franca* – English, by force of historical and colonial circumstances (Phillipson, 1992; Parijs, 2011) – or rely on simultaneous translation among its numerous different national and regional languages. The first solution might be dubbed as cosmopolitan and the second as multicultural (Archibugi, 2005).

To use English as a *lingua franca* would avoid resorting to simultaneous translation, giving the appearance of spontaneity and authenticity to discussions, at the price of two serious consequences.

To begin, it would create unacceptable inequalities among participants (Grin, 2005). As of today, command of English is unequal in the European population

(Gerhards, 2014). It is unequal between countries, and some countries have national languages closer to English than others. It is also unequal within the country themselves, the highest socio-professional categories, typically having a better command of English (*Ibid.*). Today, to use English as a *lingua franca* in a European deliberative forum would create or reinforce social inequalities in access to political activity and influence. It would discourage the members of poorest socio-professional categories to participate and interest themselves in European activities. This would probably result in a distortion of European public policies in favor of wealthier classes.

In the foreseeable future, one might imagine this problem alleviated. The EU could impose English classes from an early age, as to diminish the differences in mastery between social classes. This action would itself be limited by the fact that school can be a space for the reproduction of social inequalities in the acquisition of knowledge. It could also settle for a language that no member-States speaks, such as *Esperanto* or modern simplified Latin, *Interlingua*. Alas, these creative efforts would not avoid a second problem.

Indeed, the use of a lingua franca for deliberation could threaten the linguistic diversity in Europe, by placing all national and regional languages in a situation of relegation relative to a central dialect.

The European Union was built on the principle of preservation of the diversity of its members. It aspires to be a multilingual democracy, in which citizens could both perpetuate the identity and diversity of their national and regional languages and understand each other. Ideally, European citizens should virtually form a multilingual community in which communication flows without being restricted by language differences.

That is why it had been chosen to rely on, in the European Parliament (Archibugi, 2005) and in the EuComMeet project, simultaneous translation rather than on a single *lingua franca*. We will see if the technical realization has been up to the challenge.

Non-spontaneous translation made multilingual exchanges less convenient

The EuComMeet platform allowed for informatic translation for text exchanged in the chat, but not for oral exchanges. Thus, in the European plenaries, the participants could not directly talk to each other. Instead, they were asked to exchange by text, in the common European chat.

Unfortunately, the text-to-text informatic translation was not spontaneous. Each participant had to accomplish three tasks to translate each message : first, mouse hover the text to be translated, second, click on the first icon of a menu that appeared, and third, select the language in which the message should finally be translated. This tiny, but frustrating effort, had to be multiplied by the number of messages exchanged, which slowed down and complicated the discussion. Designer of Users Interfaces (UI) generally try to minimize the number of clicks a user has to realize to access relevant and plain information (Dilen, 2022).

To insure a free-flowing conversation, it would be better for the translation to be fully automatic and spontaneous as a default option, as it would nudge the participant to read and pay attention to all the messages. We could imagine that, by default, both the original message and its translation in the user's language automatically appear, to strike a balance between intercomprehension and authenticity of the exchanges.

The quality of translation was at times insufficient

The automatic text-to-text translation was satisfying. Most translated messages were understandable. However, it produced at times unnatural-sounding texts, whose interpretation and comprehension was difficult. At least one german participant declared to use Google translator rather than the platform's built-in translator :

"It is a great thing and extremely important. The problem is that I cannot use Google Übsetzer [Translate] as quickly as you write. : -) "

International EU plenary, german participant

A Polish participant also wrote :

"This automatic translation, however, often did not work as it should. Maybe GPT chat would work better ;-) "

International EU plenary, polish participant

These impressions are confirmed by the interviews conduced on 31 participants. When asked "How was the automated translation?", 5 answered "Bad" (50%, 95% confidence

interval = ±30.99%), 3 answered "Mixed" (30%, 95% confidence interval = ±28.40%) and only 2 answered "Good" (20%, 95% confidence interval = ±24.79%).

Most participants judged the translation either "Bad" or "Mixed". However, we can expect automatic translation to improve in the future. More advanced translations systems such as speech-to-text or speech-to-synthetic-speech could be experimented.

Multilingual discussions happened but did not transcend the language barriers

In the EU plenaries and EU text-forum, we do observe interactions between participants that speak different languages. For example, messages written in Polish are "liked" by French and Italian participants. Messages written in different languages responded to one another.

Nonetheless, it seems that language differences still over-determined the interaction between participants. To evaluate this we registered, in ten EU plenaries, all the messages that directly answered another message. Among 211 replies, 69.66% answered a message written in the same language. For a more precise picture, refer to the table below.

Language of reply	Language of message answered (Absolute number of messages)					% of messages that *do not* answer the same language
	Italian	French	English	Polish	German	
Italian	37	4	8	1	6	33.92%
French	12	45	6	0	1	29.68%
English	11	6	43	4	2	34.84%
Polish	0	0	1	2	0	33.33%
German	1	0	1	0	20	9.09%

Table 19. Analysis of messages answering other messages, by languages

It appears that most Italian messages answer to Italian messages, English messages to English messages, French messages to French messages, Polish messages to Polish messages and German messages to German ones. From which it follows that EuComMeet's participants did not truly form a multilingual community in which the language one speaks would not influence its probability to answer to another message.

The realization of a multilingual democracy, in which deliberation can simultaneously flow in different languages, is central to the contemporaneous European ideal. Given the diversity of languages among its member states, the European Identity can hardly be conceived on the basis of linguistic homogeneity, as related in the report 6.1. The Union built itself with the promises to end war of conquest between member states, allowing each to preserve its identity, whose language is an important part. Hence, we observe in the EU institutions an important normative commitment to the idea of linguistic diversity (Mos, 2020; Barbier, 2018), although in practice English is becoming increasingly dominant in work procedures.

Different compromises had been found in the working of the European institutions. On the one hand, the European Commission officially uses three working languages – English, French, German – with a de *facto* domination of English (Bellier, 2002; Salomone, 2022). This setting is made possible by the very nature of the commission : a body of specialized politicians and functionaries, in part selected on the basis of their plurilinguism. On the other hand, the European Parliament allows its members to speak in their national languages, though not in regional languages, thanks to a simultaneous translation system provided by human interpreters. This setting is suitable for a representative body whose members are not selected on the basis of their linguistic abilities.

This last model poses fewer barriers to participation, allows greater presentation of linguistic diversity, and does not threaten the construction of national identities on the basis of languages. It represents a hopeful path for a European public sphere that preserves linguistic diversity, to which European citizens are attached. In this way, it could enable stronger adhesion to European identity. The system of automatic translation of EuComMeet makes a step in this direction but falls short of the ideal.

1.3 Exchanges that do not conceive actions – shallowness of deliberation

In the following section, we will differentiate between three modes of conversation : "discussion", "debate" and "deliberation"(Lê Quan Phong, 2023). A "discussion" is a conversation about a certain topic, in which participants bring their opinions, reflections, and their knowledge of the subject. The participants answer each other, but do not attempt to convince each other. A "debate" is a discussion in which the participants criticize and put to question each other's position, with arguments. Participants attempt to convince each other of the merit of their respective positions. Finally, a "deliberation" is a debate oriented toward action (Manin, 2011). Throughout deliberation, precise options are proposed, compared and submitted to mutual criticisms. Deliberation allows participants to progressively precise and improve those options. The name of those three forms of communications are not to be taken as synonyms in the text that follows.

Many discussions, some debates, few actual deliberations ; no option crystallization.

EuComMeet was not conceived so that the participants progressively produce recommendations or a document transmitted to authorities. In this way, it stands out, for example, from the "European Citizen's Consultation" (2007) and the "Conference on the Future of Europe" (2021-2022), both of which produced final reports handed to officials. In this way, EuComMeet did not encourage participants to refine and challenge propositions to be included in a report. Instead, it implied a series of related tasks to discuss the subject. In the following passages, we represent these tasks by the tables used to synthesize their results.

First, in the *local debate* the participants had to reflect on the practices of their own city. The output of the discussion had to be filled in this table (the first line being filled here with examples), like the following :

City involved	Challenges	Good practice	What is fair	What is unfair
Sustainable mobility	No decent national railway system in Ireland : lots of railway stations closed in the country.	Free public bikes are great : we need more of them. Also explore free motorcycle.	Public transport is the fairest and most inclusive solution.	Electric cars are too expensive : few people can actually afford to be sustainable alone while being mobile.
Sustainable food consumption				
Plastic pollution				

Table 20. Framework of responses for the local debates

Second, in the *nation-debate*, the participants had to reflect on the criteria ensuring the fairness of a transition's measure, in their country and in all the other European cities. The results of the *local debates* were transmitted to the participants at the beginning of the discussion. The participants were invited to spell out four criteria. The output of the discussion had to be filled in this table :

	What are the criteria to ensure a transition's measure is fair for everyone in your country ?	**Do you think these criteria will be the same in each European city?**
Criteria 1	Fair and affordable energy (notably electricity) prices for everyone, especially at night (smart meters)	
Criteria 2	Role of public authorities in subsidizing the just transition (in purchasing electric cars, supporting farmer and primary food producers in switching to sustainable farming)	
Criteria 3		
Criteria 4		

Table 21. Framework of responses for the nation-debates

Third, in the *Nation text-forum*, participants were invited to discuss the three following subjects : sustainable food consumption, sustainable mobility and plastic pollution. The results of the *nation-debate* were transmitted to the participants at the beginning of the discussion. The moderator had to report a summary of the discussions on those three topics.

Fourth, in the *EU text-forum*, the participants were transmitted the criteria produced by the different countries in the nation-debate. They were invited to discuss the differences they perceived between their countries.

What are the differences between countries?	**Differences**	**Reasons**

Table 22. Framework of responses for the EU text-forums

Subsequently, they were invited to discuss the role of the EU they preferred, among five possibilities :

- "The European Union is sharing good practice."
- "The European Union is giving a dedicated budget on this."
- "The European Union is enforcing regulation to ensure the transition is fair for everyone."
- "The European Union is making links between cities to help them to coordinate."
- "The European Union is controlling what localities do regarding the criteria of fairness."

	What is the role of the EU that we prefer	**Explanations**
EU group's production		

Table 23. Framework of responses for the EU text-forums

Fifth, in the *EU plenary*, the participants had to react to videos of EU politicians presenting transition's measure. The moderator had to register the reactions of the participants to the videos in this table: Question : "How do you think the EU can help the cities to manage the green transition ?"

Field of actions	Priorities for the Citizens	Role of the EU	Negative reactions

Table 24. Framework of responses for the EU plenaries

As one can see, the EuComMeet process was to organize a guided collective reflection, but this did not allow the participants to develop specific requests independently. The Main Event prompted them to reflect on current policies at the local and European level, according to questions pre-formed by the organizers. The participants could hardly introduce and refine new policy ideas, as we will discuss in a next section.

No audition work / information research work

The participants were given a few "briefing documents" on the subject of discussions – sustainable mobility, sustainable food consumption, plastic pollution – under the form of a PowerPoint file. In the EU plenary, they could also see the videos of politicians describing their actions in these three areas.

On the one hand, Deliberative mini-publics, citizen's assemblies and other participatory forums typically encourage participants to look for more information. Crucially, they often allow the participants to ask questions to a panel of guest experts and to invite additional speakers to further the inquiry (Curato, 2021). In certain forums, participants can also directly ask questions to a documentation service.

On the other hand, EuComMeet's participants could not ask questions to the speakers whose videos they were watching, nor they could invite additional speakers. However, at every step, the participants could write questions to "experts", which provided them written answers in the next step of the process. EuComMeet's Main Event allowed participants to access some information, but it was not designed to entice them to inquiry nor to question the word of the experts.

Some participants complained that the event did not entail enough information, as this discussant in a European plenary :

"I think that the instrument of deliberation has […] potential. Among the steps mentioned above, I think that the first step is the most important: "knowledge" is a

Those testimonies could be relativized by the results of the structured interviews. Noticeably, when asked, "did you get out of this experience more informed or more confused about the problem under discussion?", most respondents indicated being more informed. However, this answer is only the result of their subjective sentiment. While most participants felt "more informed", short of a systematic verification of their knowledge before and after the event, we cannot be assured that this was indeed the case.

	More informed	More confused	Neither
% of respondents	**58%**	8%	33%
n	**7**	1	4
95% confidence interval	±27.89%	±15.64%	±26.67%

Table 25. Results from the structured interviews, "Did you get out of this experience more informed or more confused about the problem under discussion?"

Top-down dynamics

Since the participants could not interact with the videos of the politicians, they could not directly answer or contest their claims. This dynamic reproduces a hierarchy of status between citizens and elected officials. In all these ways, the Main Event had a top-down dynamic. This is not suitable to a genuine democratic exercise. A democratic process of deliberation should empower the citizens in three key aspects.

First, it should give them power to converse with elected officials on a basis of equality and mutual respect. The affirmation of moral equality between discussants is necessary to enable meaningful, honest, deliberations (Beauvais, 2018). A deliberative event should affirm the *status* of the participants and enable them to question and challenge the discourse of elected officials if they deem it necessary. To this end, if elected officials participate in the event, they should not only issue a declaration, but sustain a back-and-forth conversation.

When asked, "Would you have participated if you had discussed the topic with political representatives?", 6 participants answered "Yes" (86%, 95% confidence interval = ±25.92%), 1 participants answered "No" (14%).

Second, it should give the participants power to investigate and inform themselves independently, by inviting experts and witnesses. The audition setting should allow participants to question and contest the experts, to identify their possible biases, and to reflect collectively on them (Roberts et al., 2020; Van Wesep, 2016; Lê Quan Phong, 2023).

Third, a deliberative process should enable the citizens to develop not only a common understanding of the situation they face, but also to formulate solutions to what they perceive as problems. Further, the citizens should be able to formulate these solutions independently and to introduce new options to the agenda (Fung et al., 2011). Citizen's control of the agenda is an important aspect of democratic deliberation, which cannot be limited to pre-defined options (Landemore, 2017). The citizens should be able to refine and specify these options, in order to be able to propose solutions that are sufficiently precise, to be credible, authoritative and applicable. These are conditions of an "empowered" deliberation.

No foreseeable impact of exchanges on public policies

Indeed, the EuComMeet process had ostensibly no foreseeable impact on public decision-making, whether at the local, national or European level. The participants were not asked to produce conclusions nor a document summarizing their exchanges – although the moderators did write short reports.

Accordingly, the participants were not prompted to target a particular recipient of their discussions. The discussants evoked the States, the regions, large companies, the individuals. Further, the absence of foreseeable impact did not lead the participants to formulate precise measures. The discussants evoked and supported relatively vague calls to action. As a consequence, many participants perceived the discussions as superficial and unproductive, as these two testimonies illustrate well:

> "*Unfortunately, I found the process rather frustrating, as the ideas were neither debated nor challenged. We came up with our ideas and convictions, but at no point did we take the time to confront them. While the principle is a good one, I think that working in smaller committees and with moderators who were more involved and more thorough in the exchanges would surely have enabled us to build more complete ideas. [...] I didn't see many solutions emerge, and I was expecting that…*"
> International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, French female participant

"Deliberation is extremely important to be able to live a lively democracy. […] The forum here I find great, but technically you would have to improve a lot and also provide better information on how to proceed. My opinion has not changed here. The time is simply too short and the discussions too superficial. "
International EU Plenary, 18-05-2023, german participant

The impressions of the last testimony are corroborated by the structured interviews. Perusing them, it appears that the deliberation rarely changed the minds of participants : "Has this type of conversation changed your positions, and if so, when and in which direction?"

	Yes	**No**
% of respondents	15%	**85%**
n	2	**11**
95% confidence interval		±19.61%

Table 27. Results from the structured interviews, "Has this type of conversation changed your positions, and if so, when and in which direction?"

These feeble evolutions in the participant's position might be explained by the lack of diversity and the shallowness in deliberation. Group polarization is unlikely to have played an eminent role (Sunstein, 1999; Stasavage, 2007), given that no polarization between opposed groups was observed in EuComMeet. Interestingly, most participants interviewed reported to have acquired new ideas, perspectives and felt more knowledgeable about the topics of discussion.

When asked "There were moments you remember during this experience, in which you think you got new ideas, or you acquired a different perspective on the problems to be discussed?", 7 answered "Yes" , (70%, 95% confidence interval= ±28.40%), 3 answered "No" (30%).

Finally and fortunately, when asked, "did deliberations enable you to better understand perspectives on climate change and corresponding policy preferences that diverged from your own perspective and/or preferences?", 7 participants answered "Yes" (70%, 95% confidence interval= ±28.40%) 3 answered "No" (30%).

If the respondents adequately relate their understanding, we can gain comfort in the idea that the deliberation played a role in the "intercomprehension" of participants. According to (Niemeyer et al., 2007), deliberation shall facilitate "meta-consensus", "that is to say, agreements on the nature of issues and on the considerations (information, beliefs, values) that shall be taken into account" and "intersubjective rationality", "that is to say, agreements on the reasons why there are agreements and disagreements" among participants (Lê Quan Phong, 2023). From the structured interviews, we can reckon that the discussions, although they did not produce operationalizable options, they made it possible to achieve this.

As we will see in the next part, the difficulties voiced by participants do not amount to a rejection of deliberation *per se*. The participants of EuComMeet expressed a high support for the idea of deliberation and expressed requests to improve it.

Conclusion

This part shed light on three shortcomings of the deliberation process at EuComMeet, which hindered its potential to contribute to the formation of the European identity.

To begin, the event had a very low participation rate. Throughout the event, about 13.87% of the citizens invited to partake in a discussion actually attended it. This low participation rate had regrettable consequences. It diminished the descriptive representativity of the event, the diversity of opinions and thus the quality of deliberation.

The low participation rate can be explained by several hypotheses, supported by the structured interviews. The event was not linked to public decision, which reduced the motivation of the participants. It was conceived to blend in the professional and personal life of the participants, but finding the time to do so proved challenging for an important minority of them. Further, the platform was not easy to navigate, about half of the participants experiencing difficulty with it.

Next, the automatic translation system proved insufficient. Unfortunately, the participants had to manually click on each message to have it translated, which complicated their interactions. Further, the quality of translation was at times poor, prompting some to use Google Translation instead.

The participants were able to discuss in several languages simultaneously, but most replies to messages (about 69.66%), in the EU plenaries, occurred between

speakers of the same languages. In this way, the translation system at EuComMeet had been a flawed, but encouraging, attempt at citizen's multilingual deliberation in the European Union.

Finally, the deliberation proved relatively shallow. The discussions were not oriented toward the production of precise recommendations or a document to be handed to authorities. Further, the participants could not answer the declarations of the politicians and experts that testimonies before them, a regrettable top-down feature. The participants were not able to put new options on the agenda, to challenge and to refine them. That is why some participants perceived the deliberation as superficial and unproductive.

Despite these limitations, the process prompted meaningful exchanges between the participants relating to deliberation and European Identity, subjects to which we now turn. The most significant contribution of this report will be to show that the participants themselves, in the course of their discussions, identified and articulated demands to improve citizen's participation in Europe. They also expressed positive conceptions of the European identity grounded in collective action. Thus, participants outlined solutions to two pressing problems in this report, as we will see in the second part.

2. The successes of EuComMeet: manifestation and construction of European identity in exchanges

Before going any further, let us remember the definition and understanding of "identity" we adopted. In this report, we define the "identity" as the representation one makes of oneself by integrating and mobilizing one's features (E. Kunnen et al., 2006). One can mobilize differently those features according to the context and ongoing social interactions, which will incentives or sanction these features. In this way, group belonging will alter both personal identity (as an individual) and group identity (as a member of the group). Indeed, there is a "social component of identity", understood as "the part of one's self-concept that is informed by one's membership in groups defined by some shared attribute, such as language, religion, or race." (Kalin et al., 2018). In the instance of the European identity, it is important to avoid a group self-definition centered on religion or ethnicity, which would reproduce phenomena of racialization and ethnic suprematism (Baber, 2004; Martinot, 2003; Murji et al., 2005).

We will investigate what the deliberation of the participants at EuComMeet's Main Events revealed about their representation of the European Union and themselves as Europeans. What shared attributes did the participants focus on to develop and express a collective identity in EuComMeet ?

To do so, we will analyze their speeches and report on the recurring patterns. We choose ten EU discussions – plenaries and text-forum – counting between 3100 and 3400 messages, which we read extensively. From these discussions, we identified 192 messages of interest, which we classified under nine topics :

1. Exchanges with other EU citizens (7 messages)

2. Meeting of different viewpoints and access to new information (17 messages)

3. Deliberation and its outcomes (84 messages)

   1. Deliberation of the citizens opposed to an exclusive decision-making power of politicians (9 messages

   2. To generate new ideas (40 messages)

   3. Demands for impact and accountability (9 messages)

4. Demands for referendum and institutionalization (16 messages)

4. Identification of common or different problems among countries (10 messages)

5. Transfer of practices (8 messages)

6. EU regulations (15 messages)

7. EU funding and subsidies (16 messages)

8. Support for local decisions (10 messages)

9. Critics of the process & of the current state of political affairs (25 messages)

In total, 45 of such messages are directly quoted in this report. The EU Plenaries in which they were produced happened at the end of the cycle of discussions, after the locale debate, nation text-forum, nation-debate and the EU text-forums. In the latter, the participants were asked to discuss the "criteria of fairness [in ecological transition]" produced by the different countries in the nation-debates. Subsequently, they were invited to discuss the role of the EU they preferred, among five possibilities :

- "The European Union is sharing good practice."
- "The European Union is giving a dedicated budget on this."
- "The European Union is enforcing regulation to ensure the transition is fair for everyone."
- "The European Union is making links between cities to help them to coordinate."
- "The European Union is controlling what localities do regarding the criteria of fairness."

These instructions obviously influenced the themes of the participants' messages. However, these messages provide us with important information on their opinions and attitudes towards these themes, at the end of the EuComMeet process.

The 45 messages directly quoted in the report were produced in the EU plenaries, in which the participants had to react to videos of EU politicians presenting transition's measure. The moderator had to register the reactions of the participants to the videos, to answer the question "How do you think the EU can help the cities to manage the green transition ?"

The discussions highlighted some possible basis of European identity : the mobilization towards common goals, through EU regulation, subsidies and local actions, enable the Europeans to put forward shared values and representations. These policy goals can themselves be identified and determined by empowered citizens' deliberation, which provide legitimacy and increase their relevance.

Deliberation among Europeans establishes a *space* in which citizens can represent themselves, not only as members of their home countries, but also as members of a political community facing common challenges and striving toward common *goals*.

We will show how these elements have come forward in discussions, and how participants identified in their deliberations necessary changes for this European identity to come to realization.
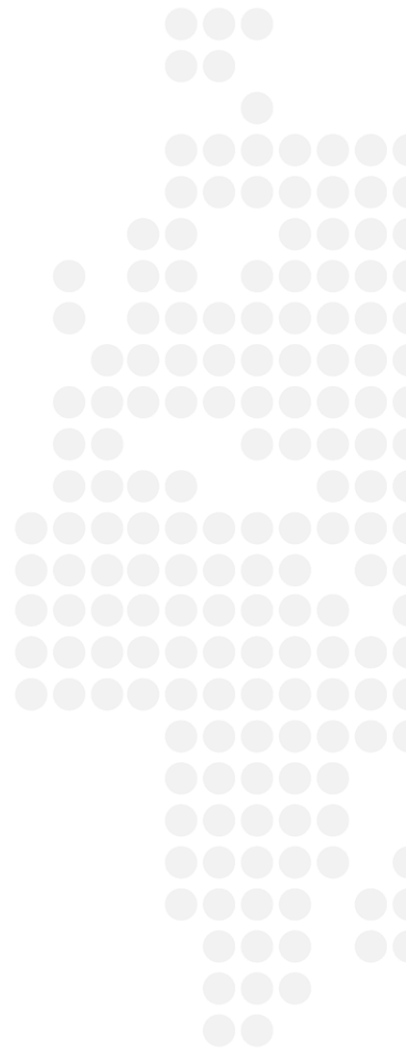
2.1. Deliberation and European political identity

This first section of the second part of the report aims to determine *to what extent would a deliberative and bottom-up management of community affairs strengthen a European political identity based upon the people's constituent power at a continental scale?*

In the EU plenaries and text-forum that closed the main events macro-groups, the observed EuComMeet's participants produced a great wealth of messages reflecting on deliberation, its advantages, outcomes, and perspectives. Reading and classifying these messages provide rich information on the attitudes toward deliberation of EU citizens and their demand for empowerment.

2.1.1 Support for deliberation

At the end of the EU plenaries, participants were asked three questions about the process itself : "Did you change your ideas on the topics as a consequence of deliberation?", "What do you think about deliberation?" and "What did you learn from the other participants?".

Meeting other EU citizens

The answers to these prompts invariably showed high enthusiasm for the discussions themselves. We observed messages expressing pleasure and gratitude to discuss and exchange with other EU citizens.

"Firstly, I would like to thank you for giving me a voice. I at long last thanks to this meeting and talking to fellow citizens feel truly part of the EU."

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, Irish participant

"The debates also reassured me that Europe's action is positive and democratic and that we all have a role to play in helping the ecological transition."
International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, Irish participant

"Seems the participants from all countries agree and are positive and anxious for change... if we could spread this attitude among all citizens"

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, Irish participant

Nevertheless, when interpreting those messages, one has to remember that the EuComMeet panel has a strong bias in selection. The citizens that accepted to sign in

the process and who participated in the EU plenaries and text-forum were probably already pro-European or had already a strong interest in the activities of the EU in the first place. Indeed, in the interviews conducted after the events, many participants declared to have committed to following the process out of an interest for the European Union.

Hearing different viewpoints

We also observed messages expressing explicitly the pleasure to hear different viewpoints and to learn new information. Interestingly, few observed participants (15% of the respondents in the structured interviews) reported to have changed their ideas as a consequence of deliberation. When asked, most participants reported that they did not change their mind but felt more knowledgeable and appreciated the exchanges with citizen's from other countries.

"I didn't change my ideas, but it was interesting to know about what is happening in other counties and countries. I would say it brought some clarity and facts. "

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, Irish participant

"Each country has a very different starting point, i.e. wealthier countries have been in a position to invest more in their solar, wind, hydroelectric generation and started on this journey earlier than some less well-off countries with less ability to invest. Some of these may be more recent additions to the EU. Clearly, some countries have made greater inroads in building their electric car charging infrastructure and provided greater financial incentives / grants toward the purchase of electric and hybrid vehicles. "

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, Irish participant

"It was very interesting and a good way to hear many people's different points of view, especially as people from cities had different ideas and opinions than people from rural areas. "
International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, Irish participant

During the discussions at EuComMeet, we observed two main divisions in Europe expressed by the participants and illustrated by the quotes above. First, between wealthy countries, with an advanced ecological transition and poorer countries, further behind on the transition. Second, between cities and rural areas, more dependent on cars - a divide that seems to transcend countries.

Although the participants highlighted the differences in situations between their respective countries, these were never expressed in a confrontational manner. Nor were there direct reproaches among nationalities. For example, no criticism has been made against the Poles for coal, against the Germans for their aversion to nuclear power, against the Italians for their automobile lobby, against the French for their increasing use of pesticides, etc.

2.2.2 The benefits of deliberation according to the participants

The participants themselves identified what they perceived as the advantages of deliberation. We classified those messages under two broad functions : deliberation as a tool to generate new valuable policy ideas, and deliberation as a tool to overcome the limitations of politicians.

Deliberation to generate new ideas

Some messages adopted what specialists might call an "epistemic" approach toward deliberation, viewed as a rational and civil process to gather information and opinions and produce apt ideas.

The literature on deliberation insists on several epistemic phenomena. First, (Landemore, 2012) emphasizes the gathering of information enabled by the meeting of diverse groups, encompassing diverse life experiences and ways of reasoning ("cognitive diversity"). Second, (Mercier et al., 2011) highlight the importance of deliberation for the production of sophisticated and sound arguments and, most importantly, counter-arguments. Third, (Sunstein et al., 2015) insist on the free expressions of critics among discussants, which promotes group intelligence. Lastly, (Goodin et al., 2018) shows how the size of the group and the individual aptitude of the participants determine the likelihood of the group to choose the "correct" option in a vote. Which of these approaches is closest to the attitude of the participants ?

"Deliberation is good - everybody comes with ideas and knowledge (we are not the same, we all have different skills and knowledge) sharing it and communicating can lead to success, one may have an idea - others may have tools to do it - others have the money (government/EU). "

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

"I think that deliberation is the key to our success as humans. We are social beings, and I think that events like this remind people that there are faces behind these ideas. I think everyone was very civil in most chats, and I think that a lot can be said for promoting conversations in places where people are calm and comfortable rather than angry (such as at political rallies or protests). "

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

"Deliberation is an extremely democratic process and necessary to team up and act in the best possible way"

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Italian participant

"I also find the idea of the citizens' forum very exciting, understanding people's "expertise" as a usable asset and thus promoting real democracy makes sense."

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, German male participant

Their speeches emphasized the gathering of diverse opinions and information, as evidenced by the messages above. However, they did not evoke the exchanges of counterarguments and critics. Indeed, the participants remarked that there were few dissenters to argue with.

Deliberation to overcome the limitations of politicians

The participants also evoked what they perceived as a gap between the actions of politicians and the measures necessary for the ecological transition. Faced with this problem, some of them confidently affirmed deliberation as a necessary tool to overcome the limitations of politicians.

"[Deliberation] reinforces my belief that we need to listen to citizens and not just let politicians choose. "

"I've noticed a huge gap between what officials say and propose, and what citizens actually live and think. We feel helpless and worried when faced with decisions taken without consultation, most of which are inapplicable. Electric vehicles at unaffordable prices, lack of public transport, no energy renovation possible when you're a tenant, and so on. "

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, French female participant

"I think that often politicians are so scared of public opinion that they don't even suggest "difficult" topics as matters of discussion. But often we are all open to discussion and might be more willing to make changes than they believe."

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

"It's very important not only that they're consulting citizens, but they acknowledge how important it is. I think this should be "amplified" so more people know about these initiatives and become more engaged/involved in politics that will impact everybody's lives. "

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

"This initiative could (potentially) be the door to a "REAL EU", where policies would be applicable to all and everyone. "
International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

These declarations should be put in perspective with the very divided receptions of the videos of politicians in EuComMeet, evidenced by the structured interviews.

"Did you find the intervention of experts and politicians useful, irrelevant, limited?"

	Useful, relevant	Irrelevant, not useful
% of respondents	47%	53%
n	8	9
95% confidence interval		±23.73%

Table 30. Results from the structured interviews, "Did you find the intervention of experts and politicians useful, irrelevant, limited?"

While the intervention of experts was not criticized, the interventions of politicians have been by a few participants. A participant doubted that politicians really listen to citizens, four others explicitly denounced vague and irrelevant statements from politicians, akin to waffle.

We can suppose that the reception of the politician's interventions in EuComMeet and the propensity of participants to perceive citizen's deliberation as a way to overcome the limitations of elected officials depends on the satisfaction of each participant with the current political system in the first place. Many studies have centered on the trust of citizens in national elected officials (Marien et al., 2011; Weber et al., 2017). They report

important differences among European countries, as consistently evidenced by the periodical *Eurobarometers* surveys (Talving et al., 2021). In 2020, the report *How's Life* from the OECD (OECD, 2020) noted that 34.2% of Poles declared to trust their government, 35.4% of Italians, 43.4% of French, 60.8% of German and 62.3% of Irish.

Further, research have developed the idea that trust in political authorities and institutions is correlated with the willingness of citizens to accept sacrifice for the ecological transition - such as the acceptance of environmental taxes (Kollmann et al., 2015; Kitt et al., 2021; Taniguchi et al., 2018). In this perspective, politicians are willing to carry out the ecological transition and shall convince reluctant citizens to accept it, even if it requires sacrifices.

But in EuComMeet, the participant's speeches express a completely different narrative. Citizens perceive *themselves* as willing and motivated to achieve the ecological transition. Conversely, many perceive politicians as timid, unmotivated and unwilling to offer the necessary services – to quote a participant above : affordable electric vehicles, public transport, energy renovation, etc. We notice a combination of distrust in the government and its competency, and heightened concern for the environment.

In addition, it is extremely important to note that the participants in EuComMeet, did not express distrust and skepticism toward officials of the European Union, "Brussels" or "the Commission" in particular. They expressed skepticism towards elected officials in general, and their discontent was principally directed towards national politicians.

Why do participants in EuComMeet express they cannot fully rely on elected officials to carry out the ecological transition ? In their messages, at the local, national and Europeans levels, two main arguments arise. First, politicians would be under the influence of lobbying groups, with interests opposed to those of the majority. This idea is particularly prevalent towards Italians and French participants.

> *"Nothing new. I think we almost all want the same thing, but we are usually not heard. The lobby rules, that's the problem. Citizens would often do many things differently, more practically."*
> International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, German female participant
> *"A stronger push is needed, however, to move away from certain production, or at least, as soon as possible, to change certain highly polluting production processes. At a global level, the influence of lobbies is heavy."*

"But which elected official is going to make decisions that undermine our system totally based on Capital, Profit and Dividends at the risk of seeing his career end immediately at the next election? Lobbying of all kinds must be banned."
International EU Plenary, 19-05-2023, French participant

Second, politicians would not be sufficiently informed about the needs, constraints and demands of their constituents. As we have seen, both of these arguments bolster the demands for empowered deliberation among the participants.

2.1.3. The demands of the participants with regard to deliberation

The participants demonstrated a strong support for the idea and practice of deliberation. The messages calling for its development to drive the ecological transition, more effectively than elected politicians alone, do support the idea that a deliberative and bottom-up management of community affairs could strengthen a European political identity based upon the people's constituent power at a continental scale.

When asked, *"do you think tools like the one you used would make people feel closer to the democratic process?"* all participants answered a resounding "yes", to which many of them added conditions.

	Yes	No
% of respondents	**100%**	0%
n	**15**	0
95% confidence interval	±20.00%	

Table 31. Results from the structured interviews, "do you think tools like the one you used would make people feel closer to the democratic process?"

Indeed, this would only be possible to the extent that certain conditions, that the participants themselves identified, are respected. The citizens of EuComMeet reflected on these conditions, which implies significant evolutions of the national and European democratic institutions. We can identify two broad demands : first, a clear impact of deliberation on public policies and the accountability of public authorities to participants ; second, the institutionalization of deliberation and direct participation, in particular through the referendum.

Demand for impact and accountability

Although EuComMeet's main event had no promised impact on EU policies, many participants in the local, national and European discussions expressed their hope and desire to see their propositions taken into account by the relevant political authorities.

" I hope our suggestions are taken on board "

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, German female participant

"Deliberation is something which must be implemented, hopefully also includes a way to check the progress and results, in case if the results are under the expectations it would be important to put in place some flexibility which permits corrections "

International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, Italian male participant

"I wonder what purpose this consultation will serve? Who will read and study these exchanges? "

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, French female participant

"Deliberation is a very interesting democratic concept, but we'll have to see how well the ideas put forward are taken into account. "

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

"How will our exchanges be synthesized and sent to the members of the European committee of the regions? That's a question I'm wondering about. "

International EU Plenary, French participant

"It's always interesting to share. Now we'll just have to see whether the ideas we've put forward will be taken on board at European level, so that we can move forward.
International EU Plenary, French participant

These declarations are puzzling since EuComMeet, as we recalled in the first part of this report, was not conceived to transmit recommendations to authorities. How can we explain these speeches ? We do know that influence on public decisions is a key motivation for participants in deliberative experiments (Monnoyer-Smith, 2013). It appears that some participants at EuComMeet either misunderstood the situation or deluded themselves on the influence of their implication, imagining themselves having more power than they really had. It is even possible that participants hoping, wrongly, to have an influence on European decisions were more inclined to participate.

Demand for an institutionalization

As we have just seen, many participants asked for the deliberations to have an influence on the actions of public authorities and that they would be accountable for their actions. Their language evokes accountability and the ability to monitor the elected official's action in the long run. Indeed, these speeches go counter to the idea of punctual and occasional deliberative events, without follow-up, which have constituted the practice of the European Union to date (Kies et al. (eds.), 2013). Participants proposed to institutionalize the citizen's power.

"These kinds of initiatives should regularly be put in place to assure the follow-up of the subjects "

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

"The EU can run more projects and ask public opinion. "

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

"As stated by other speakers, it is essential for the EU to get closer to and get to know the population (which local policy should also do…)."

The participants evoked two mechanisms to do so : citizen's assemblies and referendums.

"Deliberation is a good thing, but you have to know who is deliberating, how the people who give their opinion are chosen: by drawing lots, by volunteering, etc. "

International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, French male participant

In this message, a participant asks a fundamental question : should the citizen's deliberation in the EU entirely function by volunteering, or should it use sortition, which ensure a superior descriptive representation ?

Citizen's assemblies

The other participants did not offer a clear answer, but other messages seemed to champion the institutionalization of assemblies drawn by lot.

"Should the EU set up a citizens' parliament to share ideas and report to the parliament?"

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, Irish participant

This message, formulated as a question, plausibly evokes a permanent European citizen's assembly tasked to send propositions and reports to the elected European Parliament. Today, this idea is defended by several activists and academic groups, such as *YouMove Europe* and *DemocracyNext*. It is quite novel to hear this idea outside these circles.

"It would be useful to have a constant comparison with a citizens' committee from each country, as we are doing now, in order to keep a close eye on the voice of the people."

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Italian participant

This distinct proposition seems to envision a permanent citizen's assembly in each country, apparently to control the conformity of domestic or EU policies with the will of its population. The formulation is intriguing : there are multiple countries, each with a "citizen's committee", but one "voice of the people", in the singular. As if the different Europeans populations were expected to express in fundamentally similar ways. We will come back to this idea later, with the notion of a "European deliberative constitutional patriotism".

While these observations come from a few messages, it is striking to see the participants spontaneously engage in an exercise of constitutional design and envision new representative institutions, when prompted to express themselves about deliberation. This bolsters the notion that everyday citizens themselves can craft the fundamental social contract. It bolsters the idea of popular constitution-making that do not rely on the propositions of a strongman, ratified by plebiscite, but on the workings of a representative assembly in which citizens can participate : the idea of deliberative constitution-making (Choudhry et al., 2020; Reuchamps et al., 2023; Landemore, 2020).

Further, the citizens who do so seem aware of the issue of the representativeness of citizens involved in deliberation, which we evoked in the first part of this report.

It is useful to put in perspective the discussions at EuComMeet, with the Conference on the Future of Europe's Citizen panel on Democracy and the Rule of Law proposition 39 (2021) :

"Holding Citizens' Assemblies periodically, on the basis of legally binding EU law. Participants must be selected randomly, with representativeness criteria, and participation should be incentivized. If needed, there will be support of experts so that assembly members have enough information for deliberation. If the outcomes

are not taken on board by the institutions, this should be duly justified; Participation and prior involvement of citizens and civil society is an important basis for political decisions to be taken by elected representatives."

As one can see, the participants at the Conference on the Future of Europe and EuComMeet converged on key demands : that the deliberation be institutionalized, through frequent repetitions and laws, be representative, be nourished by facts and be binding for elected officials.

The referendums

In addition, eight messages in the observed EuComMeet's European plenaries called for the use of a well-known tool of direct democratic participation, the referendum.

"I find the best form of consultation to know the will of the people is through the referendum."

International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, Italian participant

"The referendum seems a good solution, since it give a voice to everybody"

International EU Plenary, 23-05-2023, French male participant

"The decision to create more cycle lanes or mores pedestrian streets and remove cars should also count with popular vote by local referendums "

International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, Italian female participant

Note that the referendum does not seem to be systematically opposed to direct deliberation or elections, as in the following messages :

"It would be good if we made more use of referendums and deliberations like this one. "

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

"Deliberation must be actively implemented by all European citizens with voting and referendum instruments. "

International EU Plenary, 18-05-2023, Italian female participant

The requests for referendums represent an important and possibly transgressive demand. By definition, it is the most direct tool of democratic participation and the tool that involves the participation of the greatest number of people. However, the different European countries have contrasted histories and practices of the referendum (Morel,

2019). For example, the German Basic Law only provides for referendums at the federal level to confirm the new limitations of Länder (article 29). At the level of the Länder however, there can be citizen's initiative and referendums on laws, both binding and non-binding. In France, the referendum on an ordinary law can effectively only be triggered by the President of the Republic (article 11), a provision which in September 2023, has not been used since 2005. In Italy, there are popular referendum, prompted by a petition, to abolish an existing law.

In the European Union, there are no pan-European referendums. As Bruno Kauffman relates "Two decades ago, in the Convention on the Future of Europe – which itself was the consequence of a popular vote, the Irish "no" on the Nice Treaty – discussed a whole set of initiative and referendum tools to be introduced at the EU level. In the very end majorities of the Convention members voted in favor of these reforms, while the Convention's chairperson – former French president Giscard D´Estaing, as a gate-keeper for the member state governments – vetoed this move."

We have already compared the demands expressed in EuComMeet and the results of the Conference on the future of Europe. In its proposition 38-2 was "Conceiving an EU wide referendum, to be triggered by the European Parliament, in exceptional cases on matters particularly important to all European citizens." It's Europe's Citizen panel on Democracy and the Rule of Law also recommended "that the initiative to organize a referendum can also come from the citizens themselves (following, for example, similar rules as the European Citizens' Initiative)" with a vote of 77.5%.

How could the regular organization of pan-European referenda, requested by the participants, contribute to European identity? They could be an important factor in the emergence of a European public sphere. As EuComMeet deliverable 6.2 reminded, in the early 2020s, the public conversation on European affairs remained primarily national. Political parties, elected on the basis of national or regional constituencies, tend to approach European issues through the sole lens of national interests and domestic partisan struggles. This perception of European affairs through the exclusive lens of national interests is, for example, an impediment to the development of European financial solidarity (Miró, 2022)

However, single-constituency pan-European referenda would create political identifications, alliances and oppositions across the national frontiers. The voters, partisans and opponents of each proposition submitted to the referendum, would be brought to confront each other peacefully and support each other from one end of the Old Continent to the other. One could identify with the other voters, who, elsewhere in

Europe, has voted like them, on the exact same question. The media would also be encouraged to identify those cross-national coalitions of voters, becoming the new actors of this new European public sphere. Rivaling Europeans political identities, in the plural, would appear and contribute to the importance of European identity, in the singular.

In this light, the regular organization of pan-European referenda could both contribute to the formation of a European public sphere, to the Europeanisation of national public sphere and thus, to the reinforcement of European identity.

In conclusion, the participant's messages bolster the idea that empowered citizen's deliberation could become an important aspect of the European Identity. The citizen's assemblies, the citizen's initiative and the referendums are three different devices which can give rise to empowered deliberations. The Citizens' Assembly aims to spark deliberation in the confined and regulated space of the assembly, in order to produce sound decisions and compromises. The citizen's initiative will be useful to put the subject to the deliberative agenda and the referendum. The referendum will spark deliberation throughout society, in everyday conversations. These three devices work together to improve the functioning of the deliberative system. We will now elaborate on this idea, through the lens of a contemporaneous ideal : constitutional patriotism.

2.1.4. Toward a deliberative constitutional patriotism

The idea of "constitutional patriotism" notably defined by Jürgen Habermas seeks to ground the attachment in a political community neither in a common ethnic or religious basis, nor in an opposition to common enemies, but in the norms, procedures, and values of the community (Lacroix, 2002; Müller et al., 2008).

Distinguishing itself from the rest of the report, this section will be based not on the analysis of EuComMeet observations, but on a literature review, nourished by intuitions resulting from this experience.

Three objections to European constitutional patriotism and their answers

The application of this idea to European identity has produced three important criticisms that we will briefly review. We hope to sketch a new approach of "European deliberative constitutional patriotism" taking these criticisms into account.

First, authors have pointed out that the values and norms underlying constitutional patriotism are presumed to be universals (Kumm, 2017). Attachment to human life, civic rights and democratic process are not exclusive to any particular place. They are principles enshrined in international law. As noted (Ballangé, 2020), Europe presents itself as exceptional and as an example of universal values. It is paradoxical for Europe to affirm its singularity on the bases of values that supposedly every political community should respect and affirm.

Second, critics have pointed out that abstract principles could very well be insufficient to generate an attachment to a particular community. A clever answer to these objections can be found in the interpretation of Habermas by Kumm. As he remarks, while the principle might be abstract (and universal), the very efforts undertaken by a community to respect them will be concrete (and particular) :

"Stories relating to blood, sweat, and tears are also likely to be central to the identities of citizens committed to constitutional patriotism. Moreover, these tales of sacrifice, heroism, or failure will be crafted around the vindication of, struggle for, or tragic violation of the universal principles that lie at the heart of constitutional patriotism." (Kum, 2017)

Likewise, a European patriotic deliberative constitutionalism would revolve around principles and practices thought as universal by destination. Deliberation and

direct democracy form a common legacy of Humankind. Europeans might ought to cherish those principles, but they are not restricted to Europe.

What is important is that when striving to apply these principles, in the course of their deliberations, mobilizations and vote, and afterward at the time of the implementation of common decisions, Europeans create bonds of attachment and identification between themselves. These bonds could be threefold: recognize the other Europeans as equal *interlocutors* and members of one deliberative community, recognize the other Europeans as sharing common *values,* and recognize the others Europeans as partners engaged in *common efforts* towards those values. In this light, European constitutional patriotism could progressively come to life as its underlying institutions produce discussions and policy actions that Europeans can respect and take pride in.

Precisely, a third problem, evoked by (Kumm, 2017) is that current institutions of the European Union might not be able to generate a European constitutional patriotism. The author points to the relative lack of power of the directly elected European Parliament, which cannot initiate laws nor completely determine the European Commission.

Conditions for the realization of European deliberative patriotism

The observation of EuComMeet bolsters the idea that a "deliberative and bottom-up management of community affairs" could contribute to European political identity. The European Union could be perceived as a democratic space that provides possibilities to citizens to shape public policy by direct deliberation among peers and by referendums.

But, as we have just pointed out, we shall insist that this can only be possible if significant reforms are conducted, to ensure that key citizen's demands are met. While deliberation arouses enthusiasm and a warm feeling of community in participants, it can only support the European identity if it is perceived as important and genuine.

First, the deliberation shall have a foreseeable and significant impact on public policies. Crucially, the deliberations should be authoritative enough to complete or counter-balance the perceived insufficiency or inadequacy of decisions taken by elected officials. As far as the observation of EuComMeet can tell, the Europeans citizens demand a strong accountability and control of their elected officials, control that can be partially realized through deliberative tools.

Second, they shall be frequent and institutionalized through devices, such as citizen's assemblies, that ensure their representativeness. The exchanges at EuComMeet suggest that EU citizens are ready for a conversation on the new representative institutions that could be instated. The EU citizens should themselves determine their shape, through an exercise of people's constituent power.

Third, deliberation should work in conjunction with other direct participation tools. The participants of EuComMeet regularly championed the use of the referendum. Today, transnational European referendums are not possible in the European Union. If instated, they could give a direct say on legislation or constituent matter to millions of EU citizens.

As written in the report 6.1 (p. 29-30), the objective of "reinforcement of an open European identity […] cannot be limited to the hundreds of people participating in the deliberations that will be organized". Moreover, severe criticism targets the mini-public whose agenda and whose possible binding decisions would escape "the democratic control of the mass of citizens" (Lafont, 2020; Fishkin, 2020). How can deliberative forums can be integrated with the direct participation of citizens in an inclusive "deliberative system" (Parkinson et al. (eds.), 2012)? In other words, how can they contribute to the formation of a European public sphere, in which Europeans affairs are discussed, a European public sphere which Report 6.1 reminded us is lacking today?

Referendums and, perhaps to a lesser extent, petitions, are possible means to link great masses of citizens to mini-public. In 2011, the experiment What's Next California provided an example of a deliberative mini-public responsible for examining petitions and submitting some to the referendum (Fishkin et al., 2015). This sequence integrating participatory, deliberative and direct democracy continues to inspire theorists. Today, an activist group such as DemocracyNext, proposed, along with the European University Institute, a permanent "European Citizens' Assembly" (Berg et al., 2023). They wish that a European Citizen Initiative (ECI) be able to put a proposition to the deliberative agenda of the European Citizen's Assembly ; the resulting recommendations would be submitted to "pan-EU multi-referenda, including several topics".

This sophisticated and empowered deliberative system is likely to multiply the common *spaces* of discussions about European values and policies. For example, everyday citizens would be encouraged to discuss the ongoing petitions (ECIs), the current workings of the European Citizen's Assembly and the forthcoming European

referendums. So many spaces of discussions in which deliberation can strengthen the feeling of belonging to a community of citizens moving towards common goals. Likewise, the media themselves are likely to increase their coverage of European democratic exercise, whose decision-making impact would be greater. In this way, an empowered deliberative system would support the Europeanization of public national debates (see the report 6.1), the formation of a European public sphere and of a European identity.

The establishment of a European deliberative system must be determined by legal texts, in order to guarantee its legal certainty and its proper functioning. These legal texts themselves can be established through citizen's deliberations and contributions (Reuchamps et al., 2016). To find a deliberative constitutional patriotism, Europe must equip itself with the equivalent of a constitution guaranteeing the citizens' new rights of participation and deliberation.

Three possible advantages of European deliberative constitutional patriotism

EuComMeet was not, per se, an example of deliberative constitutional patriotism. Instead, EuComMeet had shown attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate that deliberative constitutional patriotism could develop and bolster European identity. If this path is pursued, the advantages of such a deliberative European constitutional patriotism could be threefold.

First, it would reinforce the feeling of belonging to one community. Today, the formation of a European constitutional patriotism rests principally on elected representative institutions, such as national governments and Members of the European Parliament (MEP). These institutions present the double particularity to split the representation along partisan and national line (Kumm, 2017)

Thus, European politics can be perceived as a negotiation between countries, or block of countries – the Hanseatic league, the Visegrád group, Mediterranean countries, the French-German axis – of diverging interests (Schulz et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2021). These phenomena constitute a severe limitation for the development of a European identity through political action.

Meanwhile, a European deliberative constitutional patriotism would add institutions in which citizens act, neither as appointed members of a party and or a country, but as European citizens. As we observed in the deliberations, the participants tended to present themselves as individual citizens striving for common understanding and solution, rather than representative of the interests of their respective countries.

In other words, European deliberations construct common *spaces* in which the citizens can act and see themselves *as* Europeans and as *equals interlocutors*.

Second, the development of deliberative practice could favor the formation of a shared cultural identity through common experiences and EU action. Deliberation enables Europeans to identify and express common *values*, *issues* and *challenges*. It enables them to commit to common *actions*. In their turn, the efforts carried out to strive for these common goals can become a source of pride and collective identity.

Lastly, a deliberative European constitutional patriotism could reinforce trust in European institutions. The participants of EuComMeet regularly expressed frustration with respect to what they perceived as a disconnection between the elected officials and their will. The problem of the influence of lobbying on public decision-making is also evoked and can undermine trust in the European Union. The development of deliberative practices could, on the one hand, produce public policies more closely aligned with the preferences of the public, and on the other hand, provide greater legitimacy to those policies, by showing that they are indeed the fruit of the activity of European citizens themselves. Further, a stronger European identity would reinforce the support for financial solidarity among member-States, which we will see is very important for the participants (see 2.2.4), (Verhaegen, 2018).

In the next part, we will see how the action of the European Union, whether regulatory or pecuniary, resulting from the deliberations of citizens, might strengthen European identity.

Limits of the EuComMeet experiment

The proposal for a "European deliberative constitutional patriotism" might be of great interest for the future of the European Union and certainly is worthy of discussion. However, it is important to recognize that the data collected by the EuComMeet project are severely insufficient to conclude that this idea corresponds or responds to profound aspirations of the European population or a significant proportion of it.

Indeed, the citizens involved in the EuComMeet experiment are a limited number and their social characteristics are unknown. They might only represent a small, enlightened pro-European minority. Although the participants had been initially selected by lot, it is likely that the most pro-Europeans attended more of the sessions than those hostile to the Union, which engender an auto-selection bias in the panel. While the

EuComMeet experiment provides intuitions and observations, its results can hardly be generalized to the entire European population

Additional research are necessary to determine with higher certainty whether the specific frame for social interaction created by the deliberative setting can shape orientations favorable to the common good and a European identity.

It would require to conduct the experiment with a panel, or a Citizen's Assembly, whose social composition (in term of sex, age, socioeconomic class, living environment, diploma, etc.) correspond to the European population, and to compare its results with a control group of citizens, whose social composition would also correspond to the European population. Although this is a demanding task, any potential future European Citizens Assembly could be a good occasion and framework to accomplish it.

With these necessary reminders, we can move on to the next section, devoted to participants' perceptions of the EU's role and the possible construction of a shared European identity.

2.2. A shared identity ? The participants discuss the role of the EU

"It was also good to "refresh" the European feeling with all these discussions and points in common"

Participant of EU plenary, on the 7th May 2023

One of the aims of the report is to determine to "what extent could the setting up of deliberative procedures favor the emergence of a shared cultural identity in which permanent and institutionalized dialogue between the actors of various national history and ways of life could limit the risk of essentialist antagonisms thanks to the coproduction of a common future."

In this section, we study how the participants related to the common experiences and differences they perceived between themselves. To do so, we collected the messages on two topics: the transfers of practices between regions and municipalities and the role of local decision-making.

We also wonder how the action of the European Union, decided by a permanent and deliberative dialogue, could contribute to a shared cultural identity between Europeans. In the last section, we hypothesized that deliberation would enable the Europeans to recognize each other as bearers of common values and objectives, thus creating a group identity.

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed the attitudes of participants towards two roles of the European Union : establishing common regulations and providing funding and subsidies. These exchanges indicate to us how, in a context of European deliberation, participants from different countries and ways of life can coproduce solutions and compromises.

2.2.1. Transfers of practices between countries, regions, and municipalities

Among the roles of the European Union proposed to the participants, there was "sharing good practices between countries, regions, and towns". The EuComMeet's participants endorsed this idea, and some noted with surprise the local and national disparities.

"I learned a lot, that different places have different problems when it comes to green transition, so what works well somewhere, may need to be altered somewhat in another locality. Also schemes that work well in one country need to be shared throughout Europe and adopted and that can only happen with the deliberation, just like learning from other participants on here."

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Irish participant

Other messages are along the same lines and ask for the EU to organize the transfer of good practices between regions.

"My message to the [Committee of Regions] members is to share what has worked in your region - and share what hasn't worked - and the reason why so that we can all learn and implement better policies for the future. "

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, Irish participant

"The connection network between regions of one state and regions of another is also fundamental. Promote the exchange and connection also between municipalities of different states in order to share experiences."

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, Italian male participant

The idea of sharing good practices was not controversial and aroused no particular opposition. It might be because the communication of practices between towns and regions is not legally binding and does not seem to entail significant costs.

Indeed, as we shall now see, the possibility of regulations imposed from above to countries and cities stirred up widespread concerns of maladjustment.

2.2.2. Support for local and national decisions

In the ten observed EU plenaries and EU text-forums, no participant expressed explicit reject of the European Union and its action. Likewise, all seemed to agree that the countries, regions and towns shared common goals of ecological transition. Accordingly, we identify the ecological transition as one of the common goals susceptible to forming a basis for European identity.

However, many participants expressed their concerns for the differences in resources, in advancement and the different challenges that countries and cities face. As a consequence, the participants regularly reaffirmed that the countries and cities should be left room to maneuver and be able to make their own decisions. The following

messages nicely sum up the reasoning developed, a reasoning that seemed to generate no counter-arguments among participants :

"The European Union shall understand that the problems facing cities are not the same, depending on the regions and on the countries ".

International EU Plenary, 07-05-2023, French male participant

"Nevertheless, due to differences in the level of the current development between countries and in civil society, as well as based on so far experience in the implementation of various actions in the countries, the emphasis placed on different areas and ways of implementation. This could be seen also at the local level - within one country, which is mentioned in some examples. So, naturally, differences between EU countries are inevitable. Locals better know what will work within their society, what kinds of encouragement would be the best for them, whether it will work in the given area/town/city/region or rather better to look for alternative or adjusted solutions. But the most important, in my opinion, is that we are all aiming for the similar goal. "

International EU Plenary, 19-05-2023, Polish participant

"I share the fears at the local level! It's going to be difficult for us to move everywhere at the same speed."

International EU Plenary, 02-06-2023, French participant

"For an ecological transition to be successful at European level, it is necessary to take into account each country and the resources available to each... we do not all have the same resources [...]."

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, French participant

Reading these messages, it seems that a European cultural identity can hardly be grounded, in the foreseeable future, in the feeling of socioeconomic homogeneity among country members. The more Europeans exchange, the more they realize and express the inequalities among their respective countries and regions. For the time being, deliberation can support the formation of a European cultural identity, it seems it is rather through the recognition of common goals and values than the celebration of common experiences.

We also note that increased fiscal solidarity is necessary if we aspire to reduce income disparities across Europe (Seelkopf et al., 2018). We will discuss in part 2.2.5

how citizen's deliberation could reinforce financial and fiscal solidarity in the European Union.

Principle of adequate scale and principle of subsidiarity

The participants seemed to adhere to the democratic idea following which political problems should be dealt with at a scale on which the decision-makers are the most apt to perceive the needs, aspirations, and abilities of the population, to take decisions in their best interest.

In this instance, participants emphasize the importance of local and national authorities to implement the common objectives, given their different resources. In addition, when asked "*would the event have been more effective if focused only at one level, e.g., local, national or European ?*" a relative majority supported the national level, followed by a second-largest majority supporting the three levels – European, National, Local.

	No - three level best	Yes - European	**Yes - National**	Yes - Local
% in respondents	28%	19%	**33%**	19%
n	6	4	**7**	4

Table 32. Results from the structured interviews, "Would the event have been more effective if focused only at one level, e.g., local, national or European ?"

The European Union itself was built on the principle of *subsidiarity*, mentioned in the article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, according to which political problems should be dealt at the most local level consistent with their resolution (Kersbergen et al., 2004).

Deliberation and subsidiarity have complex interplay (Eriksen et al., 2000). On the one hand, the principle of subsidiarity can promote the democratic ends of self-governance when "subunits are better able to secure shared interests, particularly if shared geography, resources, culture or other features make for similar interests and policy choices among members of the subunits", and to the extent it "helps protect against subjection and domination by others".

On the other hand, the principle of subsidiarity can reduce the discussants agenda-settings power, by moving away issues from them - whether because only the subunits or the higher unit can act on the matter. Likewise, Erisken et al., notes that

subsidiarity can hamper the accountability of officials, by diluting and blurring their responsibilities in policies. Lastly, subsidiarity can hinder equality among citizens by hindering the redistribution of costs and resources between subunits.

Given the ambiguous effect of subsidiarity suggested by the literature, it is interesting to analyze how the participants formulated their own ideal. As we read closely the participant's messages, the word itself, "subsidiarity", does not appear. Additionally, the participants do not ask explicitly for the decisions to be taken at the *most* local level possible. More specifically, they seem to ask for the decisions to be taken at *scale in which the voices and interests of the affected population will be better heard*. For example, a participant declares :

> *"It is indispensable that the discussions take place at different levels (countries, regions, cities). "*

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

An interpretation of these messages can be brought by the principle of "exact adequation" defended by the federalists authors Guy Héraud and Alexandre Marc (Gouzy, 2010; Nigoul, 2013). The idea of exact adequation does not give the priority to the local level. It states that each question should be dealt with at the level which can "most effectively and efficiently" resolve it (Sidjanski, 2000).

Is this interpretation coherent both with the messages of the participants and their answer to the structured interview ? On the one hand, respondents judged that the event should have only focused on the local level : 19% (n=4) , the same proportion that judged that the event should have focused on the European level. On the other hand, respondents were 33% (n=7) to judge that the event should have focused only on the national level and 28% (n=6) to judge that it was good that the event took place on three level - local, national and European.

It might be possible that the supporters of the local and national level, 52% (n=11) of respondents combined, adhere to the principle of subsidiarity, most of them judging that the Nation-State is "the most local level consistent with the resolution of the problems" at hands. However, the other 48% (n=10) of respondents support either the European level exclusively or the three levels. They might not adhere to the principle of subsidiarity. In this way, we cannot infer a super-majoritarian support for the idea that decisions should be made at the most local level possible. The interpretation of a demand for the less stringent principle of "adequate scale" fits better with the dispersion of respondents across the four answers. It appears, from these data, that we can more

surely infer a broad support for the idea that every problem political should be dealt at the scale at which it could be treated with the more efficacy, given the affected population interests, be this scale be local, national or European, than we can infer the idea that every political problem should be dealt at the most local scale possible. The first idea is likely to be more consensual and supported than the second ; however, more direct interrogations of Europeans on the matter would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis. Once again, these results are qualified by the small number of participants on which the quantitative analysis is based.

If only 19% (n=4) of respondents privileged the European scale over any other, these results should not be interpreted as a rejection of the action of the EU. Indeed, as we will see in the next part, many participants do support, in their messages, a regulatory action of the European Union.

2.2.3. Regulation

During their discussions, numerous participants called on the EU to "provide common guidelines" to "guide the actions" of the countries and municipalities with "clear and attainable directives ".

Reading the messages in detail, it appears that the participants envision different two modalities of regulation: goal-settings and rule-setting. The conversation is complicated by, which appears as, a widespread ignorance of the precise vocabulary of the legal act of the European Union. For example, no participant points out the difference between a "directive" and a "regulation".

Goal-setting by the EU

This first modality of regulation seems inspired by the practices of "management by objectives". The EU would set quantified objectives of transition for its members, letting them adjust and adapt to meet them.

"The EU can help cities by setting global and personalized targets for each city; Ex: achieve at least X% daily use of bicycles or pedestrians in transport and if the city is already well ahead of the question, then see what objectives specific to this city can be set."

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

"Perhaps initially, Europe must do as we did, study where each country is and define a minimum level for each environmental ambition. Then, if a country that is above

level already, good. And a country below is being helped to reach the competition quickly."

International EU Plenary, 19-05-2023, French participant

Rule-setting

Other participants supported the direct establishment of common EU regulation.

"*It is important, even fundamental, that the EU establishes common standards and parameters, thus dictating rules and regulations common to all countries clearly respecting the characteristics of some territories.*"

International EU Plenary, 18-05-2023, Italian female participant

"*I have chosen the European Union to apply the legislation that is fair and feasible for all layers of society. […] It is good that the European Union makes use of institutions, regions, businesses, private citizens to ensure that, through dialogue, the problems of each of us, depending on whether the city, region or country is co-formed, a city with climate neutrality can be implemented quickly.*"

International EU Plenary, 11-05-2023, Italian participant

"*I think the EU should try to set common rules and subsidize green energy.*"

International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, French participant

"*The EU can help by enforcing stricter packaging laws – all packaging, except for critical items like medicine etc., should be easily recyclable.*"
International EU Plenary, 03-06-2023, Irish participant

"*We talk a lot about "the European Commission" doing and controlling, but I doubt the effectiveness of the controls which in France finds excuses but not much attention. The European Commission must create an Environmental Police with extended powers.*"

International EU Plenary, 19-05-2023, French participant

How can we make sense of these messages ? We did not observe, in the plenaries, messages frankly opposing ecological transition and regulatory measures, at the European level, to achieve it. This might be explained, on the one hand, by a bias in selection, citizens interested in the ecological transition being more likely to participate in the discussions, and on the other hand, by peer pressure and group conformity.

Given this high consensus on the necessity of transition measures, the underlying disagreement relates to the nature of regulation. Some participants consider the different European countries and regions to be too different in resources and problematic : they plead for personalized *objectives*, set by the EU, for regions and countries ("goal-setting"). Other participants think that the EU should directly edit *rules* concerning common issues ("rule-setting").

However, the discussions in EuComMeet were limited by their vagueness and generality. We can hypothesize that, if the participants had to deliberate on precise measures and objectives, they would have distinguished more clearly the advantages and limitations of *goal-setting* and *rule-setting*. In the EuComMeet, the participants lacked information and concrete, as opposed to generic, reasoning to confront these two options on a case-by-case basis. On a side note, we remind that research indicates that participants are more likely to endorse a decision if they perceive they took part in the decision process, even if it runs counter to their preferences (Tyler, 2006; Zeitlin et al., 2022). In this way, deliberation and participative processes might increase the legitimacy of EU regulation (*Ibid.*)

At any rate, the EuComMeet experiments showed participants favorable to European regulation or goal-setting towards objectives shared by all Europeans - the ecological transition - provided that countries and regions are given the means and necessary latitude to adapt.

2.2.4. Funding and subsidies

As we saw, the participants are very preoccupied by the resources of countries and cities to realize the ecological transition. They often discussed the role of the European Union in funding and subsidizing the transition. The idea of "financial help at the local and national level" seemed to enjoy broad support and did not generate opposition. Participants liked the idea of a dedicated budget of the UE for the transition, as it can be read in the following messages:

"In my opinion and based on experience of different approaches that I and all we could see during recent years, the most effective and added value role of the EU in a majority of countries would be co-financing of key changes. That is why I am pleased that funds for this goal from the budget perspective of 2021-2027 were increased and this makes more opportunities to implement various changes for mitigation of the effects of climate change."

International EU Plenary, 19-05-2023, Polish participant

"The EU should devote a specific budget to ecological transition, as this would make it possible to finance all kinds of measures in favor of the environment (investments and subsidies in renewable energies, aid to households to improve their housing or their practices and make them more sustainable, more substantial aid for organic farming...). The financial aspect is one of the driving forces behind ecological transition. Political will is nothing without the funding to back it up."

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, French participant

"First of all, through funding from the special budget earmarked for such purposes. "

International EU Plenary, 18-05-2023, Polish participant

"I think that the EU can help with green management through support, expertise and funding."

International EU Plenary, 18-05-2023, Polish participant

A particular message strikes the attention, as it suggests that deliberation could increase the willingness of European Citizens to financially contribute to the EU budget and to the transition.

"A particular point. I initially thought that our country should not contribute to public spending to solve problems in other countries caused by adverse climate situations, for example. Because in Italy, we have few resources for our families. I understood that in the face of such a major climate problem, WE SHALL, all of them were given a hand because, as the Planet is all and WE ALL HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS. ".
International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, Italian participant

We will discuss further in part 2.2.5 the implication of deliberation to support financial solidarity in the European Union. As we will see, one crucial aspect of this support, illustrated in the message above, is a shift in how financial solidarity is framed. A shift from a vision centered on transfer between countries – *"our country should not contribute to public spending to solve problems in other countries"* – to a vision in which all Europeans form one community of endeavor confronted with a common challenge –

"in the face of such a major climate problem [...] we all have the same rights". Deliberation between Europeans provides a favorable framework for this shift to appear.

Which control for subsidies and funding ?

French participants expressed particular concern in the risks of subsidy misappropriation :

"I discovered that we shared common problems: subsidy hunters operate in different countries, not just in France, and gobble up money for unsuitable technologies (solar panels in Ireland! Supposedly ultra-insulating windows in the south of France...) We're talking about billions of euros diverted from the citizen's pocket to that of clever little guys (and diverted from the fight against climate change). "

International EU Plenary, 01-06-2023, French participant

The same participant goes on and elaborate :

"I've learned from participants that there are subsidy scams in other countries too 😕 What if, instead of transferring public money to opportunistic wise guys, we collected money from carbon emitters and transferred it to citizens? I'm not saying this is the role of the European Union. But if one country set an example, the others would follow."

This idea did not seduce the other participants, which preferred to discuss the control of the use of subsidies by the EU, as did this participant :

"In my view, the role to be played by Europe is that "the EU controls what local authorities do on the basis of fairness criteria." I understand that to achieve the ambitious goals, we need control. I think this is necessary because many of us, Italian but not just Italian, are not yet aware of the great risk that we will be able to completely close cities to traffic, quota sales of certain products, increase food costs, etc. ".

International EU Plenary, 11-06-2023, Italian male participant

Popular accounts of corruption in EU cohesion policy expenditure, whether true or exaggerated, are widespread. Research has shown that, at least in Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, misappropriation of EU funds is attributed both to national political elites and, to a lesser extent, to the EU institutions which failed to control their use (Batory, 2021). Public perceptions of corruption undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the

EU. Knowledge and public perception of European funding determines their impact – or lack thereof of impact – on citizens' identification with Europe.

EU funding and support for the EU

The participants expressed support for the idea of EU funding for the ecological transition. Can these funds be a basis for European identity? The literature on EU structural funds bears valuable lessons on this subject.

Recent studies affirm that EU regional policy broadly fails short of reinforcing European citizenship (Courcelle et al., 2015). These authors notably relates "the small volume of financings with respect to the national policies of welfare States", "poor" knowledge of the rules for using funds", "the complexity of project articulation, the control and assessment of running projects", "pledge to solidarity paired with a commitment to competitiveness" among European nations, and "the principle of additionality which blurs the lines of European intervention and makes it indistinguishable from national and infra-national policies."

Likewise, in 2017-2019, the European Research Project "Perceive" has systematically assessed the impact of the EU's structural funds on support for the European project and identification with Europe. Among their key findings, they report that "the communication of Cohesion Policy has not been effective in promoting support to the EU". As a result, "half of European citizens are not aware of EU policies" (Project Perceive, 2017 ; 2019). Another article confirms low awareness of EU cohesion policy in the Netherlands, (Dąbrowski et al., 2021)

In addition, *even when citizens are aware* that their region receives European structural funds, this does not necessarily imply higher support for the European project, nor higher identification with Europe. Researches of the Perceive Project hypothesized two explanations: "structural Funds do not generate a benefit because they are not spent well; communication needs to be improved with regard to the virtuous results of cohesion policy."

These conclusions come directly at odds with the findings of (Vergioglou, 2023), according to which European regional investment subsidies have a negative effect on eurosceptic voting (both in European and local elections) in regions that are net beneficiary ("less-developed regions").

What is the missing link between awareness of fiscal transfers from the EU and support for the EU project? It might often be concrete results attributable to the European Union. A study in Britain showed that EU funding *per se* did not have an effect on Eurosceptic voting in the Brexit referendum. The funding only influenced voting

preferences in the area where they brought tangible economic benefits, including on job opportunities and employment (Crescenzi et al., 2020).

These contrasted results indicate that the development of EU funding for the ecological transition, while supported by EuComMeet's participants, should be accompanied by a clear communication clearly showing its origin and its effects, so that it truly supports European identity.

2.2.5 Basis for a shared European identity

How can deliberative procedures contribute to a shared European identity? How can permanent and institutionalized dialogue between the actors of various national histories and ways of life could limit the risk of essentialist antagonisms? How can deliberative procedure enable the coproduction of a common future? The observation of the exchanges at EuComMeet brings three main teachings.

First, deliberative procedures among Europeans participants led to frequent expressions and concerns for differences between countries and regions. Different problems and constraints, differences in resources and in experience with the ecological transition. It did not lead to an expression of common roots or cultural similarities between countries, neither in the local, national nor European discussions.

Given these observations, one should not expect deliberative procedure to produce an artificial sense of homogeneity or similitude among members. In 2000, the European Union adopted "*In varietate concordia*", "united in diversity" as its official motto. The institution gave itself a symbol in which expression of diversity central in the representation EU citizens conceive of themselves. As established in the report 6.1, Europe is constituted from different national identities, on which are superimposed different religious, linguistic and regional identities – Nordic, Mediterranean, Germanic, Hanseatic, Slavic, etc. In other words, we hypothesize that the European identity can hardly rest on the feeling of likeness, nor on the idea of common cultural or, a fortiori, ethnic roots.

Further, to avoid a European identity based on ethnic belongings and projections is a moral imperative. By definition, one is born into an ethnicity and can hardly move from one ethnic group to another. Thus, a political group identity based on ethnicity will emphasize essentialized differences, whether real or, more importantly, fabled, transmitted by heredity. A European identity based on ethnicity would reproduce phenomena of racialization, the valued ethnic group asserting themselves as inherently

superior to others, by their heredity (Baber, 2004; Martinot, 2003; Murji et al., 2005). The consequences would be threefold. First, heightened xenophobia and hostility to immigrants. Second, a deterioration of international relations with non-EU countries. Third, a reinforcement of racial discrimination towards minority groups in Europe – for example Muslims and descendants from the Arab world, Black people, Romani people etc. The long European history is tarnished by the fantasy of a racial superiority, of the Christian towards the Jews, which justified their persecutions by the Catholic Church in XVth century – in 1492 was proclaimed the infamous Alhambra Decree ; of the White towards the American Natives, the Africans, the Asiatics, which justified Slave trade, colonization, slavery and genocides, from the XVth to the XXth century and created a world shaped by unequal post-colonial relationships in the early XXIth century ; of the Aryans towards the Jews and the Romani people under the Third Reich (1933-1945), which justified one of the greatest crime against humanity of history, the Holocaust (Nicholson, 2016; Lindqvist, 2018). Any affirmation of an ethnic European identity is an invitation to the return of disaster. Therefore, we must be vigilant, since supremacists and far-right groups have pushed, in recent years, for hostility and discrimination toward immigrants and descendants of immigrants. At least since the 1990s, far right groups have turned away from exclusive nationalism and have developed the idea of Europe as a "fortress" for the fabled "White race" (Rueda, 2021; Doron, 2019). More often, these groups have developed the rhetoric of a "European Civilization", white and Christian by essence, which ought to be defended against non-white immigrants, treated as barbarians (Lorimer, 2023; Bonnett, 1998; Vives, 2011; Hellgren et al., 2022). This rhetoric has notably recently influenced immigration policies in Italy, Denmark and Hungary. To develop an open European identity based on deliberation and shared objectives might be an answer to avoid the development of a European identity based on race and religion.

Despite expressing their differences, the participants in EuComMeet supported the pursuit of common European goals. Participants expressed interest in EU intervention to pursue those goals, either by setting objectives to cities and member-States, either by establishing direct regulations. The participants do not evoke a common past, but they certainly do evoke a common future. Their feeling of Europeanness was not associated with retrospective features (cultural legacy, history, ethnicity) but rather to present (pleasure to discuss with citizens with other viewpoints, related in part 2.2.1) and prospective ones (obligations for the future, common objectives).

Nevertheless, one could wonder if this acknowledgment of common goal is specific to the ecological transition itself. The three themes discussed at EuComMeet – sustainable mobility, sustainable food consumption, reduction of plastic pollution – might be consensual and urgent enough to motivate common actions and regulation. But the Conference on the Future of Europe (2020-2022) demonstrated the eagerness of Europeans to deliberate on diverse themes : "Digital Transformation", "Climate change and the environment", "A stronger economy, social justice and jobs", "EU in the World", "Values and rights, rule of law, security" "European democracy" and "Migration". It appears that Europeans can identify common political goals in a large array of questions, and not only on the matter of ecological transition. It is interesting to read in the Plenary report of the Conference calls to reinforce health and social protection, for example, through European regulation and common standards. As we have already noted, many Europeans in the deliberations support EU regulations, provided that they align with their values and interests and that they allow countries and local authorities to adapt to their specific needs. In this sense, regulations resulting from empowered deliberation could be a basis for European identity.

Third, the exchanges between participants highlight the importance they place on financial support from the European Union. Given the inequalities of resources mentioned between countries (see part 2.2.2), numerous participants asked for a direct funding of common policy goals discussed – *id est*, sustainable mobility, sustainable food consumption, reduction of plastic pollution – by the EU.

Hence, can empowered citizen's deliberation reinforce financial and fiscal solidarity in the European Union ? Indeed, increased fiscal solidarity is necessary if we aspire to reduce income disparities across Europe (Seelkopf et al., 2018). In recent years, crises such as Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia have given rise to vast and exceptional spendings from the EU, but financial solidarity requires long-term commitment and public support (Katsanidou et al., 2022).

Today, there is a gap between citizens of poor and rich countries in public attitudes toward solidarity. Citizens from the worse-off countries are being less susceptible to favor fiscal solidarity, even if their countries could benefit from it, because they prioritize the national over the transnational level in a context of resource scarcity. (Vasilopoulou et al., 2020). Prior research had already indicated that "citizens with a stronger European identity are more supportive of financial solidarity with member states in economic crisis", but experiencing economic hardship mitigates the

relationship between European identity and support for solidarity (Verhaegen, 2018). Another study realized during the Covid-19 pandemics indicates that citizens which exclusively perceive themselves as nationals, not as Europeans, were also prone to support more solidarity, in the wake of what they perceived as a "common crisis" (Kyriazi et al., 2023).

On the one hand, the perception of European financial solidarity through the lens of national interest is an impediment to its development. It drives the cleavage in European elites between "a pro-fiscal risk sharing coalition geographically situated in the South of the EU *versus* a coalition defending national sovereignty in fiscal policy situated in the North." (Miró, 2022). In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, the Northern countries supported fiscal solidarity "as an exceptional and temporary measure to strengthen their internal markets", while the Southern countries considered it as a means to develop their economies, reduce inequalities with the Northern countries and safeguard cohesion in the EU. Divergences in national interests perpetuate the cleavage.

On the other hand, in EuComMeet we observed an important support for EU investments to face the challenges of the ecological transition, as related in part 2.2.1. Further, a participant explicitly mentioned that participating in the discussions changed her mind in favor of contributing to the EU budget for the ecological transition (part 2.2.4). Given these results, it appears that to foster solidarity in the European Union, the institutions shall create spaces in which transfers from countries to the EU budget are not framed as transfers among countries, but as contributions to the resolution of common problems and crises.

In this light, it seems that deliberation among European citizens reinforces their will to mobilize to address these common problems and strengthen their perception of themselves as a political community.

But once again, the data collected by the EuComMeet experiment on low number of participant, whose social representativeness is unknown, can not fully support those conclusion, nor it enable us to generalize to the European population. While the EuComMeet experiment provide worthwhile results and intuitions, only socially representative citizen deliberation linked to policy decision and referendums could produce decisions that could be legitimately attributed to the European citizenry.

Conclusion and main findings

The observation of EuComMeet Main Event and the subsequent interviews conducted with the participants bears valuable conclusions.

1. The participation rate was low. On average, only 13.87% of the participants invited to a discussion actually attended. The average number of participants for the entirety of the main event was 6.26. This low turnout decreases the potential for descriptive representation and implies less diverse and less rich discussions. We exposed several hypotheses to account for the low participation rate at this purely online event. It is very important that future European deliberation events achieve high participation rates.

2. The automatic, text-to-text, translation system was flawed. First, it did not spontaneously translate the messages, asking participants to complete three tasks to see a message translated. This feature has made it more difficult for the participants to read messages written in other languages than their own. Second, the translation system apparently worked poorly for German and Polish participants. Despite these difficulties, multilingual discussions happened, messages in a language answered to messages written in another language. Perhaps due to the flaws in translation, approximately 69.66% of messages answering another message were of the same language. The translation system ought to be improved in the future.

3. The deliberation remained superficial ; the participants did not conceive, refine and challenge precise policy options. EuComMeet Main Event was structured as a series of related discussion, which does not lead to conclusions or the drafting of a document by the participants, as it is often the case in deliberative experiences. Some participants complained that the discussions did not challenge their ideas. The Main Event included video from politicians, and the participants could ask written questions to experts. But the participants could not invite additional experts or witnesses, nor could they answer them directly. In that respect, the deliberation and the search for information remained superficial and insufficient to realize a form of citizen's power.

4. The participants supported the idea of deliberation with enthusiasm, enjoying exchanges with citizens from other countries. Messages emphasized the interest of citizen's deliberation to produce valuable ideas and to overcome the limitations of elected officials. Participants also expressed demands that their deliberation had an

impact on public policies and be institutionalized as to happen frequently. Many demanded referendums at the local, national and European level.

These findings support the idea of a "deliberative European constitutional patriotism"– an identity attached to the practices and norms of deliberation and direct citizen's power. Whereas messages evoke distrust in the actions of lobbies and frustration with the actions of elected officials in relation to the ecological transition, the participants seem to think that deliberative practices have the potential to produce policies more aligned with the preferences of the public and to increase trust in European institutions. The practices of a "deliberative European constitutional patriotism" such as Citizens Assemblies, petitions and pan-EU referendums would multiply spaces in which Europeans citizens recognize each other as interlocutors of a single political community, faced with common issues and challenges. In other words, it would contribute to the creation of a European public sphere. These processes enable Europeans to identify common values and goals, across the nationality divide. The actions taken toward common goals can be a source of pride and additional identification for Europeans. While promising, this "deliberative European constitutional patriotism" cannot yet attach itself to established practices and a reference document. The European treaties in force do not provide powers for deliberations and direct citizen participation, except for the European Citizens' Initiative, the use of which is in fact only possible for organizations with significant resources. If the European Union wants to anchor its collective identity and legitimacy in empowered citizens deliberations, these must be registered and protected by the equivalent of constitutional texts, themselves the result of citizen deliberations and subject to popular approval. We recommend that citizens' deliberation be able to issue binding decisions and clearly link the deliberative forums to public decision-making.

5. Participants in their deliberation emphasize the differences in resources between countries and regions. As a consequence, they regularly expressed that decisions should be taken at the national and local level, so that the ecological transition be conducted in the best interest of the affected populations. We analyzed this demand, not as an unconditional preference for the local scale, but as a demand that each problem be addressed at the scale at which the affected population can best express themselves.

6. In their exchanges, the participants did not evoke a European identity based on a common cultural, linguistic, or ethnic heritage. They emphasized their differences in

resources and in advancement toward the ecological transition. Deliberations do not erased the differences between country, but it seemed to prompt participants to address them constructively and take them into account, rather than conceiving essentialized antagonisms from them. The participants discussed in detail the possible intervention of the European Union, through direct and indirect regulation, and funding. We did not find much manifestation of a shared European cultural identity based on the celebration of common characteristics, but we did find enthusiasm for common policy goals and support for common actions toward these goals.

There were, however, important methodological limitation in the experiment. The collected data provide valuable intuitions but do not allow us to draw and support definitive conclusions for the European population.

First, the panel was too limited in size and we do not know if it was representative of the social composition of the European population (in terms of sex, age, socioeconomic class, diploma, etc.). It is plausible that participants favorable to the European Union attended more to the events that participants hostile to it. This auto-selection bias would have created an unrepresentative and exceedingly pro-European group. The conclusions drawn from this group may be overly optimistic and detached of the real current European political landscape. Second, the panel was not offered any direct influence on direct policy. The interactions among participants might have been different if it was the case. We can note that the 2021 Conference on the Future of Europe, in which citizens had more influence, went orderly and without incident.

Lastly, we did not observe any speeches at EuComMeet calling for a European identity based on cultural, historical or ethnic similarities between European peoples. But such speeches perhaps have appeared if the subject of deliberations had been, for example, the diplomacy of the European Union towards foreign countries, rather than the ecological transition.

In any event, the EuComMeet experiment put forward policy goals of ecological transition, which aroused a lot of interest from people who agreed to participate. In future experiments it would be desirable to diversify the themes of deliberation, so that Europeans identify, in all policy domains, the objectives that unite them. The Conference on the Future of Europe provided an interesting example of this approach. It is this process of collective deliberation and decision, and not the mythical appeal to the past, which makes it possible to truly find the values that Europeans share and on which they can base a group identity.

EuComMeet suggests that deliberative practices can support the formation of European identity, to the extent that they allow Europeans citizens to express common *values*, identify popular policy *goals*, conceive and legitimize common *actions* to attain them. Deliberation provides a *space* in which the citizens can see themselves as Europeans. It could contribute to the formation of a *European public sphere*. Further development and institutionalization of empowered deliberation and mass direct participation are necessary for this "deliberative European constitutional patriotism" to progress and bear fruits.
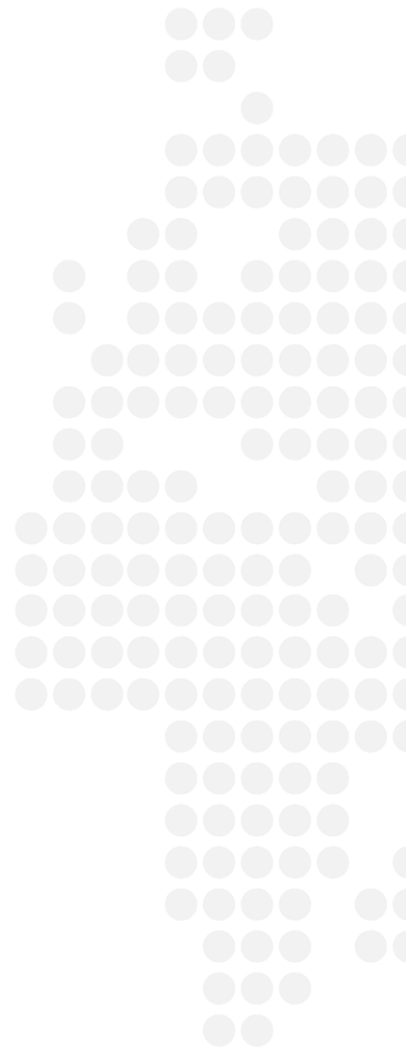
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Appendix : Interview guidelines for participants, non-participants and non-attendees

OBJECTIVES

There are several objectives related to our research questions, but also related to the deliberative event itself. With these interviews we want to understand

1. <u>What leads citizens to participate or not</u> to participate/not to attend;

2. <u>Whether there are significant differences</u> between those who refuse to participate and those who accept but do not attend);

3. Whether there are <u>specific elements</u> of the event or of the technological tools used <u>that may have influenced non-attendance</u>;

4. <u>How was the experience of those who participated</u>, what kind of experience they went through, whether they got any forms of empowerment (or the opposite), whether there were transformative moments in the discussion for the group or for them personally.

Questions based on Jacquet (2017) on the explanation of non-participation and Talukder and Pilet (2023) on citizens support of CAs.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION FOR INTERVIEWERS: Interviewees cannot feel judged at any moment for not participating or not attending. In depth interviews have to resemble a conversation.

The content blocks of the questions synthesize the main ideas of what we already know about non-participation and other hypotheses not yet explored. The questions in bold are general questions that aim to address the contents of the sub-questions. The latter are to be asked depending on the answer to the main question (be flexible but go into the depth of the arguments given).

Please note that there are separate questions for participants (in **pink**), non-participants (in **red**) and non-attendees (in **green**).

Opening with a short presentation of the interviewee: questions related to their socio-demographics, political interest in general and political participation, etc.]

GROUP OF QUESTIONS

1. General interest in the event and in the topic under discussion
2. Availability/resources
3. Political efficacy and reflectiveness
4. Impact consideration
5. Online deliberation and technical problems (only for participants)

QUESTIONS PER GROUP

GROUP 1 *[General interest on the event and on the topic discussed]*

When you first received the invitation to the event what moved you to accept (or not to accept) to participate?

Sub questions

[ASK ALL]:

- Would you say that the information provided was enough to decide on whether or not to participate?
- Were you interested in the topic under discussion?

- [ONLY TO NON PARTICIPANTS: Is there anything about the project that, if it had been different, would have made you want to participate?
- Was this the first time you were invited to participate in this kind of event?

GROUP 2 [*Availability/resources*]

Have you found it challenging to find the time to participate in the various activities of this deliberative process?

Sub questions

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES**]:

- Did you have family/work obligations?
- Would you have participated if the event had been shorter?
- Did any unexpected issues arise that prevented you from attending?

[ASK ALL]

- Did you find the remuneration adequate to the tasks demanded?

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]:

10. Would you have participated if there had been a higher remuneration?

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]

- Would you have participated if the event had been scheduled to last less time?

GROUP 3 [*Political efficacy*]

What do you think of people's ability to influence the decision-making process?

Sub questions

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]:

- Would you have participated if the event had been more related to local/national or European decision-making?
- Did you feel that you had or had not something to say on this topic?

[**ONLY TO PARTICIPANTS**]:

- Have there been any moments in which you felt yourself inadequate (e.g., lacking information, feeling powerless, etc.)?

- Did the perception of your ability to change things, to make the difference changed as a consequence of the participation in this event (e.g., I can count more, my ideas are shared, I feel empowered, etc.)?
- Would you have had a different attitude (e.g., more active, less active, etc.) if the result of the decision were mandatory for the local authorities?
- Would the event have been more effective if focused only at one level, e.g., local, national or European.

GROUP 4

[*Impact consideration*]

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]:

- **Would you have participated if you had discussed the topic with political representatives?**

Sub question

- at which level (European, national, local, sub-local)?

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]:

- Would you have participated if the event had more influence on the decision-making process?

Sub questions

[**ASK ALL**]:

- Would you have preferred any other participatory engagement event?

[**For non-attendees**: did you expect something different?

[**ASK ALL**]:

- You would have had a different attitude if the result of the decision were mandatory for the local authorities?

GROUP 5 [*Online deliberation and technical problems*]

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES & NON PARTICIPANTS**]:

- Would you have said "yes" if the event had been face-to-face?

[**ONLY FOR NON-ATTENDEES**]

Did you manage to navigate on the project's platform?

[**ASK ALL**]:

- Do you have experience with online platforms (not necessarily for deliberation purposes)?

- Do you feel comfortable with it?

[**ONLY TO PARTICIPANTS**]:

- Did you find the platform easy to navigate? Did you feel that the platform was easy to use, slow, too complicated/too simple?

[**ONLY PARTICIPANTS**]: User experience

- How easy did you find to work with the platform?
- How was the experience with the platform? Make sure you touch upon the main issues, such as
    - Easy/complex to use?
    - It took a lot of time to get acquainted with the system?
    - How was the automated translation? Were you able to follow the debate?
    - How did you find the moderation? Was the moderator fair and balanced?
    - How was the tone of the discussion? Did you find it conflictual or smooth? Did you ever feel embarrassed or uneasy?
    - Did you find the briefing document useful?
    - Did you find the intervention of experts and politicians useful, irrelevant, limited?

[Overall experience] **ONLY PARTICIPANTS**

- **Do you think tools like the one you used would make people feel closer to the democratic process?**

Sub questions

- Do you think these things should be used more regularly?

- Did you find this experience useful to better understand the complexity involved in addressing big problems such as climate change and the environment?
- Did you get out of this experience more informed or more confused about the problem under discussion?
- There were moments you remember during this experience, in which you think you got new ideas, or you acquired a different perspective on the problems to be discussed?
- (In how far) Did deliberations enable you to better understand perspectives on climate change and corresponding policy preferences that diverged from your own perspective and/or preferences?
- (In how far) Did deliberations enhance your understanding of the reasons and motives for *your own* policy preferences?
- Has this type of conversation changed your positions, and if so when and in which direction?

Sub questions (whatever is the change in attitudes)

- Was this because of the nature of the conversation, because of the briefing materials, because of the moderator?
- How did you find the group discussion (cooperative, adversarial, smooth, etc.)?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, what are the things you liked and disliked the most about the event?