



RSC 2023/67
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

WORKING PAPER

**Evaluating the Conference on the Future
of Europe: Inclusiveness and Deliberative
Quality of the European Citizens' Panels**

Aliénor Ballangé

European University Institute
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

**Evaluating the Conference on the Future of Europe: Inclusiveness
and Deliberative Quality of the European Citizens' Panels**

Aliénor Ballangé

RSC Working Paper 2023/67

ISSN 1028-3625

© Aliénor Ballangé, 2023

This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) International license which governs the terms of access and reuse for this work.

If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the series and number, the year and the publisher.

Published in December 2023 by the European University Institute.

Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

www.eui.eu

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual author(s) and not those of the European University Institute.

This publication is available in Open Access in [Cadmus](https://cadmus.eui.eu/), the EUI Research Repository



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission supports the EUI through the European Union budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, created in 1992 and currently directed by Professor Erik Jones, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21st century global politics. The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world. For more information: <http://eui.eu/rscas>
The EUI and the RSC are not responsible for the opinion expressed by the author(s)

Abstract

This working paper offers a critical assessment of the first generation of European Citizens' Panels (ECPs) organized as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) in Autumn 2021 and Winter 2022. Building on direct observation of the Panel 2 "European Democracy/Values and Rights, Rule of Law, Security", it focuses on three key issues in deliberative democracy experiments: the inclusiveness and representativeness of citizens' assemblies, the epistemic value of ECPs, and the quality of citizens' deliberation. The paper first shows that the attitudinal representativeness of the ECP was limited by the absence of selection criteria linked to the adherence to, or the rejection of, the EU. As a result, the panels seemed uniform, and they gave a partial image of the citizens concerned and affected by the future of Europe. Second, it argues that inclusiveness depends largely on equal access to the knowledge and information required to feel legitimate to deliberate. In order to better include social categories that participate the least, the paper emphasizes the necessity of granting ordinary citizens basic information regarding the EU's functioning to limit and counterbalance the effects of inequality at the start of the process. Ultimately, the paper concludes that as a consequence of this lack of inclusiveness, and limited briefing information, the cognitive and epistemic level of the ECP remained low.

Keywords

European Citizens' Panels, Deliberative Democracy, Epistemic Democracy, Transnational, Inclusiveness.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Department of Political Science of the University of Frankfurt and the Alfons and Gertrud Kassel Foundation through the Justitia Center for Advanced Studies. I especially thank Sandra Seubert and Rainer Forst for hosting me in Frankfurt and steadfastly supporting this project from the beginning, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis and Jamie Mackay for multiple rounds of precious comments and for agreeing to position this argument within the context of the EU's Democratic Odyssey.

Table of Contents

Abstract	6
Introduction	8
0. General Context of the ECP	8
<i>0.1. Methodology of the ECP</i>	<i>8</i>
1. Preliminary Hypotheses	11
2. Inclusiveness and Representativeness	14
3. The Epistemic Value of ECPs	19
4. Quality of Deliberation	23
5. Conclusion	30
1. Appendices	33
<i>Appendix 1: List of abbreviations</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Appendix 2: List of citizens interviewed at least once for at least one hour:</i>	<i>33</i>
Authors	34

Introduction

This working paper (WP) focuses on the conduct and preliminary results of non-participatory direct observations conducted in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) between September and December 2021.

Specifically, I focus here on the European Citizens' Panel (ECP) 2 "European democracy/Values and rights, rule of law, security". This choice is justified by the fact that to this day¹ only this panel carried out the three sessions initially planned – the first in Strasbourg (September 24-26), the second online (November 12-14), the third in Florence (December 10-12). During the first session in Strasbourg, the ECP 2 collected the main "issues" that citizens wanted to develop further. These issues were then transformed into "orientations" during the second online session, and finally into "recommendations" during the third session in Florence.

Officially – in theory – ECP 2 addressed democracy-related issues such as elections, participation outside of election periods, the perceived distance between citizens and their elected representatives, media freedom and misinformation. This panel also addressed issues related to fundamental rights and values, the rule of law and the fight against all forms of discrimination. At the same time, it looked at the EU's internal security, such as the protection of Europeans against acts of terrorism and other crimes.

0. General Context of the ECP

Before proposing an assessment of the main theoretical arguments and outputs to be retained from the ECPs, I start by summarizing some framing elements in order to specify the methodological context in which this experimentation of transnational deliberative democracy emerged. It is indeed important to note that the ECPs resulted from, and were exercised in, a specific institutional power relationship between the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and that the methodology chosen by the Common Secretariat aimed from the start at a precise practical horizon: that of a balance between, on the one hand, a deliberative loose framing that should have enabled the emergence of an unguided bottom-up deliberation and, on the other hand, an incremental methodology that left little room for improvisation and for the deliberative agility of citizens.

0.1. Methodology of the ECP

Rather than detailing all the technical details of the methodology chosen and implemented by the CoFoE (these elements can easily be found here: <https://assets.futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/26336/European-Citizens-Panels-Updated-practical-modalities.pdf>), I favor an analysis already informed by the practice of ECPs. Briefly, the general methodology of ECPs is based on five main pillars:

- **Representativeness:** The representativeness of the randomly selected citizens was guaranteed by five criteria explicitly mentioned and sought by the research institute Kantar: geographic origin (both in terms of nationality and urban/rural balance); gender; age; level of education and socioeconomic background).

Although it is difficult to make a firm statement regarding this methodological grid, it is worth noting that the subjective impression of observers and citizens was that it was insufficient at three levels: 1. Rural/urban balance (with an over-representation of urban dwellers), 2. Level of education (with an over-representation of university graduates), and 3. Socioeconomic background (with an over-representation of middle-class citizens). I return to each of these points in section 2, but the level of

¹ December 20, 2021.

education criterion clearly appeared to be the least representative.

In addition, there was an imbalance in terms of pro- versus anti-EU opinions. This issue was not retained by the CS, although Kantar had initially proposed it.

Finally, many irregularities were observed in the random selection process, especially in France and Italy where a few citizens had been “coopted” by friends or pre-registered on consumer panels (such as MyConso in France). I come back to this point *infra* and I suggest that, counterintuitively, it has not been without positive effects on the representativeness of the 800 randomly selected citizens.

- **Maximum inclusiveness of citizens:** Not only should the 800 citizens' panels be the descriptive representation of some 450 million European citizens; they should also allow all randomly selected citizens to feel included and genuinely heard.

To this end, ECPs were based on the principle of multilingualism. First, it was regularly recalled that translation was the only truly common language of Europeans. Hence every effort was made to allow any citizen – regardless of her or his level of education – to be able to speak and to listen in her or his native language. And, as a matter of fact, the 24 official languages of the EU were represented through a system of simultaneous translation.

The translation process was performed in two steps: all national languages were first translated into English, and then translated back into the language requested by the citizen. For example, if a Danish citizen wanted to listen to a Romanian citizen, the Romanian citizen's words were first translated from Romanian into English before being translated from English into Danish. The interpreters were never physically present, neither at the Parliament in Strasbourg nor at the EUI (in the case of ECP 2). They worked remotely from their offices in Brussels.

The multilingual dimension of the ECP worked rather well and citizens were generally satisfied with it, even if the technical complexity of the translation process caused many problems at the level of the quality of deliberation (see sections 2 and 4 below).

- **A systemic approach to democracy:** The CS chose to divide the experimentation of European deliberative democracy into three “spaces” that were supposed to be both distinct and complementary.

The Digital Platform, which was launched first, allowed all Europeans who wished to do so to share ideas on the future of Europe, to debate these ideas and to propose events related to the future of Europe at the local level. A discussion of the results of this platform is beyond the scope of this report, but it is worth noting that very few Europeans used (or even were aware of) this tool. Yet it was partly on the basis of this platform that citizens were invited to deliberate.

This brings me to the second and best-known space conceived by the CS – that of the ECP. In these assemblies, citizens met physically and remotely to discuss and enrich the ideas already raised on the platform.

The third space was that of the Plenaries. This space was mixed since it brought together citizen-ambassadors (voluntary and randomly selected citizens), professionals from civil society, national MPs, and representatives of the institutions, including hundreds of MEPs from all political groups on the basis of fair proportional representation.

What we may call CoFoE's “systemic approach to democracy” could be summarized this way: all Europeans were invited to *participate* via the digital platform; randomly selected citizens *deliberated* on the proposals of the digital platform via the ECP; finally, these randomly selected citizens *represented* their fellow citizens during the plenaries, while all European citizens *were represented* by elected officials and civil society during these plenaries.

This systemic approach to democracy somehow resonates with what the literature describes as the “systemic turn” of deliberative democracy (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012). In effect, deliberative democracy was performed at all levels (digital forums, citizens’ assemblies, mixed assemblies) according to different modalities. Moreover, deliberative mechanisms were complemented by participatory and representative mechanisms.

- **Neutrality in the framing of deliberations**: By neutrality, I refer to the fact that the CS decided to frame the citizens’ deliberations as little as possible during the ECPs.

The justification for this loose framing was that the process had to be designed on an exclusively bottom-up logic. At no time were the citizens to have the impression that the institutions were pursuing a hidden agenda that would have influenced them in the orientation of their deliberative practice. As explicitly mentioned in the methodological document entitled “Practical modalities of the European Citizens’ Panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe”, there was “a need to leave enough room for a *true* bottom-up and citizens-driven deliberation”. As a consequence, “information material provided to the Citizens prior to the event remain[ed] therefore *basic*” (my emphasis).

As I suggest in section 3, this loose framing had rather negative consequences on the epistemic quality of the citizens’ deliberations. Even if the citizens themselves recognized that this citizen-driven process was well-intentioned, they regretted having received so little preliminary information and having been so poorly supported. Deliberations often amounted to little more than a few monologues rather than a real discussion driven by the facilitators. And as an observer, I noticed a real difference in epistemic quality between the groups where the facilitation was very light and those where it was more present/demanding.

- **Gradualism in the deliberative method**: The objective of this incremental methodology was pedagogical. It was about *accompanying* citizens in their deliberative practice so that they were not overwhelmed by the need to immediately produce the recommendations that they would convey to the institutions.

They were first asked to reflect on the “issues” that seemed to them to be the most important and urgent for thinking about the future of Europe. At the end of session 1, they should have mapped and prioritized these issues. They were invited to discuss them again in session 2, and then, progressively, to transform them into “orientations”. From these “orientations” selected at the end of session 2, they were required to produce their final “recommendations” (between 1 and 5 per sub-group), each time specifying the “justifications” that determined their choices.

Although this incremental mechanism was supposed to facilitate the work of citizens, some of them criticized the process. First, they complained about the extensive and unjustified use of a technical “Newspeak”, which they did not always understand. Additionally, since this gradualism was never made explicit, nor was it justified or explained to them at the outset, citizens complained of a lack of transparency. They did not feel included and were not incited to be very active in the deliberative process. Many told me that they did not understand why the sessions were “kept from them”. They would have preferred to co-construct their deliberative progression rather than be given a methodology that excluded them from the whole process.

As Günter (ECP 1) told me: *“I found it somehow untransparent. The facilitator came up with some things... on how she wants to evaluate what we said. She did say that, but after we had put all the opinions on... whereas she should have said that in advance. (...) It looks untransparent. Normally if you want to make people engaged in something that is not maybe clearly shaped then you must be very open and say “look, we are doing this, and our intention is to get that and how do we do it”. You have to explain how this thing is going to... the imagination of what it can be, what you can gain from that. It’s important and they didn’t do that. They explained some things sometimes, but it was too late, or sometimes afterward where we would have liked to know that before. Sometimes they*

didn't explain anything at all".

I add here the testimony of another citizen, Iris (ECP 1): *"I felt a bit of a desire not to tell us what the next step would be because they wanted us to arrive fresh on each step (...) My complaint is that we never had any visibility on the rest of the process. I like to think that the first day is like this, the second day is like this, and so on. I would have really liked to have a visibility on what was going to look like the weekend concerned. Not necessarily what was going to happen next, but at least that we could say to ourselves, the goal is basically to get there. We're not going to go there now, we're going to go step by step, but basically: phase one, it's a very generic thing; phase two, more specific; phase three, activity on what the experts can bring to us. I would have a clearer visibility of the process".*

And finally, another testimony from Simon (ECP 2): *"It was somewhat unclear to me, to be honest, at some points – like, so what's the end goal? It was sometimes a little bit unclear also to the moderator, who had specifically been trained for this session, but not necessarily for the whole procedure. So sometimes she was also a bit wondering about what would happen in session 2... something like this, it wasn't very precise, to be honest. Sometimes it was a bit like we have to search for what we were doing".*

It is important to keep these different framing elements in mind to better understand the impact on practical and theoretical results, which I will now discuss. I begin by recalling the preliminary hypotheses (section 1) that I drafted in advance of my direct observations based on the most recent literature regarding the 'deliberative turn' in democratic theory and experiments such as those conducted in Ireland (2012) and France (2019). Starting from these preliminary hypotheses, I focus more specifically on four points that are of great interest to research in (EU) democratic theory: the representativeness and inclusiveness of randomly selected citizens' assemblies (section 2), the epistemic value of citizens' deliberations when they are not preceded by a training phase (section 3), and, finally, the quality of deliberation when it is performed through a loose framing (section 4). I conclude by suggesting some areas of improvement based on the results described in the previous points (section 6).

1. Preliminary Hypotheses

Prior to my observations, I wrote a series of working hypotheses on [September 6, 2021](#). I transcribe them extensively and without any modification here. They stem from (a) a first analysis of CoFoE's official objectives and (b) from an intensive review of the literature dealing with democratic innovations. At the end of this section, I elaborate on their relevance and justify my choice to focus on the issues of representativeness, quality of deliberation, and epistemic added-value.

1. There will be a difference in the nature and intensity of the conflict in the debates depending on the subject of the panel: i.e. calm and courteous (consensual) in P3 "Climate Change" (and more salient and intense in P4 "Europe in the World and Migrations). My hunch is that deliberation works better in a consensual and technical context such as climate change, whereas it cannot but disappoint in the context of more ethnocultural topics such as migration and international relations.
2. The citizens will be disappointed by a procedure that will be judged as "surface democratization" with the conclusion that they are not listened to, that they are not taken into consideration (French citizens, for example, will compare this to the Citizens' Climate Convention).
3. The citizens will be disappointed by the deliberative modalities (no training, insufficient information material i.e., too weak and too vague, no precise rules concerning speaking etc.). Specifically, they will find the process of making them think about their future by asking them, in the first instance, to write a "blank page" about their panel topic, ineffective. I anticipate failure at this

stage: people will either not know what to write, or they will only write whatever crosses their mind to the point that it will be totally unusable.

4. Deliberation will not be “bottom-up” or “citizen-led” but driven by experts and facilitators because citizens will not know how to do it, when and how to react.
5. Multilingualism will increase participation because people will not worry about having to speak (well) in English, and they will find it a good process, but it will encourage a cacophony that will make it technically difficult to listen to and consider different opinions. There will be technical bugs, and, in the end, citizens will meet and deliberate more by national or linguistic groupings than by their ideological views.
6. Little research will have been done by the organizers to counteract the problem discussed for years in political science that only the most self-confident citizens – and in particular older, white European men – will feel they have the legitimacy to express themselves and give their opinion. This will lead to a lot of frustration on the part of a silent majority of people (young people, women, less educated citizens) who will consider that they have participated fictitiously without being able to really influence the process.
7. Point 6 will be reinforced by the fact that, as there is no initial training, only those who feel, at the outset, the most competent or best informed about European issues will have the courage to express themselves, while the least competent citizens will suffer from a complex of illegitimacy or imposture syndrome that will increase their resentment.
8. Point 7, however, will be qualified by the fact that, although the citizens were selected by lot, they were not obliged to participate, and only those who have the most natural “contact” with the EU will have agreed to participate. During my investigation, I will discover that many people have actually refused to participate, and that the Executive Board has had difficulty bringing together enough people. Most of the time contacted people will have said: “Well you know, Europe doesn’t mean a thing to me, and I don’t know anything about it – so no thanks”.
9. Before and after the first session, people will be generally excited, curious and committed. But the more we advance in the process, the more frustrations there will be, which I will discover offline with the cohort of citizens that I will follow outside the moments of the assemblies.
10. People will be quite convinced from the start that it will be useless and that the institutions will not take their proposals into account, but they will participate because “it’s interesting” and because for the very first time in their history European institutions seem willing to listen to them.
11. The inter-generational conflict is likely to be important because young folks will reproach old people for wasting their future and old people will reproach young folks for being individualistic, incompetent and having an immature vision of what Europe is and/or should be in tomorrow’s world.
12. Eastern Europe will be more conservative on all issues than Western Europe and the South, and the gap will be widest with the North.
13. Citizens will be more circumspect about deliberative democracy and will call for a return of experts, because they are paid to master their subjects. They will defend representative democracy more, but they will want to be better represented. They will want the people who know to deliberate and decide among themselves, in the name of the represented, but with more respect and consideration for the represented. My hunch is that people will be disappointed with participatory democracy.

14. A form of “demophobia” (Crépon 2012) will be carried by the experts and experienced by the citizens. Everything will be done to limit the empowerment of these citizens so that their proposals are framed rather than free and meaningful.
15. There will be very little media coverage.
16. Are we going to observe a consensual ethos amongst citizens or the multiplication of contradictory debates? I’m betting more on a search for consensus on the part of the facilitators, but that will fail and turn into contradictory deliberation.

In the end, most of these hypotheses have proven to be relevant: not only those which concerned the lack of media coverage, the disappointment of citizens regarding the process, but also, more generally, those which dealt with participatory democracy, citizens’ frustrations and their feeling of not having been sufficiently listened to and valued. On the other hand, I did not anticipate the cordial, constructive and friendly behavior of the citizens in the deliberative groups. Contrary to what I had anticipated, I never witnessed moments of tension between citizens. There were never any real conflicts that involved any form of symbolic or rhetorical violence. On this point, and for the sake of completeness, I must add that even though this report focuses exclusively on ECP2, I also observed ECP4 on Europe in the World and Migrations. But even there, I witnessed no tense moments or real conflicts between “left-wing” and “right-wing” citizens. In fact, and I come back to this point in section 4, everything was done and planned by the organizers to reduce the risk of conflict as much as possible – whether it was between citizens, or between citizens and experts/facilitators.

The positive point of this methodology is that the exchanges went well and that the citizens felt confident to deliberate. In interviews, many of them said that they would not have thought of participating so much because, at first, they felt shy and not very legitimate, but that in the end, the friendly atmosphere of the subgroups encouraged them to speak up. They were actually very happy with this positive atmosphere. This is especially true for the younger participants. Gabrielle (16 years old) and Filip (20 years old) told me about how happy and surprised they had been to be able to speak up and express their opinions. They spoke of an educational experience that went beyond the mere framework of a democratic experiment. For them, they were different before and after the ECP. They were happy to have been socialized to Europe in a friendly and caring environment. They told me about how scared they were to participate, and then how relieved and proud they were to have had the courage to express themselves in front of older and more competent people. In this sense, a deliberative framework that relies on a caring methodology is undeniably inclusive of younger and less confident people.

On the negative side, if there were no real conflicts among citizens, there were no real debates among them either. As I elaborate in section 4, until session 3 in Florence, deliberations basically amounted to a series of individual monologues that left no room for any form of what I suggest calling “dialectical deliberation”.

Based on these preliminary assumptions, I have chosen to devote the remainder of my report to four points that seem particularly interesting and relevant to a political theory approach: the inclusiveness and representativeness of these citizens’ panels (section 2), the impact of these panels on the emergence of an epistemic democracy from below (section 3), and the quality of deliberation among randomly selected citizens (section 4).

2. Inclusiveness and Representativeness

Inclusiveness and representativeness of European citizens were the clearest official objectives of the CoFoE. In all the framing documents that were made available to us, it was mentioned that all European citizens – regardless of their geographical origin, age, and education – should feel equally and symmetrically involved in the future of Europe. Antoine Vergne (Missions Publiques) once mentioned the notion of “citizen’s expertise”, but most of the time the organizers referred to the “citizen of the street”. Indeed, the organizers were not so much interested in the *ideas* of citizens competent in this or that field as they were interested in consulting the state of a broad *public opinion* to gain insight into European citizens’ attitudes, behavior, and preferences. This deliberate disinterest for peoples’ *competences* was, for instance, evidenced by the fact that at no point did the facilitators ask the citizens their profession or field of study. Similarly, citizens were not offered the possibility to choose their working subgroup in accordance with their interests or with their social, cognitive, or technical skills. This choice impacted on the epistemic quality of citizens’ deliberations (cf. sections 3 and 4). Should this objective of maximal inclusiveness be defended, my take is that it should be supplemented by a prior training session, so that any “citizen of the street” could also claim to be gradually considered as a “citizen-expert”, and not only as the participant of some consumer panels.

Methodologically, this focus on inclusiveness involved two crucial mechanisms in the organization of ECPs: selection by lot and multilingualism. The diversity of European citizens must be represented by a fair and equitable sortition process, while the possibility to be heard in one’s own language without having to master English must be ensured and guaranteed by an instantaneous translation mechanism. However, these elements raised several practical and theoretical questions that should be addressed specifically.

THE ISSUE OF SORTITION – The sortition process was carried out by Kantar, which won the call made by European Commission’s DG COMM. It was then up to all of Kantar’s national subsidiaries to contact citizens on the basis of five criteria that were intended to guarantee maximum representativeness of the participants. The first criterion was parity. Citizens had to be strictly distributed according to their gender – i.e. as many women as men in each of the national cohorts. It should be noted that nothing was done for non-binary citizens.

While I don’t have the quantitative data to assume that the gender balance was respected, my impression is that there were as many women as men among the citizen panelists. This is a clear improvement over the digital platform, where the lack of gender selectivity resulted in a clear bias toward male participation. Thus, according to the report conducted by Kantar in September 2021, 60% of the contributors to the platform were men, 15% were women, and 24% did not wish to respond. Compared to the ECPs where 50% of the participants were women, there is a much better descriptive representation of European citizens in the ECPs thanks to a deliberate policy of gender equality in the selection process. This would tend to prove that women are less likely to spontaneously participate in deliberative forums and that their participation should be encouraged by incentive schemes. To my knowledge, no qualitative survey has yet been launched by Kantar to try to understand why so few women participated on the digital platform. It is also unclear whether Kantar’s employees had more difficulty obtaining consent from women than from men when they called them.

Apart from that, two other points should be addressed. First, even with a strictly equal numerical distribution, men tended to speak more than women during the work in sub-groups². Second, and to qualify this observation, the disproportion between male and female interventions significantly evolved over the sessions. Already, during the second online session, several observers noted that the number of women participating was higher than during the first session in Strasbourg. This trend became more pronounced in the third session, where – at least in the subgroup I followed throughout the weekend – as many women as men participated.

It should be said, however, that these remarks are personal and subject to the limits of ethnography: I cannot guarantee that my observations are representative of what happened in other subgroups. These epistemological precautions stated, I would nevertheless suggest that my observations during the three sessions of ECP 2 allowed me to ascertain that if women's *representativeness* was established before the deliberative process and it remained unchanged throughout the process, women's *inclusiveness* enhanced during the deliberative process insofar as women gained visibility and audibility throughout the three sessions.

A similar phenomenon was observed with the social category of "youth" – i.e., in this case, European citizens aged 16 to 25. Since citizens' panels were supposed to elaborate on "the *future* of Europe", the Common Secretariat chose to over-represent youth, and therefore asked Kantar to select a third of citizens aged 16 to 25. But here again, if European youth under 25 was disproportionately represented by these 16-25-year-old panelists, its inclusiveness in the deliberative process happened to be more questionable: the citizens under 25 were by far the social category that participated the least in the deliberations. On the digital platform, they represented only 10% of the interventions, while citizens over 55 represented 28.5%. During the ECPs, this trend seemed to have been only slightly reversed: young people were physically present and visible, but few of them dared to ask for the floor. The reasons that came up most often in my interviews were fear and lack of legitimacy. Fear and lack of self-confidence were also shared by the least qualified citizens, while lack of legitimacy was shared by many women.

This issue is frequently evoked in the literature on deliberation. Women and less educated participants tend to make fewer contributions to small group discussions, even with active facilitation (Gerber 2015; Setälä, Grönlund, and Herne 2010). As Gabrielle, a 16-year-old French woman, told me: "*When I spoke in working group sessions, I really couldn't express myself at all. So, I'm a little ashamed. (...) The only times I participated I didn't say what I wanted. I mean, I was so freaked out that I didn't say what I wanted. As a result, I don't really have the impression that I was anyhow useful*". Berger and Charles (2014) have shown that participation in democratic innovations is a difficult experience, full of symbolic violence because these spaces reveal discursive and power inequities. When power dynamics are not mitigated by strict facilitation and the discussion is dominated by vocal individuals, participation can result in (self-)exclusion.

As I suggest in Section 3, I believe that the lack of inclusiveness of women, young people, and the lesser educated was reinforced by the absence of training prior to the deliberative sessions. This training would have helped mitigate the social and cultural inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Without such training, those who already felt competent and legitimate felt less anxiety about speaking up and presenting their views, while those with very little expertise on the EU felt a strong lack of legitimacy that prevented them from voicing their ideas in the deliberative process. Indeed, the well-educated and politically interested and active tend to be over-represented among active participants (Neblo et al. 2010). Moreover, skills and abilities associated with deliberation are not equally distributed: participants with lower economic status tend to have lower opportunities to contribute to high-quality deliberation (Gerber et al. 2016). My claim for an initial training was

² I got into the habit of noting all the interventions during a specific session of work and compared the interventions of women and men; during certain sessions in Strasbourg, only men spoke during almost an hour of debate.

reinforced by my observation of women's increasing participation in the process. Because they had a better grasp of their subjects – which was reinforced by the fact that the sub-groups and their thematic focus remained the same between session 2 online and session 3 in Florence – women asked for the floor much more towards the end of the process.

However, this was less evident with young people. One could have expected them to participate more than their elders in the online session for they were digitally literate, but the opposite happened. At least in my subgroup (and in those of the citizens Pascal and Pierre that I interviewed right after), young people almost disappeared from the deliberations throughout the online weekend. Their cameras were often turned off, and even when the facilitators asked them to intervene, they remained mostly silent. As for the last Florence online hybrid session, it is more difficult to say because only 140 citizens were physically present out of the 200 panelists. A potentially important part of the 60 online citizens was made up of young people who did not have the opportunity to be vaccinated twice against Covid-19 before the beginning of the third session (a mandatory condition to be able to participate face-to-face).

Representativeness of cultural and socio-economic minorities was the most debated issue. First, a questionable choice was made to limit ECPs to “European citizens”. Even though “the future of Europe” concerned at least as many *European citizens as citizens living in Europe*, the organizers did not seek the representativeness of citizens living in Europe but of citizens with a specific legal status, that of “European citizen”. Then, even if we focus on the group of “European citizens”, it is hard not to be taken aback by the lack of ethnocultural diversity of the ECPs. Here again, I do not have precise data allowing me to state with certainty that Kantar's selection criteria were not respected at the time of selection. My observation is therefore limited to what a precise and honest observation could establish. In addition to this, I share the observations of citizens who spontaneously expressed their surprise at the lack of diversity in the panels. For example, Simon (ECP 2) told me about his *“skepticism about the representativeness of the panels. (...) More higher-educated people involved. Lot of White people. I didn't see anybody with headscarf for example. And if I look at Europe, I know that there are quite some. I mean there are some people who have headscarves, at least women. So, it's not necessarily about the headscarf, but I think it's really telling about maybe the representativeness of ethnical religious minorities. I think they were very much underrepresented at the conference”*. Similarly, Pierre (ECP 2) brought up this subject several times. The first time, he took the floor in plenary to ask how the selection of citizen panelists had been made, “because when we look around, we see almost no one from ethnocultural minorities”.

To be fair to Kantar, ethnocultural representativeness was not part of the criteria used for the selection of the panelists, nor were the opinions regarding European integration. The over-representation of white Europeans and of pro-European citizens could therefore be explained by a self-selection phenomenon. Indeed, the people contacted had the choice to participate or not. Insofar as the criterion of pro- or anti-European sentiment was not retained, it is very likely that only citizens who were already favorable to European integration agreed to participate. In the same way, for people from minorities who are regularly targeted by very restrictive European policies on migration, the fact of engaging in a participatory process in which they would, once again, be in a very small minority could be perceived as a major obstacle. As Iris (ECP 1) summarized, *“We were overwhelmingly Caucasian. That's a fact. Either they (the ethnic minorities) were not called, or most of them were part of the 90% who said no, which is also possible”*.

On the other hand, the impression shared by many observers and citizens of an over-representation of university graduates raised more questions about the rigor of the selection made by Kantar. In fact, criteria such as level of education and socioeconomic background were part of their methodology. However, I am surprised by the number of “PhD Students”, “doctors” and “professors” that I met during these citizens’ panels. Iris (ECP 1), herself a doctor in agronomy, told me: *“As the organizers kept telling us that it was drawn by lot and that it was fairly distributed, I gave them the benefit of the doubt (...). But, on the other hand, all the people I spoke with were people who had a qualified job, higher intellectual professions, people who had studied, and sometimes even had quite a career. And I found that striking. I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt, but I still think it was a bit strange”*.

This impression of an unequal distribution of citizens, and thus of an insufficient representativeness of the European citizens gathered in the ECPs, was reinforced by the numerous testimonies that I collected from citizens who admitted that they had not been selected by lot but “co-opted” by relatives. I limit myself here to the case of ECP 2. An Italian citizen explained to me, for instance, that it was his sister – a woman with less education than himself – who had originally been contacted. When she said she was not interested, the person on the phone asked her if she knew anyone who would be. She then thought of her brother – a professor at the University of Padua – and he was finally considered as a “randomly selected citizen”. I have a similar testimony from a young French press officer in the car industry. She too was contacted on the advice of a relative randomly selected by Kantar France. I even heard the case of a young Dutch woman who knew someone involved in the selection process and asked her whether she would be interested in participating. If these citizens correspond to the category “young” and/or “female”, there is no favoritism (neither voluntary nor involuntary). However, the criterion of non-voluntariness, which is the basis of sortition, is seriously hampered. Sortition is legitimized by the fact that it allows “anyone” to participate. If it is no longer “anyone” but people who are willing – and therefore potentially more competent, more interested, more politicized – to participate, then one of the foundations of the legitimacy of lottery is clearly called into question.

The most dishonest practice in the sortition process involved Kantar France. Several citizens in the French cohort were not randomly contacted, nor were they co-opted by relatives. They had previously registered on a customer panel platform (MyConsoo) to participate in the ECPs. These customer panels are generally used by people who volunteer to give their feedback on goods, or to test things in exchange for a little money, samples, or small gifts. In the case of the ECP, an advertisement had been uploaded on MyConsoo with the appealing title “Share your opinion and travel in Europe”. That is the way Pascal (ECP 2) was selected. I was asking him whether he thought that many of the citizens contacted accepted to participate:

“Pascal: Well, I assume that as soon as you register, you have to go! I don’t see why you would refuse.

- Aliénor: But here it’s not a question of registration. They call you randomly.

- Pascal: Okay, but at first you have to register anyway...

- Aliénor: No!

- Pascal: What do you mean, no? I signed up here!

- Aliénor: You registered on MyConso, right?

- Pascal: Absolutely!”

According to Didac Guttierrez-Peris, one of Kantar's researchers, these practices were marginal and should not be generalized to the entire selection process. As a matter of fact, I only heard about these practices in the case of the French cohort. However, Kantar France's schemes raise questions and cast doubt on the transparency of the system as a whole.

Paradoxically, this dishonest selection process had unforeseen positive effects. Indeed, I found more diversity in terms of level of education and socioeconomic background amongst these "MyConsoo citizens". Because the advertisement explicitly mentioned that this initiative was paid, and because it highlighted the trip and the many benefits included in the package, it attracted people who were less genuinely interested in European politics than people who proved to be mainly interested in traveling – and getting paid for it. Consequently, it appealed an audience different (less educated and more skeptical towards the EU) from the one constituted by citizens who were genuinely randomly selected.

That being said, one should recall that less than 10% of the people contacted agreed to participate in the ECPs. From there, can we really consider that these 10% can be descriptively representative of all the citizens living in Europe? If 90% of the people contacted could not or did not want to be involved in a European process of participatory/deliberative democracy, can we say that this process is representative of the expectations of the citizens of Europe? Therefore, would it not be better to focus on the criterion of inclusiveness rather than representativeness? Inclusiveness refers here to the real participation of the people present in the panels. Even if these people are not strictly representative of all the citizens living in Europe, their ability to speak and be heard should be taken seriously and be considered as a crucial element in the process.

MULTILINGUALISM – This brings me to the last point I want to address in section 2: the inclusive dimension of multilingualism. In Section 4, I address the issue of multilingualism in terms of its impact on the quality of deliberation. Here, I simply assess its impact on inclusiveness. Multilingualism was originally intended to counterbalance the social inequalities resulting from the differences between the least qualified/educated and the most qualified/educated citizens – the discriminating element here being the command of English as a working language. If the choice had been made to conduct these citizens' panels in English, there would have been a great risk of transforming an experiment in popular deliberation into a meeting of elites experienced in transnational exchanges. A case in point: a former Bulgarian worker told me that he would never have agreed to come if the working sessions had not included instantaneous interpretation into his native language.

However, if we look closely at what really happened behind the scenes of the citizens' panels, we realize that this multilingualism is only a façade. Actually, the majority of these exchanges were conducted in English. And when these exchanges were not conducted in English, they were conducted in the mother tongue of citizens who, not knowing English, ended up in small national groups. Of course, all the "official" deliberations conducted in sessions 1 and 2 were translated. But as the citizens themselves admitted, "the real deliberation was done outside of working sessions", i.e. during coffee breaks, lunches/dinners at restaurants, social events... For those who spoke little or no English, these informal exchanges quickly became too difficult to follow and they found themselves virtually excluded from the social dynamics that preceded and accompanied the official moments of deliberation. Similarly, during session 2 online, some of the unofficial deliberations were carried out in a chat room. But obviously nothing written in the chat room was translated. It was therefore necessary to have a minimum command of written English to be considered via this channel.

Eventually, the limits of multilingualism as a vehicle for inclusiveness spilled over into the realm of official deliberations during Session 3 in Florence. To give citizens more freedom in their exchanges, the organizers decided to set up "Open Forum" moments during which citizens were invited to gather as they wished, on the themes they wanted, to exchange on elements they considered important, but on which they had not yet had the opportunity to express themselves. However, since these

Open Forums were voluntary and improvised, the rooms provided for the voluntary citizens were not equipped with interpretation channels. As a result, these moments could only gather citizens who were confident enough to speak naturally in English for more than an hour. Many citizens felt abandoned, literally “lost in translation”, like Pascal who left the room in a very bad mood saying that he did not understand anything, and that this kind of device did not give him a fair opportunity to be heard.

3. The Epistemic Value of ECPs

In this section I refer to Hélène Landemore’s research on the “epistemic turn in deliberative democracy” (2017) to assess the cognitive added value of first-generation ECPs. According to Landemore, deliberative democracy finds its full justification when it tracks the truth in public action, without which deliberation remains a purely procedural and solipsistic exercise. This position refers to a non-relativistic conception of democracy. Contrary to scholars like Urbinati who defend a strict procedural-egalitarian conception of democracy (Urbinati 2014, Urbinati and Saffon 2013), Landemore argues that democracy should first be considered as the best regime for arriving, via confrontation and well-reasoned deliberation, at elements of truth on which one can reasonably agree. Here she argues against the post-Rawlsian argument according to which it is impossible to overcome the “fact of disagreement” due to the structural pluralism of liberal democracy. Using Landemore’s arguments –even though I do not share them *in toto*– I state that ECPs were disappointing at this level. In effect, the cognitive level of this first generation of citizens’ panels remained low for two main reasons that I will develop separately: (a) a series of missed meetings with the experts, and (b) a non-existent training that never allowed participants to counterbalance the cognitive biases that divided citizens before and during the deliberative process.

THE MANAGEMENT OF EXPERTISE – Whether it be the organizers, the citizens, or the experts themselves, all the people that I interviewed complained about the way expertise was presented and managed vis-a-vis citizens during the ECPs. For Simone Chambers (2017), experts have a dual function: that of translating major technical issues to make them clear and comprehensible to everyone, and that of conveying the expectations of an informed public opinion to decision-makers by translating these expectations back into specific policies. Experts thus occupy a function that I would describe as an “epistemic node”, for they are at the junction of two groups that barely communicate – i.e. decision-makers and citizens.

In the case of ECPs, experts never played the second function in the recursive loop, since at no time were they asked to convey the expectations of citizens, nor to translate them into concrete policies for decision-makers. The CS left this role to two other types of agents: i.e. facilitators and institutional observers. The facilitators were supposed to draft citizens’ expectations so that they could be transformed into orientations (session 2) and recommendations (session 3). But they were not supposed to guide citizens, nor even to carry out a translation work that would have given a ‘technical’ character to citizens’ demands – these remaining too often extremely vague (e.g. more equality between the citizens of Europe, more solidarity between the MS, more respect for European values etc.). Priority was given, at this level as elsewhere, to neutrality. The facilitators, like the experts, had to remain neutral throughout the process, so that citizens could produce their own spontaneous claims – no matter, in the end, if these claims remained untranslatable in European law and therefore totally unusable. Here we cannot but think of Landemore’s argument against a purely procedural and solipsistic approach to deliberation. Deliberation for deliberation’s sake will end up being utterly pointless if it is not oriented towards truth-tracking.

As for the institutional observers, they observed some citizens' deliberations and reported to their respective institutions – i.e. the European Parliament, the Council or the Commission. Here, one can only regret the almost complete lack of transparency of these pseudo institutional translators. They almost never introduced themselves to the citizens, they came and went very quickly, and they never specified the framework in which they were going to send their observations to their institutions. And, apart from the famous Google sheets on which all the ideas and recommendations of citizens were written, nothing was planned by the CS to really feedback citizens' complaints or remarks to European decision-makers.

What about the role of experts understood as translators and pedagogues engaged in a top-down dynamic? Were experts able to translate, train and inform citizens on the major European issues on which they were supposed to deliberate? The choice concerning the expertise consisted in privileging the already questioned notion of neutrality at all costs. Not only did the experts have to be neutral, but even the deliberation *between* experts had to remain impartial. As Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul explained at the dinner on September 24, 2021, experts must provide “facts and figures, and only facts and figures” to citizens. They should not give their personal opinions or views. She admitted that she was in favor of giving more space to “fact-checkers” – i.e. anonymous individuals who never appeared in front of citizens and who got their information mainly from the Internet – because, she said, “experts remain human beings who cannot help but give their personal opinion, even if we spend hours briefing them on the fact that they must absolutely remain *neutral*” (my emphasis).

Moreover, in session 3, experts were no longer allowed to intervene, nor even to answer to citizens, without first asking the CS for authorization to answer or intervene. Officially, this was supposed to make the CS aware of citizens' questions, but many experts experienced this as hidden censorship. At this point, it seemed clear that the CS was annoyed by the experts who “could not help but give their opinion”, just as the experts were annoyed by the CS contacting them, often at the last minute, giving them almost no information about what was expected from them (except that they had to be neutral), but simply requiring a presentation comparable to a technical note translated into simple English. Beyond that, it's worth noting here that the citizens themselves strongly contested this ideology of neutrality, especially when it came to expertise.

All the citizens I interviewed were highly disappointed with the experts. For some, the main problem was that their ‘exchanges’ with the experts were simple monologues on the part of the experts that left no room for discussion with the citizens. They reported that this was not democratic deliberation anymore, but “monotonous lectures” imposed on them. They wished they could have asked specific questions to the experts, but they had neither the time nor the opportunity. For instance, Günter (ECP 1) told me: *“The experts were giving a presentation on something they found very important for themselves and that was nice, but it made absolutely no sense in the context of our discussions. (...) They gave not enough place for questions. They gave 20 minutes presentations and at the end the moderator said, ‘now we’ll have a small time for one or two questions’. Why do they do that? They could bring the experts and say, ‘we discussed this and that and now some of these people they may have questions for you’. Why don’t they just answer questions? Why did they give some lectures? The time was much too short for that”.*

For Iris (ECP 1), experts were not responsible for the situation, but they were very badly exploited. As she summarized her experience after session 1: *“It’s not their fault at all, we used them extremely badly. We had them come to the plenary session, which lasted, I think, two and a half hours, it was the longest plenary session. They each spoke for a while about what their subject was, what they were doing. At no time we were told what Europe can do, it was just what they were working on. Yes, they were asked maybe two questions about Europe, but that was about it. We had a ridiculously short question time for each expert, and almost no preparation time to prepare the questions for the experts... (...) And afterwards, in the groups, these experts were brought in in a very arbitrary way. They would show up in the room at a time that was not necessarily relevant for them to be asked*

the questions on which they were competent. They left after ten minutes. So, if we wanted to take advantage of their presence, we absolutely had to stop talking and concentrate on asking them questions. And I thought that was a real shame”.

For some citizens, this ideology of neutrality posed the greatest problem in the management of expertise. As Pascal (ECP 2) said: *“It is by questioning and criticizing that we make progress. If it’s just to listen to people who give us their speeches, speeches that are already all set, all framed, it’s not interesting. (...) They didn’t even contradict one another! (...) The six were all more or less in agreement, I mean, there was nobody who contradicted. (...) I like it when there is debate and contradiction. I mean, when there are several opinions. When it becomes monotonous (...), for me it is uninteresting”.* The fact that experts did not debate made their interventions difficult to follow for many citizens. It did not help them to build their own opinions because they were unable to “weigh the pros and cons” of this or that argument. As Pierre (ECP 2) put it: *“I wanted to know their opinions on this, how they saw it, how they (...) would have settled it according to their own ideas”.* Several of them told me that, insofar as we are talking about deliberative democracy, it would be good if there were at least a little deliberation and debate among the experts.

Moreover, the lack of proximity with the experts made the citizens feel a bit abandoned in their own deliberations. They often lacked concrete information – the facilitators were not at all trained in European issues – and they would have liked to have had the opportunity to ask questions to the experts much more often to be sure they were not deliberating in a “purely solipsistic” manner. As Gabrielle (ECP 1) told me after session 1, if an expert had been attached to each group, *“it would have added a much more focused point of view on the subject. We would have been able to understand a lot more things and not just say anything”.* This impression of abandonment due to a clear lack of information arouses questions that I now want to address specifically; that is, the lack of information and its many repercussions on the epistemic dimension of ECPs.

(THE LACK OF) INFORMATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON DELIBERATION – According to Landemore deliberations must be oriented towards a collective search for truth to avoid becoming pointless. But truth-tracking –especially when it comes to technical issues such as European policies– requires a minimum of prior knowledge and information. Several past deliberative experiments have proven the importance of this type of training, which not only ensures a minimum level of collective competence but also counterbalances initial inequalities in access to knowledge. As the young Gabrielle (ECP 1) said: *“If I were well versed in the subjects, or even if I had a little more confidence in these subjects, I could speak up and really say what I think. (...) But I didn’t have enough knowledge to really say everything I thought, or to speak up on half the topics”.*

Citizens were not given any source of information before the first session, except for a dozen-page “framing document” that reproduced the ideas mentioned on the digital platform without giving any significant context or explanation. This document was so indigestible that some citizens skimmed it, while others simply forgot about it – like Gaia who confused it with the planning and logistical information document. Iris (ECP 1), who, I recall, has a PhD degree, complained about the fact that so little effort was made to involve citizens in the preparation of the panels: *“I found that the documents were quite heavy, quite complex. It was very long, quite long. I found that they didn’t make much effort to simplify the technical jargon. (...) Maybe because these are things that are supposed to be obvious, but which clearly for me were not. (...) We had several pages on the proposals that were made on the platform on the subject and what came out. I found it (...) very dense, quite long to read. I’m used to reading heavy documents and I found it a bit painful. And I say to myself for people, in particular the young fringe of the population, which is perhaps not very politically committed, (...) I think that it is a reading which must have been painful”.*

More generally, citizens were concerned by the gap between what they were selected for (i.e. just being “everyday people who live in the European Union”) and what they were asked for (delivering recommendations on extremely complex topics, such as the rule of law or the institutional balance in the EU, on which they had no opinion because they had no knowledge).

During the interviews, I was interested in the actual knowledge these citizens had on how the EU worked. I started by asking them how they felt about their knowledge of the EU and whether they felt confident/comfortable enough to talk about it. Most of them told me that their knowledge went back to school but that they had already forgotten everything. At worst, some told me that they knew absolutely nothing about the EU and that they hardly knew anything after the first two sessions.

Then, I asked them all to name the three main institutions of the EU. At that point, it is noteworthy to recall that, among my interviewees, I had a university professor, a doctor, and a PhD student. None of my nine interviewees was able to correctly name these three institutions. They all cited the European Parliament – but they thought it was the one that “proposed the laws”. Most were able to name the Commission – but none of them knew its role in the EU’s institutional organization. And very few named the Council – which they usually confused with the European Council. However, most of these citizens were in favor of “revising the unanimity rule”, even though they had no precise idea about what it meant or implied precisely.

Some citizens were perfectly transparent on that matter, like Simon (ECP 2) who confessed that *“for example we were talking about the veto issue. But then I think we quickly realized that it’s very easy to say, ‘The veto in the decision-making process should change’, and you quickly realize that you don’t really know what the incentives that can be used are, what the details are”*. Since they had no information, they often repeated what they had heard in the media, just to be part of the group, to participate, or ‘say something’. As Pierre (ECP 2) said: *“You’re going to have a lot of people who, in the end, are just going to follow the majority, or just follow ideas like that, which they catch on the fly, but which in the end won’t really be their own ideas. (...) I think that if you don’t explore by yourself, you’re just going to let yourself be guided, and be carried along by the flow”*.

While this lack of prior knowledge was normal and predictable, the citizens I interviewed all regretted that at no point were they given some kind of “survival kit” (as Iris called it) that would have, at least, helped them to better map the European institutional design. This “survival kit” should have consisted of knowing (a) the main institutions and their role in the decision-making process, (b) the legislative process in order to know where their recommendations could fit, and (c) the domains where the EU is, or is not, competent. This information should have been provided to citizens long before the first session, in a brief, clear and dynamic format.

Here, I quote Iris (ECP 1): *“(Rather than the framing document) I would have preferred to have something more exhaustive on what is Europe and what is it able to do concretely. You see, for example: what is in Europe’s hands and what is not? Because I didn’t know anything about it, and so it’s very nice to make a proposal, to say ‘well, I would like to do more sport’, but concretely what can Europe do about it, I don’t know, and I found that it was missing in the documents”*. Here is Gabrielle’s statement (ECP 1): *“I think that it would have been good to give, for example, a small video in an email to make a quick summary – a quick summary so that we don’t arrive like that, and we don’t really know what we are going to talk about”*. And finally, Pascal’s surprising remark on the ‘European Constitution’ (ECP 2): *“I think that more information would have been useful. (...) Because it would have allowed us to exchange. For example, the European Constitution [sic] (...) well we don’t really know it. We know the main lines, the history of the majority and the unanimity etc., but there are a lot of little things that we don’t know. And it would have been good (...) to have much more information. (...) Because in the European Constitution, or even in smaller European laws, it is always said that Europe is more or less managed by technocrats, but maybe we should know who manages who, and who really governs”*.

Not only did the citizens I interviewed regret that they did not have enough knowledge to feel legitimate and comfortable in their deliberations, many of them also considered that this lack of “detailed information” had a bad impact on the quality of the deliberation (section 4). They told me that their lack of knowledge somehow “slowed” the flow of deliberation and did not allow them to say what they really wanted to say. As Simon (ECP 2) summarized: *“It’s very easy to say, ‘oh we should do this, things should be changed. European democracy should be closer to the citizens’. But then, when you start to think about it, (...) well it’s very complicated! And then, ‘Ok then how to make it better?’ Well, it’s even more complicated! Saying things to change is easy but proposing something and how to do it is very difficult. And it requires a lot of detailed information, also about the current system, which we don’t have. You quickly realize that there is a lack of knowledge. Maybe the information was available on the website, it probably is. But you can’t expect people to be experts. If they were, they wouldn’t be interviewed in a citizens’ panel, they would be interviewed in an experts’ panel”*.

The direct consequence of this ‘knowledge gap’, that many citizens experienced throughout ECPs, was the emergence of a sense of meaninglessness in their own participation. As Günter (ECP 1) described it: *“The less you know about something, the less comfortable you feel discussing it. A lot of people feel like that. Noémie [the facilitator] asked some of us ‘why don’t you contribute?’ and one replied ‘I don’t know anything about it, so what should I say?’. The context that people have with certain questions is very important. Otherwise, they don’t want to discuss it. Because they are not interested or because they feel uncomfortable because of their lack of knowledge”*.

Thus, not only did the lack of real exchange with the experts and information about the concrete functioning of the EU led to final recommendations that were extremely vague and far below what one would have expected from proposals to improve the future of Europe³, but it also hindered the smooth process of deliberation because many citizens felt incompetent and therefore illegitimate to discuss subjects they had little knowledge of.

4. Quality of Deliberation

In the previous section, I suggested that a low level of epistemic quality may impact the quality of the deliberative procedure itself. Because citizens lack information, they lack the basic knowledge and skills to feel legitimate to deliberate on complex or technical issues. Because they do not feel sufficiently legitimate, they tend to appropriate the (neutralized) opinions of experts, or any related information they have heard via the media. As for the most self-conscious social groups, mainly composed of young women and less educated citizens, they tend to adopt a passive non-participatory position. This passive position is not without consequences on the concrete outputs of any deliberative process which comes with a final vote on recommendations. If very few people participated or shared their opinions before the final vote, it is indeed difficult to predict the positioning of this audience at the time of the vote. A proposal that was apparently consensual and strongly supported by a very vocal minority could be rejected by a more passive majority which did not wish to express its concerns during the deliberative sessions. This deliberative gap may result in an increase in intersubjective distrust, to the extent that it may have counterproductive effects on depoliticization or negative politicization.

3 I am referring to the final recommendations that were proposed and voted during the ECP 2 session 3 in Florence. These recommendations remained, at that stage, provisional since they had not been discussed during the Plenary Conferences. But as such they remained extremely general, not binding, and not very innovative. Cf. Recommendation 24: *“We recommend establishing a common basis, according to a set of economic indicators and indicators on quality of life, for all MS, with the same opportunity and with everyone being at the same level to reach a common economic structure”*.

In this section, I evaluate three other concerns that were regularly addressed to explain ECPs' "low quality of deliberation": (a) logistical problems related to translation, room organization, and digital media, (b) the thematic overloading of some panels, and (c) the questionable choice of a loose moderation. Whether in meetings with Yves Sintomer's research group or in meetings conducted under the aegis of the EUI Democracy Forum, many theorists and practitioners of deliberative democracy regretted the lack of debate and the weakness of discussions in the sub-groups. I would not go that far. Having been –I believe– one of the few observers physically present during six weekends of ECPs⁴, I would rather describe the deliberative quality of these first citizens' panels as *irregular* and *insufficiently enhanced* by the organizers.

I do not feel comfortable with this "weakness of discussion" statement in the case of ECPs, because it underestimates the remarkable involvement and commitment of the citizens. Spending three full weekends, sometimes working ten hours a day, deliberating and exchanging in several languages with foreigners about the future of Europe cannot be taken for granted. These citizens were not trained, they had to listen to long hours of sometimes extremely dense and technical presentations dealing with the common market or EU trade policy, they had to get up early and to go to bed late. These details may seem trivial, but they are part of the daily routine of deliberation, i.e. an activity that requires a lot of attention, energy and motivation.

I was surprised by how few people checked their mobile phones, how few people arrived late or chatted about anything but the CoFoE, how many people volunteered to represent their fellow citizens at the Plenaries (100 volunteers out of 200 citizens for ECP 2), and how many people came back from one session to the other – including during the online session, during which no benefits (hotel, restaurant, social events) were provided. Of course, I also met a few free riders and a few citizens who were mainly interested in travelling and being paid for it. But honestly, these citizens were a minority, and most of the ones who remained passive felt illegitimate rather than unconcerned. Finally, all the citizens I interviewed mentioned the surprise, the thrill, or the curiosity they felt when they were contacted to "give their opinion on Europe". Some of the youngest interviewees even mentioned that this experience changed their lives. Filip (ECP 1) was one of them: "*I didn't even think that there are things in this world I can appreciate so much. And I appreciated it so much that now I have some sort of motivation... this made a difference in my life, I think, some kind of impact*". He added: "*I had the feeling to be different. (...) It was very strange for me that I was in a conference, and I wanted to talk! I was like "Whaaaaat?! It's not me! (...) I didn't know that it was so easy, that everyone can do this*".

This commitment went beyond the fact of travelling and meeting other European citizens. A lot of citizens attributed their involvement to the exchanges they had during the working groups. As an ethnographer, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the gap between scientific observers and citizens concerning the specific issue of the deliberative quality of ECPs. For the citizens I interviewed, the work and the exchanges they performed in sub-groups were globally very satisfactory. None of them –even the most skeptical ones, and even when I asked them their opinion on that matter– agreed with the statement according to which their discussions were of poor quality in terms of deliberative inputs. All of them mentioned the problems I evoked at the beginning of this section –i.e. logistical concerns, thematic overloading and ineffective moderation– but the vast majority happened to be quite satisfied with the discussions they had together as fellow citizens. Contradiction, antagonism, or conflict were discursive situations perceived rather negatively by the citizens interviewed, who contrasted them with their satisfaction at having taken part in "constructive" exchanges, where they felt "listened to" and "respected", where they were "not afraid" to speak up, where "compromise" and even "consensus" were actively sought. I assume that we should take this feedback seriously in order not to overestimate the accuracy of the "adversarial principle" (Manin 2021), if it comes to be

4 I.e. three weekends (ECPs 1, 2, 4) in session 1, two in session 2 (ECPs 1 and 2), and one in session 3 (ECP 2)

understood as the alpha and omega of the deliberative process. If our criterion for a well-functioning deliberation is “adversity”, then it is a bit dishonest to state that a deliberative process does not work well because it deliberately privileges consensus rather than conflict or contradiction.

Yet, it is true that some panel discussions –not to mention the plenary sessions, where there was little or no exchange– were suboptimal for reasons that have, in my view, little to do with the involvement of the citizens. In my view, the sub-optimality of the deliberation was partly due to logistical problems, but largely due to thematic overloading and the choice for a loose moderation of citizens’ deliberations. The most obvious, most discussed and least debatable point is the poor logistical quality of the deliberative environment.

TECHNICAL AND LOGISTICAL ISSUES – By deliberative environment, I am referring here to tools and spaces that were designed to allow constructive exchanges to take place. By low quality, I suggest that these tools and spaces have not allowed for truly effective, constructive, and satisfying exchanges for their actors. I will briefly mention three points that were constantly criticized by citizens and observers: the layout of the working rooms, translation, and the use of digital tools.

First, the layout of the rooms during session 1, in the European Parliament of Strasbourg, physically limited the exchanges. As evidenced in the picture below, the room chosen for the subgroup I observed was configured in an amphitheater mode: the facilitator was perched on a podium and he faced several rows of citizens who could not speak into the microphone (which was required for translation) while looking at each other.



Moreover, the pandemic situation required that all citizens kept their masks on throughout the deliberations. These two elements undeniably limited the emergence of a natural and spontaneous discussion. In session 2, the management of the deliberative space corresponded to the now well-known requirements of video conferencing. All citizens were able to see and hear each other virtually, except that only about half of the citizens turned on their cameras. As in session 1 in Strasbourg, when they wanted to speak, they had to raise their hand first and wait for the floor to be given to them in a chronological order. So much so that sometimes the exchanges turned out to be very disjointed: for example, C responded to a remark made by A while B had asked a new question unrelated to A. This resulted in the impression, evoked many times by the citizens I interviewed, that they were attending a “series of monologues” rather than a “verbal ping-pong”, as Iris aptly put it. The management of the deliberative space improved significantly during Session 3 in Florence when the staff decided to organize the working group sessions into a “meeting” format:



Attributing the obvious increase in participation observed during session 3 to the reorganization of the rooms would be far too risky, but it is interesting to note that this decision was positively acknowledged by a many citizens. Several citizens mentioned the fact that deliberation was based not only on verbal communication, but also on non-verbal communication, whose codes in terms of agreement and disagreement would happen to be clearer and more intuitive (and had therefore to be fully visible during deliberations).

The second logistical point that greatly limited the quality of exchanges and communication between citizens concerned the choice made by the CS to privilege digital tools over traditional ones. Very often, these tools did not work well, if at all. Not only did solving the problems take up the time needed for deliberation, it also sometimes directly hindered the deliberation.

First, Wi-Fi connection was often unstable, irregular, and unpredictable. During session 2 online, this problem came from both the citizens (whose access to quality internet was very uneven, depending on the geographical areas from which they attended the panel) and the organizers (staff, facilitators, presenters). The time lag, which was already considerable due to the order of the speeches and the translation, was further lengthened by connection problems that either chopped up speech or forced the person to repeat (sometimes more than once) her or his question/statement. These problems were also present during session 3 in Florence as the discussions took place in large old buildings, not well adapted to these kinds of digital practices. The Wi-Fi was very weak, and since everything (including translation and the voting system), went through the “Interactio” application, the sessions were continuously stopped by the intermittence of the connection.

Apart from strict connection issues, the digital tools hastily settled-on by the CS were not sufficiently stable to support the large number of people present during session 2 online. Thus, at the end of session 2, on Sunday afternoon, November 14, during the last plenary session in which the citizens of each sub-group had to present and justify their orientations to the rest of their fellow citizens, the session started 50 minutes late due to a technical problem that was never explained. The citizens then had only one minute left to present the results of two full days of deliberation. This problem was repeated in session 3 of ECP 2 in Florence – which was a hybrid session. Two-thirds of the citizens were physically present, while part of the remaining third followed the online conference. In fact, there was so little mention of the online citizens throughout the weekend that the presenters and facilitators did not involve them at all in their speeches. Among the citizens I was following, Pierre, 25, was online, and I was able to get some information about what was happening on the platform thanks to him. On Friday, December 10th at 11:30 am, he wrote to me: “*Second hour of the panel and the computer tool is already down*”. Then a few minutes later: “*They’ve been explaining for an hour in all languages that they have technical problems, and nobody understands anything*”, before concluding: “*This online format is really laughable*”. At the end of the session, he wrote to me that

they “*did not have simultaneous translation: the facilitators did the translation in each language for each explanation, some languages were not covered*” and that the votes for the selection of the final recommendations were made “*on the platform’s chat*”, without any anonymity.

There were countless technical problems throughout the ECPs and this report is not the place to count them exhaustively. However, these few examples are significant because they show that beyond the simple issue of technical reliability, they had important repercussions on deliberation. In the case of the hybrid session 3, there was even a flagrant breach of equality between citizens, since the online participants did not have the same deliberative means as *in situ* participants, even though the former had never “signed up for it” before the process. This is a problem that the non-observers were unable to observe and which they attributed a little too quickly to the lack of involvement of citizens or to the systematic search for consensus on the part of the organizers.

Finally, the last logistical problem related to the deliberative environment has been much commented on and I will not elaborate on it here. It concerns the communication problems associated with the choice of multilingualism and its practical interface: simultaneous interpretation. From a technical point of view, the written translation was not working well. The organization asked the facilitators to write down everything on a Google sheet that instantly translated the intervention of each citizen into all the languages of the working group concerned. However, Google is not the best translation software available. Moreover, from a political/ethical point of view, the choice for a U.S. multinational to take notes and translate the results of a citizen deliberative process should surely be questioned.

While this tool served primarily as an informative working document and ensured the transparency of the process, the problems related to oral interpretation had a greater impact on the quality of deliberation. In practice, the interpreters were not present, and everything was done via the Internet. As a consequence, every connection problem meant a loss of interpretation –which happened constantly and sometimes blocked the deliberations for several minutes. In addition, the interpretations went through English before being translated into another language. This resulted in a great waste of time and made it almost impossible to have a “verbal ping-pong” kind of communication, except between speakers of the same language. But then, the interpreting system went haywire because the interpreters did not have time to hear and translate the two interventions and it was the rest of the audience that was lost. As Iris (ECP 1) perfectly summed up: “*It’s translated into another language, it’s heard by the others 40 seconds later... You can respond, but usually after those who speak your mother tongue, because they have heard what you said in your mother tongue, so they can respond earlier. I find that it is a context that makes the conversation (...) very difficult. Giving your opinion is possible. Reacting to what someone else has just said is complicated. And all the more so because there were 13 of us in my group, which means that if I speak, there are on average 12 people who have spoken before me; so, my basic intention, when I finally take the floor, is to take advantage of this moment to say all the things I wanted to say since the last 12 people spoke. So, of course, I speak for a long time. It is complicated for the others to react, so they will store ideas in their heads. In the end, I think that the group format was hardly adapted to having a verbal ping-pong between the participants. Expressing your ideas yes. (...) Having a real conversation... well, it’s very complicated! With a group of 13 French speakers, it would not be easy. But then with 13 people speaking different languages, and with everyone not hearing the end of the translations at the same time, it’s hyper delicate*”.

The balance between the inclusiveness of the largest number of citizens and the effectiveness of deliberation was mentioned as a crucial issue. Simon (ECP 2) explicitly contrasted these two issues: *“It was more like a sequence of monologues which were related to each other. People would just hold some very short monologues of three minutes, or something, and then someone else would think of something and then would do the same! And you couldn’t really ask questions or interrupt people on the stand. For me it was also a little bit frustrating, for the quality of the discussion. Skipping the translation part would improve the quality of the discussion. But then of course, it would be very less accessible for people”*.

I will end this section by focusing on two other points that weighed heavily on the uneven and suboptimal quality of the deliberation. The first point concerns the thematic overloading of some panels, which the citizens themselves considered arbitrary and detrimental to the quality of deliberation. The second point concerns the contested methodology of facilitation.

THEMATIC OVERLOADING – Even though this issue was more relevant to ECP 1 than to ECP 2, I have chosen to address it in this report because it is an important issue to bear in mind when considering ideal deliberative processes. ECP 1 combined areas as diverse as economics and social justice, culture, education, sports, and digital issues. As Iris (ECP 1) summarized, *“In panel 1, we had a topic that was hyper broad. I have the impression that panel 1 was where they threw everything that didn’t fit in panels 2, 3 and 4. And so typically before we got there, we didn’t know if we were going to talk about education, sports, or economics”*.

In addition to being untrained, citizens were randomly assigned to deliberate on topics so broad and vague that they could not even prepare them at home on their own. Once these citizens had spent the first weekend of Session 1 refining the contours of the issues they wanted to work on, they were again dispersed into new thematic subgroups in Session 2 online. Many complained about the lack of rigor in the organization, which forced them to engage into some “deliberative tourism”: while they had made important efforts to engage with complex issues during session 1, they were told that they would not have the opportunity to discuss them anymore during session 2.

Besides, in such overloaded panels, citizens who found themselves in a topic that interested them were more willing to participate and contribute than those who were subjected to a topic that they did not find interesting. Günter (ECP 1) was very upset about that: *“Sometimes you had no ideas about these. If I had gone to the sport session, I would not have anything to say because I’m not interested in European sport”*. As for Pierre (ECP 2): *“To get people to participate, you must encourage them to get informed and to get involved – and to do that, they must be involved in subjects in which they feel concerned. If you throw them randomly into subjects that don’t concern them at all, you’ll have a hard time getting them involved and therefore you’ll have a hard time really getting their opinion”*. Those who, by happenstance, elaborated on the same topic in sessions 1 and 2 were a little better trained than the others and consequently intervened more. This resulted in an inequality between citizens, and therefore the risk of a loss of motivation for those who felt the “unluckiest”.

This sub-optimality of “deliberative tourism” was made explicit by its counterargument in session 3 of ECP 2. During this session in Florence, the organizers decided to keep the same composition of the working groups as in session 2. Thus, citizens who had already worked together in session 2 online were able to work altogether again in Florence. Interestingly, these deliberations happened to be much more dynamic and inclusive than those of the two previous sessions. The participants knew each other a little and they had good command of their subject. To summarize, the quality of the deliberation depends largely on the scope of the topics – the broader the scope, the less precise and effective the deliberation – and on the time that the citizens spend deliberating together on the same topic – the less familiar they are with each other and with the topic to be discussed, the more laborious and conformist the deliberation will be.

THE CHOICE FOR A LOOSE FACILITATION – The role of the facilitator⁵ – the person who organizes the discussions in the working group sessions, who circulates the floor and notes the citizens' proposals by rephrasing them into Google sheets – is both a fundamental and a thankless one.

Many of the citizens I interviewed complained about the facilitators. Even when they found the individual in question “nice”, even when they recognized that she or he “did their best”, they generally regretted her or his “lack of leadership” – i.e. sometimes her or his “lack of dynamism”, but more often her or his lack of guidance in the facilitation. The methodology chosen by the CS concerning facilitation was also based on the idea of neutrality. The facilitators were supposed to transcribe the ideas that would emerge naturally and spontaneously from citizens. They were supposed to animate the group, to bring a serene and dynamic atmosphere into the group, to improve people's confidence. But at no time were they supposed to guide or even structure the deliberations. They could not even intervene to reframe interventions that strayed too objectively from the theme of the subgroup. Some citizens perceived this as a confusing factor. I quote Iris (ECP 1): *“I was not convinced by our moderator. (...) I found that she had a little tendency to let people digress on a subject that was not central (...). We really had precise objectives, and I think that reminding people of the objectives and giving one or two warnings by saying ‘be careful, we’re straying from the objective, it’s not the subject, we need to refocus’, it’s important because if we talk for ten minutes about something that’s off topic, well that’s a big proportion of the time that’s been wasted”*.

For others, this type of moderation was non-transparent and inefficient. Here I quote Günter (ECP 1): *“What I was missing in our facilitator is that she did not give us any ideas about what all of that is good for. For me she had the same skeptical feelings that I have now. We do it like this and if you asked then she said ‘no, no we’ll do it another way’. But why? No leadership at all. She was nice and she answered the questions. That’s ok. But I would expect a little bit more leadership or enthusiasm. A bit like: ‘yeah I’m forced to do this, so I do it, and I’m happy when it’s finished”*. As for Simon (ECP 2), he deplored that *“the process was sometime a little bit unclear also to the moderator, who had specifically been trained for this session, but not necessarily for the whole procedure. So sometimes she was also a bit wondering about what will happen thereafter (...). But it wasn’t very precise, to be honest. (...) They could have been a little bit clearer with the overall method. I think the method was about not to steer people too much in any kind of direction, to have a free and open floor for discussion (...). But well, I don’t think we went really like deep, we didn’t do a really deep-dive into the topic. (...) So, I think we started quite broad, and we will dive into topics more deeply... But then, this could have been notified by the moderator. If that was clear upfront, then people wouldn’t make a fuss of that. You could have prevented these questions, and these questions took up maybe 25% of the time also”*. Finally, other citizens regretted that this choice for discretion and neutrality was made at the expense of knowledge and competence in European integration.

Beyond all these criticisms, the importance that a framing moderation could have on the quality of the deliberation was evidenced for the first time during the online session 2 of the ECP 1. The facilitator intervened in the progression of the orientations. She reformulated them in such a way that she did her best to add all the changes and improvements that were constantly suggested by the citizens. The citizens felt equally involved in a collective task, of which the Google sheet became the tangible proof. She did not hesitate to intervene when the propositions strayed too far from the subject and constantly made sure that she faithfully transcribed the work-in-progress outputs of the deliberation.

⁵ As explicitly stated in the document entitled “Briefing Facilitators” that the CS provided to the facilitators of ECP 2 session 3: “The role of a facilitator is to create a discussion **friendly atmosphere** in subgroup settings”. This positive description of the role of facilitators is complemented by a section entitled “How to minimize biases”: “a. Avoid **personal interpretations** and judgments; b. **No personal additions** to the content; c. **Neutral** and value-free reproduction of content” (my emphases).

This first observation was confirmed during session 3 in Florence. As previously stated, working groups remained unchanged between sessions 2 and 3. The facilitator was also supposed to remain the same. But in the case of the subgroup that I observed, the facilitator of session 2 (X) was sick, and another (Y) replaced him. I could therefore compare the responsiveness of this group, which I had already observed in session 2 with facilitator X. This comparative approach to facilitation was reinforced by the fact that, at some point a third facilitator (Z) had to replace Y.

Y performed a form of facilitation slightly different from the other facilitators I observed (8 in total). He talked much more, described the whole process, intervened very regularly and even gave some hints. And he did not hesitate to express his opinion on the deliberative process. For example, I noted that, at one point, he took the liberty of saying, *“I feel like suggesting that we go in the direction of competition-based rules to limit the influence of politics. That would give something more precise”*. Of course, the idea of competition was not his. This was initiated by a citizen. But he took the initiative to give his opinion on how he thought the deliberation could gain in precision. At another point, he said: *“This is not precise enough, the recommendation needs to be rephrased”*, or *“This is a bit too generic”*. He assumed a slightly more pedagogical role than the other facilitators by giving some reflective hints on the deliberative process when citizens started to doubt the effectiveness of their own exchanges. To a citizen who was afraid of lacking precision, he answered: *“It’s good to get lost a little, it’s part of the process of finding a compromise, it allows us to give more strength to the arguments later on”*. Similarly, to a citizen who feared that the exchanges had returned to the starting point, he replied: *“It’s part of the deliberative cycle, at each round the arguments are refined and improved”*.

This method of moderation seems to me to be much more effective because it highlights the contribution of the participants and aims at getting the best from them. It does not simply record ideas. It certainly structures and even guides the deliberations. In this sense, it can be perceived as a bit too invasive. However, it stimulates more people and raises the level of deliberation by increasing the citizens’ involvement and perseverance. Last but not least, this facilitator was warmly acknowledged by the group. As a citizen told me: *“Y really made us work well when we compare our recommendations to others”*. *Made us work well...* words are significant here.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to provide a critical assessment of the three sessions of ECP 2. A transnational deliberative democracy is an extremely ambitious and promising theoretical and practical project, but the operationalization of ECPs remained unsatisfactory at several levels. Rather than yielding to the convenient argument that these shortcomings were primarily due to the experimental nature of ECPs, I will conclude here by proposing some avenues for improvement that have been suggested to me by citizens and confirmed throughout my observations.

First, in section 2, I wrote that the objective of representativeness was supposed to be fulfilled by the sortition procedure. As for the objective of inclusiveness, it was supposed to be fulfilled by the multilingualism and the multistage structure of citizens’ deliberations. However, these two objectives were not fully reached. The representativeness seemed limited by the low number of citizens coming from ethnocultural minorities and from socio-professional categories less endowed in social and cultural capital. Similarly, the ideological/political representativeness of ECPs was clearly limited by the absence of selection criteria linked to the adherence to or the rejection of the EU. As a result, the panels seemed uniform, and they gave a partial image of the citizens of Europe concerned by the future of the continent.

To remedy this, I would first advocate for a sortition process that would not be limited to European citizens but that would include all the individuals who reside and pay their taxes in Europe. Then, I assume we should add a criterion that would enable better ideological representativeness of the citizens' panels. Unconvinced by the fact that people contacted by telephone would spontaneously say if they were pro- or anti-EU, I would prefer a neutral and factual question, such as: "Did you vote in the last European elections?". This would measure political commitment and involvement more than vague and intermittent European feelings.

As far as the inclusiveness of the ECPs is concerned, it seems to me to be an even more important issue than representativeness insofar as it implies the notion of equal participation that is at the heart of a deliberative procedure. Citizens must be *willing* to engage but also *able* to participate. To that end, I would keep the multilingual tool, even if it poses technical problems that I believe can be fixed. On the other hand, the dual deliberative space "assemblies + digital platform" does not seem to bring anything, insofar as a) it favors the usual categories of citizens most apt to get involved (mature men with higher education), and b) it does not result in any real circulation of ideas between the participants of the platform and those of the assemblies. Finally, and to transition to section 3, I believe that inclusiveness depends largely on equal access to the knowledge and information required to feel legitimate to deliberate. In order to better include the categories that participate the least (especially young women), I would therefore emphasize training in order to limit and counterbalance the effects of inequality at the start of the process.

In section 3, I showed that due to, among other things, insufficient inclusiveness of certain categories of citizens and a lack of basic information required to know what one is talking about, the cognitive and epistemic level of the ECPs remained low. To improve the overall level of these deliberations and move towards a participatory democracy based on a high-quality requirement, I would advocate for three elements.

First, citizens who wish to do so should have access to real training before the process. This training could take the form of face-to-face sessions, or dynamic, clear, and synthetic videos of several episodes during which EU institutions, their role, the competences of the EU in relation to the MS, and EU legislative process would be discussed, so that citizens are able to better understand the place and the role that their final recommendations could have in the European legal system.

Second, during the first session, a "contract of trust" could be established and discussed with citizens, so that all participants (organizers, facilitators, and citizens) understand exactly what their role is and what they can expect from the procedure – as well as where they might be disappointed or frustrated. This idea of a "contract of trust" was inspired by Günter. I quote him: "*Normally if you want to make people engaged (...) you must be very open and say 'look, we are doing this, and our intention is to get that and how do we do it'. You have to explain how this thing is going to... the imagination of what it can be, what you can gain from that. (...) And sometimes it doesn't work of course, and it is also something important to say. What do we do if we don't get any results?*".

Third, I think that facilitation would benefit from including more epistemic depth in the working groups. This can be done through the permanent presence of an expert whose field of expertise corresponds to the group's work theme. Nevertheless, the presence of an expert risks paralyzing the audience and moreover raises the question of influence. Therefore, I would rather opt for the presence of a student (MA or PhD) in European studies in the role of facilitator. This student could be trained by companies such as Missions Publiques, IFOK, etc. to obtain qualifications in terms of group facilitation. This would give the impression of an EU that cares about the integration of its students, while allowing these students to value their knowledge by obtaining work experience. The citizens, for their part, would lose nothing vis-a-vis animation, but they would gain quick and precise answers to their most technical questions about the EU.

This brings me to my final point on the quality of deliberation. In this section, I recalled citizens' enormous democratic desire towards this type of participatory experiment. This is a valuable result, and it would be extremely unfortunate to minimize or devalue it under the pretext that the environment or the deliberative methodology remained sub-optimal. Digital tools did not appear very useful, and citizens hardly used them. They hindered and slowed down the discussion. Of course, these problems would disappear if the technology improved. But as it is, we could probably do without it. Similarly, I think that online deliberation should be avoided as much as possible. Not only did it pose new and regrettable obstacles to deliberation during official sessions, neither did it allow for the emergence of spaces of alternative deliberation (those informal and convivial spaces from which the most solid proposals discussed during official sessions were elaborated). Finally, the ideology of neutrality and non-intervention in facilitation should be amended. Having been truly amazed by the evolution of deliberation in my group with the arrival of Y, I think that engaged, dynamic, and framing facilitation is much more effective, and desirable, than neutral and mechanical facilitation.

1. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of abbreviations

- **CoFoE:** Conference on the Future of Europe
- **CP:** Conference Plenary
- **CS:** Common Secretary
- **EB:** Executive Board
- **ECP:** European Citizens' Panels
- **MEP:** Members of European Parliament
- **MS:** Member States

Appendix 2: List of citizens interviewed at least once for at least one hour:

- ECP 1: **Gabrielle:** French, female, 16 years old, high school student
- ECP 1: **Günter:** German, male, 65 years old, retired, Prof. Dr. Management
- ECP 1: **Iris:** French, female, 29 years old, engineer (PhD in agronomy)
- ECP 1 (ambassador): **Filip:** Polish, male, 20 years old, art student
- ECP 1 (ambassador): **Vasco,** 22 years old, male, student in computer science and political science.
- ECP 2: **Pascal:** French, male, 63 years old, retired, former miner
- ECP 2: **Pierre:** French, male, 25 years old, humanitarian worker with migrants, graduate of a business school
- ECP 2: **Simon:** Dutch, male, 29 years old, PhD student in sociology

Authors

Aliénor Ballangé

Florence School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute, Italy

St Antony's College, University of Oxford

alienor.ballange@sant.ox.ac.uk