The Malaise of Electoral Democracy and What to Do About It

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The Re-Bel initiative aims to rethink in depth, in an open, rigorous, non-partisan way, what the institutions of the Belgian federal state - or of whatever else this part of the world needs to become - can and must look like in the longer term, taking full account of the evolving European context.

The Re-Bel initiative does not aim to produce one programme or manifesto to which everyone involved could subscribe. Its ambition is rather to provide a fertile intellectual environment in which new ideas and promising initiatives of all sorts can germinate and develop, with a concern for their relevance to a thorough reform of Belgium's institutions, but also to the institutional design of other complex polities, most obviously the European Union.

The Re-Bel initiative involves scholars from all Belgian universities, runs a web site, publishes e-books and organizes workshops and public events. It intends to associate to its activities both foreign colleagues and the Brussels-based international community. The working language will usually be English.

The Re-Be initiative is supported by the University Foundation, which will host all its activities. The University Foundation was founded in Brussels in 1920 at the initiative of Herbert Hoover and Emile Francqui. One of its missions, also central in the Re-Bel initiative, is to foster fruitful contacts and collaboration between academics of all Belgian universities.

Each contribution to a Re-Bel e-book is written under the sole responsibility of its author. The views expressed in it cannot be assumed to be shared by either the Re-Bel initiative as such or the University Foundation.

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Preface

Throughout the world, the idea of "democracy", the idea that the people should be governed by the people, remains a popular idea, enthusiastically embraced in many places by the opponents of autocratic regimes and safely protected in other places by the norms of political correctness. Nonetheless, the actual functioning of democratic regimes, based as it is in our country and elsewhere on the electoral process, seems to experience, if not a crisis, at least a deep malaise. And this malaise prompts a questioning of its foundations and a search for alternatives.

Two such alternatives are provided by deliberative assemblies of randomly chosen citizens on the pattern of the G1000 experiment that took place in Brussels in 2011 and by the European Citizens' Initiatives launched in 2012. The 7th Re-Bel event organized on 24 May 2012 took these two interesting new experiments as the starting point of a reflection on the malaise of democracy and what to do about it.

The present e-book includes a much enriched version of the two main presentations made on that occasion, respectively by Didier Caluwaerts (VUB) and Min Reuchamps (UCL) and by Kristof Jacobs (University of Nijmegen). These two pieces are preceded by a set of aphorisms on democracy by the historian and writer David Van Reybrouck, the mastermind of the G1000 and author of *Tegen verkiezingen* (De Bezige Bij, 2013, translated as *Contre les élections*, Actes Sud, 2014). They are followed by a commentary by Philippe Van Parijs, which benefited greatly from the discussion at the Re-Bel event and in particular from the contributions by Henri Monceau (Notre Europe), Charlotte Rive (European Commission), Jean-Pierre Rondas (ex VRT) and Daniel Van Lerberghe (Euractiv). And this commentary is in turn followed by an epilogue in the form of a letter in which David Van Reybrouck responds to Philippe Van Parijs's commentary

Paul De Grauwe & Philippe Van Parijs
Coordinators of the Re-Bel initiative

Prologue

On Democracy

David Van Reybrouck, founder of the G1000

1. Democracy is not meant to make people happy, it is meant to teach people how to be unhappy.

2. Democracy is not meant to be exciting, but to be boring.

3. Democracy is not about solving conflict, it is about learning to live with conflict. (Luc Huyse)

4. A world in which conflicts are constantly being minimized is not a democracy, it is utopia.

5. A world in which conflicts are constantly being maximized is not a democracy, it is hysteria.

6. A world in which conflicts are valued as sources of insight into each other nurtures the culture of democracy.

7. Of all political systems, democracy is the one that celebrates conflict the most.

8. Democracy is not about consensus, it is about conflict.

9. A world in which conflicts are being dealt with before they turn into violence fosters the culture of democracy.

10. A world in which conflicts are neither buried nor blown up is in the process of becoming democratic.

11. Democracy is an early harvest of what otherwise would grow into war.

12. In order to remain democratic, the pursuit of happiness should go hand in hand with the acceptance of unhappiness.

13. Happy the society whose inhabitants are all slightly unhappy, for this may betray the culture of democracy.

14. Democracy is about the even distribution of unhappiness. This is its utopian ideal. In the absence of its full realisation, it teaches people to be moderately happy about their moderate unhappiness.

15. Democracy is government of the people (tick), for the people (tick), by the people (question mark).

16. Universal suffrage does not suffice to allow us to speak of 'government by the people'.

17. If elections once belonged to the nature of aristocracy, universal suffrage was only a form of 'quantitative democratisation', not 'qualitative democratisation' (Bernard Manin). People got a right to vote, not to speak.

18. The person who casts his or her vote, casts it away. This is called: the principle of delegation. The only way of reclaiming that vote, is by sanctioning candidates at the next election.

19. Today, people despise the elected, but worship the elections. This is wrong: rather than being upset about politicians, parties and parliaments, they should be upset about the electoral mechanism.

20. For the very first time in the history of representative government, the weight of the next election has become bigger than the weight of the previous election. The danger of the sanction has become bigger than the power of the delegation.

21. The theory of electoral democracy: let the past push the present (delegation). The practice of electoral democracy: the future hinders the present (sanction). This cripples action. We are being ruled by a misty void. This void is not the future, but the fear of the future.

22. Elections are not only outdated as a democratic procedure, they were never meant to be democratic in the first place. Elections were invented to stop the danger of democracy. This is not blasphemy, but history.

23. Three thousand years of experimenting with democracy, and only two hundred years of playing with elections: and yet, we believe that elections are sacred.

24. There is nothing sacred about elections. They are only procedures, aristocratic procedures that people have tried to democratize, with considerable success, over the past two centuries.

25. There is nothing sacred about 'one man, one vote'. It is only the historically contingent expression of a deeper democratic concern: the equal distribution of political chances.

26. If democracy is government through debate, electoral democracy is fairly mute: citizens wait, citizens listen, citizens cast their vote, citizens wait again.

27. In a world that is becoming increasingly horizontal, elections are an obsolete vestige of more vertical times.

28. In a world where information spins fast, voting once every four years is no longer enough.

29. In a world where technology empowers people, citizens not only want to vote, but voice their opinions, too.

30. Democracy through periodic delegation and sanction is rapidly loosing its legitimacy.

31. In a communication society like ours, it is natural that people want to engage in public discussion on the future of their society, it is positive that they want to take part in collective affairs and help shape the future of their communities.

32. People have the right to vote, they now ask for the right to speak.

33. How should the right to speak be organized? We have to avoid that only those with money, degrees and contacts get heard. We should not repeat the mistakes from the past: a new democracy should never become an elitist democracy.

34. The right to speak should be evenly distributed. The best way to do so is by sortition, i.e. by random sampling.

35. Sortition is the blind selection procedure by which a random sample of a population is drafted in order to get an adequate representation of that population.

36. If elections create representation on the basis of virtue, sortition creates representation on the basis of equality.

37. Both have their advantages: elections may guarantee more competences, sortition guarantees more freedom. Those who are drafted have to rotate after a while, their decisions will not be influenced by the need for reelection.

38. Two key notions for elections: delegation and sanction. Two key notions for sortition: equality and rotation.

39. If democracy is about the equal distribution of political chances, sortition guarantees that everybody has the same chance of being selected.

40. 'One man, one vote' now becomes 'One person, one chance'.
41. Sortition is commonly used in contemporary democracies: it forms the basis of the entire polling business.
42. Opinion polls measure what people think when they don't think; it would be much more interesting to know what they think when they had a chance to think (James Fishkin).
43. Giving a random sample of people a chance to think by letting them talking to each other and to experts and by giving them time to get at their own conclusions is the very nature of deliberative democracy.
44. Deliberative democracy is not about voting but about talking; it is not about avoiding conflict but about embracing it; it is not about consensus but dissensus.
45. Because deliberative democracy is both about the pursuit of happiness and the acceptance of unhappiness, it is a much needed complement to classical electoral democracy.

David Van Reybrouck is the founder of the G1000 and the author of *A Plea for Populism* (2008) and *Against Elections* (2013). He was Cleveringa Professor at Leiden University in 2011-2012.

Lead Pieces

The G1000

Facts, figures and some lessons from an experience of deliberative democracy in Belgium

Didier Caluwaerts & Min Reuchamps

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Democracy means many things to many people. For some it means that citizens have the right to express their political preferences through free elections. For so-called deliberative democrats, the strength of any democracy is public deliberation, the frequent and above all reasoned discussion between citizens on political issues. Through talking to each other, citizens identify good reasons and reject bad ones, which eventually leads to well-considered decision making.

In recent years, this ideal of deliberation as the basis for social and political action has gained momentum in political theory and practice. The deliberative turn, as it came to be known, takes a talk-centric approach to politics in which the quality of democratic decisions is determined by the rational process of arguing back and forth (Dryzek, 2000). After all, through deliberating on public issues, citizens adopt a perspective of the common good and they will come to see their 'true' preferences.

However, the rise of deliberative democracy was more than a theoretical endeavor. It also laid the foundations of a positive theory of deliberation. There is an ever-growing experience with organizing so-called mini-publics, whether they be scientific experiments such as Deliberative Polls, or government-initiated projects such as Consensus Conferences. All of these deliberative experiments show that the philosophical assumptions are well corroborated. For instance, the Deliberative Polls show quite clearly that people's opinions shift significantly during deliberation (Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002), and other experiments reported an increase in civic-minded attitudes through deliberation (Grönlund, Setälä, & Herne, 2010).

The initiative we are going to discuss in this lead piece is the G1000 in Belgium. Contrary to most other initiatives by researchers or government agencies (Reuchamps, 2013), the G1000 project is a more hybrid type of deliberative event. There are certain characteristics that set it apart from other initiatives, such as

the way in which the agenda of the event was set, the scale of the event, and the fact that is was a grass-root initiative by and for citizens. Because of its hybrid form, the G1000 deserves special attention.

In this chapter, we first sketch the general background against which deliberative democracy in general – and the G1000 in particular – came about, after which we show that there is an ever-growing experience with deliberative events, and we highlight some of the main characteristics of these events. Next, we go into detail on the ideas and the methodological choices behind the G1000 project. And finally, we offer an overall evaluation of the project.

1   The deliberative turn

The rise of deliberative democracy has to be sketched against the political background of the 1990's. In this period, political analysts in all Western European countries discovered the contours of what they thought to be a wide-spread crisis of democracy. The alleged decline of political trust and the rise of electoral volatility pointed out that the gap between politicians and citizens had never been wider. This political climate characterized by a deep-rooted crisis offered an excellent breeding ground for critical reflection on the role, shape and function of democracy in modern societies. It gave rise to a fruitful quest for new and innovative ways of governing a democracy.

It is in this turbulent period that the ideal of a deliberative democracy was developed. A community of international scholars and philosophers were inspired by the work of Jürgen Habermas. They held the conviction that a vibrant democracy is more than the aggregate of its citizens, and that democratic politics should be about more than merely voting. The quality of a democracy and the quality of democratic decisions, according to them, did not depend on the correct aggregation of individual preferences, but rather on the quality of the public debate that preceded the voting stage. Democratic decisions were thus no longer considered a function of mere compliance with aggregation rules. Instead, they are determined by extensive argumentation about political choices before voting on them.

Deliberative democrats therefore took a talk-centric approach to decision making (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Contrary to many political theorists and practitioners at that time, deliberative democrats did not promote the idea that the solution to the crisis lay in offering citizens more opportunities to vote in e.g. referenda. Deliberativists rather shifted the attention from the aggregation of votes to the transformation of preferences. Talking about political issues, according to deliberative democrats, instigates a more considered judgment; it allows citizens to hear other perspectives to a problem and to broaden and question their own opinions. However, these beneficial effects do not come about easily, because two crucial conditions have to be met.

First of all, deliberation has to be inclusive. Every perspective on an issue of public concern should theoretically be heard in order to come to "good" decisions. This also means that all arguments and counterarguments should be treated with equal respect. Secondly, deliberation should be rational. Arguments offered and positions taken should be justified on reasonable grounds, and when better

arguments are brought to the discussion, participants should be willing to yield to the "the unforced force of the better argument" (Habermas, 1999, p. 332). Moreover, these arguments have to be formulated in terms that are expected to be acceptable to others. This means that in a deliberation arguments cannot merely reflect self-interests or group interests, but they should refer to the common good.

Besides its radical shift from voting to talking, deliberative democrats also advocate a strong grass-roots perspective. From its very inception, deliberative democracy took a non-elitist stance, emphasizing the importance of talk in the wider public sphere, and not just among elites. Deliberation should after all be rooted in everyday interactions between citizens (Akkerman, 2007, p. 272; Ikeda, Morales, & Wolf, 2010). Discussion between citizens on all issues strengthens political life by allowing citizens to put their ideas to the test – and it works (Caluwaerts & Deschouwer, 2013).

As such, the process of reflecting on opinions and arguing back-and-forth adds to the value of democracy by enhancing the consideredness of public opinions; it shows citizens what their true preferences are in light of better arguments, or should be in light of the common good. It is through political talk that citizens find out what they value themselves and what is acceptable to others. Informal political talk therefore fosters "representative thinking", i.e. the cognitive incorporation of other citizens' standpoints (Arendt, 2010, p. 303).

2   G1000: a citizens' initiative

It is in such deliberative democracy atmosphere that the idea of a G1000 was born.[1] Much in line with the analyses that were made in the past two decades, the G1000 project also starts from the idea that democracy is in crisis (Caluwaerts, 2011). There is an ever-growing gap between politics and citizens, and the public and political agendas no longer coincide. Politicians take a short-term approach to politics emphasizing the importance of getting reelected, whereas citizens are no longer satisfied with their role as passive subjects. They take a much more active approach to political life, and they long to set out on their own roads.

The reasons for the perceived lack of political legitimacy lie in the changing nature of representative relations. After all, politics is no longer about citizens choosing their representatives, and those representatives being held accountable to the citizens. Rather, politics is much more than before an indirect process, in which the ties between citizen and representative are mediated through the mass media and new social media.

This changing interaction fosters nervousness among politicians who feel like they are constantly being monitored, who feel like the media and citizens are constantly looking over their shoulders. That leads to a politics in the trenches, a politics in which the least bit of compromise is immediately magnified and

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[1] The manifesto of the G1000 as well as its final report is available in Dutch, English, French and German on the website: http://www.g1000.org/.

considered treacherous. In such a society, politics is about taking positions and sticking with them for fear of being publicly discredited, and no longer about listening to each other's arguments.

The main diagnosis of the G1000 is thus the conclusion that politicians in such a system have little room to deliberate, between two elections, whereas citizens have more liberty to do so. Citizens are only accountable to themselves; they don't need to worry about reelection. They have the liberty to genuinely talk to each other and they have the openness to change their minds in light of better arguments. That is why the formal representative system could benefit from an injection with bottom-up impulses.

This idea is at the basis of the G1000 project. The G1000 aims to be a citizen initiative that is capable of innovating democracy, a project which attempts not to overthrow the representative system, but to complement it and to breath new life into it. Its aim is to gather ordinary citizens in a setting, which is conducive to open and uncoercive deliberation on possibly contentious political issues, and to let citizens themselves experience democracy and thus the difficulty of building bridges over highly polarizing issues.

3   The three phases of the G1000

In order to live up to its ideals of inclusion and openness, the G1000 was organized as more than a regular deliberative event. The G1000 was a process of public consultation and deliberation consisting of three distinct – but interrelated – phases, namely public consultation, citizen summit (for a large-scale deliberation), and citizen panel (for an in-depth deliberation).

Phase 1: Public consultation

The first phase consisted of a very open process of agenda setting. The agenda of the citizen summit itself was not determined by the organizers; as it is a commonplace practice in deliberative ventures. Rather, the organizers were convinced of the importance of starting with a very open agenda, which would be determined entirely by the public itself.

In order to guarantee an open process of agenda setting, a large-scale online consultation was organized. In the beginning of July 2011, the organizers launched a so-called idea-box on the website in which every citizen, no matter what his or her opinion or background, could post the questions or problems that should be treated at the G1000 citizen summit. This online consultation resulted in a total of over 2000 ideas, dealing with all kinds of social, political and economic issues. Moreover, those who submitted their questions could also rate the ideas and proposals of others, allowing us to get an accurate reading of the saliency of the issues. In total, more than 6000 people took part in this process.

Because most of the proposals appeared several times in the list, the ideas were subsequently clustered into a top 25 of themes based on the number of times they appeared and on their rating. This list of 25 was once again put online in October 2011, and through the media, citizens were invited to vote for their three

preferred themes for the G1000. Eventually, these three issues turned out to be: social security, welfare in times of economic crisis, and immigration. [2]

In order to avoid a bias in the results, the 25 ideas appeared in a random order on the screen, so that the organizers had no influence on the final agenda. There was also an ex-post IP check to prevent massive voting by a single individual or group. This large-scale public consultation, and the voting tool for the top 25 guaranteed that the agenda of the deliberative event was very open and not inspired by partisan or political ideas.

Phase 2: Citizen summit

After the phase of public consultation, the second part of the project consisted in a process of citizen deliberation, the G1000 citizen summit. Through a mix of random selection and targeted recruitment (as described and discussed in §5.1 below), 1000 citizens were invited to participate in a deliberative event in Brussels. On 11 November 2011, sitting at 100 tables, the participants were invited to reflect, discuss and argue their positions on the three issues that were put on the agenda. The discussion at each of these tables was facilitated by experienced volunteers who received proper training the day before the event. They received the briefing materials and the scenario for the discussion beforehand. Moreover, 30 tables at the G1000 were bilingual, and a translator was assigned to each of these tables.

The G1000 event in Brussels was flanked by two side projects: G'Home and G'offs. The G'home was a software application aimed at online discussion, whereas the G'offs gathered citizens all over Belgium to discuss the same issues as in Brussels but at local tables. The participant pool of these G'Homes and G'Offs was based entirely on self-selection, but the possibility to take part in local initiatives or even at home did lower the threshold for participation, and they did allow a much larger group than those gathered in Brussels to gather and simultaneously discuss the same issues. To this end, the event in Brussels was live streamed on the website.

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[2] All the results are either presented on the website or in the final report of the G1000, which is available for free on the website.

Phase 3: Citizen panel

The G1000 citizen summit took the format of a Town Hall Meeting. It was a large event designed to facilitate the pooling and sharing of ideas and the elaboration of proposals. Given the fact that each round was relatively short and focused on exploring the diversity around the tables, the ideas and proposals that were launched were still very basic. The third phase of the G1000 project, which is also known as the G32, aimed at elaborating these basic ideas, and to further concrete proposals. During three weekends, 32 participants of the G1000 gathered to work out policy proposals.

These 32 citizens were randomly selected from a pool of 491 names. These 491 people were participants of the G1000, G'Offs or G'Home who agreed to be considered as potential G32 participants, which meant a significant commitment to participate in each one of the three weekends. The random selection of the 32 was done with a control for diversity in terms of gender, language, region and age.

The G32 took the form of a citizen panel (also called consensus conference), which is a design often used in policy processes throughout the world. Such a deliberative design is much more intensive since participants endeavor to propose specific policies and actions. It is also more open than a citizen summit since the participants have a much greater say in the process itself. In fact, the citizens do have the lead on what precisely they wish to work on (i.e. the choice of the specific questions they want to tackle), on how they want to work (i.e. the choice of the experts and stakeholders they wish to question) and above all on what they decide and bring to the public debate.

4 The funding

The main difference between the G1000 and many other deliberative projects is that it was not funded with public nor research money. The G1000 was an initiative by citizens for citizens. As an independent organization, it relied on crowd funding, especially for its first and second phase. The first two phases were entirely funded by private donations without any return for the funders (so it was not sponsoring). In order to guarantee our independence, each individual donation could only amount up to 35000 euro (or 7% of the budget). So, for the first two phases, the G1000 did not ask for public money. However, for the third phase, it opened up the funding to public money as it was believed that such deliberative democracy initiative should also be supported by public institutions, once it was launched. Thus, the three weekends of the G32 were organized in three parliaments in Belgium: in the Flemish Parliament, in the Walloon Parliament and in the federal Parliament.

Nonetheless, this choice for limited private and public donations had important consequences for the project. It required a non-relenting flow of energy towards finding money, which also conditioned some methodological choices as we explain in the next section.

5 The methodology

From the beginning, the organizers were convinced that the G1000 should respect three important principles: diversity, inclusion and independence. These three principles are reflected in each of the methodological choices we had to make notably concerning the recruitment of the participants and the design of the script (as well as in the agenda setting process of the first phase, as we have described it before). Nonetheless, beside these three overarching principles, methodological choices are also unavoidably driven by practical considerations, which need to be stated openly (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014a).

5.1. The recruitment

The key question when gathering citizens to discuss political issues at a deliberative event concerns the selection of the participants. There are many techniques available for recruiting participants (Caluwaerts & Ugarriza, 2012; Reuchamps, 2011). Many deliberative events, especially when they are initiated by government organizations, rely on self-reporting (Ryfe, 2005). This means that there is an opt-in possibility by which volunteers can answer a broad call for participation. Often this technique also relies on snowball sampling in which organizers rely on the participants to bring along others they know. Another technique often used is drawing samples from existing panels (Caluwaerts, 2012a; Price & Capella, 2002). Especially when the groups are small, and guaranteeing representativeness is not the main aim, members of panels are often called upon.

Random selection

However, normatively and methodologically, the most appealing technique for recruiting participants of deliberative events is random selection (Bohman, 2007, pp. 351-352; Fishkin & Farrar, 2005). The reason why randomization is so normatively appealing is because it gives every citizen an equal chance of being selected to participate. Moreover, randomization ensures that the multitude of public opinions is present in a group and it thus "produces discussion among people who think and vote differently and would not normally be exposed to one another" (Fishkin, Luskin, & Jowell, 2000, p. 660).

This is also the reason why the G1000 opted for random selection. Besides methodological soundness, the recruitment procedure aimed at maximizing the diversity of opinions among the participants, in order to avoid "informational inbreeding among likeminded citizens" (Huckfeldt 2001, p. 426). Citizens can, after all, only find themselves in a situation of genuine deliberation when they are faced with competing claims and opinions (Caluwaerts & Ugarriza, 2012). When everyone at the table shares the same opinion, there is very little contestation within the group, and under such circumstances, deliberation does not lead to well-considered opinions and well-argued positions.

Nonetheless, we did not seek for representativeness. In fact, we did not put forward any claims to representativeness because when 1000 people are invited, if one does not show up, there is no statistical representativeness anymore. Rather, diversity – and not representativeness – was the central principle governing the G1000, and the random selection of participants from the population was generally considered to be the most promising technique for ensuring this diversity.

Because it proved very difficult, too lengthy and much too expensive for our crowd funded budget to draw a sample from official census lists, we asked an independent recruitment agency (GFK Significant) to contact participants through Random Digit Dialing. This technique generates random phone numbers for fixed and mobile lines and in Belgium that, in total, has a penetration rate of 99%. Every inhabitant – who has a fixed or a mobile telephone – thus had an equal chance of being selected for participation in the G1000. However, for such invitations, the "yes" response rate is always very low: around 1%, so 100 phone calls for 1 yes. This figure may be surprisingly very low, but it should be qualified. Indeed, response rate for a telephone political survey ranges from 10% to 50% (on the Internet, it's a bit higher because the respondents are slightly different from the overall population) and for such survey, no commitment is asked from the respondents. In the case of an invitation to participate to a deliberative experience, the commitment is much higher: ordinary citizens are asked to spend one (or sometimes more) free day to discuss topics for which they often have no clue and possibly no interest.

So for the recruitment of the G1000 participants, we expected a normal response rate of 1%. In fact, it went up to 3% because the experience was quite well known. In addition to the phone calls by the independent recruitment agency, we also organize a follow-up call or visit (it was up to the participant) by one of our many ambassadors, who were other citizens interested in the G1000 and willing to spend some of their free time in its organization. The task of the ambassadors was to answer the questions of the participants and above all to reintroduce a human face to the event.

In order to guard over the quality of the participant sample, the random selection was checked for certain predefined population quotas. More specifically, our selection guaranteed that the sample resembled the population with regard to gender, age and province. This last quorum was considered crucial in order to guarantee a proportional representation of both linguistic groups.

In the end, these quota seem to be well respected in the group of final participants. 52% of the participants was female, 48% was male, which is a perfect reflection of the gender composition of the population, and which was rather unexpected since women are found to be more likely to drop out of such deliberative events (Ryfe, 2005). Moreover, 61% of the participants were Dutch-speaking versus 39% of the French speakers, which is also an accurate reflection of the population. And there was a large diversity in age groups, with the youngest participant being 18, and the oldest one being 85.

Targeted recruitment for difficult-to-reach groups

Despite the careful process of random selection, however, we knew that there was possibly a stronger dropout among the groups who traditionally feel less at ease with politics, or with social and political participation. Moreover, some people are simply much harder to reach which further contributes to self-selection effects.

This consideration urged us to slightly expand our recruitment strategy. Because we valued the diversity at the table so much, and because we wanted to optimize the possibilities for social learning and creative thinking, we reserved 10% of the places to persons who were least susceptible to answering positively to our invitation. In order to reach these groups, we contacted numerous grass-root organizations dealing with socially vulnerable people such as homeless people or people from a foreign origin. The other 90% of the participants were selected by random recruitment.

This strategy of relaying our invitation through intermediary social associations is often suggested because of the bond of trust these organizations have with the underprivileged groups (Ryfe, 2005). Moreover, our strategy of recruiting specific target groups seems to have worked since the diversity at the tables was one of the main points of praise the G1000 project received from the international observers.[3]

Dropout

Despite all recruitment efforts and despite all the hard work of the volunteers to keep the participants motivated, we knew that it was very likely the G1000 would not reach its symbolic target of 1000 participants. As is common in deliberative practice, we experienced a dropout rate of about 30% among the people who had confirmed their participation shortly before the event, with the final number of participants amounting to 704. This has to be put into perspective, however. Unlike many other events, the participants for the G1000 did not receive any financial compensation for their participation. For instance, in Deliberative Polls, which are comparable events, the participants receive a flat fee of up to 300 euro simply for attending the event. In the case of the G1000, we could only compensate the transportation of the participants by train. Moreover, the 11th of November was a very sunny holiday and there was a train strike, which was announced to last until 10 o'clock in the morning. This puts the dropout rate of 30% into perspective.

5.2. Managing group dynamics: the script

Since deliberative events are always social events, in which citizens are gathered, who formerly did not know each other, the group dynamic aspect of these events is crucial for its success. In order to manage the group dynamics, and to give everyone the liberty to utter his or her opinion, we designed a clear script of the different rounds (see appendix A with the script of the citizen summit).

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[3] This report is in appendix of the G1000 final report.

The first important choice we made to improve personal relations around the table was to organize an introductory round at the beginning of the day so that the participants had an opportunity to get to know each other. Group deliberation is after all a very unusual and sometimes frightening setting, with which some feel more at ease than others (Caluwaerts, 2012b). It was therefore crucial, from a group dynamic point of view, to get the participants acquainted with each other, with their tasks and with the environment (Krueger, 1998). Once again, the main argument of the organizers was to give equal consideration to all opinions represented at the table, and to guarantee the openness towards and inclusion of all opinions around the table.

After the introductory round, the participants discussed the three issues at their tables. The central aims of these discussions were to come to clear problem definitions, to suggest solutions, and to take stock of the different ideas and perspectives the participants had on the themes. Each of the three themes on the agenda was dealt with in three sequential rounds. In each round, the theme was first introduced by two experts on the subject. These experts offered their takes on the problems and proposed possible solutions. In each round, the experts came from different sides of the linguistic border. After all, it was crucial to guarantee a balanced presentation, in which the views of both linguistic groups were represented but also on different perspectives. Nevertheless, as the international observers rightfully pointed out, the experts might have not shown or represented the full spectrum of perspectives on the issues at stake. Of course, one can always argue that experts because of their status of experts have always an influence on the participant's opinions. The lead facilitators have repeatedly told the participants, however, that they should not take for granted the suggestions brought in the debate by the experts; i.e. they should keep a critical attitude and deliberate them. To apprehend this possible bias, we have asked the participants in the posttest whether their opinions had been influenced by the experts (see below). In the G32, the choice of the experts was mainly done by the participants themselves.

In order to facilitate the process of perspective-taking and information pooling, these discussions were highly structured: there was a detailed script which the facilitators were supposed to follow, and which clearly stated the outputs that were expected in each phase of the discussion. This explains why the quality of deliberation was similar across the different tables (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014b). Moreover, in order to support the natural group dynamics, different interaction styles were used. Sometimes the participants had to discuss in pairs of two to lower the threshold of speaking in public; at other times, they discussed the issues with everyone at the table. Sometimes the tasks were very simple like expressing their feelings towards an issue such as immigration, but at other times, the expected outcomes were more complex and the cognitive investment was much larger.

The scenario for each of the discussion rounds and for each of the themes was thus construed in such a way as to maximize the inclusion of all and the process of information sharing, and to minimize the social thresholds for fully participating in the discussions. Even though the final evaluation of the G1000 made clear that we expected a lot of input and effort from the participants in very – maybe too – little time, it was this built-in alternation between complex and easy tasks, which made the discussions very effective in bringing out the cognitive diversity of the group.

Finally, because the results of the discussions were very tangible, the participants remained motivated throughout the day. At multiple times during the discussions, we asked concrete inputs from each of the tables. Sometimes this was a mere Post-it with feelings or key words, but most of the time ready-made templates were used.

These templates were subsequently sent to the central desk, which was the key information processing office. This central desk consisted of six experienced academics who collected the data from each of the tables and who sorted out and analyzed the proposals. This process of aggregation resulted in a list of ideas or solutions on each of the topics the participants discussed, which were then resubmitted to the individual vote of the participants at the end of each round. Using voting equipment, the participants could express their opinions and preferences on each of the solutions that circulated in the discussions. Even though it was strictly speaking not necessary to have this final vote, it made the results of the discussions very tangible to the participants, and it also gave them the opportunity to see where they situated themselves in the larger group of participants (for the results of the vote, see appendix B).

6 Lessons from the participants

Even though the G1000 was not conceived as a scientific experiment, we did manage to gather some crucial information in a pretest and posttest questionnaire, beside the results of the votes which are available on the website. Based on earlier research (Caluwaerts, 2012a), we gathered information about how the participants experienced their participation in the event. These are good indicators for the overall satisfaction with deliberation itself.

The posttest survey shows that the participants felt like they had sufficient opportunities to express their opinions and that they could participate without restraints. They were not afraid to utter their opinion and they really put a lot of effort into arguing their positions and elaborating their arguments. This extensive process of justification and the openness towards new ideas and perspectives is also what they appreciated in the other participants. Well over 90% of all participants claimed that others showed sincere interest in what they were saying. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of 75% of the participants felt like they were treated with much respect during the discussion. The respect accorded to others in the discussion is one of the most important indicators for the quality and intensity of the deliberation.

Beside their perception of the deliberative process, we also surveyed the participants about the role of the experts. Every theme was introduced by two experts – one Dutch-speaker and one French-speaker – as we explained above. These experts gave their take on the issue under discussion, and attempted to offer different perspectives on the problem and its solution. Of course, one of the big risks in deliberative events, as we mentioned earlier, is that experts, with their expertise, influence the citizens in one direction – and other experts would have influenced in the opposite direction. Did they participants retain the critical attitude towards what they heard during the presentations by the experts?

No one can know it for sure. What we know, however, is that we asked the participants to retain their critical attitudes towards the arguments of the experts but also towards the arguments of the other participants. From the feedback we have collected from the participants, it seems to have been the case in most tables. Above all, we surveyed directly the participants on this issue in the posttest. Overall, we notice that the impact of the experts was mixed on the opinions of the participants (Figure 1). About 50% of them claims that the experts had no influence whatsoever on their own opinions, whereas only 23% of the participants responded that their own opinions did change because of the experts. The experts thus did not have an all-encompassing effect, even though – let's not be naïve – they had an impact in the discussion; that's also part of the deliberative process at stake.

Figure 1

In general, the experts who spoke at the G1000 have influenced my opinion.
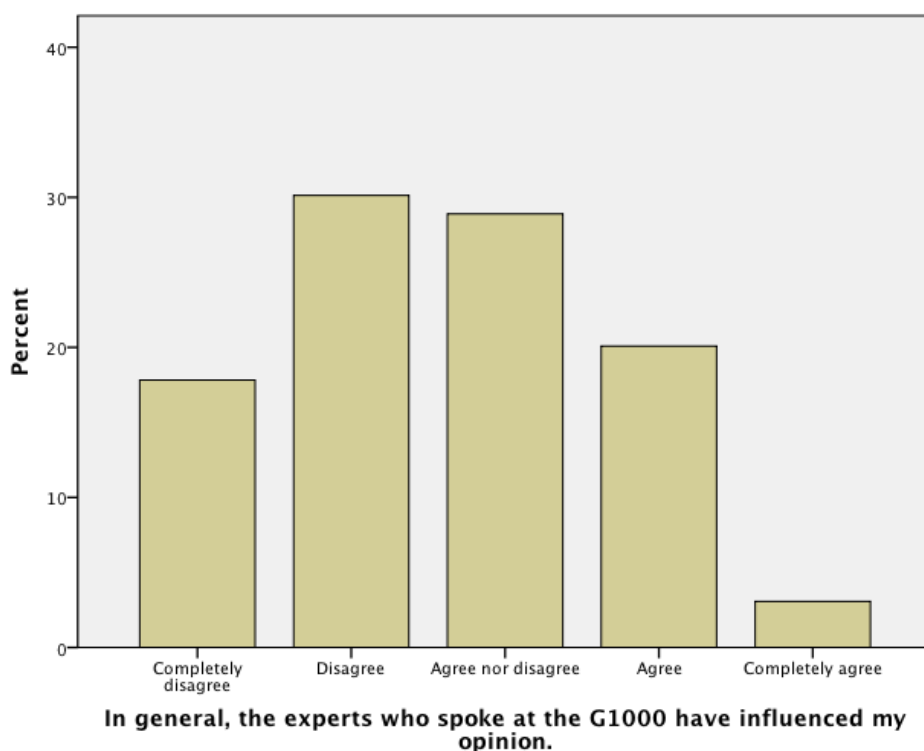
We not only asked the participant about how they perceived the process, and how they felt about deliberation. We also asked them about their opinion on the final votes that were taken at the end of each round. As Figure 2 indicates, more than 75% of all the respondents felt that good decisions were made at the G1000. The question was quite broad since we did not qualify which decisions were meant. It was up to the respondents to decide whether decisions meant the discussions at the tables, the propositions, the results of the votes, or – more likely – a mix of everything. Nonetheless, these results indicate an overall high level of satisfaction with the G1000 in terms of the outputs of this day of deliberation.

Figure 2

I think that good decisions were made at the G1000.
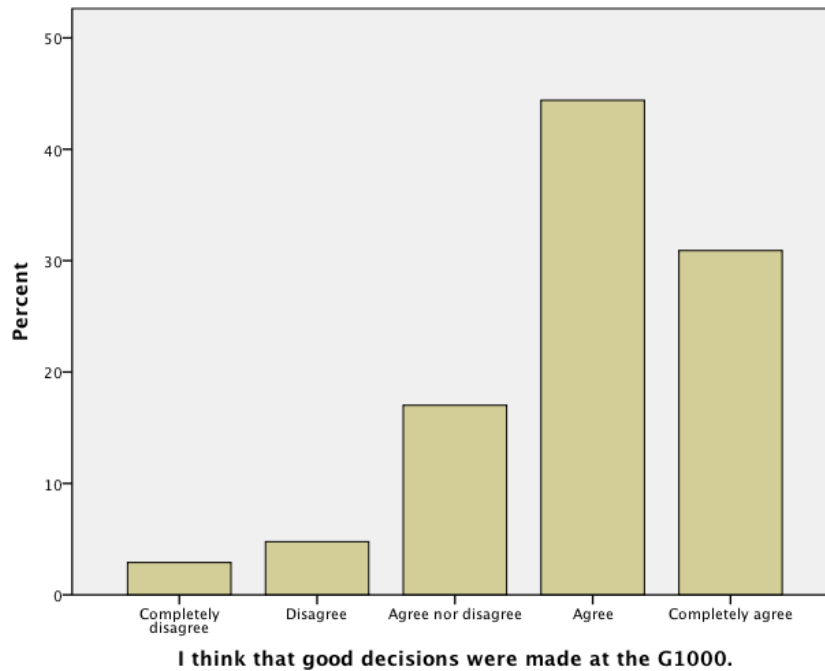
7   Evaluation

Despite the choices we had to make and the justified criticism we might get for that (Reuchamps & Caluwaerts, 2013), the G1000 project did succeed in one important thing: its ideas and its methods stirred public opinion and set in motion a debate about the quality and organization of democracy. It instigated a public discussion on what it means to be a citizen in modern society, and on how politics should be shaped in order to meet the demands from the citizens. And even more than that, it showed us the wisdom and the passion of the crowd. Many citizens arrived at Tour & Taxis on that 11 of November with skepticism, but at the end of the day, the motivation among the participants and the pride of being part of the event set the tone.

The citizen panel of the G32 went one step further. During three weekends, the three-dozen participants tackled the question: how shall we deal with work in our society? This topic was a sub-topic of the issue of social security, one of the three main themes of the citizen summit. The participants chose themselves to dig into this issue and selected the experts and the stakeholders they wanted to meet in order to sharpen their recommendations. At the end of the third weekend, they delivered publicly two dozens of recommendations related to several topics related to work4. As such, the contribution of the G1000 to the public debate was in terms of both results and processes.

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[4] The recommendations and all the preliminary work of the citizens is a core section of the G1000 final report.

However, as in any debate, many objections were formulated: the G1000 was an anti-political project, the G1000 wanted to replace representative democracy, the G1000 was against referenda, the G1000 cost too much, there were too few toilets at the event… Nevertheless, we can say that whether they were for or against deliberative democracy, critics did contribute to its success by publicly contesting the premises and choices of the G1000 project.

Despite these critical reflections, we are convinced that the main contribution of the G1000 lay in its ability to offer a new way of thinking about politics. To us, it is not necessarily the substantive results that are the crucial determinant of the success of the G1000. They are important, and they deserve to be considered by politicians when thinking out future policies, but the added value of the G1000 project was also the fact that it proposed a new way of doing and living politics. In a sense, the G1000 can be considered a learning school for democracy, a setting in which ordinary citizens could meet and learn about each others' preferences, intentions and arguments. The discussions at the G1000 and the public debate surrounding the G1000 proved to be a crucial factor in deepening and rejuvenating a democracy that risked turning its back on citizens. Of course, this new page of democracy still needs to be written; the G1000 only offered the first draft of the first lines.

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Appendix A – The G1000 script of the Citizen summit

1   Aims and general principles of the script

Substance	1. Exchange ideas about the three central issues, which were determined in the first phase. 2. Determine the "appreciation" of the participants on these issues, and their reasons. 3. Testing the legitimacy of different policy options and solutions.
Procedure	1. We aim to give everyone the word during the discussions. 2. Participants can utter their opinions on the issues they are concerned with. 3. Promoting deliberation as a means for policy formulation and implementation

2   Programme

1) Introduction round

Aims
❏ The participants know the context and aims of the G1000 ❏ The expectations regarding the G1000 are set right ❏ The participants get to know each other

Approach
 	
❏ Welcome by David and Paul
❏ Lead moderators explain:
    1. The context of the G1000, and the use of the results of the G1000 for feeding the G32
    2. The process: how will we work? Who are the different persons (facilitators, translators…)
    3. Structure of the day
    4. House rules: sharing an opinion, listening to each other, no need for consensus, difference of opinion is good.
❏ Getting acquainted (25 minutes):
    o Some general questions: who are you? Where are you from? Why are you here? Why did you say "yes"?
    o The facilitator notes down the reasons for participation and notes them down on the template in the last 4-5 minutes.
    o Templates are collected and brought to the central desk.

- ❑ Lead moderators introduce the voting application (15 minutes):
  - ○ Exercise based on demographic and substantive questions:
    - ▪ Gender
    - ▪ Age
    - ▪ City or village
    - ▪ How early did you get up this morning
    - ▪ How did you get here?
    - ▪ How interested are you in politics?

Central desk

- ❑ As soon as templates enter, the central desk starts clustering and reducing the list to the +/- 10 most important reasons.

2) First discussion round and votes introductory round

Aims

- ❑ Exchange of arguments on the question: what do we think about the social security in our country and how can we improve it?
- ❑ Specific outputs:
  - ○ A score per subdomain (health insurance, unemployment benefits, child allowance and retirements) of what people think about this domain
  - ○ For the two worst scoring domains, arguments that explain these scores.
  - ○ For these domains, also 3 possible improvement measures

Approach

Plenary

- ❑ Lead moderators recapitulate the theme and aims
- ❑ Experts give their presentations on the different subdomains.

Tables

- ❑ Step 1:
  - ○ Facilitator asks everyone to give a score on each of the subdomains and one or two reasons why this score is given (5-6 minutes)
  - ○ Facilitator collects the scores, notes them down on a flipchart, and determines the lowest scoring domains. He also notes down the 3 most important reasons, and sends them to central desk.
- ❑ Step 2 :
  - ○ The facilitator asks the participants to note down some measures – in pairs of two – that would improve the worst domains on post-its. (10 minutes)

- ❑ Step 3:
    - ○ When everyone is finished, the facilitator collects the post-its, and clusters them per subdomain.
    - ○ Table discussion about why and how the measures would contribute. The facilitator asks for more information and reasons, and asks if the group would like to add measures.
    - ○ These measures and reasons are noted down on the templates and taken to the central desk. The facilitator thanks the participants for their contributions.

Plenary

- ❑ Lead moderators present results of the introductory round (= motives for participation)

Central desk

- ❑ Continue to cluster and prepare slides for first round.
- ❑ Begin processing results first round:
    - ○ Input average scores
    - ○ List arguments for high/low scores
    - ○ Cluster and list measures

4) Second discussion round

Aims

- ❑ Exchanging arguments about the following question: The financial crisis costs the state and society much money. Which measures does government have to take to continue to care for a just distribution of our welfare?
- ❑ Specific output:
    - ○ Prioritizing a number of potential measures.

Approach

Plenary (20 minutes)

- ❑ Lead moderators introduce the theme, the structure of the round, and the presenters.
- ❑ Presentation by two experts

Table (10 minutes)

- ❑ Step 1: (10')
    - ○ The participants discuss in pairs about the listed measures that are preferred. They note this measure and two arguments down on a template
- ❑ Step 2 : (30')
    - ○ Facilitator opens up the discussion by asking the first duo what their favorite measures are, and to

give their arguments.

- o Then he/she asks if anyone else at the table has chosen this measure.
- o A discussion follows on the measures and the arguments.

- ❑ Step 3 : (10')
  - o The facilitator leads the table to a conclusion on which measures are most valued, and which are least valued. For each measure, two arguments are formulated and written down on a template.
  - o Templates go to the central desk.

Plenary (20')

- ❑ Lead moderators do a short energizer.
- ❑ The results from the first round are presented, and vote takes place on the measures for each domain.
  - o The average scores are presented, with the arguments.
  - o Vote per subdomain. Everyone chooses 2 measures.

Central desk

- ❑ Continue clustering data first round and preparing slides
- ❑ Process templates second round.

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5) Third discussion round

Aims

- ❑ Exchange arguments about the question: what should be the most important principles for our national immigration politics?
- ❑ Specific outputs:
  - o 3 principles that should determine immigration politics

Approach

Plenary (25')

- ❑ Lead moderators introduce the theme, the structure of the round, and the presenters.
- ❑ Presentation by two experts who bring novel approaches to the issue under discussion

Table

- ❑ Step 1: expressing feelings (15')
  - o Each participant gets a sheet with emoticons to express his or her feelings towards immigration

- o Facilitator notes down emotions and reasons for these emotions on a flip chart.

- ❑ Step 2: exchange convictions and principles (40')
  - o In pairs of 2 the participants reflect about the following questions:
    - ▪ The essential criteria for decisions in immigration policy
    - ▪ What should politicians be more attentive to on migration issues?
  - o The facilitator starts the discussion by inviting a someone to state his principles.
  - o These principles are written down on the appropriate templates.

- ❑ Step 3: Prioritizing (5')
  - o Everyone gets 3 stickers which they stick to the template in order to express their relative importance.
- ❑ Templates are sent to central desk.

Plenary

- ❑ Lead moderators present the results from the previous round:
  - o The measures formulated and the arguments
  - o Vote on which measures are preferred.

Central desk

- ❑ Continue processing the results of the second round and preparing slides.
- ❑ Begin processing results of the third round
  - o Cluster principles for migration policy

6) Open round and vote on results from the third round

Aims

- ❑ In this open round, we want to give the participants the opportunity to choose from the top 10 themes.
- ❑ It is the last round, so the pressure for strong outputs is lower.

Specific outputs

- ❑ Determine the relative importance of each of the issues.
- ❑ Around the table a couple of proposals are elaborated.

Approach

Plenary (2')

❑ Lead moderators explain the process and structure of the round, and present the 10 themes.

Tables (35')

❑ Selection of issues at the table. Each participant has 3 votes to give to each of the themes. The one with the most votes is selected for discussion.
❑ Facilitator opens the general discussion based on the following questions:
  ○ Why did you pick this issue, why is it important?
  ○ What should be done?
  ○ What should be reached?
  ○ Who has to take responsibility and who has to take action?
❑ Proposal is written down on a template and sent to the central desk.

Plenary (7')

❑ Lead moderators thank the participants for their inputs.
❑ Vote on the different principles for migration policy.
❑ After the break, vote on the proposals of the open round.

Central desk

❑ Process results of the third round and prepare slides.
❑ Process results of the open round
  ○ Rank the issues by importance
  ○ Cluster the proposals per issue

Appendix B – Proposals per round and results of the vote

Introduction round

Motivation to participate	- I want to show my personal involvement as a citizen	63%
	- I am worried about the political crisis and the crisis of democracy	52%
	- Our democracy needs rejuvenation	43%
	- I am curious and wouldn't want to miss this experience	35%
	- I find the process of dialogue and diversity important	29%
	- I want to contribute to the restoration of the dialogue between the communities in Belgium	21%

Note: each participant could vote for each proposition

Round 1: Social security

Average appreciation per domain	- Healthcare	6,7/10
	- Child allocations	6,0/10
	- Unemployment	5,2/10
	- Retirement	5,3/10

Note: each participant gave was a score for each domain; at the tables, the scores were merged; eventually, the central desk merged the scores from the tables

Unemployment	- Limit unemployment benefits in time	36%
	- Individualized assistance in finding a job	35%
	- Making work attractive by raising minimum wages	38%
	- Fighting fraud	16%
	- Making daycare for children more affordable	9%
	- Guaranteed basic income for everyone	15%

Note: each participant could vote for up to two propositions

Retirement	- Facilitating the end of career, making retirement a gradual process	18%
	- Starting from a basic retirement, but considering the individual career	18%
		15%
	- Revise or abandon the system of early retirement	23%
	- Harmonizing the workers' statutes and making the system more transparent	
	- Stimulating different ways of financing a retirement (legal pension, 2nd pillar, 3rd pillar…)	10%
	- Take into account special situations (hard manual labor, women staying at home…)	16%

Note: each participant could vote for up to two propositions

Child allocations	- Higher allocations for families with low incomes	31%
	- Equal allocations for all children	45%
	- Replace child allocations by child cheques to cover the costs of raising children	24%

Note: each participant could vote for one proposition

Health care	- Guarantee equal access to the health care system	35%
	- Higher taxes for the pharmaceutical sector	27%
	- Abolish the renumeration per prestation	17%
	- Reduce medical overconsumption by putting the doctor central	31%
	- Smaller packaging and sensibilization against overconsumption	21%
	- Simplify the granting of pharmaceutical licenses, and allow for more citizen participation in this system	14%

Note: each participant could vote for up to two propositions

Round 2: Welfare in times of economic crisis

Proposals	- Reforming corporate taxes: lower them but eradicate all possible legal loopholes	43%
	- Lower taxes on work, in particular for specific groups	27%
	- Tobin tax on financial transactions	31%
	- More "green" taxes: tax things that pollute the environment	15%
	- Split up business banks and savings banks	19%
	- A European financial policy as a counterweight to international financial groups	16%

Note: each participant could vote for up to two propositions

Round 3: Immigration

Principles	- Duty to integrate	31%
	- Speedy procedures and clear and objective criteria	26%
	- Development cooperation	20%
	- Improve possibilities to integrate	21%
	- Stricter policy (limit and sanction more)	18%
	- Build bridges between cultures	14%
	- Harmonize migration policies at European level	25%
	- Immigration following the needs of the labor market	8%
	- Send back criminals	13%

Note: each participant could vote for up to two propositions

Round 4: Open round

Issue			
	-	How to develop a sustainable energy policy?	16
	-	How many levels of government does Belgium need?	14
	-	How can we rejuvenate and broaden democracy?	7
	-	How can we solve the problems with mobility?	6
	-	How should education and labor market interact?	12
	-	How can our government become stronger and more efficient?	0
	-	How can we stimulate knowledge and innovation as the basis of our economy?	5
	-	How do we deal with multilingualism in this country?	9
	-	Do citizens have to be able to vote for politicians of the other linguistic group?	6
	-	What role and future for Brussels?	2

Note: the number indicates the number of tables who chose this item.

The promises and pitfalls
of the European Citizens' Initiative

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1. Introduction

Some time ago I worked for a Belgian consultancy company that organised citizen participation on a large-scale infrastructure project in and around Antwerp. Not surprisingly, the main goal of the citizen participation was to increase the legitimacy of the project. My company decided that the citizen participation would consist of evening meetings with a group of local citizens, randomly chosen from the local population. What made these meetings so special was not particularly that citizens were involved (which happens more often), but that the recommendations stemming from these evening meetings were binding. Now you may be wondering: what's the catch here? What is crucial is that the citizens were only allowed to decide on which of four types of trees would be planted in their nearby areas. The meetings were no success: at best six citizens joined the group. Though all of them were very much interested in trees and though we had some thorough discussions about the topic, the problem was obviously that the turnout was too low to have any impact on the legitimacy of the decisions made.

This example illustrates some of the basic dilemmas of citizen participation in decision-making. The more important a decision, the less likely it is that politicians will allow citizens to have influence and the less likely it is that it will mobilise citizens. If few citizens are mobilized, legitimacy will be unaffected and the whole participation exercise becomes meaningless. Some participatory devices are thus predestined to failure. Is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) one of them?

In this lead piece, I will start by presenting an overview of three different types of initiatives. This distinction matters as each different type of initiative has different promises and pitfalls. Afterwards I will discuss the potential impact of the ECI on the input, throughput and output legitimacy of the EU. After this theoretical discussion I will zoom in on Austria, which has a long history of initiatives, and discuss what practical lessons we can draw. The subsequent section will then discuss whether the ECI and the initiative fits in divided societies. The last section will provide a summary of the promises and pitfalls of initiatives and conclude that there are reasons to be mildly optimistic about the ECI.

2. Three types of initiatives

Let me start with the distinction between different types of initiatives. Broadly speaking there are three types of them: namely citizen petitions, citizens' initiatives and citizen-initiated referendums. Each type is different and has different consequences.

A first type of initiatives are petitions. Petitions are rather noncommittal and there are few formal requirements that have to be met. As a result, petitions are very commonly used. However, politicians also have few obligations and can decide to drop the issue if they want.[5] Such an initiative is no threat to politicians, but neither is it very likely to increase the legitimacy of an institution. Petitions exist in many countries, such as Australia, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States. More in general, the right to petition is enshrined in most of the EU member states' constitutions (Preuß, 2012: 949-951).

A second type of initiatives are agenda initiatives (Setälä & Schiller, 2012). Such initiatives have a distinct set of rules and require a certain signature threshold to be passed before an initiative is deemed valid. Most often such a threshold is about 2 or 3% of the electorate, but this differs from one country to another. Typically once an agenda initiative is deemed valid, the parliament must discuss the issue. The ECI fits in this category, as well as the Dutch ('Burgerinitiatief') and Austrian initiatives ('Volksbegehren').

A third and last type of initiative are citizen-initiated referendums whereby a successful initiative automatically triggers a referendum. This type of initiative is clearly the most far-reaching as it is far more difficult for a legislator to ignore the outcome of a referendum. This form of initiative is very rare and presently only exists in a few established democracies, most notably in Italy, New Zealand and Switzerland at the national level. At the sub-national level it is more widespread, especially in the US.

The three different types of initiatives should not be lumped together. A petition is at best a low investment/low returns instrument while a citizen-initiated referendum is potentially a high investment/high returns one. As a result, their impact and workings are entirely different. Probably due to the difference in impact, petitions are hardly ever studied (Preuß, 2012:949), while there is an abundance of studies dealing with the impact of citizen-initiated referendums. Agenda initiatives are somewhere in the middle and therefore it is difficult to predict what their impact will be. There are just a few empirical studies that examine the impact of agenda initiatives (Müller, 1998; Bos & Pieterse, 2012). In what follows I will try to draw lessons from the few available studies and experiences with such initiatives. When no such information is available I will use insights from either petitions or citizen-initiated referendums. When I do so, it is important to remember that petitions are weaker instruments than agenda initiatives while citizen-initiated referendums are stronger ones.

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[5] One of the few studies that examines petitions and their impact illustrates how low the impact of petitions often is Palmieri (2007) found that in Australia merely 3.3% of the petitions presented to the House of Representatives (2001-2006) have been discussed; while just three of the 2589 petitions since 1999 received an official Ministerial response. Similar results were found by a special committee of the German Bundestag (http://www.bundestag.de//bundestag/ausschuesse17/a02/Docs/PetJahresbericht2010.pdf) and a special committee of the House of Commons (UK House of Commons Procedure Committee. 2006-2007).

3. Why it matters: increasing legitimacy

The most important question is obviously: will the European Citizens' initiative be able to create/restore the legitimacy of the EU? In what follows I will always take a citizens' perspective (and not for instance a judicial perspective). To assess the legitimacy question I will focus on input legitimacy ('will the ECI increase the legitimacy of the EU because citizens were involved themselves?'); throughput legitimacy ('is the way the European Commission deals with the initiative likely to be deemed legitimate?') and output legitimacy ('will it lead to better policies?') (cf. Risse & Kleine, 2007).

3.1 Input legitimacy

To increase the input legitimacy (or perception of accountability) of the EU, European citizens must know the ECI and know that citizens were involved in the ensuing legislation.

1. 'Awareness'. As research has shown, citizens are not reluctant to sign a petition and by now signing has become a common practice in Western established democracies (Norris, 2003). However, before citizens can sign a petition they have to know about its existence. This brings me to the so-called 'awareness problem'. The current awareness of the ECI is not exactly high. If citizens do not know they can hold the EU accountable and contribute to EU policy through the ECI, it cannot change their ideas about the legitimacy of the EU. However, what is crucial is the following: general awareness about the ECI and its procedures is only a minor issue. It is not important to communicate about the procedures as civil society has already picked them up. This is crucial as it will not be individual citizens but civil society who can and will use the citizens' initiative. Citizens cannot gather one million signatures, civil society can. In that sense, information availability and practical support are more important than awareness. When necessary, civil society groups should be able to find information about the procedures. If the EU wants to increase its input legitimacy, the awareness of specific citizen initiatives and their consequences on European policy matter more than the mere knowledge that there is such a thing as the ECI. In any case, it will be difficult to raise awareness about the ECI as an institution and therefore I am quite skeptical about information campaigns about the ECI procedures. It is a successful and highly publicized initiative that raises awareness. Hence, my advice would be do not try to sell the ECI, but sell specific initiatives.

2. A successful ECI was ignored. The flip side of the coin is that once an ECI has received a lot of attention it will be difficult to ignore it even if there are valid reasons for doing so. In these cases chances are that ignoring an ECI will be seen as another act of an out-of-touch EU. As such the ECI can actually reduce the input legitimacy of the EU by giving citizens the impression that the ECI is just another example that there is no way that the EU can be held accountable. The underlying reason is that citizens have little knowledge about the European decision-making process. The ECI is not an instrument of direct legislation and does not eliminate the traditional processes, it merely offers a more or less alternative means of initiating the legislation-process. The cumbersome decision-making still follows afterwards, which may lead to frustration and unrealistic expectations from citizens. As a result, rejection may lead to

discontent. It has been well documented that people who participate in deliberative or participatory democracy have high expectations of the outcome of that process. When their input is rejected, they become very dissatisfied (cf. Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs, 2004).[6] As a result, ignoring an ECI may increase euroscepticism.[7] My advice would thus be to tread carefully when rejecting an ECI.

On the more positive side, an ECI could (1) make citizens more attentive to European policy and (2) empower the European institutions vis-à-vis national governments. Indeed, research has found that people who sign petitions are more likely to vote, a finding that is the strongest amongst the people who are 'irregular voters' (Parry, Smith & Henry, 2012:117). Given the relatively low levels of voter turnout at European elections, there may well be a lot to gain here. But it is especially the second effect that is probable as it will be hard for individual governments to ignore or reject a successful ECI. This is even more likely when a significant number of signatures comes from their countries. As such the ECI can strengthen the position of the European Commission in negotiations.

3.2 Throughput legitimacy

Many of the difficulties that surround legislation on agenda initiatives in the early days of their existence have to do with throughput legitimacy. Throughput legitimacy is linked to the process itself. In concreto such legitimacy stems from the transparency of the procedures, the legality of the process and its overall quality. Especially when the legislation has just been introduced, as is the case with the ECI, it is still unclear how it will actually work out. For instance, it is impossible to predict exactly which initiative proposals will be put forward. As such it is also impossible to outline in detail which topics are allowed and which are not (see also De Waele, 2012: 60). This is something that is developed en cours de route. As a result one can expect 'turf wars' whereby different conceptions of the scope of the initiative legislation clash. To acquire throughput legitimacy, it is therefore important that the European Commission is open (transparent) about its reasons to accept/reject a proposal. However, mere transparency is not enough – the quality and legality of the argumentation matter as well. Here consistency, i.e. similar proposals needed to be treated in a similar way, and consultation of the initiators can play an important role. Especially the latter is important as it has been shown that people who are consulted and taken seriously are more likely to support the outcome of a discussion (even if they do not agree with it) (Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs, 2004). Such consultations can also reveal bottlenecks in the procedures.[8] In sum, especially in the beginning it is important to spend enough time on building throughput legitimacy.

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[6] Similar results were observed in a report that evaluated the Dutch agenda initiative and a report that evaluated the UK petition provision. The Dutch researchers interviewed all the initiators of the 12 initiatives held to date. In the cases where the initiatives were ignored, the initiators became very dissatisfied with politics in general (see Bos & Pieterse, 2012: 14-15). In the UK, the House of Commons Procedure Committee found that 'very often the outcome of the procedure is perceived by petitioners to be inadequate (UK House of Commons Procedure Committee. 2006-2007:8)

[7] One can make a distinction between three types of citizens: the initiators, the signers and the rest of the population. The first group has the highest expectations. The signers can also have high expectations, depending on how well they are kept up to date by the initiators or the media. The last group, the people who did not sign, do not have specific expectations, but can be influenced by the media.

[8] Hence, one can only applaud the recent decision of the Commission to allow some of the initiatives to make use of its free, open-source software in response to complaints.

3.3 Output legitimacy

Lastly, one could wonder: will an ECI lead to better policies? Will it increase the sense of responsiveness of the European people? It may well, but here again some dangers loom ahead. After all, some people are more likely to sign initiatives than others. Initiatives can be biased in three ways: they can be hijacked by the participation elite, special interests and a few countries. If such hijacking takes place, the ECI will not lead to 'better' policies but to policies that fit one specific group better than all others.

1. The initiative gets hijacked by the participation elite.

The first danger is the impact of the so-called participation elite. This is linked to awareness of the specific initiative (you must know it to support it). There is a chance that the ECI only reflects what the usual suspects, the citizens (groups) who already participate a lot, know and want. If this is the case, the initiative will only reflect the desires of this higher educated, cosmopolitan, wealthier, middle-aged participation elite as these groups are more likely to sign petitions (Caren, Ghosal & Ribas, 2011:141-142). One way to overcome this bias is using tailor-made survey research from the Eurobarometer and check the attitudes of the broader European public opinion.[9] This is common practice regarding important topics, so why not use it for the ECI?

2. The initiative gets hijacked by special interests.

Experiences from California, where you have citizen-initiated referendums, show that lobby groups are quite good at getting (or even buying) signatures, but not at winning referendums (Donovan, Bowler & McCuan, 2001:117). However, given that the European citizens' initiative consists only of a signature phase, theoretically, one could fear that the people who signed the initiative are channeled into signing by lobby groups who spend lavishly. More in general, if this occurs an ECI will probably not be representative for large parts of the European public opinion but only those targeted by the lobby groups. To be fair, I think that the requirements included in the procedures of the ECI limit the danger of excessive influence of special interests. Nevertheless it is important to stay vigilant on this matter. I will return to this topic in section 4.2.

3. The initiative process is biased towards a few countries.

One of the potential problems of the current procedures is that the signature requirements are different for different countries. As a result it will be easier to collect signatures and meet the requirements in some countries but not others. The danger that looms is that some countries will be reduced to useful 'fillers' to

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[9] The ECI on the other hand offers insights on the *intensity* of these preferences (i.e. how important the issue is to somebody).

meet the requirements. Obviously, from a macchiavellistic point of view one could note that this offers possibilities for initiators to focus their attention to just a few countries. Whether this will be problematic or not again remains to be seen. What is most important is to evaluate this regularly.

4. Citizens' initiatives in practice: lessons from Austria

Until now my discussion has been fairly theoretical. In this section I will examine how citizens' initiatives work in practice – and what problems one can expect to occur. I want to focus in particular on Austria as this country has a lot of experience with citizens' initiatives: no less than 35 initiatives were held between 1964 and 2012. Austria is thus a good 'what if'-case (what if there is actually a lot of awareness?), but it is also a good 'how'-case (how do you make sure that an ECI gets a sufficient number of signatures?).

First some background information. In Austria initiatives require at least 100.000 signatures (around 2% of the electorate) to be valid. In a first stage, the initiative organizers need to collect 8.032 signatures to trigger the start of the procedure (Müller, 2006:110). Once this initial number of signatures has been collected the second stage of the process starts. In this stage offices are opened all over the country where people can sign the initiative. When the required number of signatures is reached, the organizers are invited to the parliament when their initiative is discussed.

4.1 One million signatures: a lot or not?

The ECI threshold is set at one million signatures (or approximately 0.25% of the European electorate), which is actually quite low if you compare it to the Austrian one. However, ironically, if you want to sell this to the European electorate, one million still sounds like a lot. It is a symbolic number that conveys a strong message. This is a disadvantage and an advantage at the same time. It is a disadvantage because it will be more difficult to sell this to the media and the public opinion, who will automatically think the ECI is merely window dressing with a bar that is deliberately set high. However, it can also be an advantage as one million signatures are hard to discredit once they are gathered. Such perceptions matter, especially for the media. In Austria for instance, the threshold of 100,000 signatures is deemed to be very low. Most of the initiatives that start the second stage pass the threshold. Of the 35 a solid 33 managed to do so.[10] Some even manage to get 25% of the electorate behind them (http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/ BMI_wahlen/volksbegehren/ Alle_Volksbegehren.aspx). As a result, any initiative who just barely gets more than 100,000 signatures is labeled a failure by the Austrian media. It is unlikely that this happens to the ECI even though relatively the Austrian threshold is actually higher than the European one (2% of the electorate versus 0.25%), because of the symbolic weight the number 'one million' has.

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[10] As an aside: in Austria and the Netherlands politicians expected a large number of initiatives when the legislation was first implemented. However, in practice just one to two initiatives are submitted per year. In that sense, the ECI already outperforms both countries, though it obviously remains to be seen whether this pace will remain the same.

4.2 The success formula

As I mentioned earlier, in Austria, the support for individual citizens' initiatives can vary substantially. The least successful initiative, the 1995 initiative in favour of the abolition of the special taxes on motorcycles, got merely 75,525 signatures; while the most successful one, the 1982 initiative against the building of a conference centre in Vienna, got no less than 1,361,562 signatures (http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_wahlen/volksbegehren/Alle_Volksbegehren.aspx).

But what makes one initiative more successful than the other? The success formula seems to be: [Political issue] + [Support political party] + [Popular media support] = Success.

A first element that all successful initiatives share is that the topics are highly politicized and as a general rule, the more political an issue is, the more signatures it gets. Many if not all of the current initiatives deal with niche topics. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to start a snowball effect and attract one million signatures. A second lesson from Austria is that many of the successful initiatives had the support from political parties. Indeed the parties often used an initiative to profile themselves and helped to mobilise support for it (Müller, 1998). As such, the ECI may spur the 'Europeanization' of political parties. It can also give the factions in the European Parliament an opportunity to profile themselves and it can strengthen the ties between civil society and the parties. In sum, it can create a more 'political' European arena. A third characteristic of successful Austrian initiatives is that they are discussed and supported by national media, especially the popular newspapers such as the Austrian 'Kronen Zeitung'. The popular media can reach an audience that normally is not aware of European issues. However, popular media are typically anti-establishment. As such, I would expect that the first successful ECI to be one on a fairly populist issue, one that is picked up by the popular media.

What if an initiative does not comply to the success formula? Can money buy success? Indeed, an alternative route to success may be hiring a specialized company. This happens quite regularly in California, where such companies can be hired to gather signatures. In California in 2001, one signature cost approximately 0.87 to 1.32$ (Donovan, Bowler & McCuan, 2001: 119). It has to be stressed that these costs come on top on all the other costs. As such it seems pretty clear that one would have to invest an awful lot of money to buy the needed ECI signatures. Given that getting the signatures is absolutely no guarantee that the Commission will accept the ECI, it is unlikely that a company would spend so much money. It should thus not come as a surprise that buying signatures does not happen in Austria as the citizens' initiative instrument does not lend itself very well to such practices. To sum up, the threshold of one million signatures makes it unappealing for special interests to buy success in an ECI instead of e.g. using the more traditional lobbying approach.

4.3 The difficulty of polarized issues

A third lesson from Austria is that a citizens' initiative such as the ECI is not a referendum: the opposing side has no voice. One can compare it to facebook: you can only like an initiative, you cannot dislike it.

This is especially problematic with polarized issues. Theoretically, such an issue can lead to two opposing initiatives. But what if both make it? This happened in Austria in 1980. The opinion of the silent majority (the people who did not sign) is crucial here. Indeed, one initiative having more signatures than the opposing one does not automatically mean that this initiative is more popular amongst the silent majority. For instance, in Austria 90% of the electorate did not sign any of the competing initiatives. Under such circumstances the opinion of the silent majority is crucial. All of this is obviously important for the legitimacy of the EU. My suggestion would again be to complement the ECI with information from Eurobarometer surveys when both ECI's are successful.

4.4. The cost of ignoring the outcome of an initiative

A fourth lesson from Austria is that the reaction of politicians matters. Initiatives leave the politicians a lot of room to ignore or reject an initiative. Many of the Austrian initiatives with a high support were ignored (Müller, 1998). However, they did politicize the issue, damaged the legitimacy of the government and had electoral consequences for the parties who ignored it. In sum, ignoring an initiative comes at a cost and the higher the support for the issue, the higher the cost is likely to be.

5. Unifying or dividing the people?

Giving that this e-book appears as part of a series in the context of 'rethinking Belgium' I will reflect upon the potential consequences of a citizens' initiative for divided societies. Indeed, one could think of both Belgium and the European Union as 'divided' societies. To the best of my knowledge no research exists on the impact of petitions and citizens' initiatives in divided societies. However, there is some research on the impact of (citizen-initiated) referendums in such societies. Citizen-initiated referendums can be seen as an 'extreme' case of initiatives, as citizens' initiatives are a milder version of initiatives. As such research on referendums can teach us about what happens under 'extreme' circumstances – and how to make sure things do not go wrong.

Belgium, for instance, has had a very negative experience in this area. In 1950 a referendum showed that the Flemish part of the country overwhelmingly supported the return of King Leopold III, while the other parts decisively rejected his return (Gerard & Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2005:237). These divergent results put the country on the brink of a breakdown. The traumatic referendum experience has haunted Belgian referendum discussions ever after (for an overview see Jacobs, 2011: Chapter 6). Nevertheless referendums are not necessarily incompatible with divided societies. There are many federalized countries that actually have referendum provisions, such as Australia, Austria, Canada and Switzerland. There are generally two ways to adapt referendums to divided societies. The first is by excluding certain topics from the referendum and the second is by introducing special majority requirements (Qvortrup, 2005:165). Of the two, the second is the most important as it is often difficult to predict which topics will prove to be 'explosive'. In the remainder of this section I will therefore focus on the special majority

requirements. What is vital is that federalized countries have a different understanding of what is meant by 'the people'. Quite often referendums are about the majority of the people – i.e. a simple 50% +1 of the people/eligible voters.[11] Yet in federalized countries this is often seen as a caricature of democracy. In Switzerland, for instance, a referendum has to pass in a majority of the cantons before it is deemed valid. Such a geographical requirement exists in Australia as well. It is interesting to note that Swiss referendums only rarely fail because they are not supported by voters in a majority of the cantons: just 6 of the 143 proposed constitutional amendments (where the geographical requirement applies) were rejected for this reason (Qvortrup, 2005:172). Indeed, such requirements primarily function as an emergency brake and have a preventive effect by discouraging referendums that stand no chance in large parts of the country.

What does this all mean for the ECI? Referendums are clearly different from agenda initiatives. Citizens' initiatives are not about getting a majority of the votes. Neither do they typically pit one part of a country against another. Indeed, contrary to referendums where results are often calculated by province or region, we often do not know the exact geographical distribution of the signers. On top of that, agenda initiatives differ from referendums in that it is easier to reject them. However, such initiatives -and especially the ECI- are not completely different from referendums. As stated earlier it will be difficult to ignore an ECI that brought together one million signatures given the symbolic value of that number. Moreover, the ECI differs from most other agenda initiatives in that it does offer insight in the distribution of the signers. As such the ECI could theoretically face some of the dangers of (citizen-initiated) referendums. Luckily in practice the ECI procedures actually include both a limitation of the range of topics and a geographical minimum requirement. As both safeguards are applied, the risk of disintegration is significantly reduced.

A bit more about the geographical requirements. As the Green Paper by the European Commission (2009:5) already mentions, in order for the ECI to have a 'genuine European flavour' it has to reflect a 'reasonable body of opinion'. But what is significant and what is reasonable? Compared to for instance the Swiss majority requirement (50% +1 of the cantons), the ECI requirement, which stands at some 27% of the member states, is actually quite low. As such it may be a bit vulnerable to the criticism that the signers are not representative of the European public opinion. As mentioned earlier, if a few countries hijack the process, this risks decreasing the output legitimacy of the EU. Again, I think that the ECI procedures provide ample protection against such biases by allowing the Commission to reject an ECI. Still, this is an important matter to keep an eye on, as frequent rejections damage the legitimacy of the whole instrument. It is a thin line.

I want to end this section with a positive note. Given that seven countries is still quite a substantial number, the geographical requirement will most likely push for a more European civil society, one that is active in several countries. Hence the ECI may even have a unifying effect. Indeed, when proper procedures are applied, citizens' initiatives need not damage a divided society but can actually be beneficial. As they currently stand, the ECI procedures are likely to do a pretty good job.

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[11] As Qvortrup (2005:165) shows, only very rarely a referendum is decided by a narrow margin. Most referendums have a clear outcome.

6. Conclusion: promises and pitfalls

In this lead piece I have discussed the promises and pitfalls that surround the European Citizens'
Initiative. I focused on input, throughput and output legitimacy and provided some insights based on the
Austrian experiences with agenda initiatives. Given that the ECI is still new, it is difficult to predict what
its consequences will be. Nevertheless some elements of the instrument are clearly promising, while the
contours of some pitfalls are also starting to become visible.

Regarding the promises, it cannot be denied that the ECI offers European civil society and citizens the
opportunity to take part in the European decision-making process. This is definitively a step forward. If
the instrument becomes widely known and mobilizes a lot of signers, it may well be the beginning of a
more political European arena. The signature threshold is relatively low, but not so low as to make the
ECI meaningless compared to European elections. As a result the ECI has the potential to become a
powerful instrument.

However all this potential will come to naught if successful initiatives are not taken seriously. This is the
main pitfall of the ECI and of participatory devices more in general. When successful initiatives rejected
or ignored by politicians, the instrument risks to backfire and increase europscepticism – even if there are
good grounds for doing so. As such it is important to build throughput legitimacy and to work on clear,
reasonable and widely accepted rules for rejection. All of this matters as you can't have it both ways: if you
want the ECI to have a chance to increase the legitimacy of the EU, you have to grant citizens genuine
impact. If you do not take them seriously, it is just a waste of time and money.

All in all, the ECI is promising. Whether or not it will fulfill its potential, will depend on many factors.
Some of these are 'known unknowns'. It is clear that the Right2Water initiative will influence how the
ECI is perceived by citizens and received by politicians, though its precise impact is at the time of the
writing still unknown. However, there are also 'unknown unknowns' - factors that nobody can foresee.
This lead piece has identified some of the areas that need monitoring, but without a doubt new things will
pop up along the road. It is thus important to regularly evaluate the ECI and it is applaudable that the
Commission intends to do this. In the end only time will tell what the impact of the ECI will be. Until
then, as this piece has shown, there is room for mild optimism.

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Commentary

Electoral Democracy and its Rivals

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Electoral democracy is in trouble. Elected politicians are maligned and despised. Short-termism rules. Interest in alternatives has never been as high. Two among them stand out and are discussed in this volume: deliberative assemblies with randomly selected citizens and bottom-up citizens' initiatives. I have sympathy for both, and indeed I followed closely and with great interest one paradigmatic instance of each. On the one hand, I attended as one of the "experts" the G1000 event that took place in Brussels on the 10th of November 2011 and followed both its preparation and its sequel. On the other hand, I attended on the 26th of January 2012 the launch event of the European Citizens' initiative opened by European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefkovic and followed from the beginning to the end the European initiative on an unconditional basic income organized within this framework. I shall turn to these instructive experiments shortly and spell out some of the conclusions I drew from having seen both types of alternative at work. But I want first to present what I see as the three key virtues of electoral democracy and its three most fundamental deficiencies.[12]

Educational, civilizing, disciplining: electoral democracy's chief virtues

What it is that justifies a presumption in favour of electoral democracy, understood as a mode of collective decision-making that relies ultimately on free elections, universal suffrage and some form of majority rule? There are three basic justifications for this presumption. The first two focus on the expected quality of the collective decisions, and the third one on the cost of enforcing them.

Why should the democratic nature of a collective decision-making process increase the probability that the decisions it generates will be good decisions? A first reasons is rooted in the educational force of vote fishing. This cognitive or epistemic virtue of democracy was neatly highlighted by Josiah Ober's (2008) analysis of ancient Greek cities. In a despotic regime, political leaders can stay in power even if they know little else than what their courtiers or bureaucrats bother to tell them. In a democracy, by contrast, the need to be elected and re-elected forces political leaders to reach out and listen, to gather valuable but widely scattered knowledge from all those on whose vote they depend: about their situation and their

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problems, their fears and their hopes. And decisions that are guided by better information about those affected also tend to be better decisions.[13]

The second reason for expecting democratic decisions to be better decisions derives from what Jon Elster (1986) aptly called the civilizing force of hypocrisy. This reason holds because the democratic process does not reduce to voting, to the aggregation of preferences. If it functions properly, it also involves deliberation, the formulation and discussion of arguments. It must therefore give a key role to the conversation that precedes elections, particularly during the electoral campaign, and to the conversation that follows them, especially in the parliamentary assemblies. In the conversations induced by the democratic process, aspiring political leaders of all persuasions and temperaments tend to develop a discourse that appeals to some notion of general interest, or of fair treatment of the interests of all those present in the electorate or represented in the assembly, or of concern for the fate of the worst off among them. Whether sincere or not, this discourse ends up having some impact on their acts. The need to sound good in the deliberative forum civilizes not only their words, but also their policies.

The third basis for a strong presumption in favour of electoral democracy resides in the disciplining force of self-infliction. What is being presumed is that the democratic nature of the process increases the probability that the decisions will be willingly complied with by the individuals and bodies subjected to them, whether or not they think these decisions are good. Any political entity will work more efficiently if the enforcement of its decisions does not require an expensive and intrusive repressive apparatus. Enforcement is easy and cheap if those subject to the decisions and rules regard them as legitimate. This can be because they happen to believe they are good (this is the so-called output legitimacy). But for a political entity to function smoothly, voluntary compliance must also be prompted in the overwhelming majority of cases in which many of those expected to comply with the decisions either believe these to be bad or have no idea bout whether they are good or bad. This can happen as a result of people recognizing that the decision makers were entitled to make them (this is the so-called input legitimacy). Very schematically, in earlier times, such recognition could be achieved thanks to enough subjects believing that God had endowed their monarch with the appropriate authority. In modern societies, such authority may occasionally be bestowed upon charismatic leaders perceived as incarnating the nation for the better or the worse (Adolf Hitler, Fidel Castro, Nelson Mandela?) or upon wise old men believed to combine unfailing competence and impeccable integrity (a national "government of technicians" formed in a crisis situation, a European Commission whose members are bound by an oath of impartiality, the venerable leaders of the Chinese Communist Party?). However, the most general and safest way of making decisions acceptable to individual citizens and subordinate political entities irrespective of their content is to let them decide freely who can decide on their behalf, i.e. to give citizens the power to choose their rulers and to get rid of them through a fair democratic process. The higher probability of voluntary — and hence cheap — compliance secured in this way provides a third ground for a strong presumption in favour of democracy.

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[13] Drèze and Sen's (1991) famous analysis of the difference between China's and India's responsiveness to the outbreak of famines can be interpreted along these lines.

All three justifications, not only the last one, could be said to derive ultimately from one feature of electoral democracy famously emphasized by Karl Popper (2000): "Democracy is all about throwing out the rascals." But for the first two justification to work, it is those affected by the decisions who need to have the ability to help sack the "rascals", whereas for the third one to work it is those who need to comply with the decisions who need to possess this ability.

Short-termism, cross-border impacts, media addiction: electoral democracy's failures

In so far as the presumption in favour of democracy hinges on the first two justifications, it is clear that it loses much of its force when a large proportion of the people affected by the decisions are not entitled to vote. This is the case, even with universal suffrage and high voting turnout, if decisions taken in one country impact significantly what happens in another and/or if decisions taken by one generation impact significantly the fate of later generations. What electoral democracy throws out is the unpopular. But the unpopular need not be rascals. They can also be high-minded advocates of the interests of the aliens or of the unborn. This generates the two most fundamental problems for electoral democracy.

Firstly, when there is a major impact on younger or future generations — for example through the effect of our life style on climate change or through the effect of current public spending and retirement rules on future tax liabilities —, even the best democracy remains a dictatorship of the present. For this reason, a "democratic deficit" can be a major advantage as regards the quality of the decisions taken, as soon as a fair treatment of the young and unborn is given due weight in the specification of this quality. Greater intergenerational justice may be achievable only as a result of some sovereignty being transferred to a less democratic level, with key decisions being taken by institutions and individuals more immune to electoral pressures. Unpopular injunctions on carbon emissions or pension reform by an electorally unaccountable (or less accountable) European level could therefore lead to better decisions than if policies in this area were left to electoral democracy, i.e. to national political leaders structurally scared of being thrown out.[14]

When there is a major impact on people who belong to the current generation but live beyond the borders of the entities at the level of which democracy operates, the problem is not as fundamentally intractable by electoral democracy as it is when the impact is on unborn generations. But it constitutes nonetheless a second serious challenge to electoral democracy. It is in part in order to deal with cross-border externalities of this sort that the European institutions were created and developed, but the volume of these externalities was massively swollen as a result of this very development, not least as a result of the adoption of a common currency by a subset of member states. But it is not sufficient to form a common political entity. In addition, the democratic process must be designed in such a way that both the

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[14] This argument is strengthened by the increasingly sophisticated nature of the knowledge needed to take good decisions, especially when long term effects are involved. This implies both that the educational force of the electoral pressure is less effective at inducing the collection of all relevant information and that lifting the decision power to a larger entity has the advantage of generating economies of scale in enlisting reliable expertise. See Bourg (2013) for a persuasive argument about the systemic shortcomings of democracy in today's ecological and technological context; and, along the same lines, Lamy & al.'s (2013: 44-47, 58) plea for "creating institutions that are somewhat insulated from short-term politicalagendas or electoral terms".

educational force of vote fishing and the civilizing force of hypocrisy can do their job on the appropriate scale, i.e. in such a way that European political decision makers are induced to gather knowledge from all the people affected by their decisions and to develop a discourse that commits them to pursuing fairness between all of them. One reform that would go some way towards addressing this concern is the introduction of a pan-European electoral constituency for part of the seats of the European Parliament, with the result of the election in this constituency determining the choice of the president of the European Commission. However, even with the best designed electoral system and even with a European executive whose composition depends tightly on the outcome of the elections, each of the EU's (around) 400 million potential voters will unavoidably have only a very limited sense of being able to affect the determination of who is in power. This can be expected to depress the proportion of those bothering to vote and even more the proportion of those bothering to investigate the relevant issues and the positions adopted by the various candidates. This can (in part therefore) also be expected to depress their ability to "throw out the rascals", and hence to debilitate the operation of all three mechanisms mentioned above to justify electoral democracy. Thus, the second fundamental problem takes the form of a dilemma: either electoral democracy excludes many of the people affected by the decisions taken at the level concerned, or the impact of each voter on the outcome of the election is dissuasively small.

To these first two problems, on may one to add a third one, which is arguably gaining so much in importance that it may soon overshadow the first two. Our European medias changed a lot in the course of the last hundred years or so, first from the dominance of a partisan printed press to the dominance of public radio and television, and now to an increasingly segmented electronic landscape. One may rejoice at the increasingly bottom up and diverse nature of the supply of observations and arguments. But the very openness of the new media world triggers a proliferation of unreliable information and biased analyses, eagerly disseminated by those whose emotions or prejudices they match. Moreover, competition for attention amongst a plethoric torrent of information gives a premium to snappy tweets, theatrical appearances, random mishaps, personal revelations and clever sound bites relentlessly spread by YouTube or FaceBook. These are clearly not the only opportunities opened by the irreversible dominance of the internet. But these trends are certainly present, and the stronger they are, the less the people elected and the policies adopted will be enlightened by information patiently gathered from the electorates and by arguments appealing to their general interest.

This leaves us with the following predicament, which I view as the most fundamental root cause of the malaise of electoral democracy. Firstly, in a context in which current decisions have ever weightier long-term impacts, the unavoidably short-termist responsiveness to today's electorate can become a major defect rather than a virtue. Secondly, in a context in which decisions need to be taken on an ever larger scale because of massive cross-border externalities, the three virtues of electoral democracy lose much of their force. Thirdly, in a context in which volatile electorates are becoming more and more responsive to unchecked rumours and simplistic messages reaching them through an increasingly segmented system of electronic channels, the election process becomes more and more erratic and its propensity to educate and civilize those who want to be elected and reelected is accordingly much weakened.

Can alternative forms of democracy do better, in particular deliberative assemblies with a random sample of citizens such as the G1000 and bottom-up collections of signatures such as the European Citizens Initiatives?

Deliberative assemblies

My observation of the G1000 process led to two main surprises. What most surprised me was first, that about 50.000 phone calls were needed on order to end up with 700 odd people actually turning up in Brussels on the 11th of November 2011; secondly, that what emerged to the outside world as the tangible outcome of the event reflected only to a minute extent the discussions on which the day was spent. Neither of these facts destroys the relevance of the experiment. But each invites to modesty as regards its potential.

The first surprise highlights an important limit of this form of democratic process, with which I believe we can live. I did expect that there would be a significant gap between the number people the agency entrusted with the recruitment tried to reach and the number of people who agreed to come and actually came. But I did not expect it to be that huge. Even before the agency started the phone calls, there was the bias involved in the possession of a phone. This was combined with the bias involved in happening to be reachable when the call was made. Then there was a cascade of self-selection processes: those who listened to more than the first sentence, among them those who understood what this was all about, among these those who really considered spending a long day in Brussels, among these those who agreed to be contacted again about a possible participation, among them those who agreed to be there (over 3000), among these those who confirmed a few days before the event that they would attend it (well over 1000), and among these those who actually turned up (704) and stayed all day. [15]

Even though a serious effort was made to get the right balance of genders, ages and provinces, this process can hardly be expected to yield a representative sample of the Belgian population. For example, one major factor of acceptance and attendance seems to have been that the person contacted had heard of the G1000 before the phone call, which supposes some degree of in-depth exposure to the quality press, not exactly a feature randomly distributed in all layers of the population. Is this a fatal defect? It would be if the aim were to get a snapshot picture of the population's opinion at a particular time. But the purpose of the exercise is rather to shape opinion through deliberation, and that you can — and arguably must — only do with people sufficiently interested and motivated to listen, think and form their own judgment. Is it then pointless to make 50.000 phone calls at great expense, rather than simply issue a call for volunteers? Not quite. For while representativeness is far off and anyway unnecessary, diversity matters and it was certainly far greater than it would have been among volunteers. At the G1000 event, the usual suspects

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[15] As explained by Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2014: section 5.1), an attempt was made to correct this self-selection event by recruiting 10% of the people from under-represented categories (such as homeless people and recent immigrants) via organizations dealing with them. Along other dimensions than those explicit in the definition of the categories, however, it is most likely that these 10% were less diverse than the randomly selected remaining 90%.

were gravitating around the tables, carrying instructions and serving coffee, not deliberating at the tables with fellow random recruits. Such diversity is undoubtedly valuable for a deliberative exercise.

My second surprise related to the design of the day and the outcome it yielded. The bottom-up spirit of the whole initiative led to a selection of four themes that emerged from a prior online consultation, and on each of these four themes discussed in succession at the meeting, each group of ten people was asked to make concrete proposals. After some filtering to avoid overlap and privilege convergence, a selection of 36 proposals was submitted to the vote of the whole assembly. And the result of this vote was then presented and picked up by the press and the outside world as what emerged from this first major deliberative assembly with a random sample of Belgian citizens.[16] This was no doubt an effective way of coming up at the end of the day with some "deliverables", but also a serious misrepresentation. For most of the proposals had been discussed, or even just mentioned, only at a minority of the tables, often a small minority. And the plenary vote on the proposals therefore hardly differed from one that could have taken place at the start of the event.

The lesson to be drawn seems to me obvious: if some aggregate outcome is expected from this sort of event, its focus in terms of proposals to be discussed must be significantly narrowed down from the start, and its design therefore made more top-down than it was on this occasion. Once this is realized, the modesty of what could be achieved by deliberative exercises of this sort should be obvious. I was greatly impressed by how much effort was put by David Van Reybrouck and his team of volunteers into the preparation and organization of the event, and not least into the indispensable fund raising for all the expenses that came on top of massive volunteering and various donations in kind. For example, all G1000 participants had to be provided with two meals and have their travelling costs refunded. The effort involved in this civil society initiative was so daunting that one can safely bet that it will never be replicated, at least of anything like this size. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, an increasing number of decisions needs to be taken today on a much larger scale. James Fishkin, one of the main propagators of deliberative assemblies worldwide did organize such an assembly at the European Parliament on 12-14 October 2007, with 350 people flown in from 27 countries. As one might expect, the expenditure on travelling, accommodation and interpreting was phenomenal, compared to the comparatively modest G1000 — which did not need to cover hotel rooms and only provided Dutch-French interpretation by volunteers for 30 out of the 100 tables. One may reasonably wonder whether the outcome is worth the expenditure. Even if one thinks that it is, the conclusion is clear: such assemblies on a European and even on a national scale can only be organized for a very tiny subset of the questions to be settled every year in our democracies.

My two surprises and the conclusions I draw from them do not annihilate the interest of deliberative assemblies of the G1000 type, as lucidly spelt out in Caluwaerts and Reuchamps' (2014) essay. But they make modesty inescapable: no claim to representativeness can be made, and only a tiny subset of the

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[16] The list of proposals and the outcomes of the votes feature in Appendix B of Caluwaerts and Reuchaps (2014), who mention that this "made the results of the discussions very tangible to the participants". See also the final report, where the votes on these 36 proposals are presented as "preliminary conclusions from a full day of deliberation" (G1000 2012: 45-47).

issues a polity needs to address can be handled by them. Both these objections to the relevance of deliberative assemblies are in some sense pragmatic. But there is a more fundamental objection to the idea that they could — even if statistically representative and affordable — provide a substitute for electoral democracy. In a nutshell: it is better for the people that rulers should be chosen from among them by them rather than from among them by a lottery. And the reason for this resides in the three forces — educational, civilizing and disciplining — triggered by electoral democracy and switched off by random selection. True, advocates of random selection generally propose them for assemblies rather than for executives. But precisely, this is why it could only fulfil a marginal function in supplementing electoral democracy, rather than provide a truly alternative paradigm.

There is, however, one set of issues for which I believe it has special relevance, precisely the set of issues for which electoral democracy's three mechanisms cease to be virtuous. Whenever decisions need to be taken that deeply affect future generations, it may make sense to rely on assemblies whose members do not need to be obsessed by how well they and their parties will fare at the next election. As regards Belgium, Kris Deschouwer and I argued over ten years ago in favour of "a senate without senators", with the staff and premises of the senate being used for organizing and hosting deliberative assemblies consisting of a balanced set of citizens particularly qualified by their engagement or competence to discuss the long-term questions on which the elected Parliament (the Chambre/Kamer) wants to be advised.[17] In his recent book, David Van Reybrouck (2014: 139-150) makes a related "temporary plea for a bi-representative system", with the member of the senate chosen by lottery for three years. Why not? But the best formula may not be to go for three-year terms: knowing the rate of (unavoidably very biased) self-selection for a single G1000 day, we can imagine what it would be, and what the rate of attrition would be, when it becomes a matter of giving up three years of one's life. A more promising (and cheaper) formula would consist in recruiting citizens randomly for shorter sessions on a specific theme. These ad hoc assemblies may conceivably include in addition elected politicians from the regional parliaments and representatives of the organized civil society, providing the meetings are managed in such a way that the randomly chosen citizens keep the upper hand. Being less prejudiced than the lobbies active in relevant areas and their experts, and less tied by party lines and electoral fears than politicians, randomly selected citizens, once well informed and given the time to reflect, have a better prospect of being guided by fairness towards future generations. At the European level, once all routine activities of the European Parliament will be transferred to Brussels, a similar role could be given to Strasbourg: focused sessions with the participation of members of national parliaments, experts and randomly selected citizens. At both level, this assembly does not need to the final word, but with an appropriate framing, the conclusions it reaches should have a major impact on what the elected authorities will end up deciding.

Citizens Initiatives

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[17] Deschouwer and Van Parijs (2003).

Could Citizens' initiatives, insightfully analysed by Kristof Jacobs (2014) play a more important role? To help us reflect on this question, it is instructive to contrast two initiatives that were happening at about the same time on the same subject. In Switzerland, the possibility of popular initiatives at the federal level was introduced in 1848. According to today's constitution, if a federal popular initiative gathers at least 100.000 signatures from Swiss citizens entitled to vote in at most 18 months, Switzerland is obliged to organize a national consultation on the proposal as an addition to the Swiss constitution within the next two or three years, unless the federal government or the federal parliament make themselves an alternative proposal with which the initiators of the proposal agree. In the last 50 years, more than 160 initiatives were launched, more than 100 gathered the required number of signatures, and 13 gathered the support of a majority of the voters and a majority of the cantons, thereby becoming part of the Swiss constitution. In April 2012, a federal popular initiative was officially launched proposing to add the following article to the Swiss constitution: "1. The Confederation introduces an unconditional basic income. 2. The basic income must enable the whole population to live a dignified life and to participate in public life. 3. The law will determine the funding and level of the basic income." On the 4th of October 2013, the initiators handed in over 127.000 signatures to the federal chancellery, thereby triggering a process that should lead to a national referendum at the latest in 2016.

The Lisbon Treaty of December 2007 introduced for the first time the possibility of a form of direct democracy at European level: the European Citizens Initiatives. To be acceptable, a European Citizens Initiative needs to be initiated by seven EU citizens living in seven different member states. It must consist in a proposal that belongs to a domain in which the European Commission has the power to propose legislation, and it must not be "manifestly abusive, frivolous or vexatious" nor "manifestly contrary to the EU values". To be successful, it must gather at least one million signatures from EU citizens entitled to vote for the European Parliament in at most 12 months, while reaching a threshold number of duly validated signatures in at least seven member states, a threshold that is proportional to the number of members of parliament from each state and hence proportionally less demanding in more populated countries than in less populated ones. Successful initiatives are entitled to an official response by the European Commission and to a hearing at the European Parliament. It took a while for the various logistic conditions for the scheme to get sorted out, in particular reliable and uncomplicated validation procedures in each of the member states, but in April 2012, the procedure was operational.

One of the first initiatives to be submitted, on the 8th of July 2012, was entitled "Universal Basic Income" and phrased as follows: "Gain support for the introduction of a universal, individual, unconditional basic income to ensure a life in dignity and participation in society within all member states of the EU". On the 6th of September 2012, the Commission replied that this proposal was not acceptable as a European Citizens Initiative because it did not fall within the legislative powers of the European Union. The same initiators then proposed a watered down version of their proposal: "Asking the Commission to encourage cooperation between the Member States aiming to explore the Universal Basic Income as a tool to improve their respective social security systems". It was officially accepted by the Commission on 14 January 2013, and the collection of signatures started immediately. Twelve months later, 285.000

signatures had been collected, most of them online (278.000), from all 28 member states, with the threshold reached in six of them (Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Belgium, Estonia and the Netherlands). This was not an insignificant number, but hardly more than a quarter of what was needed, and a far lower percentage of the potential signatories than in the case of the Swiss popular initiative on the same topic. Had the proportion of signatures been the same among the 500 million European citizens as among the 6 million Swiss citizens (not Swiss residents), the European initiative would have gathered about 10.300.000 signatures and not less than 300.000.[18]

Why such a huge difference regarding a proposal that one has no reason to expect to be more popular in Switzerland than in EU countries, in particular in Switzerland's four EU neighbours, none of which reached the threshold? Plausible causes are not hard to identify. Firstly, there is the difference between on an age-old institution to which the Swiss population is accustomed at every level of government and an institutional innovation, particularly unfamiliar in those EU member states in which direct democracy is completely unknown whatever the level of government. Secondly, the EU initiative had to cope with some teething problems with the registration system and a shorter time to collect signatures (12 months instead of 18 in Switzerland). Thirdly, because of the European Commission having no direct competence in matters of social policy, the phrasing of the proposal was much weaker — and hence less exciting — in the EU case than in the Swiss case. Fourthly, what would be triggered in case of success was far less than an EU-wide consultation with a binding impact on the EU's fundamental law: just a letter from the Commission and some Committee time at the Parliament, both of which may turn out to be no more than polite formalities. Finally, while the linguistic challenge is not insignificant in Switzerland, it is daunting at the level of the Union. The seven initiators of the basic income initiative had no language in common which they all understood, the volunteers involved spent a lot of time on translations, and the coordination meetings were hampered by the need for expensive and stiffening interpreting services, the slowness of consecutive translation and/or the misunderstandings of broken English.

Does this mean that the European Citizens Initiative is a hopeless avenue, a gadget more than a real democratic instrument? Not necessarily. But further inspiration should be drawn from the Swiss case in order to determine what can be reasonably expected from it. One crucial function popular initiatives play in the Swiss context is, as former Swiss president Micheline Calmy-Rey put it, that they are what turns the Swiss into "un peuple", "ein Volk", "un popolo", despite all the cleavages, cantonal, linguistic or religious, that divide Swiss society. Several times every year, Swiss citizens talk and discuss with one another at the same time about the same issues across all internal boundaries, and this is what makes them one people,

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[18] The "Right2Water" initiative ("The EU legislation should require governments to ensure and to provide all citizens with sufficient and clean drinking water and sanitation.") was the first one to reach the one million threshold. It was launched on 10 May 2012, was financially supported by the European Federation of Public Service Unions, gathered 1.659.543 signatures in 12 months and satisfied the threshold condition in 13 countries. It was therefore the first to receive a response by the European Commission, in the form of an extensive official communication: http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/finalised/details/2012/000003. At the time of writing, only one more initiative reached the threshold: "One of us" ("Juridical protection of the dignity, the right to life and of the integrity of every human being from conception in the areas of EU competence in which such protection is of particular importance."), financially supported by the Italian Foundation Vita Nova.

one demos.[19] In addition to these consultations triggered by citizens' initiatives and within the same spirit, the Swiss people also have the possibility of "referendums" in the strict sense, which enables them to cancel what was decided by their government or their assembly. This can be viewed as the corollary, for the sake of democratic legitimacy, of the so-called "magic formula", the customary proportional composition of the federal government. As there is no alternation possible between government and opposition and hence no way of "throwing out the rascals", the decision structure retains legitimacy in the people's eyes because of their power to throw out what their government decided.

It is worth thinking about an analogous set up for the European Union, bearing in mind the massively higher cost of organizing popular consultations with nearly 100 times more potential participants. Firstly, there is the demos-creating impact in a highly segmented polity. In Switzerland, average participation in consultations and referendums is not far from 50%. This is way beyond the meagre 0.25% of the EU citizenry required for a successful European initiative. For direct democracy to have in the EU the sort of demos-creating effect it has in Switzerland, real EU-wide consultations would need to be triggered, with significant legislative consequences, and not just collections of signatures. In this far more ambitious institutional context, even campaigns that do not gather the required number of signatures would make significant contributions to demos creation by linking citizens across all cleavages. Secondly there is the contribution to the perceived legitimacy of decisions taken by an executive that cannot really be "thrown out" by the people. The fact that the Swiss federal executive includes in a roughly proportional way all the main political forces reduces the likelihood of acute crises with cantonal governments. For analogous reasons, there may well be wisdom in having a European executive that is not the emanation of a parliamentary majority but includes all the EU's main political forces. For the sake of perceived legitimacy, the impossibility of "alternance" arguably needs to be compensated, as it is in Switzerland, by another mechanism: the vulnerability of the executive's decisions to a hostile referendum. This suggests a second specific reason for introducing a strong form of direct democracy in a highly segmented polity such as the European Union. Even more than the first one, it only kicks in if far more significant consequences are attached to a successful European citizens' initiative than is the case under the present scheme. But the latter can be viewed as a first experimental step in that direction.

It is of course also possible to think about strong forms of direct democracy in less segmented national and sub-national levels. But the possible indirect impact on government formation needs to be reflected upon.[20] And so must the risk of consultations being hijacked by local lobbies, often denounced in California, as well as the likelihood of voting fatigue: close to 20% of the Swiss citizens entitled to vote (in addition to the 20% of non-citizen residents) practically never take part in the Swiss votations, and the turn

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[19] Meeting with Micheline Calmy-Rey and her team, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bern, 19 January 2011. See also Stojanovic (2009) and Lacey (2013) for analyses of the Swiss system that stress this aspect.

[20] In Switzerland, the perpetuation of the "magic formula" (i.e. essentially a proportional representation in the executive (the Federal Council) of the parties represented in the assembly (or National Council) is by no means the automatic outcome of the voting procedure: as the seven members of the Federal Council are elected sequentially under a simple majority system, a party coalition that includes more than 50% of the members of parliament could elect an executive drawn entirely from its ranks in a constitutionally impeccable way. It is rather the fear of hostile popular initiatives that would keep stalling the political process that dissuades parliamentary majorities from evicting other parties.

out at the national elections is lower than anywhere else in Europe. Moreover, while there is a large consensus on imposing some limits on what can be submitted to a popular consultation, it can be tricky to specify them. To take two questions raised by some recent Swiss consultations: should the European Court of Human Rights be consulted prior to the vote if there is a possibility that the proposal could be interpreted as a violation of human rights; and are international treaties untouchable, or touchable only in their entirety rather than clause by clause?

In all cases, popular consultations can only avoid the risk of doing worse than representative democracy if there is a sufficiently well educated and well informed public opinion with the will and the time to listen, think and talk about the issues under discussion, and not just with the likes of them. This requires a quality press that is widely read or viewed and that makes room for diverse views in an intelligent and intelligible way. This cannot be taken for granted even in the most formally "democratic" of countries, and when these conditions are not present, a popular consultation is no better than an opinion poll that records prejudices, short-term interests and the impact of recent sound bites. It is then better to stick to the place where deliberation — and hence the civilizing force of hypocrisy — is more likely to find the competence, interacting diversity and time it requires: elected — and possibly also partly unelected (see supra) — assemblies entrusted with this specific task.

A healthy electoral democracy

In light of the previous discussion, it is pretty clear that both deliberative assemblies and citizens' initiatives can and must be given only a relatively marginal role in the functioning of our democracies, relative to the electoral process. Given the crisis, or at least the deep malaise of electoral democracy mentioned at the start, this may sound like a disappointing conclusion. I do indeed believe that there is no big alternative to electoral democracy. There is no alternative set up that could be reasonably expected to be better at producing collective decisions well informed about and fair to the legitimate interests of all the people affected by them, while not being worse at commanding voluntary compliance with these decisions by all those to whom they apply. However, there are thousands of ways of refashioning electoral democracy so that it could perform better in these respects. But the guiding principle should not be accountability to the voters but justifiability to all those affected.

This might involve, for example, extending the vote to all minors with a proxy for their parents.[21] It should certainly involve extending the suffrage to all permanent residents within a particular territory, for example by giving a vote at the regional elections to over a third of the Brussels adult population currently deprived of it because of not having Belgian citizenship. It should involve lifting powers to an entity operating on a larger scale — for example the EU — because of the magnitude of cross-border externalities. It should involve designing the election of both the assembly and the executive so as to secure (through quotas or other means) a sufficient degree of diversity along various dimensions that may prove particularly

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[21] See Van Parijs (2011: chapter 4) for a discussion of "the children's vote and other attempts to secure intergenerational justice".

significant and so as to ensure as much as possible that the electorate the key players are responsive to includes the bulk of the people affected by the decisions they will have to make. Finally, it may also involve, as suggested above, the creation of ad hoc deliberative assemblies dealing with long term issues and including some members chosen by a lottery rather than nominated by parties and pressure groups, and the possibility of popular initiatives or abrogative referendums both to oblige the legislators to pay attention and to help strengthen a common demos in segmented polities.

Moreover, irrespective of where the real decision-making power is located — in an elected parliamentary majority, in a proportional government relying on consensus, in ad hoc assemblies, in agencies entrusted with specific mandates, or indeed in lobbies or other private actors —, transparency is crucial. But what is transparency? Obviously not that the people in power should be able to see everything the citizens do and think. But nor that the citizens should be able to see everything the people in power do and think. Why not? In part because protecting the private lives of people with public mandates is essential to prevent reducing even further the pool of competent people willing to fulfil public functions. In part because public exposure of every conversation, of every negotiation, of every communication between people in power will hinder the development of indispensable trust, solidarity and capacity to make compromises among representatives of different parts of the population concerned. And also because identifying the ultimate motives and deepest thoughts of those holding or wanting to hold power is not required for the effectiveness of both the educational force of vote fishing and the civilizing force of hypocrisy.

Nonetheless, transparency is essential. Transparency in the sense that decisions by the authorities and proposals pushed by significant actors should be made visible and hence in need of a justification. Transparency in the sense that the information and analysis which is used to justify these decisions and proposals must be made explicit, publicly and cheaply available — a possibility massively enhanced by today's technology — , so that they can be checked and challenged on the basis of further information and closer analysis. Seeing everything, however, is seeing nothing. The information publicly available must be fairly selected, highlighted and made intelligible. This requires, in particular, that what is being done and the effects of what is being done must be made susceptible of evaluation thanks to reliable data allowing meaningful comparisons across places and times. This duty falls partly on those who provide the information, partly on a trustworthy quality press, and partly on a socially responsible academic profession. A socially responsible academic profession is one that does not insist on remaining confined to its ivory tower, one that doe not shy away from speaking out beyond the narrow boundaries of its highly specialized expertise. Socially responsible academics must view participation in the public debate as part of their core business, with an intransigent commitment to telling what they believe to be the truth on the basis of a critical synthesis of scientific knowledge generated not just by themselves nor only by their discipline, and with a willingness to move from analysis to recommendation in the light of value judgements they must be prepared to reflect upon and spell out. The complex, always imperfect, process of transparency so understood should help the decisions made by those authorized to make them to be not only rhetorically justified but, to the best of our n-knowledge, really justifiable. This is quite different

from accountability to the voters in a sense that could be better approximated, say, by imperative mandates, revocability at any time, or taxation ear-marked for purposes chosen by the taxpayer-voter.

Does the untouchable centrality of the electoral process entail that that electoral politics is the only significant avenue for political action? Not at all. There is an ever greater role to be played by civil society, even in the form of civic disobedience, but these other forms of action will and must remain parasitic on the electoral process and, to be effective, judiciously articulated with it. Thanks to e-mail, websites, facebook etc., lots of initiatives can be organized bottom-up without relying on the resources of politically controlled public administrations or big organizations. Indeed, the G1000 and the first European citizens' initiatives provide spectacular illustrations of how this new potential can be mobilized. Even with the help of these new tools, such initiatives required a huge and prolonged effort by hosts of selfless volunteers. Without that help, they could not have hoped to achieve even a fraction of what they achieved and, anticipating this, they would not even have tried. But whether or not they will have a lasting impact depends crucially on whether the pressure they generate on electoral democracy is strong enough, sharp enough, timely and justifiable enough for the people in power to take notice.

Another instructive illustration, far more modest in its scope, but probably more conclusive in its impact, is "Picnic the Streets", an unauthorized mass picnic that took place on 10 June 2012 at the Place de la Bourse, across the whole width of Brussels' central boulevards. It called for the making this portion of the boulevards car-free and more broadly for a vigorous rehabilitation of Brussels' public spaces in order to make a better life possible for all city dwellers even in the absence of growing material consumption.[22] The action could not have succeeded, thousands of picnickers would not have had the courage to sit down across the street, had it not been for the three facebook event groups being launched on the very day the first call was made. And it would not have had the impact it had, had it not be justified by a persuasive analysis that appealed to the general interest in a way that drew the media's sympathy. But no doubt a key factor of its (expected) success in terms of impact on the ground is that it took place shortly before the municipal elections. This is why prominent members of all parties showed up at the picnic, why most parties took up the pedestrianization in their electoral programmes, why the majority agreement made after the election included a firm commitment to doing what previous legislatures had repeatedly failed to do, and why less than two years after the picnic a detailed plan for making a significant part of the central boulevards car-free was unanimously approved by the municipal council. Had "civil society" not taken action, had the public interest argument not been strong, had it not been supported by a fairly independent press, this result would not have been achieved. But no less crucial was that the movement could weigh on electoral democracy sufficiently to make it overcome the resistance of vocal short-termist local lobbies.

More than ever, a good democracy requires an active, imaginative, intelligent civil society. More than ever, civil society possesses the tools for effective action. The realization of many good and important ideas is thereby made politically feasible. But civil society also generates many crazy or selfish demands.

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[22] See Van Parijs (2012a, 2012b).

The best filtering mechanism remains the requirement of justifiability before all that is inherent, however imperfectly, in the public debate induced by a healthy electoral democracy.

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Epilogue

Belgium Needs a State Secretary for Democratic Innovation

David Van Reybrouck, founder of the G1000

Dear Philippe,

I am not sure whether an epistle can serve as an epilogue, but you will forgive me for choosing this alternative format for sharing some of the ideas your commentary gave rise to. I am grateful that Paul De Grauwe and you have decided to dedicate a Re-Bel e-book to the important topic of democratic innovation and I am really thankful for the incisive and constructive criticism you supplied.

Democracy is evolving and you have been personally involved with one of the earliest examples of the European Citizens' Initiatives as well as with the deliberative assemblies like the G1000. As to the latter, we seem to concur in a great many respects: I do agree with you that "randomly selected citizens, once well informed and given the time to reflect, have a better prospect of being guided by fairness towards future generations" than lobbies and political parties typically have. I, too, believe that at this stage deliberative assemblies should not be seen as substitutes for electoral democracies, but rather as complements. Like you, I find that election by lot may be more meaningful for assemblies than for executives. I am equally in favour of "a senate without senators" and I am thrilled to learn that you and Kris Deschouwer proposed this idea as early as 2003. I welcome your suggestion that at this stage citizens could already be invited by the senate, in particular for topical sessions with elected politicians and civil society delegates. Indeed, it would be beneficial to Belgian democracy if our new Senate could become a meeting place and a reflection chamber, not just for representatives from the regional governments, as the 2014 Constitution has it, but for randomly selected citizens, too.

And yet, I feel disappointed.

When you write that deliberative assemblies and citizens' initiatives "can and must be given only a relatively marginal role" in the organization of today's democracies, I feel rather puzzled by the normative tone. And this sense of bewilderment only grows when you add: "I do indeed believe there is no big alternative to electoral democracy." While I try to restrain the pavlovian reactions of the modern democracy activist ("How about ancient Athens then?" "How about renaissance Florence?" "How about the sophisticated schemes for reintroducing lottery today?"), I cannot stop being struck by two oddities in the argument you develop.

First, let me return to what you have called the three "chief virtues" of electoral democracy. One of them, you wrote, involves the power to command people's voluntary compliance with decisions taken by their political leaders. Your argument went more or less like this: If individuals are allowed to vote for their rulers, they will more readily accept the rules of the latter. In your own words: "The most general and safest way of making decisions acceptable to individual citizens (...) is to let them decide freely who can decide on their behalf."

Although this sounds attractive and coherent on paper I was quite surprised, Philippe, that your paper never mentioned the actual amount of distrust that is ubiquitous in Western democracies today. According to a recent study published by Transparency International, 67% of Belgians regard political parties as corrupt or extremely corrupt, making them the least trusted public institutions in the country. Figures elsewhere are equally dramatic: 66% of respondents in the UK view parties with utter suspicion, 73% in France, 83% in Spain, even 90% in Greece.1

Though perceived corruption of political parties may certainly differ from the readiness to comply with government policy, we nonetheless must wonder: how virtuous is electoral democracy when its main actors, i.e. political parties, are widely seen as the most corrupt force in the nation? How can the principal architects of public policy ever hope "to command voluntary compliance" with their decisions, if they are structurally and increasingly distrusted as legitimate policy designers? How can there be input legitimacy in electoral democracies if electors despise the elected? How can citizens successfully outsource their decisional power, if they feel no confidence in the recipients of that power? Put bluntly, how can you delegate if you don't trust the delegates?

It may be that I am approaching this issue more as a historian and writer than as the philosopher you are, but I firmly believe that any discussion on the value of electoral democracy should take into account not just the principles but also the practices of the system. If not, we run the risk of committing the logical fallacy of confirming the consequent: people are more ready to comply if they can vote; they can vote; therefore, they are more ready to comply. Quod non.

My second difficulty concerns the methodological conservatism of your argument. You are right: the first examples of the European Citizens' Initiative were rife with difficulties, as was the G1000 deliberative assembly I co-organized in Brussels. (Here is, for the record, my Incomplete List of Things I Would Do Differently If I Had Known Then What I Know Now: 1. I would not choose for a bottom-up agenda but let the organizers do the agenda-setting, perhaps together with political leaders, 2. I would opt for a much emptier, digestible agenda, 3. I would not recruit possible participants by anonymous phone calls, but by official letter, preferably signed by a national authority like the Prime Minister or the President of Parliament, 4. I would offer a financial incentive in order to increase participation, 5. I would elect only 600 by lot and invite 100 politicians and government officials, 100 civil society representatives, 100 journalists, and 100 from under-represented categories, 7. I would ensure that every table at the deliberative assembly had a good mix of the above groups, 8. I

1   http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013

would create task-forces of voluntary participants at the end of the day for each of the topics that had been voted, 9. I would do it again.)

You are right, like any model, deliberative assemblies and citizens' initiatives have got their limits and their merits. Yet which limitation is fundamental and which is incidental? I, for one, find it hard to tell at this stage. With a 3% response ratio during the recruiting phase, the Belgian G1000 had to go to great lengths to meet its standards of diversity, yet the recent G1000 citizens' assembly that was held in the Dutch city of Amersfoort enjoyed at 10% response ratio. The difference? People were invited by a letter signed by the mayor, the event took place three days after municipal elections, participants did not have to travel far as this was a local event, and, crucially in terms of communication, the organizers could refer to the Belgian prototype to explain this novelty. How will response ratios develop in the future, once deliberative practices become more deeply entrenched in the daily practice of democracy? The fact is: we don't know. But what seemed like a fundamental obstacle at first, may turn out to be more or less surmountable later.

You are right in pointing out that only a tiny subset of questions can be dealt with by a deliberative assembly, given the difficulties of meaningful concertation with a large (and sometimes multilingual) group of citizens. But if this subset comprises the decisions that deeply affect future generations, as you write yourself, the bonus would be enormous! These are precisely the major challenges that contemporary electoral democracies are unable to deal with, for fear of being beaten up next time people go to vote. Damn the number of issues that can be discussed! As long as they are the key issues, we are doing fine.

In fact, a deliberative assembly with randomly selected citizens might even draw attention to topics that are nowhere structurally dealt with today. Language is a case in point. Belgium is a trilingual country, and the very first competence that was relegated to the subnational level (in 1970) concerned language policy. Though frustration and irritation about each other's linguistic competences may be at the root of a great many social frictions in everyday life, there is nowadays no federal instance that is entitled to stipulate the minimum linguistic requirements in a multilingual country like ours. If a deliberative assembly, on the other hand, would call for a national agreement on language, it would definitely move the boundaries of what is presently attainable in our party-driven electoral democracy.

Reading your article, I got the impression that you, though far from being unsympathetic to the idea of democratic innovation, presented a number of sobering thoughts on today's attempts at alternative decision-making. Citizens' initiatives have a hard time mustering the legally required number of signatures, deliberative assemblies have difficulties in recruiting their panels, participatory democracy can only deal with a limited number of topics. Etcetera.

Whence this despondency? Whence this pessimism?

"This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication," Western Union's president William Orton famously said in 1876 after one Graham Bell asked for an investment. Well, we know what happened. And when a British military officer in

1916 saw the first tank, he wrote: "The idea that the cavalry will be replaced by these iron coaches is absurd."

The point is: It is pretty hard to tell the potential from a prototype. When prototypes show severe shortcomings, either one can reject the invention altogether, or one can start to improve the prototype. We only stand at the beginning of an age of profound democratic transformation and it may not be considerate to downgrade the experiment after a few early trials. Please forgive me the caricature I am about to make, but your position could read like: "This 'telephone' thing doesn't quite work, the investmest is too high, the voices on the other end of the line are hard to understand, so let us rather improve the telegraph and the postal services, while granting at best a minor role to this new fad."

I truly hope that your ideas for improving the existing electoral system and for falling back on more traditional forms of political action such as civil disobedience will be enough to revitalize the democratic system and to restore civilian trust in representative government. But I fear it may not be enough. Yes, Picnic the Streets was a wonderful campaign to challenge traffic policy in downtown Brussels, but you know as well as I do that such a playful action only works for tangible, topical policy-making. For years, you have been defending the idea of an electoral constituency at the federal level in Belgium, a necessary measure to counterbalance the centrifugal forces of the current system. The efforts, however, have so far not materialized, partly because of political lack of will, partly because it is hard to raise mass public support for a crucial, if abstract theme like electoral law.

Now, what could be done instead? If 'picnicking the ballot' does not work for creating a national constituency, if elected politicans are unwilling to legislate on this touchy issue, if citizens' initiatives do not exist in Belgium? Well, one could always invite a randomly assembled sample of citizens to come and deliberate about the issue at hand...

These are the reasons that lead me to believe that Belgium should seriously begin to invest in democratic innovation, for instance by appointing a State Secretary for Democratic Innovation after the 2014 election. For over half a century, Belgium has massively invested in state reform; now it is time for democracy reform. In the recent past, we have created state secretaries for administrative simplification, for digitalization, for fighting fiscal evasion, etcetera. A State Secretary for Democratic Innovation would be a much-needed complement to the functioning of the country, allowing government to discover alternative means of collective decision-making and to experiment with the relevant parameters for engaging citizens in innovative ways. After the May 25 election, the country will enter a period of five quiet years, uninterrupted by major electoral dynamics. It would be the ideal moment to organize deliberative assemblies consisting of elected and drafted citizens, and to put finally into practice your idea of a 'senate without senators'.

Very best wishes,
David

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