



EuroPCom Report : Workshop 1

Activating voters ahead of the 2024 European elections

26 June 2023, 17:00 – 18:00

Speakers:

- Gaia Manco, *Head of Service in DG COMM, European Parliament*
- François Decoster, *Mayor of Saint-Omer, France, and President of Renew Europe at the CoR*
- Jens Mester, *Head of Unit, DG COMM*
- Laura Sullivan, *Executive director of WeMove Europe*

Moderator: Silke Toenshoff, *Head of Unit "Events and local dialogues", European Committee of the Regions*

A takeaway from the session

The strategies driving active participation in democratic processes rely on a people-centric principle. Conveying the right set of information through the right channels can help people to vote.

Summary of the session

The panellists discussed what communicators needed from the EU institutions as they strove to activate voters.

Ms Manco provided three words to describe together.eu for democracy, the European Parliament's citizen engagement project.

The first word was "action", meaning that institutions should provide input, spaces, tools, education and training, but final solutions should always come from civil society. Information led to engagement and engagement led to mobilisation. This would help to activate a smaller but more engaged audience willing to be active on the ground.

The second word was "community", a group of people who were in contact with each other. People met through events and that was why no ambitious engagement project could be led by institutions without engaging people on the ground. Ms Manco also stressed how social media were not enough: email needed to be used as well, because it was a one-to-one communication tool able to create close communities. Moreover, communities should not be constructed in terms of "us" and "them", as the idea was to be as inclusive as possible.

The third word was "unknown", something that must be embraced: an engagement project was a co-creation by institutions and communities, so the result could not be known in advance. Ms Manco felt that it was also necessary to embrace new formats and channels.

Mr Decoster spoke about the difficulties in explaining how the EU could drive protection for its people. To address this issue, he encouraged the audience to consider three questions:

1. Whom are we voting for?
2. Why do we vote?
3. How should we communicate about the importance of voting?

Mr Mester presented several surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, arguing that one of the main reasons that people did not vote in EU elections was the lack of information about the EU. These surveys also showed that people were very interested in knowing more about the EU. The Commission's proposal for mobilising people therefore revolved around the following dimensions:

1. Show EU policy action and its impact (State of the Union, web pages and social media, EU General Report, Learning corners for teachers and students);
2. Provide information about the elections and electoral rights;
3. Engage people, including young people, in European democracy (European Citizens' Initiative, follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe, Have your Say Platform);
4. Team up with others / activate partners and networks.

In addition, beneficiaries of EU funding programmes had a responsibility to mobilise people in support of the EU and should be empowered to do so. Replying to a question from the audience, he argued that he could not accept that people said that the EU was failing to reach its target audience.

Ms Sullivan felt that an effective election strategy relied on demonstrating that the EU cared about issues connected to people, such as migration, climate change and women's rights. Involving people in their own language and investing in stories and visuals were also part of the way forward.

Quotes

"The EU is an ongoing process, as is our communication with people" - **Gaia Manco**

"Only 1% of Europeans would be able to explain how the EU works" - **François Decoster**

"We need to stress the impact of EU decisions on people's lives. We must show them what the EU has done for them in the last five years" - **Jens Mester**

"We care about the issues you care about and the EU is doing something about it" - **Laura Sullivan**