

Call for Participation

## **Mobilising Europe: Could democracy help?**

OpenForum Brussels (February 12 - 15, 2009)

### **What is the OpenForum Brussels about?**

A Europe existing as a democratic political entity requires active involvement of its citizens. Decisions on the European level will only meet with acceptance if they answer the needs and interests of Europeans. They can only claim legitimacy if a sufficient number of people show their support.

In our European nation states, there are different mechanisms assuring such interaction. Press and Media create a public sphere in which the topics on the political agenda may reach everybody's attention. Political parties develop policies (and select personnel) in order to generate support by citizens. NGOs as actors of organized civil society try to highlight what is important in their point of view. Finally, elections create a direct link between those holding power and those ruled.

On the European level so far none of these mechanisms contributes to acceptance, legitimacy and interaction to the extent necessary in order to allow for a truly democratic entity. Most people do not know what the EU does, let alone what it should do. Vice versa neither European institutions nor member states seem to have a clear idea about citizens' expectations towards their policies. While the European Council is trying to find an appropriate reaction to the Irish rejection of the Lisbon treaty and the Commission invests a lot into communication strategies, for us the major question is: What is going wrong in the relationship between institutionalised Europe and its citizens?

In an early stage of the campaigns for the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, we want to have a closer look on current approaches on how to mobilise citizens. What are the plans and strategies of the political parties? To which extent are there truly European campaigns rather than combined national ones? What are the major obstacles in the formation and propagation of European approaches? How do media manage or fail to reach the people? And how do initiatives work which address European topics - where do they succeed, where do they fail?

### **The host**

Citizens of Europe is a group of individuals who feel responsible for the future of Europe. We work together through interdisciplinary debate, practical training and engaged art to promote active citizenship. Vitalizing a European public sphere open to everyone is, for us, a matter of mental and cultural change that requires innovative action.

### **What are OpenFora?**

OpenFora offer opportunities for interested people to exchange views and experience on topics that go beyond mere European-integrationist matters. They are designed as weekend debates open for people of all generations and backgrounds. So far, we have realised six of them in Berlin, Vilnius, Wrzesnia, Pozarevac, Prague and Paris (see <http://www.openfora.eu>)

With OpenFora we raise controversial topics in order to provoke lively political debates. In a context of controversial debates we give people a chance to re-think their own convictions, to learn about different perspectives and to gain new insights. OpenFora are no conferences where showmanship is the top priority; they are rather spaces where European diversity by fostering responsibility, respect and passion can be experienced in practice.

We intend to reach interested, not essentially like-minded individuals who see themselves as active citizens and do not necessarily belong to the in-group continuously involved in European activities.

The debates we start will be carried on into other contexts also thanks to the results published and distributed by our media partner *Point•e.European magazine* and OpenForum documentation materials.

### **Whom would we like to meet in Brussels?**

You will be welcome to this OpenForum no matter what your academic or professional background is. We actively seek to recruit as many participants from outside the "European sciences" (European Studies, Law, Political Science, Sociology) as possible. We invite citizens to join and open up the professional debate.

We are willing to receive contributions from public and private sources, the academic community as well as the non-profit sector. Involving people with a variety of personal backgrounds (ranging from prior political activities, civic and cultural engagement to experience with transnational business, for example) will ensure a lively debate with substantial results.

### **What does the OpenForum Brussels offer?**

The weekend debate will follow a three-phased schedule (opening audience discussion, workshop, and special closing event). Hierarchies are meant to be particularly low, everybody coming will be encouraged and expected to contribute with own thoughts, knowledge and experience.

Citizens of Europe will present a framework, initiate the debates and involve the participants according to their personal profiles and the points of view expressed when applying. To integrate the local community in Brussels, we will start the OpenForum on 22nd January 2009 with a public discussion open to a greater community than the Forum's group of participants.

**What will you gain by participating in the OpenForum Brussels?**

You will enjoy a controversial and lively debate on different ways to take responsibility for the future of Europe;

You will experiment with and appreciate mutual respect and recognition when initiating and participating in a transnational European debate;

You will get to know local associations and initiatives;

You will network and exchange experiences among a pool of exciting and like-informed, but not essentially like-minded people.

**What are the conditions for participating?**

Participation requires the ability to take part in a debate held in English language.

Room and board is included. You will be lodged in 2-bed rooms in a simple hotel or dorm. A participation fee of max. EUR 60,00 (according to your place of residence) needs to be transferred to our bank account after your application has been accepted.

Find out about the fee applicable to you on:

[http://wiki.citizens-of-europe.eu/images/6/64/Participation\\_fees\\_OFBxl.pdf](http://wiki.citizens-of-europe.eu/images/6/64/Participation_fees_OFBxl.pdf)

On request, we can refund travel tickets (max 70 %, max. 125 EUR).

You can find the project website at:

[http://projects.citizens-of-europe.eu/openfora/?page\\_id=147](http://projects.citizens-of-europe.eu/openfora/?page_id=147)

## What do you need to do in order to apply?

1.) Fill in our **application form** and motivational letter, downloadable at:

[http://wiki.citizens-of-europe.eu/images/9/9f/Bxl\\_Name\\_Surname.doc](http://wiki.citizens-of-europe.eu/images/9/9f/Bxl_Name_Surname.doc)

2.) Send us **short CV** (incl. information about former project experience, if applicable, or future fields of interest)

3.) Write a **short text** (approx. 4.000-5.000 characters), or send us **visual material** produced by you, which may provide an **answer to one** of the following questions:

- *Is a European democracy possible, needed and what does it require?*
- *Are Eurosceptics better in mobilising people than supporters of further integration?*
- *Are there already, or can you at least imagine, European-scale media? What do or would they look like?*
- *Is direct democracy a suitable tool for mobilising more people in European affairs?*
- *What is your personal experience in mobilising on a European level?*
- *Can ideology be avoided when speaking about Europe?*
- *Is mobilising Europe a humanist dream that confuses our priorities?*

We are happy to receive any additional material of yours on the general programme “Contemporary Challenges to Europe” or OpenForum Prague in particular (e.g. scientific publications or media reports).

Please send your application to the following address: [office@citizens-of-europe.eu](mailto:office@citizens-of-europe.eu) with the following subject: OpenForum Prague.

The **deadline** for applications is **12 January 2009**. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions!



Education and Culture

Active European Citizenship

**This project is supported by the European Union under the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme.**