

Democratic Odyssey

Democratising Crisis! *A Citizens' Charter* to Revitalise Democracy in Europe by Navigating Future Crises Together

Preamble

Our world is changing dramatically! We see profound transformations in our planetary climate, geopolitics, financial systems, as well as our societies, technologies and cultures.

It is not hard to imagine more future crises, from natural disasters to pandemics, the way we respond to these crises will define our collective destiny. Climate meltdown, the dismantling of the welfare state, rampant corruption, the disruption of social ties, booming precarity, discrimination and inequality, are all upon us. Europeans are confronting the spectre of war.

The Assembly members of the Democratic Odyssey believe that Europeans have learned a lot through crises, but that we can do better. We call on European publics, politicians, civil servants and institutions to take a leap of faith with us.

We can better navigate through these turbulent times. We must do so democratically. Together, authorities and citizens should envision the crises of the future, avoid them where possible and address them where necessary. The key: prepare, prepare, prepare. Together we must learn from our mistakes and success and use our collective intelligence to consider what is to be done now to tackle future crises.

Let's always ask not only who already has the power but who *should* have it. Meaningful action is also in the hands of societies themselves. Whether they are acting in times of emergency or in more normal times, it should be in the interest of elected officials to tap into peoples' real-life experiences, which is often the best expertise around. Smart action and decisions depend on widely accessible democratic competence.

Through the Democratic Odyssey, a randomly selected people's assembly of 300 people from across Europe and from every walk of life and background, has come together for a year to design changes to our democratic landscape that stem from the conviction that citizens need to be involved in the making of the decisions that impact their lives. In our understanding, everyone living in Europe is a citizen and has political agency and responsibility for our collective future. Travelling from Athens to Florence and Vienna, and meeting online, we engaged in deliberation, story-telling, immersive

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theater or future envisioning, to generate ideas on what needs to change in Europe to democratise our futures.

Can the democratic ideal be reborn? We invite all citizens to reimagine democratic participation beyond elections as translocal, multi-generational, grounded in care for common goods and in symbiosis with non-human life, embedded in every aspect of our lives, from the family to the school, workplace and public services, as well as every level of government. If this were to happen, people would engineer their own democratic resilience before, during and after a crisis, and learn in the process to rely together on democratic foresight.

Our Charter lays out ten pathways to navigate towards this horizon. It acknowledges that crises can affect everyone, anywhere but in different ways. Nevertheless, broad principles can be shared to create a more participatory democratic world across our continent and beyond. Each pathway is structured with a guiding principle, changes that following this principle would bring about, tensions expressed in the assembly about the implementation of the principle, and steps towards that implementation.

Ten Democratic Pathways towards Crisis Resilience

1. 'Being involved is also our responsibility as citizens!'

Principle: *Active citizenship cannot be coerced: it must become a widely acknowledged right. Participation should not be limited to elections or occasional consultations. Emergencies should not be a pretext for a few decision-makers to ignore the citizens, the very ones affected. Our society and our future are our responsibility. Drawing on our life experiences, expertise and dreams, we can all contribute to decisions made before, during and after crises. Whatever our background, whether we are nationals or not. Even if no one likes to give up power, authorities empowered by civil society and citizens will thrive. Together they can invest cleverly in civic spaces, infrastructure and processes at every opportunity and every level, local, national, supranational. Use us as democratic turbo-batteries!*

Change? The Odyssey assembly follows the lead of other similar initiatives and projects that are already widespread around the world, from local assemblies to citizen panels. Its main aim is to bring about a scaling up of these efforts. These can be combined with a push for more democratic forms of action like referenda, petitions and the setting up of other deliberative bodies. For Assembly members, "citizens" signifies all those who reside in Europe, not just those with a European nationality.

Tensions? There are many skeptics who may or may not be won over. Finding the right

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balance between effective governance and democratic accountability involves long and controversial debates. Some in our Assembly argue that strong governments must be able to act rapidly in crises, since taking immediate control and centralization are vital in times of emergency. Others say that without citizen involvement, decisions may not reflect people's real needs and preferences. What form should policies take, when things go wrong? Should civic participation be a continuous process or should it be an intermittent one? Do people want to be involved or has apathy infiltrated their behavior?

Steps? In order to ensure this principle becomes reality we propose the following steps:

1. Develop a toolkit or blueprint inspired by the Democratic Odyssey methodology and other initiatives to convey the idea of citizen assemblies and raise awareness. First, this toolkit should explain “why” it is important, based on this Charter, and explain the cost of non-democracy and the value of participation. Second, it should include “how” to do it by providing concrete plans for local ambassadors (suggestions on how to create assemblies, recruit, facilitate training, and how to reach out to the public).
2. Establish a network of local ambassadors and initiatives to branch out and spread the idea and thus create a bigger flotilla for Democratic Odyssey. This network should be in each country and across countries, made of not only individuals but also schools, businesses, CSOs and other organisations. This will create a movement that will support training in schools and universities. It will also help create local festivals, events, meetings, associations, et al.
3. Promote an Erasmus for participation (perhaps under the name “DEMUS” or similar) that will enhance cross national exchanges to attend each other's participatory processes and events. This programme will have meetings once a year, perhaps at the European capital of democracy, or in the country of the Presidency of the EU for example.

2. 'Our Money, our Choice!'

Principle: *Spending of public money should be decided with the participation of the people, to ensure that everyone is taken into account, to limit the influence of special interests, to mobilise collective intelligence, cultivate learning, and build trust. Participatory budgeting has been tested in many places: now it should become mainstream across Europe at all levels including whether to spend or to tax. It is important to receive and implement public feedback on how to raise money (e.g. taxes). Budgets must be transparently posted on the web and accessible to all people. If not, authorities need to give us good reasons why not. If budget committees, panels, and assemblies were set up in many different ways across the continent to allocate our collective resources, that would be the people in action!*

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Change? The assembly discussed some useful examples of deliberative efforts regarding budgets around the world, especially at the local level. Now even the EU is consulting on how to spend its 2 trillion euro budget. But this exercise is limited, many aspects are not debated, and, after the fact, people are unaware of where the money goes and which purpose different budget allocations serve.

Tensions? Some dissenting voices fear this will create social conflict. Budgets give rise to conflict, as people perceive that if one group is powerful, it can take away resources from other groups. But others feel that budgets are not necessarily zero-sum, and that more resources can often be found. Many say that it is their own money and they should decide on how to allocate spending as long as they consider tradeoffs. Should consultations take the form of ad-hoc assemblies or rather of more permanent ones? How can the information about budgets be put online and updated?

Steps? We recommend concrete actions in four areas:

1. **Education**: People need the tools for a better understanding of public finances. Therefore, educational systems need to integrate classes on public budgets in school curricula and offer voluntary courses for adults (both online and offline). These should include gamified approaches and also be integrated in people's workplaces.

2. **Information**: People need to be better informed about budget spending. This includes online platforms with accessible information (in easy language) and targeted information campaigns for different target groups (using traditional and new media). Public authorities should send annual budget information via different communication channels and organize localised information events. Information should be curated by (scientific) expert bodies.

3. **Transparency**: People need transparency in public budget spending. Hence, it needs to be clear how public money is spent by whom and why. This information should be standardized and easily accessible across Europe. Moreover, there should be regular evaluations about the impact of past budget spendings by independent experts. These reviews should also include feedback by citizens and affected groups as well as recommendations on how to adapt spending strategies.

4. **Participation**: Participatory budgeting processes should rely on randomly selected volunteers who have no conflicts of interest and be transparent. Moreover, citizen budget committees should regularly inform and meet with the general public for feedback. This can be done in physical public spaces that exist at all levels (e.g., libraries). Additionally, governments should regularly conduct representative surveys on budget priorities and offer vouchers (e.g. as part of the income taxation) which individuals can use to distribute budget to NGOs and other good causes.

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3. 'Nothing About Us Without Us'

Principle: *If democratic citizenship is our basic right, the outbreak of a crisis should never be an excuse for a powerful elite to grab power or silence opposition. If spaces for debate are created upstream, people can use them to mobilise when the need arises. Even in the midst of a crisis, there must always be ways for people to participate, assemble, protest, imagine innovative ways to engage in vital decisions and make themselves heard. Only in these ways can problems be highlighted, bad policies be corrected and good policies adopted.*

Change? The Assembly members fear growing repression even in our democratic countries, and also note people's increasing concern about the limited amount of time they may have for taking care of their families, which leads to a retreat from public action. We call for other democratic instruments that need to be activated by various stakeholders, including petitions, pre referenda, citizens' panels, and so on. We also call for a better use of online tools and technology to reduce the costs of connecting different paths to engagement, and bring about faster implementation.

Tensions? Assembly members disagreed on the ideal relationship between wide-ranging-scale democratic mobilisation and, simultaneously, electoral democracy as it functions today in more densely populated countries. Some saw citizens as watchdogs, to protect checks and balances, but others feared citizens do not have the competence or the education required for taking wise decisions. Maybe they should only be involved with the issues they know something about? Others argued that direct democracy is rather utopian or inapplicable in large and congested peripheries.

Steps? What is to be done to get there?

1. **Education on civic participation and transparency**, including implementation in all areas of everyday life such as: civil associations, in school, adult learning centre, senior centres and bringing the topic directly into the community by volunteering, talking to organisations etc. Rights and duties are core values in society that should be fostered by education. At the moment, there is a common belief in liberal society but not everybody is fully conscious of their rights and duties. Education and enlightenment is important along with care, trust and transparency.

2. **Synergies should be built across sectors and stakeholders**, including the civic sector, public administration, schools, indigenous communities, academic research, universities, governments, trade unions etc. The relationships between these stakeholders can be mapped and current best practice in building civic collaborations identified. We can start this process amongst the members of the Democratic Odyssey consortium and supporters of the permanent people's assembly. We should create synergies with organisations outside of Europe and learn from what is done elsewhere

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to avoid euro-centrism and be as inclusive as possible.

3. Advocacy should be aligned with promoting civic participation for all, and seek for comprehensible wide legislation to empower participation. A people's assembly can act as an oversight body and should have representation of marginalized communities in addition to members chosen by sortition.

4. Local Assemblies should receive EU funding, and benefit from best practices in implementation. The different European capitals of culture, sports, ecology, youth, democracy should include popular assemblies in their programs.

4. 'Educate to Anticipate'

Principle: *Being ready to tackle crises calls for a commitment to maximise democratic competence for all, at all ages, in ways that allow intelligent and empathetic conversations across countries and languages. Learning is the name of the game, so we can all be empowered in advance to be prepared to think and act during crises and involved in collective learning afterwards. Empathy can be learned and practiced collectively in various public spaces and moments. Scenario making and foresight must be democratised in order to disrupt old habits. Civic education for future-thinking holds the promise of European collective intelligence.*

Change? Foresight and future-scanning remains an elite exercise in Europe. Can we imagine the practice to be generalised, before, during and after crises, seeking to reconcile polarizing views and lived experiences of crisis in different contexts, social and geographic? Can we invest in connecting debates across borders?

Tensions? Should people learn to anticipate in order to avoid crises or rather to deal with them? Should we emphasise the local or the transnational or both? Some members argued that learning must be embedded in regular community rhythms, through neighbourhood dialogues and local assemblies. Others say that it should be done through networks of cities. Many argued that we do not have to choose. Some suggest establishing a European School for Citizen Deliberation, in partnership with municipalities, civil society and citizens, to train all residents—especially underrepresented groups—in deliberative skills, digital literacy, and care-based crisis response. But others prefer to emphasize the local level.

Steps?

1. In order to prepare the population for future crises we want to introduce education reform that includes common international guidelines. These include teaching democracy, policy and rights, debating and discussion training, active listening for understanding issues from different perspectives. This should be implemented

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by national governments, the EU level, by Peoples' Assemblies at the EU level, Neighbourhood Assemblies and Civil Society Organizations. Learning from current innovators is crucial.

2. To engage the wider public we want to create spaces for discussion that include face to face workshops, community events and online platforms (including Artificial Intelligence where it is useful). Our spaces are open to all. We want to provide events that are age-inclusive and reach out to people in rural areas, include marginalized people and are multilingual.

5. 'Collectivity and self-organization are our power!'

Principle: *Whether in acute or permanent crises, people increasingly come together to take their destiny in their hands. Autonomous communities are precious and need to be empowered, from energy communities to feminist and intergenerational housing collectives, from farmer-consumer cooperatives to virtual communities and social enterprises. But we must encourage these communities to be not only autonomous but also democratic, accessible, connected and coordinated between themselves and across borders.*

Change? Some assembly members have experienced such communities and believe they now need to receive more EU and national support rather than simply local support.

Tensions? Members disagreed on whether communities have a vocation to provide public services, and on how autonomous these communities or cooperatives should be. Should local, national, or European authorities take part in their deliberation, or not at all? Or should they do so only when invited? How much should governments help? Who ensures that their decision-making is fair? Should assembly principles and rules be drawn in advance by our network? What is the purpose of connecting them across borders and when does it matter?

Steps?

1. Encouraging in-person meetings and assemblies empowering and connecting people and communities on different levels: local, national, and international, ensuring two-way interactions between the different levels. Local councils can share knowledge within the community, encourage storytelling for individuals and groups to share their experiences and perspectives.

2. Training for community members to advocate for their rights and interests, including an info kit combined with a digital platform to prepare residents involved in these autonomous communities for cases of emergency.

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3. Dialogue between officials and citizens: after getting the attention of the local authority, there needs to be a deliberate space for officials to meet with members of autonomous communities.

4. Creation of an online platform: At the local level an online platform will operate with certain topics (schools, environment, immigration etc) where a group of randomly selected citizens will issue proposals and offer solutions which can be voted upon. Every two years municipal officials set an online evaluation form of the work they have done to fix the problems. This will be part of a bigger collective fora, empowering people and communities through education using peer-to-peer collaborative networks, with direct exchange of information among users. The online spaces need a designated person in each municipality to oversee the platform.

5. Create a pilot project to promote the combination of online and offline civil engagement on the local level across Europe. To start organized and constant communication between communities we propose to create a pilot project. The would involve offline conferences that take place in 3-5 (randomly selected) communities from different regions in Europe and would be complemented by a digital platform connected to it. In this project communities could share their experiences on the problems and the ways they tackle them, embracing similarities and differences. Topics should be defined bottom-up by the communities themselves. Such a pilot project can be the basis for a Europe-wide network of self-organised communities.

6. 'If People relocate, democracy must follow'

Principle: *The mobility of people, whether they are of EU nationality or not, and for whatever reason, is a global phenomenon and is strongly connected to human rights: people often move because their rights are not respected, and when moving people's rights are often put at risk. Internal mobility is at the heart of the EU identity, where free movement and equal rights are guaranteed to all EU citizens. Enabling the mobility of people without EU nationality into and inside the EU is important for upholding our solidarity principle. However, the EU is also about people who do not relocate. We must democratically debate the relationship between people who move and those who don't. Democratic participation, which includes participation and decision-making processes, should be guaranteed to all, no matter where they come from or their nationality, on the condition that they can participate in democracy and, therefore, be considered an equal political actor with rights and duties. At the same time, all levels of governance must counter structural discriminations of people without citizenship of the country of residency, including (but not limited to) migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, expats, or stateless individuals, both EU and non-EU nationals. Local communities play a vital part in the welcoming process of people coming from elsewhere. Regulations, policies, and infrastructures must be implemented locally for them to achieve equal participation in social and political life.*

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Change? However contested and controversial the European debate on free movement, migration and refugees, it is based as much on ideology as on lived experience. Members who have experienced free or unfree movement in many guises called for changing the parameters of the debate.

Tensions? While it may be understandable for some to feel threatened by the abrupt influx of immigrants, which they see as undermining their country's national cohesion, many assembly members praise the value of migrants, a sentiment reflected in how people not born in Europe themselves feel integrated into the Assembly. Members defended the need to equalise the burdens and benefits of immigration among European countries but disagreed on whether European democratic inheritance was threatened or not by migration. Members disagreed on how strong the conditionality on some sorts of values should be: should we be hospitable to strangers, European or non-European, without condition or does unlimited hospitality to strangers risk destabilising the life of those who do not move and value their mode of life? Should people seriously consider the impact of their democratic decisions on people in other countries?

Steps?

1. A citizens assembly which includes the voices of migrants and people in mobility and those impacted by this phenomenon.
2. Lower administrative burdens for migrants and people in mobility to access their rights.
3. Create a feedback loop between different authorities who decide over e.g. migrants visa processes. This process should be transparent.
4. Create an Independent Media Authority to oversee the depiction of people in mobility and prevent hatred speech through 'watch-dog' actions.
5. Every person who pays taxes in an area or is registered as resident (no matter which residency-status they have) should have the right to vote on the community and local level.
6. There should be representatives on an institutional local level for migrants and people who move.
7. Develop a welcome package for each country, outlining participation opportunities, rights, and responsibilities for new residents. 'Democratic Onboarding' - Educate about rights, duties, democracy for people from abroad. Gamification, nudging and compensation for expenses/time.

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8. Strengthen local services (welcome services, job-orienteeing/social services...)in communities where migration levels are high to diminish social insecurity concerning the topic.

9. In the EU, we need greater synergy between the central institutions and the local communities when it comes to mobility of people.

10. Reforming the educational system implemented by civic education, civic EU education, to improve empathy education and education to step in someone's shoes.

7. 'Transparency is non-negotiable'

Principle: *If it affects us, we deserve to understand it. Complexity should be no obstacle. Transparency is a prerequisite for participation, trust and accountability, and therefore of democracy. People themselves should be able to decide how much complexity and detail they want: the science, open data and arguments behind decisions must be publicly available. When politicians make decisions that affect all of us, whether about the economy, health, education or war and sacrifice, these should be widely debated with citizens within and across countries.*

Change? Public trust is rebuilt through radical transparency. Governments must regularly release plain-language updates on decisions, budgets, and impacts. We can create great websites and platforms to do so across Europe building on examples which already exist. The spread of fake news also undermines democracy. The manipulation of information is a serious threat to societies, leading to the degradation of institutions and democratic processes, preventing people from making informed decisions. We can draw inspiration from Switzerland and Ireland which have strong traditions in preparing and sending good quality non-biased information about political topics to all households to inform voting and participation.

Tensions? Members agree that making governance and policymaking processes fully transparent is the fundamental ground for democratic engagement. But some fear that too much transparency may overwhelm citizens with information or expose sensitive strategies. The complexity of issues like climate change, health crises, and economic inequality may make full transparency impractical. Maybe people should only be involved in what they know best? But others say: everyone can learn and you don't know in advance what you don't know. Ultimately the most challenging and terrible issue of all is war. Some still believe it should be left to military professionals and politicians but others that it is us the citizens that will put our life on the line and should therefore have a major say.

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Steps?

1. Develop a culture of transparency: by embedding transparency principles, values and practices in education for all ages, teaching what transparency is, how to recognise it, essential political and social literacy to understand information, and practices to promote transparency. This education should also be for civil servants and people working in positions of authority.

2. Learn from best practices: We should promote a mapping of all actors working on transparency across society at all scales of Europe, research, collect and learn from best practices, and ensure these learnings circulate amongst all governmental, media, public and private entities which have transparency obligations. An independent EU monitoring body with citizen involvement could ensure this circulation of knowledge and training, monitor and inspect implementation and propose intervention or new regulation where necessary. This body could be connected with the Fundamental Rights Agency, European Media Pluralism Monitor, European Labour Authority amongst others.

3. Promote a free, plural and investigative media as an important source of transparency, anti-corruption and public understanding, by promoting and protecting investigative journalism, reinforcing professional ethics in the media, and requiring full transparency of ownership and commercial interests of media and social media platforms.

4. Increase resources and interest for anti-corruption prosecution and long-term monitoring of assets and interests of anyone who held public office and responsibility with life-long legal responsibility.

8. “Care is at the heart of democracy”

Principle: *Care is empathy, communication, equality and action. It is an act of giving and receiving between people, from people to institutions, and from institutions back to people. To care is to act to fulfil the needs of others, and it starts with listening to each other and being listened to, just like democracy starts with caring for and about each other. Too often in crisis public authorities and bureaucracies seem not to care about people, acting on the basis of utilitarian values instead of empathy. Care culture, emotional awareness, and bodily experience must be at the heart of a resilient and healthy democracy.*

Change? Some areas of action, like the reliance on science during a pandemic or the preparedness for war are currently considered outside the democratic realm. But these life and death questions are precisely what people are most anxious about, often depending on which country they come from. Civil servants in particular ought to have full leeway to serve, engage with and listen to citizens and civil society even in areas

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that are considered to require special expertise.

Tensions? Some members prefer to reserve care for the relationship between citizens themselves, while others think public authorities should be guided by care concerns. Some assembly members noted that maybe we are asking too much from governments. Clearly love cannot be legislated and institutionalised. But at least can we expect authorities to show true compassion for those affected by their actions? Questions arise about the need for institutional care: in a democracy, it is not only mutual care between peoples that matters, but also the care between institutions and people holding offices in the institutions. Institutions have a longer trajectory of life than individuals, so perhaps this is also a call for people to care for their institutions, such as professional civil service, courts or publicly funded media?

Steps?

1. Supporting the diffusion of a care-culture and rebuilding social connections between people. Acts of Care from people to people should include:

a. Getting engaged in more volunteering work, notably to bridge social divides with the most marginalized (youth, elderly, migrants, poor, women, etc.)

b. Bringing people closer together and re-establish dialogues to create connections and empathy through bottom-up, community-based citizens' dialogues like citizen assemblies.

2. Caring for our democratic institutions by acting constructively and using one's voice to keep our institutions accountable. Acts of Care from people to institutions should include:

Voting of course, but also setting up permanent communication channels and feedback-loop mechanisms for people to give feedback to their institutions, and hold them accountable in a constructive and positive manner, in the form of a transparent platform, thus giving citizens the possibility to act as active and constructive citizens.

3. Listening and showing respect to people's needs, and communicating clearly. Acts of care from institutions to people should include:

a. Passing and enforcing regulations to mainstream and empower Citizens' Assemblies and referendums as tools to listen to citizens' needs and set the political agenda, especially on social and care-related issues.

b. Communicating more transparently, clearly and using less technical wordings to adapt to citizens' language and communication needs, by establishing a function of

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“translator” coming from the people, as opposed to an official government spokesperson, to act as a bridge between institutions and citizens.

9. ‘Harness Technology, unleash collective intelligence’

Principle: *Technology can be anti-social and manipulative if it is controlled exclusively by private interests, corporations or disruptive powers, and if it fails to pay attention to the many biases embedded in data-sets and algorithms - especially those processed by generative AI. But if it is democratised, it can be a powerful tool for our collective intelligence and contribute to countering extremism. Grassroots-grown platforms embodying democratic design and operating standards should be encouraged and resourced. Within state, corporate or not-for-profit organisations, there should be no social spaces without democratic control.*

Change? We need to start with the governance of AI, at every level, including the EU AI office which must reflect human values, local wisdom, sustainability, and social accountability—not only technocratic control. Beyond AI, bolstering tech for good should not be restricted to acting through regulations that control or ban hate speech and protect democratic values. Europe must invest in platforms and processes that empower citizens to critically engage with information and push back against manipulation, also collaborating with reputable independent platforms. To counter extremism, we should develop checklists and standards controlled democratically. Checklists would indicate positive and negative actions and behaviours, focusing on areas such as corruption and manipulation. Similarly, the environmental effect of digital technologies should be limited.

Tensions? Technology is evolving fast. This generates distrust and makes it difficult to give opinions or be informed on the topic. The impact of technological growth on the labour market and the environment and how this can be effectively addressed are likewise difficult topics. While independent organisations should have resources to promote the widespread dissemination of credible and verifiable facts, it is hard to find resources without undue influence. Many members of the assembly believe that crowdfunding models could do the trick. Whatever eco-system is created, the control of free speech can be constantly debated to address the tension constructively.

Steps?

1. Educate on AI use

As AI technology grows faster, it creates a lot of questions and fears that we need to demystify and make people feel comfortable using it by educating them on the use of its basic functions. To ensure accountable Artificial Intelligence, platforms using AI could be required to add a possibility to rate AI responses and comments and to be able to report some answers including biases and any other forms that would be forbidden by the law. To promote public understanding, a transparent platform needs to be introduced where EU-citizens can find out about AI and understand the issue.

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2. AI Office and EU AI

Ensure AI Office is representative of the European citizens, with the addition of different minorities and nationalities. This office will be responsible for fostering AI tools that avoid the biases of other similar tools.

3. ANTITRUST regulation

In order to shelter the market and thought processes from monopolization we need to implement anti-trust regulations so that companies cannot hoard functionalities.

4. Data protection

The dynamic nature of digital technologies and AI asks the data protection to be constantly reviewed by specialized teams, ex. N04B, in order to be a relevant legislation that strikes a balance between technological innovation, fundamental rights protection and a rigorous accountability system for those using data.

5. Sustainability

Life cycle analysis on AI technologies show that they are not sustainable enough. There is technical progress towards the optimization of all processes involved, developing a cycle economy, based on renewable energies and efficient use and reuse of raw materials. But together with this we need stronger regulations, for example big companies must be forced to be responsible by leading the way towards 100 percent sustainable AI.

10. 'Not everything has been invented yet'

Principle: *Last but not least, this Citizens' Charter reflects the very process that led to its existence. Our pilot Assembly lays the foundation for a permanent Peoples' Assembly for Europe of randomly selected citizens. The EU and public authorities should open the space for the creation of such a standing body. It would be itinerant, with membership by rotation. It would be regularly convened by the members themselves, while locally embedded and serve as a bridge between EU institutions and the broader public.*

Change? Citizen engagement at the EU remains in infancy even while European Citizens' Panels convened by the Commission constitute an inspiring experiment. If such an assembly became permanent, it would no longer be the prerogative of politicians or civil servants to create and control the process. The Assembly would become progressively more visible and popular. Many of the functions outlined in the Charter would be served by the existence of this Assembly. Eventually, the role, duties, liabilities and rights of such an Assembly could be envisaged in a range of legal frameworks, from a memorandum of understanding to Treaty reform.

Tensions? The Democratic Odyssey's vision is enthusiastically embraced by the overwhelming majority of Assembly members who remark that what they were themselves

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involved in should become known to everyone. Many hope civic involvement will become not a peripheral or symbolic event but a living and evolving infrastructure of democratic life in Europe. This enduring commitment to participatory and deliberative democracy is essential for facing the complexities of the present and cultivating a just, regenerative, and resilient future. Other members have doubts as to how realistic the prospect would be and whether it would not make the EU even more complex. Some responded that democracy should be about familiarising citizens with this complexity.

Steps?

1. Participation

Participants of the Citizens' Assembly should be EU residents over 18 years old, regardless of their nationality, who spend at least one year in an EU country. Participation is mandatory with certain exceptions (e.g. illness, parents of children with special needs, caregivers). Politicians and public officials are not allowed to participate, in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

2. Funding

The Assembly should be funded from the EU budget. The participants receive daily allowances and reimbursements for travel and accommodation. Ensuring full financial transparency during the Citizens' Assembly and two years afterwards by providing public financial reports.

3. Organisation

The Citizens' Assembly would take place in person during the weekends (with work justification if needed). The mandate of the Assembly lasts one year and meetings are organised approximately four times per year. As part of the Assembly, the participants would receive training on deliberation and consultation with experts on the topic they are discussing. The experts should be selected in a way that they represent different views on the topic. For transparency and inclusion, a website of the Assembly and social media accounts would be created and the Assembly meetings would be livestreamed to the general public.

4. Procedures and rules

The EU institutions would suggest a list of topics which are policy priorities, the Assembly participants can add new topics and they make the final decision. The final result of deliberation is legally binding. A managerial board would be established with a mandate of 5 years, consisting of academia/experts in deliberative democracy, CSOs and representatives of Assembly participants. 300 participants would be selected by sortition and represent the demographic characteristics of the EU population (gender, age, education, profession, region, ethnicity, language, etc.)

5. National and local Assemblies

Should accompany and enrich the work of a permanent peoples' assembly for Europe.

