Democratic Odyssey

Draft Policy Recommendations

Towards a Citizens' Charter for Europe

How people connecting across borders help democratise the management of crisis across countries and types of governments, cities, regions, countries, the EU?

Process Acknowledgement

The charter acknowledges the agonistic or conflictual nature of democracy, reflected in the assembly meetings where disagreements were expressed through the various tensions or trade-offs that emerged from the initial discussion. The Assembly facilitated deliberation on ten different trade-offs, represented below. The preliminary policy recommendations below are the outcomes of the deliberations of small groups of citizens during the Florence Assembly based on the outcomes of Assembly meetings in Athens and online. Groups consisted of 12 citizens, two facilitators, civil society representatives and observers. Each group had the possibility to directly feedback onto two other group's policy recommendations.

Follow the updated recommendations in all languages here

Democratic Odyssey

Trade Off 1: Executive Power vs. Citizens Power

Recommendation 1: Enhance Autonomous Deliberative Communities

1.1. Core Principle: European decision-makers should respect and enable meaningful input, advice, and actionable solutions from autonomous deliberative communities. These communities include but are not limited to: renewable energy communities, housing, youth, elderly, environmental, and feminist civil societies. These are communities that regroup to provide common or local services and through their shared governance develop into deliberative communities. But sadly, these communities often do not have enough resources, time or skill to maximise their influence.

1.2. Key Actions:
- Strengthen autonomy: Reinforce the independence and self-governance of these communities.
- Progressively enlarge and connect these communities: Facilitate the expansion of participation within and across these communities.
- Include government actors over time: Integrate a government representative or civil servant into community discussions, once the community is ready, ensuring that this representative does not dominate the discussion but serves as a liaison and information resource.

Recommendation 2: Counteract Extremism by mobilising collective intelligence

2.1. Core Principle: The European sphere of debate inside and between our countries should be principally designed and managed to counter extremists, not only through regulations that control or ban certain types of expression, but better through the crowdsourcing of intelligence pushback. Humour and youth culture are key here. This includes reputable and independent online platforms (such as "Demagog" in Czechia) to fight disinformation and to publicly reduce the influence of charismatic liars and ineffective governments. But how do we practically implement this? Easier said than done.

2.2. Key Actions:
- Synergies with Independent Platforms: Foster collaboration with reputable independent platforms (e.g., Demagogues in Czechia).
- Checklists and Standards: Develop and utilize checklists of positive and negative actions and behaviours, focusing on areas such as corruption and manipulation.
- Monthly Citizens Assemblies oversight: Conduct regular public debates within monthly citizens' assemblies that debate on the basis of these reputable platforms, designate the citizens' assembly to oversee platform management, including transparent selection and temporary mandates for platform administrators.
- Dissemination of verified Information: Independent organisations should have resources to promote the widespread dissemination of credible and verifiable facts.
- Platform Management and Fact-Checking: Explore crowdfunding models to support the platform, ensuring full transparency in fact-checking processes.
- Independence: Maintain the platform's independence from external influence.

Recommendation 3: Empower citizens for crisis preparedness

3.1. Core Principle: citizens should be credibly empowered to effectively engage in civic life across all stages, from routine governance to crisis response without waiting for the crisis to become acute.

3.2. Key Actions:
- A continuous civic infrastructure should be designed to be activated at times of crisis.
- Targeted civic education: Implement enhanced and targeted civic and free education programs, including the utilization of "student-teachers."
- Confidence Training: Provide training focused on building citizen confidence in civic participation.
- Informal Duty of Participation: Implement an informal duty, akin to jury duty, to participate in citizens' assemblies, replacing a mandatory voting requirement but with soft obligation to participate and with compensation.

- Citizen Platforms: Establish and support citizen-led platforms for engagement and collaboration specifically in times of crisis
- Enhanced Public Consultations: Strengthen and expand public consultation processes that can simply rely on existing email or social media list
- "Act where you know best": Expert citizen involvement: engage citizens in areas where they possess relevant expertise.

Trade Off 2: Citizens' Involvement in Immediate Crisis Response vs. Long Term Planning

Recommendation 1: Enhance in-person spaces for enhancing deliberative skills

1.1. Core Principle: Citizens should be able to access spaces and training to gain deliberative skills, enhancing their involvement in local decision making (especially for those that directly impact their lives), which will eventually lead to social cohesion.

1.2. Key Actions:
- Regular local dialogues
- Schools should include curricula on (European) deliberation.
- Regular spaces for learning deliberative skills (Ideally every 1-5 years)

  - **Deliberative Skills: Communication**
    Empathetic Listening (active listening)
    Emotional understanding
    Guidelines
    Respect differences
    Problem solving and solution oriented
    Proactive and respectful questioning

  - **Deliberative Skills: Information**
    Fact-checking & Research
    Preparation through toolkits and trainings
    Exchange of best practices
    Neighbourhood involvement

  - **Deliberative Skills: Empowerment**
    Inclusive decision-making
    Responsibility to youth
    Dialogues followed by action
    Belonging and collective action
    Political education
    Resource Planning and investments into local economies
    Scaling and connecting collective intelligence

1.3. Potential challenges
- Engaging people long term
- Gaging the appropriate institutional support.
- Access to Resources (needs more systematic funding).
- Citizen's to access these spaces and training.

Trade Off 3: Trusting Leaders vs. Accountability

Recommendation 1: Citizen's Assemblies must be institutionalised on local, national and European level, organised by the European Commission or European Parliament

1.1. Core Principle: If Citizen's Assemblies are institutionalised, trust and accountability will be enhanced. This will enhance citizen's trust in politicians. The Citizens Assembly will be a win-win for policy makers and local authorities.

1.2. Key Actions
Citizen's Assembly to be institutionalized at the local, national and European level, organised by the European Commission or European Parliament.
Composition: Should include 20 members minimum.
Assembly must include ambassadors from other assemblies
Assembly must be organised by sortition, taking representation into account.

1.3. Potential Challenges
*   Challenge to find common local issues to deliberate on
*   Challenge in managing diversity of opinion and interest (for example in tourism, climate, migration)
*   Unwillingness of political actors to adopt solutions
*   Funding
*   Participation of citizens
*   Transparency of process
        <u>Suggestions to guarantee:</u>
                - Evaluation of policy
                - Transparent Process
                - Evaluation of citizens
                - Overseeing institutions

Trade Off 4: Direct vs. Deliberative Democracy

BEFORE CRISIS

Recommendation 1: Relevant authorities must provide skills, spaces and processes for citizens to be active citizens on a more common and regular basis (e.g. participatory budgeting)

Recommendation 2: Relevant authorities must use deliberative processes to include citizens in the preparation of protocols/ strategy, and in deciding how to deal with trade offs on rights and hard choices

Recommendation 3: Relevant stakeholders must use direct engagement methods (referendum, online consultation, calls) to pick between different protocols/ strategies.

DURING CRISIS

Recommendation 4: Executing authority must ensure shared responsibility between all actors to guarantee checks and balances

AFTER CRISIS

Recommendation 5: Relevant authorities must evaluate the effectiveness of the citizens assembly.

1.1 Core Principles: Nothing about us without us!

1.2. Key Actions
- Online Tools/ Technology can help reduce costs, and accelerate implementation time (Relevant across recommendations)
- Network of coordinates to organize and then scale debates (Relevant across recommendations)
- citizens as "watchdogs" should be engaging with institutions in mixed formats to ensure compliance with the process. (Recommendation 4)
- Assessment of the protocols with citizens and reconciling polarizing views and lived experiences of crisis. (Recommendation 5)

General Actor Involvement
- Citizens: Seize the opportunities offered to them
- Politicians: make the first step: delegate power, listen and follow up
- Experts: To inform citizens deliberations criteria : unbiased (no conflict of interest), open to new ideas, diversity.

Trade Off 5: Digital Tools vs. Human Centered Approach

Recommendation 1: Democratizing the EU AI Office

1.1 Core Principle: The EU AI Office should not solely be an expert-driven body but must integrate civil society organizations (CSOs), citizen representatives, and regional voices into its governance. This ensures AI regulation and deployment align with EU values of democracy, inclusion, and transparency.

1.2 Key Actions
- Evaluate the AI Office: Assess its current structure, mandate, and effectiveness in incorporating public concerns and diverse expertise.
- Revamp the Expert Group: Expand participation to include CSOs, citizen representatives, and regional experts to avoid technocratic dominance.
- Establish Regular Expert Groups & Subgroups: Develop a structured process whereby thematic and regional subgroups meet regularly, ensuring ongoing dialogue and responsiveness. A flowchart model should guide decision-making.

1.3. Potential Challenges
- Regional Focus: Ensuring AI policies are not solely shaped by centralized institutions but reflect local and regional perspectives.
- Funding Constraints: The level of inclusivity and participation depends on available funding. A well-resourced participatory structure is needed.
- Diversity & Tokenism: Genuine representation must go beyond symbolic inclusion and ensure marginalized voices shape policy.
- Lack of Meaningful Dialogue: Consultations should be more than formalities; mechanisms must

guarantee that citizen input leads to actionable policy changes.

General Actor Involvement (use existing systems)

Responsibility Holders:
* European Commission Vice President for Technology
* AI Office leadership
* Members of the Expert Group
* Representatives from neighborhood platforms and regional AI ethics groups

Compromises
* Leverage Existing Structures: Utilize established bodies like the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Citizens' Panels to integrate deliberative participation into the AI Office's work.
* Advisory Role Limitation: While the expert and citizen groups may not have direct decision-making power, they should have structured influence over policy recommendations.

Synergies
* Strengthening Inclusivity: AI governance that includes diverse voices aligns with democratic principles and ensures technology serves the public good.
* Enhancing Dialogue: A well-structured participatory model can create deeper engagement between policymakers, technologists, and citizens.
* Upholding EU Values in Tech Policy: Embedding deliberative democracy into AI governance ensures ethical considerations remain at the core of digital transformation.

Recommendation 2: Pilot Neighborhood Assemblies for In-Person and Digital Engagement

1.1 Core Principle: Support neighborhood assemblies combining in-person and digital tools to improve citizen engagement and crisis management. These assemblies aim to foster community trust, belonging, and effective crisis coordination.
Outcomes:
a) Strengthened community bonds and engagement,
b) Faster, coordinated responses to crises,
c) Empowered citizens in local decision-making and crisis management.

2.2 Key Actions:
* **Establish Neighborhood Assemblies**: Local platforms for residents to discuss issues and collaborate on solutions.
    → Form working groups to transfer discussions to a digital platform for broader accessibility.
* **Develop a Digital Crisis Management Platform**
    → A tool for real-time communication, resource sharing, and coordination during crises.
    → Align with democratic structures like the Democratic Odyssey for scalability.
* **Create a European Citizen Training School:**
    → Train citizens in deliberative skills, crisis management, and digital literacy.
    → Partner with municipalities and the Erasmus Student Network for diverse representation.
* **Ensure Diversity and Inclusion:**
    → Make assemblies and platforms accessible to all, including marginalized groups and non-citizens.
    → Secure Funding and Focus on Actionable Solutions:
    → Seek funding from the EU AI Office and other sources for sustainability.
    → Prioritize outcomes that lead to tangible, community-driven actions.

2.3. Potential Challenges
* Ensuring inclusivity for marginalized groups.
* Securing sustainable funding.
* Avoiding tokenism and focusing on actionable solutions.

Trade Off 6: Relying on centralized management in Brussels vs. Transnational democracy

Recommendation 1: ensuring centralised coordination can ensure efficiency, a systemic response and European unity in the world, but addressing crisis requires the involvement of everyone across the territory and an adaptive response according to local contexts.

1.1 Core principle: Addressing crisis requires finding formats of democratic coordination which empowers everyone to be heard and take action to shape the overall response, whilst also to act in their context, in their organisations, on local or personal scales.

1.2 Key Actions:
• Special law for petitions across Europe, which can be submitted to a European people's assembly. If the assembly supports the petition, the EU must take action. This is a form of direct democracy in which not only citizens but also residents should be able to participate, and associations and local institutions should also be able to launch petitions. In order for it to work there would need to be support for elderly people and people without access to technology, and a wide public information campaign across all media.
• Provide European citizenship directly to migrants, on condition that they respect EU values, in order to promote their political and social participation. In a Europe which is facing demographic decline and has abandoned villages, neighbourhoods and unused buildings, a system for Europe to coordinate finding places to live and work for migrants across all the member states should be adopted, and associations, language schools and many other social actors should be involved in making this work.
• System of European citizens assemblies: We need assemblies in every member state making a system of permanent European Assembly. Topics can be proposed from local assemblies to European Coordination to decide on agenda. In many of our countries all the public spaces for political discussion are disappearing, and creating assemblies can create new spaces. In the European Assembly people should be chosen in proportion to the population of the country, and delegates from local assemblies should take part. The first demand of all assemblies across Europe should be for their recognition as legitimate political institutions, and the EU should take action to recognise them.

1.3 Expected Outcomes:
• Strengthened community bonds and engagement.
• Faster, coordinated responses to crises.
• Empowered citizens in local decision-making and crisis management.

Trade Off 7: Collective Security vs. Individual Freedom

Recommendation 1: We must have a more participatory, deliberative democracy for citizens in-between elections

1.1 Core principle: The European values should be at the center of what we do. The European Union should be more of a political union (so far more only an economic union), a transnational institution. Elections are not the alpha-omega. We need democracy of the "greek flavour".

Recommendation 2: Europe must launch a permanent crisis citizens Assembly (for crisis decision-making / for security challenges)

1.1 Core principle: Citizen's Assemblies must be a body of regulation and accountability, inclusion and diversity. During a crisis, there is a need for increased accountability for governments; it becomes more difficult to hold a government accountable.

1.2. Key Actions
- **Composition:**
    - For cities from 20000 to 100000 inhabitants, there should be 20 people
    - For cities over 100000 there should be 100 people
- **Mandatory training for selected participants**

1.3. Potential Challenges
- Losing connection / link to broader population
- Language Access: Therefore, we need to develop a platform in different languages, diversity as a chance but also a potential obstacle due to different languages.
- Assembly should not only be advisory but also have a regulatory and accountability function
- The assembly should be independent rather than government organised - but the government must listen.
- Mandate would need to come from the EU level / or bottom-up from local governments joining up

Recommendation 3: Europe must launch a European Civic Alliances for Transnational Crisis Action

Recommendation 4: Europe must use participatory budgeting at EU level in times of crisis

Key Actions:
This committee could be within the Permanent EU level Assembly.

Trade Off 8: Localism vs. Translocalism

Recommendation 1: Europe must welcome migrants during crisis
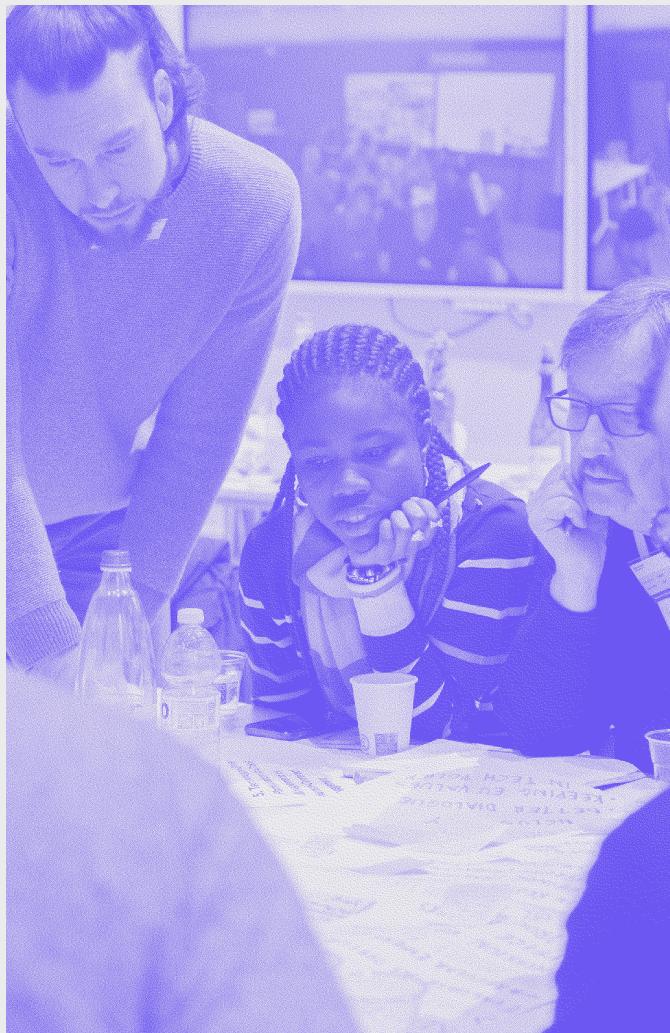
1.1 Core principle: The European values should be at the center of what we do. The European Union should be more of a political union

1.2. Key Actions
- Welcome Committees in which citizens are involved
- Including language exchange

- Working for the long term
- Promoting cultural exchange
- Also working with ambassadors in countries of departure
- Awareness Campaigns Communications
- Cooperation between citizens and between other levels of government (best practices)
- Cultural Celebrations of local and other cultures and languages
- Preparedness to Crisis (keep adapting to ensure efficiency and support)
- Bottom Up principle: People (not only citizens) and people from other countries giving feedback on Policy at all levels including digital policies from from neighborhood to EU scales
- Citizens to oblige authorities to implement existing recommendations

Trade Off 9: Inclusivity vs. Efficiency in decision making

BEFORE CRISIS

Recommendation 1: When flooding is likely, the representative authority must set up a (compensated) PEOPLES PANEL where they must present and discuss prevention, roles, money, protocols with a group of experts, who will produce decisions in an accessible language

Recommendation 2: The local authority informs citizens well in advance (in accessible language) (informed by experts before and after making their decision

DURING CRISIS

Recommendation 3: The citizens panel monitors if the plan is implemented. The citizens panel informs the citizens about the government's actions

Trade Off 10: Transparency vs. Complexity

Recommendation 1: Europe must welcome migrants during crisis

1.1 Core principle:
- Citizens should actively participate in civic life by fostering open, non-violent communication and discussing societal issues through listening to and caring for others and sharing analysis
- to rebuild trust they must demand transparency and hold institutions accountable ensuring that in-

formation is always accessible because it is for citizens to decide whether it is complex or not and no authority should use complexity as an excuse to withhold it.
- Best anticipation: vote for the government that will care!
- Citizens should resist the temptation of simplicity and embrace complexity

1.2. Key Actions
Governments must regularly publish detailed reports on policy outcomes, resource allocation, preventing corruption and restoring public trust,

Recommendation 2: Governments must offer crisis management training for people to be prepared to adapt and react to future crises, both in caring about themselves and for others

1.1 Core Principles
- Support should be given to citizens to enhance and understand complexity
- Government should reject the promotion of simplicity
- Adaptation policies should be anticipated since all crises have an impact on jobs

Process Continuation

These draft recommendations will be taken forward to an online assembly of the Democratic Odyssey, and then to a feedback session with political actors, before being finalised at the Vienna meeting of the assembly in May 2025.