

# Raising awareness on european elections

*Actions for European Active Citizenship*



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**European  
Elections**  
*IT'S YOUR CHOICE!*

# Citizens' participation and its role in the elections to the European Parliament

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**Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida,**  
**director of ALDA**

When one leaves Brussels, it is easy to forget how strong Europe is and how much it is progressing in all spheres of our daily life. Or, better said, the impact of the European Union on their daily life is not perceived clearly by the "ordinary" citizens who have more direct contacts with local or

national institutions. Many elements contribute to removing European Institutions and political bodies from the field of vision of the decision-makers.

We could mention some general perceptions by Europeans: Europe is not understood, top down imposed, complicated, and bureaucratic. The communication between the large and long processes entailed in the European policies and the citizens is not working. Only drops of information, often wrong or not precise, are conveyed to the vast and diversified European population. This failure becomes visible – even more so – during the European Parliament elections. Even when, like in May 2009, the prospects for the MEPs are to have even more competencies thanks to the upcoming implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.

Among the challenges of the progression of Europe are not only its enlargement towards the East or its relationship with its direct Neighbours (which brings, however, its great problems) but not least the true transformation of a Europe of Nation States into a Europe of Citizens.

Despite all the difficulties we have in front of us every day, Europe and its different political bodies and constructions (like the EU and the Council of Europe) remain one of the most innovative and brilliant political processes in the world. Considering the complexity of the task (because of the challenging economies, the historical background, the diversities), the declared wish to be together while maintaining our diversities and the progress of the European Union institutions in these last years seem almost a miracle.

But, more could be done and the project will remain valid only if it looks far above and beyond the immediate difficulties. Despite all the possible criticism, the Lisbon Treaty encompasses the right directions to follow but it includes also its own shortcomings: almost no communication or exchanges with the citizens about it. Indeed, the Treaty is signed by the Member States who decide how to adhere. Most of them ratify by Parliamentary deliberation and therefore do not really need a public explanation of what it is all about.

The difficulty of the European Parliament to be "voted" is also due to the fact that in many ways Europe is still a composition of Nation States and not citizens. The only process, which engages direct "election" from the bottom is the vote for the European Parliament, with all the possible failures and difficulties since the European Union is still not an organisation founded on its citizens. A starting point would be, however, a full recognition of the role of the Eu-



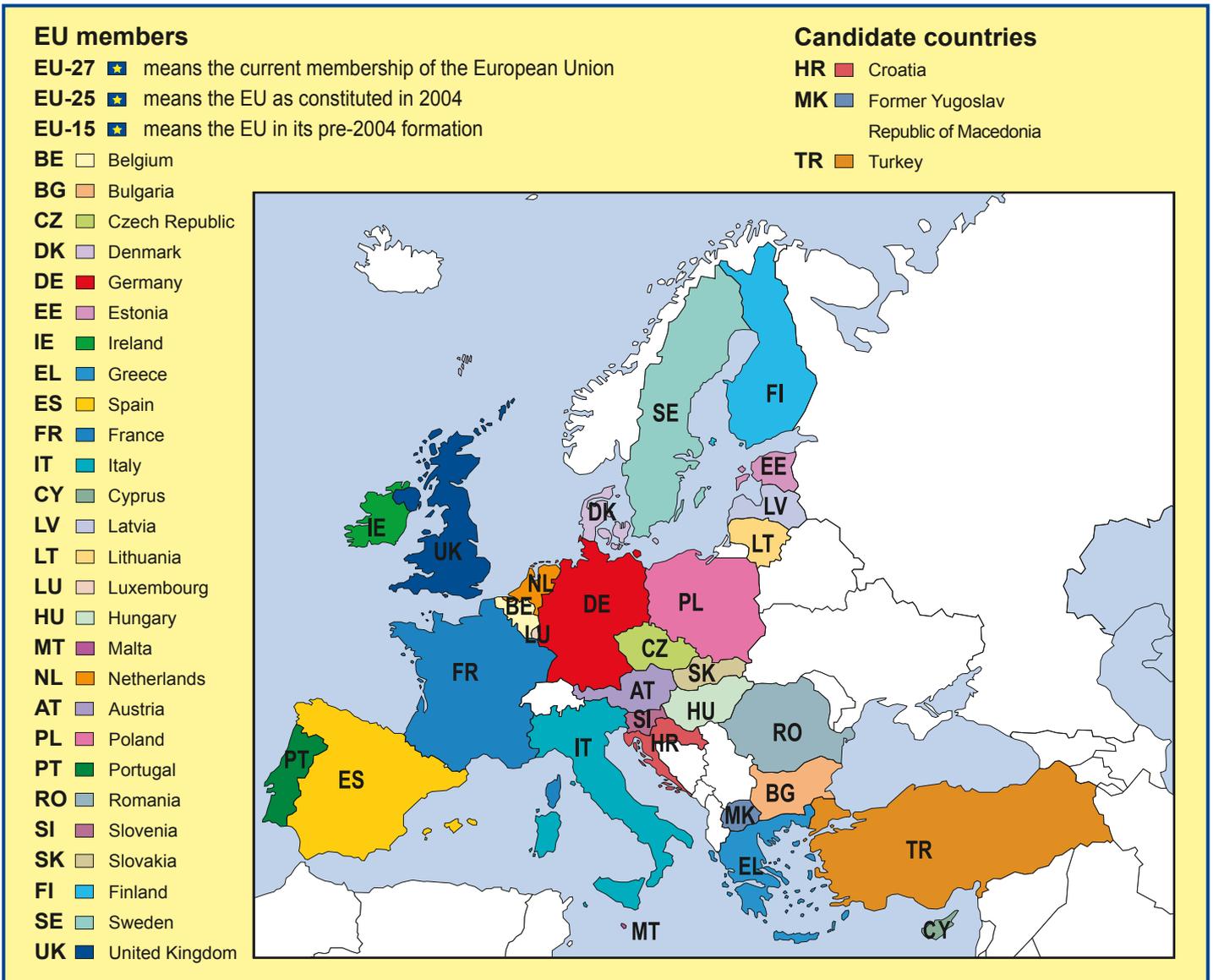
**How should we help balance family and career?**

Use your vote in the European Parliament Elections on **4 June**.

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European Parliament as the voice and defender of the interests of the citizens, presenting a first counterbalance to the other different bodies of the EU, which are mostly technocratically led or following the instructions from the Member States.

In the preparation for the Parliamentary Elections of May 2009, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies, ALDA joined the efforts made by the European Union institutions to disseminate information about this important challenge and encourage the European Citizens to vote. In this, ALDA continues its constant work to inform the citizens about what

Active Citizenship in Europe means. The awareness campaign involved all the members (150 local authorities and civil society groups dedicated to good governance and citizens' participation in Europe) and the networks affiliated to ALDA. The network of ALDA was used to promote meetings and debates and to have direct exchanges with citizens on different topics regarding the EU and drawing attention to the dates of the elections. During the months before the elections and during the implementation of the different initiatives organized by ALDA and its members, some of the weaknesses of the process were revealed.

## Distance and difficulty in understanding what the European Parliament is and what it does

For most of the European Citizens who are expected to go to vote on the day of the European Parliament elections, what the European Parliament does or represent, is not clearly understood.

The programmes supported by the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as their Representations in the Member States manage to disseminate the information but it is far from being fully satisfactory. Indeed, often the message remains too complicated and composed in a jargon, which is only clearly understandable to those who are used to dealing with EU institutions. Furthermore, they cannot reach – due to insufficient resources, both human and financial – every corner of every country!

The campaign with postcards connecting the European Parliamentary elections to the daily issues addressed by citizens was a great success but not disseminated wide enough.

There is therefore a need to convey as much as possible information about the structure and role of the MEPs and the Parliament as such to the citizens.

It is highly recommended to use NGOs and Community Based organisation to disseminate a message and relevant information. Only meetings, including direct contacts, can really offer an explanatory presentation of what are the strengths and weaknesses of the EU.



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The Member States themselves should further strengthen their commitment to these campaigns of information and dissemination, through an identified activity of their local authorities and also local civil society.

It is fundamental to use the new technologies and forms of communication to reach those who are not included in the political dissemination of information.

Important targets for dissemination of information is youth and the intersectorial target groups.

## Short and difficult political campaigns

The European Parliamentary elections have to register a substantial lack of interest from the European citizens. Part of it is due to the difficult process of campaigning for being elected and in general to the political process, which lies behind an election.

As a matter of fact, the campaign for the European Parliament is launched only a few weeks before the election itself and – to raise any interest – often connected to national and local issues. This distorts, obviously, the main objective and target and the candidates are therefore “misleading” the voters about what they are really running for. Citizens are called every now and then to vote for MEPs but, after the ballot day, they are hardly reminded of anything till the next round of elections.

In many cases, the electoral systems are one of the

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main causes of the constant low turnout at the European elections. Once the citizens understand what the European Parliament is and does, how can they be in touch and know the candidates? This is why, in some countries, there is an impossible campaign to be run since there is no contact with the candidates and the citizens, who must express – in some cases – a preference. Here we have an obvious need for expensive political campaigns to impose a name and a face without any possible meeting/knowing the candidates (therefore political parties often resort to the use of names of well-known show business or television stars). This is a negative circle, which debases the whole credibility of the democratic exercise.

**The campaign of awareness about the European Parliament should be constant and not be raised once**

every five years, a few weeks before the elections.

**A strong lobby should be exercised to influence national institutions to adapt the electoral process for the European Parliamentary elections and bring it closer to the citizens.**

**The EP should also leave the task to the MEPs to liaise with their territories and the citizens who elected them – during their mandate.**

**Information about the EU as crosscutting element throughout Europe should be further supported (i.e. Common messages – via TV or other media, should be promoted).**

### **No European Politics**

The political groups at the European Parliament are non-homogenous groupings of different parties. Often non-coherent and inconsistent. Most citizens interviewed are absolutely unable to say, in which political group the candidate A or B will end up if elected. As a matter of fact, some of the mating games are played even after the elections themselves, albeit not uncommon in national politics either.

Most of the MEPs – because of the nature and concrete process of the political election for the EP – have to rely completely on their political parties at home: the party put their name at the top of the list and financed their very expensive campaign. Therefore, when they are elected they keep looking back

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to those who made their elections possible. Those are not the “citizens” but their party and the local/national political dynamics. Any time they are called back home, they are obliged to leave the European political scene to respond to the need of their affiliates in their own countries. How much will these MEPs be dedicated to the European cause? Only to a limited extend since the centre of their interest at the end of the day remains their country and their party.

The former Commissioner, Mario Monti, once said that the European Parliament could not be considered a Parliament as we understand it (as a part of the subdivided powers described by Montesquieu, like Judiciary and Executive), in particular because there are no cross cutting European political parties.

The campaign takes place in the individual countries – only. With national and local rules and logics. Without such a political level, the only visible one of the EU Institutions in the daily life of the citizens seems to be the European Commission, which looks to many as everything but a democratic body.

**A renewed perspective for European Politics should be promoted – as a promotion of interests cross cutting through the different member states.**

**The dialogue between citizens and the European Union should be strengthened through different means (consultations and exchanges) but also through political processes.**



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The struggle for the increasing the role of the European Parliament and the importance of its election is part of the process to build a Europe for and with the citizens. Most likely, the actions undertaken so far only bring one part of the solution and it requires a further engagement of local organizations (public bodies and NGOs) to create awareness, to disseminate information, to engage in a dialogue about opportunities and weaknesses of the EU.

However, this process should be now clearly accompanied by a stand on where the EU is heading, too, and on how much the political scene could and should shift from the national level to the European level.

For some of the Brussels based think tanks – more pessimistic – the dream of a Europe of Citizens is over, or was never even born. The Association of Local Democracy Agencies considers that we are just at the beginning and that there is no other option to follow to address the challenges of the complex future ahead of us.

**Antonella Valmorbida**  
director of ALDA



## Innovative and creative activities to raise citizens' awareness on the European elections 2009

Accompanying the efforts of the European Union Institutions to promote the vote for the elections of the EU Parliament, in spring of 2009, ALDA launched a call for proposals to its members to organise activities to raise awareness about the upcoming elections of the European Parliament, to improve citizens' understanding of the role and the functioning of the European Institutions, and increasing citizens' participation at the European level through voting, fostering debates between citizens and local authorities and advocate to bring European decision makers and citizens closer together.

The overall objective of this initiative was twofold: first, to organise events to encourage people to vote for the European Parliament elections in May 2009. Second, to use the occasion of the elections to bring the debate of citizens' participation and the importance of a better understanding of the European

Union to the forefront.

The first objective of encouraging voting was reached through the promotion of the important role of the European Parliament, and the increased understanding of the scope of citizen's participation in the European Union for an increased democracy.

The second objective to raise awareness and understanding about the European Union was reached through various activities with a focus on the role of the schools and local authorities in providing knowledge, adequate information and engaging fruitful debates at the local level.

ALDA selected 4 partners, which have been selected to implements 5 sets of activities in France and Italy. The implementing partners are:

- the municipality of Monfalcone (IT);
- the municipality of Ravenna (IT);
- the association Putignanonelmondo (IT);
- Maison de l'Europe of the municipality of Caen (FR).

The common approach and method were participatory initiatives that brings together actors from different sectors, and to run both activities targeting a particular group (for example the youth) and activities that brought together categories of people that do not usually meet (for example foster a debate between students and politicians). Participatory ap-



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proach allowed actors from different sectors to work together towards a common goal.

The overall outcome of the project was an increased awareness among citizens, in particular youth, who were new to voting or voting for the first time for the European elections and a building of capacities of the actors able to provide information about Europe to the citizens (local authorities, actors in the civil society, teachers). Partners' endeavour to diversify different sorts of events showed the importance to engage the society at all levels, and through different means. The variety of initiatives taken testifies the numerous opportunities that exist to engage the debate on citizens' participation in Europe.

Activities:

- Debate on "the future of European citizens in the heart of the next European elections" with Catherine Lalumière, former minister and vice-president of the European Parliament, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2009, Caen, Maison de l'Europe, France;
- The European Week, 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, Basse Normandie region, by Maison de l'Europe, France;
- "Festa Dell' Europa", 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, in Monfalcone by the municipality of Monfalcone, Italy;
- "Diventa Cittadino europeo", Municipality of Ravenna, Italy;
- Events and campaigns, Putignanonelmondo, Putignano, Italy.

## Debate on "the future of European citizens in the heart of the next European elections" with Catherine Lalumière, former minister and vice-president of the European Parliament, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2009, Caen, Maison de l'Europe, France

The French association Maison de l'Europe organised an important event in Caen, on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2009. The debate, called "the future of European citizens in the heart of the next European elections", was organised in the presence of Catherine Lalumière, former minister and vice-president of the European Parliament. The partners of this event were Movement Européen Basse Normandie and Maisons de l'Europe.

The debate that took place in Café Mancel in the castle of Caen, which attracted 100 participants aimed at reflecting upon the adequacy between information and the purpose of voting. The other aim of the debate was to share actions and encourage cooperation in innovative projects.

The event brought together local elected representatives, local authorities, young people involved in the local life and representatives of associations.

The debate focused on the following topics:

- the issue of the elections and the international role of the European Union;

- the European Parliament in its everyday action serving the citizens;
- Europe confronted to the economic crisis.

The debate was integrated into a wider project to promote Europe, the importance of citizens' participation, and the crucial role of the Parliament in providing democratic control over other European institutions.

The activities organised within the project additionally contributed to increase the visibility of the Maison de l'Europe, to improve the knowledge of its programme by people, and ensure a sustainable impact on its citizens on the theme of Europe by planning future initiatives in the line of this project. The project was supported by a strong communication strategy: distribution of printed and electronic information to members, supporters, partners, public participating in various activities organised by Maison de l'Europe; daily updates of the website and presentation of the activities on European elections in the media<sup>1</sup>.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the impact of this event, Maison de l'Europe has implemented a holistic programme around the priority of European citizenship and awareness raising on democratic participation. The Maison de l'Europe aims at being the place for different actors to gather, discuss, and work together. It aims at attracting in particular youth, actors of civil society, and institutions working for European democracy.

In addition, Maison de l'Europe is committed to plan for future initiatives in this field:

- widen its target to the whole region;
- build partnerships with local authorities, other associations, schools and youth;
- professionalise the communication strategy and promotion of activities;
- strengthen the network of members of the association.

<sup>1</sup> Articles about the initiatives were published in the regional newspapers, and Maison de l'Europe participated several radio programmes including France Bleu, TSF 98, RCF 14 and television programmes (France 3, Citizen TV).

## “Les journées de l’Europe”, 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, Basse Normandie region, by Maison de l’Europe, France

Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, Maison de l'Europe, together with the Jean Rostand high school (Caen), municipal council of Colombelles, Maison du Citoyen (Hérouville Saint Clair) and Mémorial pour la Paix (Caen), organised a series of event to raise awareness on the European elections and the importance of citizens participation.

The events were organised in 4 different sets of activities:

1. “Semaine de l’Europe”, open debate with two candidates to the European elections, on the 5<sup>th</sup> may 2009;
2. Conference-debate “Europe: many preconceptions”: exchange on the institutions, the economy, education, on the 6<sup>th</sup> may 2009;
3. Debate meeting and exhibition around the “Fête de l’Europe”: “What opportunities can Europe offer to the Youth?”, on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009;



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4. Conference-debate with Jean Boissonnat, journalist, economist and essayist: “Europe to the test of the crisis”, on 15<sup>th</sup> may 2009.

### Opinion survey

Maison de l’Europe conducted some preliminary research in order to assess the extent of knowledge of European policies and programmes that leads to preconceptions and approximations. A survey was conducted in partnership with the University Institute of Technologies of Caen and the Normandy Management School shows the hesitation of the citizens in Basse Normandie to engage with the European Union:

- 86% said they were interested in Europe;
- 55% feel uninvolved;
- 44% said they might get involved.



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The project proceeded by targeting two set of people: the elected representatives and citizens (activity 4 and 2) and the young voters (activity 1 and 3).

### 1. “Semaine de l’Europe”, open debate with two candidates to the European elections, on the 5<sup>th</sup> may 2009

The debate was organised with the professional training of the Jean Rostand high school of Caen. The Maison de l’Europe coordinated the event but 3 students were in charge of promoting the initiative within their school. Around 60 students discussed with two candidates to the European elections about Europe and the opportunities to study in Europe.

### 2. Conference-debate “Europe: many preconceptions”: exchange on the institutions, the economy, education, on the 6<sup>th</sup> may 2009

The conference was organised in partnership with the municipal council of Colombelle for a debate between the representatives of the association Maison de l’Europe and the public on the topic of the European institutions, European enlargement, economy, and education. The debate intended to clarify information about European realities and attracted around 50 participants.

One of the key outcomes of the debate was that people should not think that it was impossible to put Europe into question. There is a space for contesta-

tion and debate, and that pointed out the importance of citizens' involvement in European issues.

### 3. Debate meeting and exhibition around the "Fête de l'Europe": "What opportunities can Europe offer to the Youth?" on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009

The meeting, organised in partnership with Maison du Citoyen of Hérouville Saint Clair gathered 40 participants: university students, high school students and apprentices. The exhibition, which took place from 6<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, attracted 300 visitors around the theme of the history of European Union. Parallel to the event, the International Relations Service of the Municipality of Hérouville Saint Clair initiated a television debate for the programme "C'Direct" of Citizen TV.

### 4. Conference-debate with Jean Boissonnat, journalist, economist and essayist: "Europe to the test of the crisis", on 15<sup>th</sup> may 2009

The conference, organised in partnership with the Mémorial pour la Paix of Caen, attracted 250 participants. Jean Boissonnat, journalist and essayist, is a well-known expert on global politics and economy. The discussion focused on the history of the last 50 years of Europe, with a special focus on the fall of the Berlin wall and its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The overall outcome of the project was to bring different actors together and try to fill the gap of



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knowledge assessed prior to the initiative. In order to make sure our service would match the public's expectations and needs in the field of Europe through:

- citizens forums;
- opinion surveys;
- local debates on European citizenship and the common values and history and the necessity of a European memory;
- provision of documentation through the "Kiosque Europe", a documentation and information space for studies on EU in schools where there are regular exhibitions presenting European countries, the different steps of European construction with the possibility to organise interventions and provide proper guidance to projects around Europe;
- important media coverage: France 3, Citizen TV, Radio France, TSF 98, RCF 14, Ouest-France and Liberté.

In order to follow-up on these initiatives and ensure sustainable awareness raising, the project was supported by the members of the association, civil society representatives, elected representatives, youth and citizens who are committed to Europe and who will become the contact points, relay information, mobilize the communities, and be able to measure the impact of the project. Another method for sustainable impact is the support to local authorities in their European projects. Finally, this working method and the initiatives implemented contributed to the process of informal learning. The plans for the future are reaching out to new public and build new partnerships.



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## “Festa dell’Europa”, 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, in Monfalcone by the municipality of Monfalcone, Italy

The municipality of Monfalcone in Italy decided to run a project in partnership with schools of Monfalcone and United World College Duino to promote the knowledge of the European Parliament and to raise citizens awareness on the European Elections 2009 essentially through schools, targeting mainly young people, and indirectly, their families. A special focus had been given to eighteen years olds who were voting for the first time.

Prior to the implementation of the project, a working group was set up with schools of Monfalcone composed of principals and teachers who coordinated the programme activities. The municipality of Monfalcone also run training activities of involved staff. This preparatory phase was divided into 3 phases:

- preparatory activities implemented by the teachers to communicate the importance and the role of the European Institutions to the students. This collaboration led to the final event that took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in the Theatre of Monfalcone;
- the convention of students was also organised on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2009;
- questionnaires were distributed in order to assess the level of knowledge among the youth about the opportunities offered by the European Union.

The main objective of the event was to raise awareness among the youth about the history and evolution of the European Union and promote the importance of citizens’ participation through voting for the European Parliament elections.

The main highlight of the event of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May was the conference given by the writer Boris Pahor, a

candidate to the Nobel Prize for literature and one of the most famous Triestian intellectual figure abroad. The event of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May attracted more than 600 participants in total and was a great success for the Municipality of Monfalcone and its partners. The two strong points of the event were the participation of the United World College and the speech given by the Mayor of Monfalcone, reminding the positive significance of a unified Europe and its role in promoting European values such as freedom and progress.

The overall feedback from the people stress that there was a lack of understanding and certain apathy among the public opinion regarding the role and activities of the European Parliament and other European Institutions. Another result was the realisation that the media does not analyse European Issues adequately, which contributes to the climate of wariness and confusion.

The project, by targeting mainly schools and youth had a great impact in integrated the European issues into the education system, which sometimes neglect the importance of educating students about the role and functioning of the European Institutions. The project was backed by a strong communication strategy and promotional campaigns to reach out to the largest number of people. The most important impact was given by the intervention and active participation of the youth. Through participation, young people increased their knowledge of the European Institutions and gained awareness of opportunities offered by Europe to the Youth in terms of mobility, training and professional opportunities.



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## “Diventa Cittadino europeo”, Municipality of Ravenna, Italy

Under the project raising awareness for the European Parliament, the Municipality of Ravenna in Italy implemented the project “Diventa Cittadino europeo” in partnership with the province of Ravenna, Flaminia Foundation and Europe Direct – European Carrefour Romagna. The European Policy Office in Ravenna has organised a Seminar called “Citizen’s Europe” held on 23 May at 10am at the Convention Centre in Largo Firenze.

This initiative aimed at encouraging and developing citizens’ participation through voting at the recent European Parliament elections. The seminar targeted young people who were experiencing European elections for the first time and needed a comprehensive explanation on Europe, its institutions and programmes. The information campaign on the event has reached about 2.000 individuals from schools, university and the civil society.

The seminar was conducted by experts from academia and the European institutions and specifically:

- Prof. Andrea Morrone, Professor of the Faculty of Law - University of Bologna, teaching a course entitled “Europe and its values: the meaning, impor-



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tance and significance of the European vote”;

- Dr. Carlo Marzocchi, Information Officer Office for Italy of the European Parliament presented the role of the European Parliament;
- Dr. Francesco Masina, Ambassador at the European Commission and Parliament Representation in Italy presented the project “European ambassadors in schools and some European youth programs”;
- Prof. Eugenia Baroncelli, a researcher in Political Science, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Bologna, conducted and moderated the discussion.

The meeting was enriched by the contributions of a group of students who have testified about their experiences conducted under the European project “What future for young people in Europe” - Youth in Action, which bind the City and County of Ravenna.

200 people including university students, elected representatives and citizens, attended the meeting.

The initiative has been divided into 3 phases: preparatory activities, the study day on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, and evaluation work.

The European Policy Office of the Municipality of Ravenna, in collaboration with the youth policy office, Universities and the training service, the decentralization bodies and the Youth Info Centre has coordinated and managed all activities of the project described above. Partners’ involvement in the project is described below:

- Province of Ravenna: the Education Department in collaboration with the Service of Community Policy participated in the working group, has helped the relationship with secondary schools and has promoted the initiative to their network;
- Flaminia Foundation participated in the working group and has helped liaising with the University of territory has identified the supervisor at the conference, promoted the initiative at the University, in student associations and at the University for adults.
- Europe Direct - European Carrefour Romagna participated in the working group, released the information material in schools, the University and the Youth Info Centre, identified the rapporteur of the European Commission and the European Parliament Representation in Italy, has promoted the initiative among their network also through its newsletter, has assisted the City of Ravenna in the distribution, collection and analysis of evaluation tools.

### Achievements

- Greater knowledge of the construction of Europe;
- Better information about Europe and its institutions
- Increased knowledge of the mechanisms that regulate the democratic participation in Europe and in particular the mechanisms of representation of the European Parliament
- Increased awareness of the value of democratic representation
- Understanding of the concept of active citizenship and awareness of European identity
- Fostering motivation to vote

The impact of the project was evaluated through the development, dissemination, collection and analysis of a questionnaire rating as a tool for evaluating the results of the day.

80% of participants answered the questionnaire. Among surveyed people, 80% found the event interesting and useful and about 70% said they would vote at the European elections.

## Events and campaigns, Putignanonelmondo, Putignano, Italy

Association Putignanonelmondo, following its statutory mission, promotes and produces entertainment activities and active citizenship projects, develops cultural resources and supports local associations.

Putignanonelmondo implemented a project to raise citizen's awareness on the European elections 2009 in partnership with the constitution ATS "I MAKE" - the local expression of associations - which allowed to reach a very broad public through a series of seminars, mostly targeting young people and Third Age people which has broadened our audience to citizens usually more reluctant to participate actively in political life. The strength of the initiative came from the support given by experienced professionals (former teachers, former politicians, ...). A further contribution to the project was provided by blood donors FIDAS FPDS-Putignano.

Overall objective was to raise awareness of local citizens in relation to the key role they play in European integration, understood not as a purely political team and economic, but as an entity composed of individuals who choose to work towards the same in the interest of each.



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Main outcomes of the project:

1. An online campaign page linked to the organisation's website [www.putignanoneimondo.it](http://www.putignanoneimondo.it) where the public could download information material, visit related websites of European institutions and to other websites of Community interest, aiming to increase the knowledge and raise awareness on the usefulness of their vote for the political renewal of the European Parliament. The page was online from April 30 to June 30 2009.
2. Free distribution of the magazine where they were published "10 reasons to vote in European elections" set out in the Parliament's press kit. Distribution of 6000 copies.
3. From 11 to 15 May 2009, 500 events were posted and distributed for implementation to associations and local institutions.

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4. 18 May 2009: invitations to the meeting of 21 May were sent with special information on European Elections in three high schools of Putignano for students of the fifth class and staff
5. 21 May 2009: Conference on European Elections, 6 and 7 June 2009: "Use your vote". During the conference, which was attended by about 150 people the special supplement to the journal 30di was distributed, as well as postcards with the slogan prepared by the European Parliament and with the logos of organisations Patrocinanti Initiative.
6. Production of a special event, broadcasted on channel 830 of Sky, from 26/05 to 30/05, to h. 21.15 and available on the portal [www.putignanoneimondo.it](http://www.putignanoneimondo.it) from May 23 to 30 June 2009.
7. Printing and distribution of 10,000 copies of the magazine 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 edition with a special report on the European Elections 2009.

The project substantially raised awareness in the local community on the theme of citizens participation in order to involve people in the creation of a single European identity, beyond the diversity of national and individual cultures. All the initiatives were given positive feedback from the participants and helped to encourage voter participation in the European City of Putignano where there was a participation rate of 84,1% against a national participation of 65,5%.



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## Conclusions

The overall result of the project was first of all to organise simultaneous initiative promoting European participation and raise awareness on the importance and the role of the European Parliament in the citizen's participation into the policies and construction of Europe. The wide range of activities initiated in France and in Italy by the members of ALDA shows the motivation and involvement of the implementing organisations as well as their effort to mobilise citizens by engaging them in educational, instructive and constructive events in order to increase the general understanding of the impact of the European elections and the necessary role of the citizens.

The common path chosen by the organisations seems to have been the focus given to the youth, most of them voting for the first time to the European elections. Partners found it essential to educate young voters and fill the knowledge gap they found in the public's understanding of the European institutions and the impact of voting to the elections. Experiences

described above showed that even though an educational part was necessary to implement such awareness-raising programme, it was important to foster public's participation through debates, variety of initiative, and encourage exchange between people. The direct impact of Europe and the opportunities given to the citizens seemed to have marked the target public, such as describing mobility opportunities to students and young professionals.

Through such initiative, ALDA managed to reach its overall goal to engage citizens' participation through a dynamic collaboration between civil society, local authorities and the public. The importance of the schools and universities was highlighted through the analysis of the different projects implemented.



## Citizens' panels: an innovative methodology to promote participation to European Parliament elections

Since 2007 and its pilot project "EURaction: Citizens acting for Europe", ALDA has been testing and promoting an innovative methodology to increase citizens' participation in Europe: the **citizens' panels methodology**. In short, "citizens' panels are groups of citizens that are not spontaneously involved in European issues".

Through a real bottom-up approach and an innovative methodology, citizens' panels main objective is to tackle one of the major challenges of the EU today, i.e. to bridge the gap between the European citizens and the European institutions. They aim at encouraging citizens' active participation at European level and stimulate dialogue between European citizens and institutions. More specifically, they aim at providing information on key EU issues and challenges to citizens, collecting opinions of citizens on those issues, exploring new methodologies capable of promoting active interaction, creating new mechanisms that allow European citizens to develop civic competences, to formulate their views and opinions on the European integration process in the form of recommendations. **The ultimate aim of the citizens' panels is to submit recommendations on the selected theme to EU institutions.**

Citizens' panels are based on a participatory methods which aim at involving citizens in all the different steps of the process. The employed methodology will be characterized by an active interaction between all the actors involved (citizens, local authorities, EU Institutions...), in order to encourage and support the active participation of citizens and to promote the dialogue between them and the Institutions of the EU. Regular meetings are organised, with very interactiv approaches. IT methods and Tools, especially the free ones

(blogs, facebook, etc) are also promoted to encourage and facilitate interaction and participation.

The expected number of participants involved in each local citizen panel is about 40. The panels include a wide range of profiles and focus on the whole spectrum of society: volunteers, teachers, NGOs representatives, representatives of the sport sector, disadvantaged people, etc. Special attention is paid to involve young people.

Transnational activities are of special importance for the citizens' meetings. They represent both an incentive to take part in local activities and an opportunity to exchange views and opinions with other citizens' panels from other countries. It grants a real European dimension to the work of the panels and will allow the drafting of common recommendations to EU institutions.

In 2009, ALDA has been implementing with the support of the European Commission 2 citizens' panels projects, in which the topic of the European parliament elections was central. This methodology proved to be a useful tool to give a voice to citizens, especially during important electoral periods.



### ALL.4.EU: Citizens for Europe

ALL.4.EU is a project consisting in the setting-up of citizens' panels (groups

of ordinary citizens, not spontaneously involved in European issues) in 5 different places in Europe (Region of Istria - Croatia, Balkan Assit - Bulgaria, CONSVIPO - Italy, CKO - Slovakia, Municipality of Velje - Denmark). This specific methodology was used to give the opportunity to people to be involved and play an active role in the construction of Europe.

The main overall objectives of the project are:

- to encourage the participation of European citizens in the construction of Europe and in the debate about the further integration of Europe;
- to enhance the relation between European citizens and EU institutions;

- to promote a «two-way process» (information and feedback) between EU Institutions and citizens;
- to encourage a bottom up approach to allow citizens to express their views;
- to develop innovative methods to enhance participation.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- to create and support citizens' panels to promote active European Citizenship at the local level;
- to collect the opinion of citizens on some key European challenges for the future, focusing mainly on active European Citizenship and new institutional developments;
- to consolidate and improve, starting from the pilot project developed by ALDA, a method for stimulating active interaction and discussion between citizens on their participation at the European level;
- to create mechanisms that enable European citizens to develop civic competences, to formulate their views and opinions on the role of citizens and civil society in Europe in the form of recommendations for policy makers at European level;
- to encourage the dialogue between European citizens and the institutions of the EU, empowering citizens as regards EU policies and their impact, and ensuring appropriate follow up of citizens' opinions by the EU institutions.

The main theme of ALL.4.EU citizens' panels is «citizens' participation», with a special focus on new EU institutional developments. A particular attention was paid to the Lisbon Treaty and the European Parliament elections of June 2009.

In the final recommendations, the citizens' panels strongly highlighted the importance of making the EU relevant for citizens and of having good quality information available. These are pre-requisites to have informed citizens active during the elections.

The final recommendations are available on ALDA website: [www.alda-europe.eu](http://www.alda-europe.eu)



## BANDIAR

The project BANDIAR aims at involving citizens in decision-making processes at the local and European levels and at giving them the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe. In particular

the project BANDIAR aims at involving a specific category of citizens – women, and at raising awareness about their participation in political life. The challenge is the diminution of the main obstacles to women participation in public life and the finding of the best solutions to them. Indeed, gender equality in all areas of life is a fundamental right and value of the European Union since 1957.

The project used a specific methodology, through “citizens' panels”, implemented in each partner country namely France (ALDA - Association of Local Democracy Agencies), Italy (Provincia di Reggio Emilia), Poland (City Hall of Bydgoszcz), Sweden (BalticFem) and Spain (ASAEL – Asociación Aragonesa de Entidades Locales) in order to elaborate a set of recommendations introduced at the final International seminar in Brussels.

For example, the French citizens' panel that met twice in Strasbourg drafted the following recommendations to improve women participation in politics:

- to launch a raising awareness campaign
- to establish accompanying measures
- to coordinate existing women networks
- to valorise the action of committed women and to give visibility to these actions
- to valorize citizens' commitment and volunteering
- to act at the educational level
- to increase information and training for women on existing possibilities to get involved in politics.

BANDIAR newsletter is available on ALDA website:

[http://alda-europe.eu/alda/front\\_content.php?idcat=2&idart=602](http://alda-europe.eu/alda/front_content.php?idcat=2&idart=602)



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