



European Citizens' Seminars

The citizens' contribution to
European public policy design
<http://www.citizenseminars.eu>

Presentation to potential participants in a Seminar

What is the purpose of the European Citizens' Seminars?

The purpose of the European Citizens' Seminars is to demonstrate by doing that the collective intelligence and knowledge present in European **professionals** can contribute high-value inputs to the **design** of **European public policies**. By bringing the citizens' voice to the design phase of public policy making, they contribute to the set-up of an Europe-wide democracy and of an European active citizenship.

The European Citizens' Seminars are each organised around a **concrete issue**, that requires an **Europe-wide answer**. They last 3.5 days over a week-end and gather ca.20 professionals that have a direct experience of the issue, gained in private firms, trade unions, academia and NGOs, from all across the European Union. They result in concrete and justified **Public Policy Proposals** that address the issue at hand.

These Public Policy Proposals will be politically powerful, because they will have both **technical relevance** (by mobilising this collective intelligence of European professionals), and **political legitimacy** (by being the result of a discussion and agreement process taking into account the points of view, the experience and the interests of very diverse people).

The results of the seminar are propagated to the relevant bodies of the European Commission and Parliament, and to the relevant stakeholder, both at European level and in the individual Member States, by events organised by the association and by the dissemination of documents.

What is the main value added of the European Citizens' Seminars?

The main value added of the European Citizens' Seminars lies in the opportunity that it provides to reach a *bona fide* **agreement** between participants on public policies that foster the European common good.

Participants to the Seminars are deliberately gathered as a very **diverse** group, coming from various Member States of the European Union and (more important still) from very different social and experiential backgrounds. They all are professionals of the issue being discussed, and have all had the time to establish their opinion on it. Initially, these opinions may be very divergent, reflecting well-known political or ideological splits of contemporary society.

The Seminar provides a safe and confidential place where you, as a participant, will have the **time** to engage in a **trusted dialogue** with persons you did not know beforehand, that you hardly ever have the opportunity to meet and that may have very different views from yours, but whose experience and knowledge is relevant to the issue.

The European Citizens' Seminars are financially supported by:



'Europe for Citizens' Programme

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship>
(2009)



<http://www.fph.ch>
(2008-2009)

This dialogue should first develop mutual respect and trust. Its primary purpose goes beyond this. It is that you discover with the other participants what is the **common world** that you can build together, and what are the concrete **public policies** that you would jointly recommend (even for very different reasons) to address the issue being discussed. Agreeing on these Public Policy Proposals is the material illustration that the group of participants has overcome its initial divergences, transcended its conflict and has reached a higher level of understanding of the European common good.

This agreement is a difficult challenge. It is also the **unique value** of the European Citizens' Seminars.

This agreement is important for the group of participants, but also (and mainly) because it **opens the path** for broader agreements at European scale. If the participants to the Seminar, i.e. people that initially held many of the opinions and convictions present in the public debate on the issue, have earnestly worked and reached an agreement during the European Citizens' Seminar, then this agreement may very well be the forerunner of the one that will ultimately be obtained in further public negotiations. This is the very essence of the "political legitimacy" that we believe the European Citizens' Seminars produce.

How do the European Citizens' Seminars compare with other public policy design methods, such as consultations, conferences, public negotiations and think tanks?

The main existing public policy design methods are: consultations, conferences and workshops, public negotiations and think tanks.

In consultations, the decision-making body organises (oral or written) hearings of all parties involved, and devises its own compromise, according to the information and the opinions received. It has difficulties in assessing the underlying rationales of the stakeholders, and therefore to design a fully informed proposal. In conferences, speakers express publicly their position, one after the other and independently from one another, and answer questions by the audience. Workshops within conferences introduce a level of interaction between participants, but it generally only lasts a few hours and involves several tens of simultaneous participants, which restricts their capacity for deep agreement. Many such international conferences and workshops are supported by simultaneous translation: this restricts the ability to engage in direct, private interaction, and reduces the number of simultaneous dialogues possible. In public negotiations, the parties present express themselves as representatives of their collective interests: their positions are made rigid, and move by relations of raw power. In think tanks, individual researchers produce proposals that draw upon their personal experience: they generally are coherent and well-informed, but have difficulties in taking into account divergent points of views.

The European Citizens' Seminars provide a more appropriate framework for designing public policy proposals in the sense that, **simultaneously**, (1) the stakeholders engage in direct dialogue, (2) the dialogue is long enough to reach agreement, (3) the participants act confidentially as individuals, under their own responsibility, and may therefore be moved by moral and intellectual conviction – and not only by the exertion of power – and (4) the work draws upon the collective intelligence and knowledge of a diverse, international and professional group.

What are you expected to do as a participant?

As a participant to an European Citizens' Seminar, you will be expected to contribute **actively** to the collective elaboration of the Public Policy Proposals aimed at answering the issue being addressed by the Seminar. The very purpose of the Seminar is the production of these Public Policy Proposals, and the goal must be reached by the end of

the 3.5 days. You are thus expected to be present and participate for the whole duration of the seminar (from Friday evening to the following Tuesday lunchtime).

The Public Policy Proposals are the result of an agreement among participants. As mentioned earlier, the association's policy is to gather participants of very diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, in order to take into account the opinions, feelings and experiences of a wide panel of stakeholders in the issue being addressed. Some time and **specific methodologies** are thus dedicated during the Seminar to the build-up of a cohesive group, to share mutual confidence and trust, as described on our website, section "a typical Seminar".

In order for the agreement to be reached, participants are expected to aim at the European common good, in good faith, and to express themselves *intuitu personae* (i.e. not as the mandated representatives of any special interest or of their organisation of origin), in full freedom. You are expected to express your opinion with courage and firmness, to support it with sound reasons, in an attempt to **convince** the other participants. Reciprocally, you must also accept the risk of **being convinced**, to change and modify your own views and opinions on the issue, following the dialogue with the other participants. Considering the diversity of participants, you should not expect to have your own views be accepted as they are, or to engage and win a battle. The purpose is that at the end, all be winners, that all be happy with the final agreement.

Strict confidentiality is formally expected from all participants on the views being expressed during the seminar, in order to ensure the necessary full freedom of speech.

The Seminars are held in **English language**, with no translation provided. You are expected to be fluent, at least orally, in English, in order to engage in direct discussion and debate with the other participants.

After the Seminar, you are welcome to contribute to the dissemination of the Public Policy Proposals resulting from your common work, and to continue the debate on-line with your fellow participants and the general public.

How will you benefit from your participation?

The main benefits lie in the **networking** and **personal development** opportunities offered by your participation. The Seminar gives you the rare opportunity to engage in in-depth dialogue with your peers from different types of organisations and from different countries across Europe. You will learn what their concerns are, understand their legitimacy and have the possibility to discuss them thoroughly, in much greater detail than in usual conferences. This will enrich your understanding of the issue, place your own experience in perspective and stimulate the emergence of new ideas and concepts that will enrich your professional practice.

In addition, if you volunteer to further advocate the Public Policy Proposals resulting from the Seminar, it will give you the opportunity to improve your knowledge and familiarity with the European policymaking bodies (European Commission and European Parliament).

Finally, if such considerations make sense for you, participating in an European Citizens' Seminar is a rather unique possibility to engage, in a modest, focused but significant way, in a better life for more than 490 millions Europeans.

How is it organised in practice?

Your participation to a Seminar is totally **free of charge**: travel to and from the Seminar location, 3-star hotel accommodation, food, non-alcoholic beverages, seminar venue are being paid for by the association. You will only be asked to send a commitment fee at

least 3 weeks before the beginning of the seminar, that will be paid back to you upon your arrival at the seminar venue.

The main dates of the **schedule** are the following:

- **1 month** before the start of the Seminar: deadline for e-mailing the Registration Form or for **registering** on-line on our website, section "Register for the next seminar". Registered participants receive the list of all participants and their details. A common e-mail address is open to broadcast information to all participants, in the shape of <date>.participants@citizenseminars.eu. The on-line debate blog will be open at the same time, for those wanting to publicise their views.
- **1 month** before the start of the Seminar: deadline for sending the **commitment fee** (50 €) to the association bank account. Final hotel bookings will be made according to the number of commitment fees received: if you are late, we will not be able to guarantee you a reserved room (although we will of course make all our efforts to do so!). The commitment fee will be returned to you in full upon your arrival at the Seminar. You should also be aware of our **cancellation policy**, that is further described in our **Legal Terms & Conditions** document.
- **1 day** before the start of the Seminar: deadline for sending by e-mail to the common address of participants or to post on our blogs¹ the **written contribution** that you may wish to share with the other participants and with the association members before starting the Seminar. This written contribution is not mandatory: it is an opportunity open for you to explicit the first ideas you have to address the issue being discussed. You are not committed by this contribution, rather the opposite: it is expected to be one of the many starting points for the common discussion, and that your opinions will evolve during the Seminar itself. In the case of an answer to a Green Paper by the European Commission, all individual contributions will be added to the final document resulting from the Seminar.
- **on the final day** of the Seminar (Tuesday noon): agreement on the final text of the Public Policy Proposals resulting from the Seminar.
- **within 1 month** after the end of the Seminar: transmission of results to the **Members of the European Parliament** that patronised the specific Seminar and to the relevant administrators in the **European Commission**.
- **within 6 months** after the end of the Seminar: Europe-wide telephone and on-line conference discussing the issue and the Public Policy Proposals, involving the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Who are we?

The "European Citizens' Seminars e.V." association was founded as a fully independent association by 7 citizens from 6 European Union Member States (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal), in **Erfurt** in the Eastern part of Germany, at the heart of Europe, both East and West of the continent, and officially registered under the number VR 2345 in June 2006. Its network of active members now covers 11 European countries.

The association is financially supported by the European Commission, DG Education, Audiovisual and Culture, "Europe for Citizens" Programme², and by Fondation Charles Leopold Mayer – FPH³.

Your participation is welcome!

¹ <http://citizenseminars.blogactiv.eu/> or <http://citizenseminars.cafebabel.com/>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship>

³ <http://www.fph.ch>