

Countdown to Europe's scientific test of democracy

Brussels, April 27 2009: Recruitment of European citizens has begun for the EuroPolis Deliberative Poll taking place in Brussels at the end of May – just the weekend before the European Parliament elections.

The predictions for the turn-out at the European Parliament elections may be alarmingly low – but someone is doing something about boosting citizen interest in European discussion of EU issues.

EuroPolis will bring hundreds of European citizens to Brussels on May 29-31 to debate immigration, climate change, and the EU policymaking process, in a unique experiment in informed decision-making.

The participants are now being selected from among more than 4,000 European citizens currently being polled across the 27 member states for their views on these two topics.

400 citizens will come to the deliberation event in Brussels. They will spend three days in discussions – in small working groups, and in plenary sessions with a battery of experts.

EuroPolis is testing how far public interest and participation in EU politics can be reignited if citizens are given the opportunity to discuss and develop informed policy preferences.

This is a scientifically-designed assessment of the changes in citizens' attitudes towards EU issues when they are exposed to information and can take part in debates. The project will also explore the impact on voter turnout.

On arrival at the event in Brussels, and again on departure, these 400 participants will be given a questionnaire on the selected issues. Both sets of responses will be analyzed, and shifts in view between the first and second questionnaire will be identified. Afterwards, the results of the analysis will be released to the media – and transmitted directly to policy-makers.

EuroPolis will give citizens of different nationalities the chance to discuss at European level with one another and with policy experts. It is an innovative approach to bridging the often-lamented gap between national and European views in EU democracy.

"The EuroPolis project will provide a real opportunity to assess just how feasible democratic participation can be at European level. It is a testbed for participation in democratic politics", says Professor Pierangelo Isernia of the University of Siena, who is coordinating the project. "And because the project takes place in the run-up to the European Parliament elections, its surveys of voter behaviour will throw light on the implications of active discussions of policy".

The Deliberative Polling event in Brussels is one component of the EuroPolis project. In parallel, the EuroPolis EU-wide telephone survey of 4,300 citizens is also revealing attitudes to

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the EU and its decision-making process, and to the chosen themes of immigration and climate change. First results from this telephone survey will be presented at a press conference in Brussels on May 28.

After the European Parliament elections, a further telephone survey will be conducted among the 400 citizens who took part in the Deliberative Polling event in Brussels, and among a control group of 1,000 citizens who took part in the first phone survey but who were not invited to the Deliberative Polling event. The analysis of the results from these surveys – to be released before the summer break - will provide unprecedented insights into how far the Deliberative Polling event has influenced views.

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Notes for editors:

Media will be provided with numerous opportunities to follow the project, before, during and after the Deliberative Polling event in Brussels. Further details from the EuroPolis press office on europolismedia@gmail.com.

The EuroPolis project employs the Deliberative Polling® method, an approach invented by Professor James Fishkin at Stanford University that tries to put into practice the principle that democratic legitimacy rests on informed opinion, open deliberation, and equal participation of citizens.

The EuroPolis research team has first-hand experience in conducting deliberative polls at the local, national and European level, in the UK, Denmark, Bulgaria, and Italy, as well as in the US, Asia and Australia. It includes some of the main contributors to the first wave of deliberative experiments conducted in 2006-2007 under the Plan D initiative.

The participating organisations are: the University of Siena – Circap, Italy; the University of Essex, United Kingdom; the University of Mannheim, Germany; Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, France; University of Oslo, Arena, Norway; Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Spain; European Policy Centre, Belgium; Avventura Urbana, Italy; TNS Opinion, Belgium; Median Research Centre, Romania



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EuroPolis
A deliberative polity-making project