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MASTERARBEIT

Titel der Masterarbeit

How to make citizens' voice heard? Communication strategies for constructing a European public sphere in the Commissions' campaign "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate".

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2011

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Politikwissenschaft

Betreuerin/ Betreuer:

Priv.- Doz. Dr. Karin Liebhart

Abstract

The gap between the European citizens and the political institutions of the European Union is due to the fact that the Union suffers from a “democratic deficit”. Many theorists think that this problem could be solved by application of the principles of deliberative democracy. Since the French and Dutch rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in spring 2005, the problem of “democratic deficit” is officially recognized by the European Commission. The Vice-President Margot Wallström was charged to renew the Commission’s communication strategy in order to reconnect with the citizens. This paper is a critical study of the deliberative qualities of the Commission’s new communication strategy “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” based on Habermas’s discursive theory. Using six indicators for measurement of the deliberation, this paper finds that “Plan D” represents several deliberative aspects, but do not have an impact on the legitimacy of the EU, since it fails to develop more inclusive EU citizenship.

Abstrakt

Die Distanz zwischen den europäischen Bürgern und den politischen Institutionen der Europäischen Union ist auf die Tatsache zurückzuführen, dass die Union unter einem "Demokratiedefizit" leidet. Viele Theoretiker glauben, dass dieses Problem durch die Anwendung der Grundsätze der deliberativen Demokratie gelöst werden könne. Das Problem des "Demokratiedefizites" wird seit der Ablehnung des Vertrages über eine europäische Verfassung durch Frankreich und die Niederlande im Frühjahr 2005 offiziell von der Europäischen Kommission anerkannt. Die Vizepräsidentin Margot Wallström wurde beauftragt, die Kommunikationsstrategie der Kommission neu aufzusetzen, um die Nähe mit den EU Bürgern wiederherzustellen. Ausgehend von der diskursiven Theorie von Habermas, stellt die vorliegende Arbeit eine kritische Analyse der deliberativen Eigenschaften der neuen Kommunikationsstrategie der Kommission "Plan D für Demokratie, Dialog und Diskussion" dar. Mit Hilfe von sechs Indikatoren zur Messung der Deliberation, wird in dieser Arbeit festgestellt, dass auch wenn "Plan D" mehrere deliberative Aspekte darstellt, die Kampagne keine Auswirkungen auf die Legitimität der EU hat, da es ihr misslingt eine engere Beziehung zu den EU Bürgern herzustellen.

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1.Introduction

There is a gap between the political institutions and the citizens of the European Union. Originally, the EU was created by political leaders as a peace project, right after the Second World War. Therefore the EU has never been a project of the people. As it looks today, the Union suffers from a “democratic deficit”. The reasons are the lack of representativity, accountability and transparency (Borén 2007:4). The results of several surveys show, that only 38 % of all European citizens believe that their voice in the European Union counts. Only half of them believe, that the EU has an important role in key policy areas. The “no” to the European constitution in the referendums in France on 29 May 2005 and in the Netherlands on 1 June 2005 demonstrates the lack of confidence better than any statistics (www.eiz-niedersachsen). The cause of the lack of trust in the European institutions is that there is none in both directions acting mediator - there is no European public sphere.

In August 2004 Margot Wallström - one of the Commission's Vice-Presidents - was appointed from the European Commission as Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication. Wallström's task was to develop a new communication strategy for the Commission in order to enable the EU to reconnect with citizens and to establish a dialogue between the institutions and the people on the future of Europe (Borén 2007: 5).

In October 2005 Wallström launched the initiative “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate”. Earlier communication strategies of the Commission had been characterized by delivering information to the people about the EU, in order to make them understand the Union better. They had showed very little effect. In contrast to those earlier strategies “Plan D” aims to get the citizens more involved in the design of a common Europe, to make the Union more democratic, to create a European public opinion and to build a new consensus on the future direction of the Union. “Plan D” was adopted as a period of reflection during which a debate involving citizens, civil society, and social partners, should take place in each EU member state. The Commission has only a support role, while the governments of the countries are the executive organs. “Plan D” carries mainly the features of a marketing policy

program, which aims to spread the European idea (Borén 2007: 5). There were thirteen measures, suggested by the Commission, to stimulate the discussion process across borders. These include: regular visits of the Commissioners in the Member States, support for European citizens' projects, greater transparency of Council meetings and the establishment of a network of European Goodwill Ambassadors. "Plan D" is about to reach a new consensus for Europe but also to deal with criticism in order to find solutions, where expectations have not been met (Bernhard et. al. 2009: 27-29).

The weak legitimacy of the EU in the eyes of the people today is a current problem. The Union is perceived as remote and people feel that they have no power of influence. At the same time the collaboration within the Union is getting more important as there is an increasing amount of decisions made on EU level, and on the second place because of the expansion of the EU territory through the accession of new Member States (Borén 2007: 5). Based on these facts, an analysis of the latest communication strategies of the EU is of a particular importance for the understanding of the citizen's needs in order to support the sources of legitimacy.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of my master's thesis is to explain the design of the campaigns within the framework of "Plan D" and to analyze the deliberative aspects of it. I am interested in the Commission's new communication strategies used for gaining public attention in order to motivate the citizens and make them more involved in the political decisions of the EU. The guiding research questions of this study are:

1. *How was the campaign of "Plan D" constructed?*
2. *Does the communication strategy of "Plan D" include any deliberative qualities?*

1.2. State of research

The consequences of the “Plan D” campaigns are less studied until now. In her master’s thesis Lina Borén (2007) analyzes the communication strategies within the framework of “Plan D” from a deliberative view. In order to measure the deliberative qualities of the Commission’s new strategy, Borén uses the deliberative democracy theory of Habermas. The author translates some of Habermas’s main values into eight questions and builds her analysis on them. The work proves, that “the Commission has created a new communication strategy which visibly aims at reconnecting” (Borén 2007: 66), but it still doesn’t analyze the concrete measures of the campaigns.

Beside this work there are no other studies that explicitly examine the “Plan D” initiative. There are studies, which include only partial analysis of some of the campaigns within the framework of “Plan D”.

The study of Stephen Boucher (2009) “If citizens have a voice, who’s listening? Lessons from recent citizen consultation experiments for the European Union” takes in account some of the campaigns within the framework of “Plan D”, for example the project *Tomorrow’s Europe*, a pan-EU deliberative poll, and the *European Citizens Consultation*. This paper criticizes the lack of clarity in the role assigned to deliberation with citizens in the EU policy making process and makes a number of recommendations for the future of dialogue with citizens. It contains important suggestions, but it still doesn’t analyze the consequences of the entire “Plan D” campaign.

In her paper “Citizens’ deliberations and the EU democratic deficit – Is there a model for participatory democracy” (2008) Gabriele Abels analyzes two examples of the Commission’s consensus conferences. She aims to answer the question, if they can serve as models for participatory democracy in the EU. Important part of the analysis is build on the example of the initiative “European Citizens’ Consultations on the future of the EU”, which was part of the Commissions “Plan D” strategy. The paper discusses these models and their specific problems against the background of the general democratic deficit debate. Still this paper does not give a full overview of the entire “Plan D” campaign.

There are several works that examine the European public sphere, the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, the citizens' participation in the EU politics and the role of communication technologies to connect citizens with the political processes of the EU.

The latest analysis of the legitimacy of the European Union and its institutions is by Andrew Power (2010) - "EU legitimacy and new forms of citizen engagement". In his paper the author looks at some of the approaches to democratising the EU such as the way in which the EU has used information and communication technologies (ICT) to connect with the citizens of Europe. Power suggests that improvements in social networking and virtual environments offer states a better opportunity to connect with citizens. Similar results show also the study of Pina et al (2007). Their research studied empirically the consequence of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) on the national governments of fifteen EU countries, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. They made the conclusion that the use of ICT in policy making will bring citizens closer to their governments in the near future.

In their study Follesdal and Hix (2006) rejected the view that legitimacy is achieved if a positive outcome is produced. There must be a link between voter preference and policy outcome. The authors see the weakness in the democracy of European Parliament as a lack of an opposition. Elections are based not on opposing visions or policies, but on local personalities or issues. The article of Boussaguet and Dehousse (2008) "A Europe of lay people: A critical assessment of the first EU citizens' conferences" is based on the interest for the citizens' conferences as measures of the public powers to attempt including citizens in the decisional and political process. The article analyzes first the reasons that have led to the development of the citizens' conferences, second the reasons for which the EU paid attention to this participatory mechanism and third, the structure of the first citizens' conference. It shows not only the positive aspects, but also the methodological difficulties of the conferences.

The paper of Michael Brueggemann "How the EU constructs the European public sphere: seven strategies of information policy" (2005) concentrates on

the Commission's information policy as the most direct link between the institution and the European public sphere. The author presents seven different strategies of information policy in order to locate it between the poles of propaganda on the one hand and transparency and dialogue on the other hand.

Another interesting aspect is the phenomenon that voters change their behaviour between different types of elections, such as national and EP elections. Sara Hobolt's (2010) research concentrates on the different types of motivations for changing behaviour. She tests the proposition, that the degree of politicization of the EU in the domestic debate shapes the amount of arena-specific voting. The findings of this study are important for the understanding how to motivate European voters.

Until now there is only less scientific work that analyses the "Plan D" initiative or part of its campaigns with the help of an empirical data. For this reason I decided that it is essential for me to analyze the campaigns within the framework of "Plan D" from a deliberative perspective.

2.Theoretical perspective

The “Plan D” initiatives indicate modification from communicating to citizens to communicating with citizens in order to increase political legitimacy through dialogue. This point of view is closely connected with the Habermas’s discursive theory, which is the basis for my analysis. Before analyzing his theory, I would like first to start with short description of the basic terms deliberation, democracy and legitimacy in order to clarify the connection between them.

2.1. Deliberation, democracy and legitimacy

Deliberative theorists define public deliberation as “freely accessible, argumentative debate about issues of collective life” (Peters 2007: 656). The general idea bases on the use of dialogue between citizens within the framework of heterogeneous and right-based law. Deliberative theory encourages people to present different views and wants discussion to be free and unconstrained. According to deliberation theory, citizens are able to reflect on an issue together in order to find a solution by creating a situation of cooperation. Deliberation could be described as learning process, where new information (revealed through debate) and new arguments permit people to transform their preferences. This means deliberation is about changing the existing perspective through open dialogue. The result is the choice of best solution and the agreement of everyone on that in a consensus (Borén 2007: 12). The most important feature of public deliberation is the equality of participation and articulation opportunities as well as the argumentative character of the debates. The benefit of public deliberation is seen primarily as increase of the rationality of public opinion. The public deliberation should finally represent a source for political legitimacy and integration (Peters 2007: 656-657).

The theory of deliberative democracy establishes a close relationship between public deliberation and political legitimacy. In order to understand this

relation it is necessary first to notice the differences between descriptive and normative use of the term “legitimacy”. When saying a political order is legitimate from a *normative* perspective, we mean it is acceptable or justified, and therefore specific binding. It implies the recognition of certain authorities. In other words, to say a political order is legitimate means that there are certain privileges and obligations. But there are also some objections against this definition. The general justification of a political order does not ensure the special obligations of the citizens. For this reason, it is better to leave open the conditions, which support the justification of the legitimacy (Peters 2007: 658). Of course we can also use *specific* normative terms of legitimacy for example liberal legitimacy. In that case we have certain kind of reasons, certain forms of justification of the legitimacy in mind. We design a specific political conception and establish it in a way which, according to our opinion, corresponds with the expected conditions of public or political justification. In a similar way we can talk of democratic or deliberative legitimacy. That means that certain democratic actions or specific forms of public deliberation are necessary conditions for the legitimacy of a political system (Peters 2007: 659-660).

There are plenty of attempts in order to define the empirical, socio – scientific use of legitimacy. Besides the acceptance of political order and current regulations and decisions legitimacy has also additional elements. These are, for example, the active consent or loyalty, the support and willingness to follow. Though, the motivation can be different: habits, identification with traditions or political communities, fear of sanctions, conviction of the justice, etc. (Peters 2007: 661).

If there are convictions under the members of the political community, normative legitimacy can be an element of empirical legitimacy. In this case legitimacy is seen as motivated acceptance, which is connected to certain liberal convictions. In other words, legitimacy is seen as support for a political order, in particular as one that is based on convictions, generated through public debate or deliberation. Public deliberation becomes a defining feature of deliberative democracy or legitimacy (Peters 2007: 660-661).

2.2. Habermas and the deliberative democracy

Jürgen Habermas is currently one of the most influential philosophers in the world. The concept of the deliberative democracy is a key theme of many of his works and he is often seen as the father of deliberation. Habermas builds his discursive model of deliberative democracy using the best of civic republicanism and liberal democracy – the republican concept of legitimacy through discussion and the liberalist idea of legitimacy through rights: The republican society is based on public discussions, which is essential to Habermas's democratic society. He also argues that the effective dialogue requires free, secular and rational discussions, which should be guaranteed through the political institutions. This on the other hand requires a liberally inspired framework of rights-based laws with universal character (Borén 2007: 12-15).

2.2.1. Main concepts

One of the most important aspects of Habermas' discursive theory is the civic republican idea of actual dialogue in society. Habermas' theory finds the process of public will-formation more important than direct participation in decision-making (Borén 2007:12). The effects of public discourses should be described as displacement of the spectrum of the public opinion: Certain positions or arguments become implausible, lose influence or disappear from the public discourse. On the other hand there are other positions and arguments which gain influence within the spectrum. At the same time new ideas, problems and controversies appear and become part of the public discourses. The result is that certain ideas and convictions sediment and become acceptable and convincing. The role of public discourses is that they reproduce and transform public culture, knowledge, norms and values. The existence of such public culture is a precondition of both the functioning of a discursive public as well as the legitimacy of a political order (Peters 2007: 667-668).

Concepts such as inclusiveness, openness and equality of the involvement within the public sphere are important elements of Habermas's discourse theory. The public sphere is the resource which should be available to everyone. Equality means here first of all equality of disposal of the resources. According to Habermas, there is a strong emphasis of the role of active participation. Everyone should have the equally right to have a voice and to be heard in public discourse. No one should be ignored. The public should have as equal access as possible to a high quality offer of information and discourse. The media public sphere should be characterized through a principle of openness and equal opportunities for subjects, perspectives, interpretations, ideas and arguments. This can be understood as a fundamental form of equality in the sense of mutual respect (Peters 2007: 669-677).

According to Habermas' discursive theory the fair procedure is more important than the outcomes of the discussion. Habermas perceives the fair procedure as both - a process and a democratic goal in itself. He does not assume that the deliberative process always results in the best answer. Deliberative democracy should allow an opportunity to question everything, so there should be always an openness around the conclusions, which makes it possible to challenge and criticize even after the decision (Borén 2007:12).

The idea of open and fair dialogue is close connected with the main concept of Habermas' discursive theory - the public sphere. This is the place, where public deliberation should take place and then serve as directions for the administration, which should be the only one with the power to act (Borén 2007:12-15).

The concept of the public sphere has a complex meaning. Habermas' first engagement with this idea was in context of his study "The structural transformation of the public sphere" (1989). In this book Habermas makes two central claims. The first is that during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century there was a variety of social changes, which gave rise for a period of effective bourgeois public sphere in France, Germany and Britain. Social conditions provoked a situation in which large number of middle class people came together to cultivate a space of rational public debate. The emergence of

this public space formed a zone of mediation between the private individuals and the state. The second claim is that there are contradictions and conflicting tendencies in the public space of the twentieth and twenty first century, which undermine this public space. From Habermas' point of view this leads to the rise and fall of the public sphere. Some of the key historical reasons for that were the separation of the political authority from the everyday life and the increasing differentiation of the society (Roberts/ Crossley 2004: 2-3).

According to Habermas, projects of self-cultivation were important for the constitution of the public sphere - the self-cultivation of the bourgeois was pursued through literature and art. The famous coffee houses and salons for example became significant places for debates. From Habermas's point of view these spaces of literary debate formed the infrastructure of the political public. The literary debate had a considerable role in generating the cultural resources, which were necessary for critical political debate (Roberts/ Crossley 2004:2-3).

Equally important for the emerging public sphere were improvements in printing technologies as well as the emergence of newsletters and journals. They were an important source of information about issues, which participants in the public debate could take as a basis for their argumentation and critique. Soon the newspapers included opinions and arguments. They became the medium through which individuals could express their views, arguments and critiques – the newspapers became open spaces for debate. For Habermas these developments were of particular importance. The bourgeois public fostered a critical rationality, so that the most operative force became the better argument. Because of their power and influence the bourgeois public could create a pressure and force for change (Roberts/ Crossley 2004: 4).

The nineteenth century, however, was characterized by some transformations of the public sphere. The most important one was that the relationship of the individual to the state has become one of consumer of services, rather than citizen. Individuals have lost the independence, that is central to the citizen role and political debate has lost its political edge. Another change was that the argumentation and debate was now subordinated to the logic of the competition for power between parties. The

activity of the public sphere, having once taken place between private individuals, now takes place between professionalized politicians. According to Habermas, the effect of party based organization is that views tend to be manipulated or stuck rather than genuinely argued over. The function of argument became now to win votes, rather than engaging the thoughts of voters or cultivating them. Politics became a stage show and debates shifted towards whatever tricks attract the disinterested body of voters. The result is that this stage show makes politics less meaningful for citizens and drives them away from it (Roberts/ Crossley 2004: 4-6).

Habermas' Structural Transformation may possibly show a negative view of modern society, however, his final vision is of a world of public life, where the forces of PR politics and scientized public opinion make critical theory possible. According to Habermas, the critical potential of public argument achieves a wider audience and stimulates the processes of transformation and reclaims the public sphere. Some of his later works shows that rational dialogue between citizens and between citizens and state has been replaced by strategic and systematic exchanges of power. Citizens offer the state legitimacy and in return the state spends its power in form of policies and laws upon citizens, but always thinking of the need to win more voters (Roberts/ Crossley 2004: 4-6). So the discursive democracy occurs in the interaction between the mobilized public and the political institutions and parties. The role of the public sphere is to serve as direction for the administration, which should have the leading role to act. People should formulate opinions through dialogue and this should guide the politicians in their decision-making. The continuous dialogue between people, people and politicians as well as within the institutions is of particular importance for Habermas' discursive democracy (Borén 2007: 12-14).

According to Habermas, the participants in the public sphere could be either individuals, interest groups, NGOs, associations or others. In the ancient Greece people deliberated in gatherings in public places, but today many other communication media are included within the public sphere - deliberative actions could be organized in forums, written, or could use new technologies such as the Internet (Borén 2007: 14). Important point is that the debates

within the public sphere are supposed to have a critical function to the will-forming institutions, and not passively receive and accept their actions. That's way it is vital for the forums of the public spheres to be independent of the institutions (Bantas 2010).

Habermas' theory sees the role of the institutions in listening and responding to the opinions from the public sphere and then deliberating within the institutions in order to make binding decisions. If politicians learn to justify their acts for the critical public in a transparent way and manage to motivate their actions, they become more responsible and more legitimate to the people. If the decision-making power cut the channels for dialogue with the people, this will generate a gap between politicians and citizens, so their decisions will no longer be legitimate in the eyes of the people. Looking at the capacity of the public sphere to influence the political agenda could help to analyze the deliberative value of a democratic system (Borén 2007: 15).

2.2.2. Problematic aspects

Habermas' discursive theory causes some serious critique. First, Habermas builds his concept of public sphere using the argument of free and equal access between participants. However, it is not completely clear how such demands for equality can be applied to the conditions of today's public. Communication processes in the mass media are defined through the absence of formal restricting access. At the level of mass communication, however, the regulation of access to public discourse by publishers, editors, organizers, etc plays a huge role. The active participation in public discourse on the other hand, is related to some inequalities of opportunities for access. Governmental organizations and representatives of other big organizations have significant advantages in the placement of opinions in the mass media. Overrepresented in the discourse are members of academic professions as scientists, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, etc. There are also large differences between the speakers in public discourse. Their differences are related first to their prominence (the level of public attention), second to their authority (the competence attributions) and third to their productivity (the

extent to which they provide skilled and innovative contributions within the discourses) (Peters 2001: 670 – 677).

Roberts and Crossley (2004: 11) criticize also the idealized view of Habermas of rational discussion. Rational communication is not an end product and modern communication techniques are not simply medium of argument but much more a potential source of power and domination.

Lastly, there is a critical point of view related to the matter of motivation to participation in the public debate. When it comes to public participation the question is if people really have the time to engage in public deliberation. People's motivations to engage in the process are different (Borén 2007: 15).

2.2.3. Summary

The concept of deliberative democracy is characterized through free, equal and rational communication in order to reach political legitimization. In other words the democratic legitimacy depends on the opportunity of citizens to participate in the effective deliberation in order to make collective decisions. The political institutions have the responsibility to guarantee the equal possibilities of expression for all members of society. According to Habermas, the importance of deliberative theory in today's complex and pluralistic society lies in the possibility to make people with heterogeneous opinions collaborate - everyone who is affected by a decision should have the right to express their opinion. The process of rational dialogue with others makes understand each other better, which opens the way for a common agreement (Borén 2007:16).

The most central concept of Habermas' discursive theory is the public sphere. People formulate opinions through dialogue in the public sphere which are then supposed to reach the politicians through good channels of communication. According to Habermas, there should be good channels of communication between the public sphere and the institutions because the opinions derived in the public sphere should guide the politicians in their decision-making (Borén 2007:16). Otherwise there is a risk that the governing body becomes illegitimate in the eyes of the people.

3.Methodological aspects

This chapter presents the methodology I used for analyzing the “Plan D” campaign and the indicators I constructed to measure the concepts I am interested in.

3.1. Methods

The purpose of my master’s thesis is first to analyze the design of “Plan D” and second to check if the campaign includes any deliberative qualities. Using the methods of content analysis and political iconography I am analyzing some aspects of the projects within the framework of “Plan D”, which are relevant for my study.

The content analysis is a part of the text analysis, which was originally used as a quantitative research method. The qualitative part of it concentrates on the interpretation of the content of text data by identifying themes and coding. It is more complex than the quantitative content analysis, which consists of counting words or ideas in a text material. Qualitative content analysis examines meanings, themes and patterns that can be manifest or latent in a text (Zhang/ Wildemuth 2009). I decided to use qualitative content analysis because it is a structured method, which gives the opportunity to sort the material easier and decreases the risk to exclude relevant aspects. Most important it helps to distinguish a pattern within an extensive material. Unfortunately this method concentrates only on the occurrence of words and overlooks what is said between the lines (Zhang/ Wildemuth 2009). In order to reach deeper understanding of the subject I need a method of more qualitative nature.

The campaigns within the framework of “Plan D” include visual aspects that help bringing the message of common Europe easier to us. In order to comprehend those aspects by creating a deeper understanding, I decided to use political iconography as a second method of analysis. The political iconography is a method, which focuses on the elements of visual design and images and their representation in various media. An important part of the

method of political iconography is the interpretation and visual contexts as part of the mediated political message. Political iconography is using the method of the image analysis in order to interpret the single elements of images (Bernhardt et. al. 2009: 43-56).

3.2. Measurement

As mentioned above, my thesis will focus on the main projects within the framework of “Plan D”, which were implemented in the member states by the EU Commission. I am interested in the way that the national governments communicate with the citizens in order to mediate the European idea and to create a European public opinion. I am constructing the analysis of this study as a two step process – first I will present five campaigns within the framework of “Plan D” in order to describe the design of them and second I will focus on the deliberative aspects of the entire “Plan D” campaign. To measure the deliberative qualities of “Plan D” I am analyzing both- the government and the citizens’ side. The analysis of the government level allows me to study the concrete actions taken by national governments/ organizations/ institutions during or after the implementation of the campaign. To capture the citizens’ opinion on the efficiency of the EU and its politics I am analyzing the results of the final reports within the framework of “Plan D”. This allows me to check if there is a positive feedback on the campaign, if the citizens are more likely to determine the EU and its politics as positive after the campaign or not and what kind of recommendations they have about the future of the Union.

The concept of deliberative democracy is one high abstract subject and from this reason it is important to develop operational indicators in order to assure the validity of the study and to avoid mistakes. For the measurement of the deliberative qualities of “Plan D”, I translated some of the concepts of Habermas’ discursive theory into six main values. The list helps me to analyze more systematically and without excluding important aspects in how far the campaigns within the framework of “Plan D” are deliberative. Because of the complexity of Habermas’ theory I can only include specific aspects of it. I

created the list of values by focusing on the importance of free and equal dialogue, as well as on the existence of good channels of communication:

1. **Public debate** as a precondition for the functioning of the discursive public sphere

a. *Dialogue or information?*

2. **Opportunity for feedback**

a. *Are there channels for communication between citizens and politicians?*

3. **Openness/ equality of participation** in the public sphere as element of deliberative democracy

a. *Is the public debate open to everyone?*

4. **Responsiveness to criticism**

a. *Did something changed since the campaign started?*

5. **Influence** of the communication strategy **on the political agenda**

a. *Are the outcomes from the feedback transformed into political actions? Are the national governments listening to the public sphere?*

6. **Strengthening the European public sphere through debate**

a. *Could the debates within the framework of "Plan D" contribute to stronger public sphere?*

Another important aspect next to the validity of the study is the reliability. According to the principle of reliability, if another researcher uses the same methods for analyzing the same subject, his research should lead to the same results (Borén 2007: 17-21). Using qualitative methods it is more difficult to reach reliability, because the analysis is based on interpretation and cannot be verified by statistical means. In my study I focused my research on the six

main values, which I created and tried to follow them as systematically as possible analyzing each source.

Another problem of the qualitative research is the objectivity of the study. According to this principle the research should be as objective as possible and the researcher should not bias his/ her study by expressing his/ her personal views (Borén 2007: 17-21). Unfortunately there is no completely objective study, there are always set of ideas and interpretations which influence the researcher. My intention while doing this research was to stay as objective as possible in the interpretation in order to avoid possible speculations, but I also think that personal reflections could be interesting, so I added my personal views in the concluding discussion.

3.3. Sources

The data I have used for my empirical analysis is based on official documents of the Commission on communication policy, documents from some independent authors and the internet sites of each of the campaigns implemented by the Member States of the EU. As next I would like to present a list of all sources I have used for my analysis.

1. Official documents of the European Commission

- *Action plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission* – it is the first document of the new communication strategy and was written on July 20th 2005; includes the concrete measures to be taken within the Commission in order to ensure more effective communication about Europe.
- *White paper on a European communication policy* – written on February 1st 2006 as a suggestion how to improve the dialogue between the citizens and the organs of the EU.

- *Green paper - European transparency initiative* – is a follow up of the “White paper” and it dates from 3rd Mai 2006; it is built on series of transparency-related measures.
- *Communication from the Commission to the council, the European Parliament, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions. The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate* – written on 13th October 2005.
- *Communication from the Commission to the European Council. The Period of reflection and Plan D* – written on 10th Mai 2006 and brings up what has been said during the debates within the framework of the “Plan D” national initiatives.

2. Documents by independent authors

For my analysis I used several publications of ECAS (European Citizen Action Service). It is a non-profit organization and it is independent from European institutions or political parties (www.ecas-citizens.eu). The publications I used are following:

- *Connecting with citizens. Does the EU have the will to tackle its information deficit?* (2006)
- *What way out of the EU constitutional labyrinth?* (February 2006)
- *Conclusion of the ECAS conference of 7 June on the future of the period of reflection and Plan D.* (11.11.2005)

EU Civil Society Contact Group is an alliance that brings together rights and value based European platforms acting in the public interest

(www.act4europe). I included in my analysis the following document which was published from the EU Civil and Society Contact Group:

- *Plan D, Communicating Europe and Communication White Paper* (20.02.2006)

EurActiv is an independent specialized European Union media portal with strong readership outside Brussels (www.euractiv). It publishes materials about EU politics on daily basis and following article has been helpful for me to get an overview on the communication strategies within the framework of “Plan D”:

- *Can EU hear me?* (October 2004)

3. Internet sites of the campaigns within the framework of “Plan D”

There are 5 initiatives within the framework of Plan D, which I would like to analyze in my master’s thesis.

- The King Baudouin Foundation launched a campaign within the framework of Plan D, called „**European Citizens Consultations - Making your voice heard**“. The idea of the campaign is to enable members of all 27 EU states to debate the future of the European Union and thereby to influence the EU decision-making process (www.european-citizens-consultations).
- The project “**Tomorrow’s Europe: Pan-European Deliberative Polling for Plan D**” (Notre Europe) aims to extend trans-border deliberation and to encourage civil participation in the EU (www.notre-europe).
- The project “**Our message to Europe**” (Deutsche Gesellschaft) includes 66 events with panel discussions on different EU issues and its results are transmitted to policy makers and opinion leaders.

- The project „***Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution***” (Európa Ház Egyesület) aims to implement a civil ownership feeling and atmosphere and to raise awareness about the importance of EU policies for the live of the EU citizens (www.europeanhouse).
- The largest civil-society-led campaign in the framework of Plan D is the “***Speak up Europe***” campaign. It was launched in September 2006 in order to facilitate the debate on the European Union. The campaign builds on the partnership of five experienced civil-society specialists on European topics and 26 national partners. On the European level the project is coordinated by the European Movement International (EMI) (www.euractiv).

4. Historical and political background on the European Union

4.1. History

The historical roots of the European Union lie in a series of efforts to integrate Europe after the World War II. As the 40-year-long Cold War began soon after World War II, Europe was split into East and West. In 1949 West European nations created the Council of Europe which was the first step towards cooperation between them (<http://europa.eu/about-eu>). In 1951 the leaders of Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and West Germany signed the Treaty of Paris and 1952 founded the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in order to run their heavy industries creating a free trade area for several key economic and military resources. In order to manage the ECSC, the establishment of several supranational institutions was important: High Authority to administrate, a Council of Ministers to legislate, a Common Assembly to formulate policy, and a Court of Justice to interpret the treaty and to resolve related disputes (www.history). This cooperation led to the creation of a common market by establishing the European Economic Community (EEC). This action eliminated practically the most barriers to the movement of goods, services, capital, and labour, led to market competition and common external trade policy. Four major governing institutions were established by the EEC: a commission, a ministerial council, an assembly, and a court. In order to advise the Commission and the Council of Ministers the treaty created an Economic and Social Committee. Later the EEC was renamed in European Community and its main decision-making institution has been the Council of Ministers (now the Council of the European Union). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the EEC expanded its membership and its scope. The United Kingdom, Denmark, and Ireland were admitted in 1973, followed by Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. The European Union was created by the Maastricht Treaty, which was signed on February 7th 1992 and entered into force on 1st November 1993. The treaty

was designed in order to enhance political and economic integration within the European community by creating common citizenship rights, single currency (the euro) and a unified foreign and security policy. The Maastricht Treaty was a significant step to modify the institutions of the Union as well the decision-making processes. The reform of the legislative process was one of the most radical changes. On January 1st 1995 another three countries (Sweden, Austria, and Finland) joined the Union, leaving Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland as the only major western European countries outside the organization. There were two subsequent treaties which revised the policies and institutions of the EU after the Treaty of Maastricht - the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in 1997 and the Treaty of Nice, signed in 2001 (www.history).

After the end of the Cold War, many of the former communist countries of eastern and central Europe applied for EU membership, but their lack of economic development was seen as an important issue for the full integration into the EU institutions. As a response of this problem, the EU considered a stratified system under which subsets of countries could participate in some components of economic integration like the free trade area, but are excluded from others (for example the single currency). In 2004 the EU admitted 10 countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia). Bulgaria and Romania joined the Union in 2007. In 2005 negotiations on Turkey's membership application began but faced numerous difficulties (www.history).

In 2002 the Convention on the Future of Europe was established to draft a constitution for the enlarged EU. The most important problem regarding this document was the distribution of power within the EU between large and small members as well as the adaptation of organization's institutions in order to accommodate a membership four times larger than the one of the original EEC. The frames of the document needed to balance the ideal of deeper integration against the goal of protecting members' national traditions. That evoked controversy over the question of whether the constitution should mention the Christian heritage of much of European society (the final version did not). In 2004 the proposed constitution was signed but the required

ratification by all EU members to take effect was rejected in 2005 by voters in France and The Netherlands. The work on a reform treaty intended to replace the failed constitution began in early 2007. The result was the Lisbon Treaty, signed in December 2007. The treaty failed in June 2008 after it was rejected by voters in a national referendum in Ireland and entered into force on 1 December 2009 (www.history).

4.2. The EU and its problems today

The world changed in many ways after the Cold War. There was no more the overhanging threat of clashing superpowers and the idea of the union as a peace project seemed less relevant. At the same time another changes occurred: the economic growth slowed down and the legitimization of the Union by its social effects became more difficult. All this aspects led to a general weakening of the legitimacy of the EU. More and more it was felt the need of political legitimacy. On the one hand policies have become subject to joint decisions and the member countries increasingly share a common market with free movement of goods, services and people. On the other hand the EU of today faces new problems – with the expansion of the territory there are new challenges for the EU institutions regarding the political legitimacy (Borén 2007: 26-27).

According to Habermas, the failure of passing the European Constitution in 2005 can be seen as an expression of people's dismay with the current shape of the Union. The reason is that the new European Constitution was written in advanced and technocratic language which made it hard for the citizens to identify with. As the European Union has never been a project by the people, but by the politicians, people feel that they have no power of influence on the decision making. This has resulted in a lack of public support to the Union and popular apathy. The gap between politicians and citizens led to the questioning of the legitimacy of the EU by the citizens. Habermas explains this problem with the fact that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit within its political system. From his point of view a common space for public debate could help to reattach the people to the European idea (Borén 2007: 26-28).

4.3. The EU and the democratic deficit

There is a huge volume of academic books and articles as well as definitions of the democratic deficit of the EU. According to Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix (2005) the democratic deficit can be defined by four main claims.

First the European integration has meant an increase in the executive power and a decrease in national parliamentary control. The central structure of representative government in all EU member states is the accountability of the government to the voters via the parliament. The European Parliament on the other hand has only formal powers of legislative amendment. The EU is designed so, that policy making is dominated by executive actors like the national ministers in the Council and government appointees in the Commission. The main problem here is that actions of these executive agents are beyond the control of national cabinet ministers. In other words national governments can practically ignore their parliaments when making decisions in Brussels (Follesdal/ Hix 2005: 533 - 562). As a result European integration has meant much more an increase in the power of executives and a decrease in the power of national parliaments.

Related to the first element is the argument, that the European parliament is too weak. The Parliament has equal legislative power with the Council but the majority of the EU legislation is still happening under the consultation procedure, where the Parliament has only a limited power. In the 1980s and 1990s there were some changes regarding the European parliament's competences. Even if the Parliament has now the power to veto the choice of the government for the President of the Commission as well as the Commissioners, the governments have still the power to set the agenda in the appointment of the Commission. Despite all the changes during the years the Parliament today is still weak compared to the governments in the Council (Follesdal/ Hix 2005: 533 - 562).

The third argument, that explains the democratic deficit of the Union, is that there are no European elections. Even if citizens elect their governments as

well as the European parliament, neither of both elections are really European elections in the sense of the personalities and parties at the European level or the direction of EU policy agenda. Close connected to this point is the problem that the EU is simply too distant from voters. The reason is that the EU is too different from the domestic democratic institutions that citizens are used to. Citizens cannot understand the Union and cannot identify with it (Follesdal/ Hix 2005: 533 - 562).

The democratic deficit of the EU is a complex problem and the purpose of this work is not to find the best explanation of it. However, using this concept I want to show that there is a gap between the citizens' expectations and the preferences of the institutions. It is necessary to create institutions that provide opportunity for responsiveness to the citizens' preferences in order to legitimise the policy of the EU.

4.4. The European public sphere and the new communication strategy of the Union

According to Habermas the suitable place for citizens to shape and express their opinions is in the public sphere. Even if the European nation states have transferred much of their power to common supranational institutions in the last fifty years, today there is still no strong European public sphere, where the citizens of Europe discuss together on a supranational level. Instead, the public spheres in Europe are mainly nationally based. The lack of supranational debate leads to lack of information and knowledge about the Union among the citizens. Different studies show, that while the Convention developed its draft for a European constitution, less than 40 % of the citizens had ever heard of the Convention and only 1 % believes that they are very well informed about the EU (Brüggemann 2005: 1-3). From this perspective, the EU does lack of awareness among its citizens

The mass media is one of the most central elements of the public sphere, because it allows communication of opinions and informations as well as generating common debate and will-formation. Unfortunately, today there are

only few truly European media. Not only the European media could help for the developing of a common debate, also national media should be able to make the public more engaged and informed about the EU. Close connected to this element is also the lack of a European identity. The fact that people in the EU speak different languages and have separate cultural heritages brings another challenge for the European legitimacy. According to Habermas, the participation in European politics leads to a political bond and could create a common identity. From his point of view deliberation and mutual comprehension is an integrative force in itself (Borén 2007: 31).

All these aspects show that citizens of the EU have no active role in the current political system; they are not involved in the agenda-setting and cannot influence directly decisions or even control the political process. Many people are not interested in politics even on a national level, therefore it is up to the European institutions to encourage people to participate in the EU politics. In order to increase the legitimacy of the EU it is necessary to create more transparency and information, as well as channels for the citizens to dialogue with the political power. In order to stimulate people's interest about the EU politics the president of the Commission Barroso decided in 2004 to start a new project aiming to spread the European idea. With the creation of a new commissioner for communication – Margot Wallström the project to renew the Commission's communication strategy started.

5. The construction of the „Plan D“ campaign

The “Plan D” campaign aims to reconnect with the European citizens and establish a dialogue between people and the institutions on the future of Europe. This chapter will take a closer look on each initiative within the framework of “Plan D” as it is presented in official documents of the Commission, the homepages of each initiative and articles. The description of the construction of the campaign is the first step to the analysis of the deliberative qualities of “Plan D”.

“Plan D is about debate, dialogue and listening. It is a means of harnessing political ideas to generate change. Faced with the challenges of globalisation, people are asking tough questions about job security and pensions, about migration and living standards. Europe must renew so it is part of the solution to those challenges. Plan D aims to inject more democracy into the Union, to stimulate a wide public debate and build a new consensus on the future direction of the European Union. Now Member States must bring this process alive. My appeal today is for national governments to seize this opportunity, to kick start the debates and to act as a motor for European change.”

(Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission, www.speakupeurope)

The European Commission has proposed “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” as a call for wider debate between the European Union’s institutions and citizens. The campaign help the emergence of a European public sphere by giving information and tools to the citizens to actively participate in the decision making process. In that sense it sets out a long-term plan to reinvigorate European democracy (www.speakupeurope).

In order to describe the specifics of the construction of the “Plan D” campaign I would like to take a closer look at each of the initiatives which are part of the Commissions’ new communication strategy. 13 different initiatives started within the framework of „Plan D“. I would like to present 5 projects, which have been organized by five civil society organizations. The largest civil-

society-led campaign in the framework of “Plan D” is the “Speak up Europe”, launched by the European Movement International (EMI). Apart from EMI the King Baudouin Foundation, Notre Europe, the Deutsche Gesellschaft and Európa Ház Egyesület run projects that debate Europe all over the European countries. Following, you will find detailed description of each project.

5.1. “Speak up Europe”

The campaign “Speak up Europe” was launched in September 2006 in order to investigate the opinions and concerns of EU citizens on a wide range of topics related to EU policies. The campaign is presented face-to-face through a series of around 300 local / national / European events in 25 EU countries as well as virtually through the thought-provoking animation “*What has Europe ever done for us?*”. The project is supported by 25 localised web portals in more than 20 languages, containing multimedia and forums. There are also a series of public events organized in the framework of the campaign including seminars, debates, workshops, conferences and think tanks. The campaign is based on several qualitative and quantitative methodologies like through on-line polls, questionnaires, pre- and post-debate voting and on-line chat-rooms. It also includes a large set of comments, concerns, recommendations and opinions. The main goal is to offer a complete debating experience to as large number of EU citizens as possible. The campaign is built around a strong partnership consisting of 4 large international partners (European Movement (EM), Young European Federalists (JEF), Union of European Federalists (UEF) and European Students Forum (AEGEE). and 26 direct national partners from 25 countries. Additional media partner is Fondation EurActiv (www.speakupeurope).

Next I would like to take a closer look at the animation “*What has Europe ever done for us?*” (www.whathaseuropedone). The idea behind it is to tackle the lack of visibility concerning the results of EU action. It is based on the excerpt from a movie called “Life of Brian” (Monty Python) made in 1979 where the Roman influence on the citizens is presented in a positive light. The “*What has Europe ever done for us?*” animation reminds the original sketch by

using humour in order to present to the public its goals. The animation lists 13 achievements of the EU and presented them as a good teaser for the debates (www.whathaseuropedone):

1. *Safer and Cheaper Flights*

The EU has provided European citizens with safer and cheaper flights. This leads to increment of competition between carriers registered in the EU Member States. This means huge improvement of the air traffic management and increased competition.

2. *Student Exchange Programmes*

In the last 10 years the EU has created different education programmes and has given students the possibility to experience different national cultures and broaden their personal horizon. The biggest education program is ERASMUS - up to now 1.2 million students have benefited from this program.

3. *The Single Market*

The Single Market is most probably the most important achievement of the EU, because it guarantees free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Translated in a practical language the Single Market provides the possibility for EU citizens to live, work, study and do business throughout the EU.

4. *Protection of Intellectual Property*

Intellectual property means industrial property and copyrights. Protection of intellectual property means basically, that people are not allowed to use somebody else's ideas. In this area the efforts of the Union have resulted in laws in order to protect company's or individual's knowledge.

5. Peace

The alliance between Germany and France as well as the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community were the first steps of the peace project Europe. International security is now more important than ever. The EU has put in place many policies to combat the increasing threats to a peaceful society in different areas of the world.

6. The Euro

The Euro is for the most of the European citizens part of the everyday life. The single currency has achieved much more than people expected: travelling with a single currency, benefits of economic growth, strengthening of the EU international role and its political integration.

7. Regional Funds

Some of the most significant aims for the EU are solidarity and unity. The EU is of the opinion that equal standards and rights should be provided to all citizens.

8. Cheaper and Better Phone calls

The ongoing development in the fields of technology and telecommunication has resulted in a decrease in the prices within the Union.

9. Consumer Protection

The Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General's main responsibility is to provide regulations and laws in order to guarantee the safety of food and consumer rights in the EU.

10. A Healthier Europe

The EU has introduced the European health insurance card that guarantees if European citizens should fall ill when going abroad.

11. *Environmental Protection*

In the EU, environmental issues have been underlined as some of the most important points for discussion and action. One example is the "Kyoto" drive which aims to reduce the air pollution that causes global warming.

12. *Equal Opportunities - Against Discrimination*

Many directives have been put in place to combat inequalities in the Member States. 2007 is officially the European Year of Equal Opportunities for all. Additionally an initiative called "Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006 - 2010" was launched outlining six priority areas for EU action on gender equality.

13. *External Trade*

The EU level of trade has increased and EU is today one of the major players in the world of trade(www.whathaseuropedone).

Those 13 key words are mentioned in the "*What has Europe ever done for us?*" animation as the most important achievements of the EU. The video should help virtually the debate by giving start points and provoking thoughts about what could be possibly missing and what do European citizens want next from the EU. In this sense the animation as an important part of the "Plan D" campaign. After the accomplishment of "Plan D" feedback from the debates was collected and presented through two comprehensive qualitative reports in Mai and December 2007 (www.speakupeurope).

5.2. “European Citizens Consultations – Making your voice heard”

"My hope is that this will be the beginning of a movement that will help to revitalise democracy in all of Europe. I promise that the Commission will listen and learn."

(European Commission Vice-President Margot Wallstroem, www.european-citizens-consultations)

The campaign “*European Citizens Consultations - Making your voice heard*” was launched with the goal not only to enable citizens from all 27 Member states to debate the future of the European Union, but also to influence the EU decision-making process. The campaign is run by consortium of more than 40 European partner organisations, led by the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) including foundations, universities and NGOs from all 27 Member states (www.european-citizens-consultations).

The design of the European Citizens’ Consultations is based on an in-depth feasibility study commissioned by the King Baudouin Foundation. The study analysed already existing European dialogue formats and identified potential areas of improvement for dialogue initiatives. The idea behind the design of the European Citizens’ Consultations was to overcome the shortcomings of past dialogue events as well as to create adaptable and transferable methodology that works efficiently at a pan European level. There were two events which inspired the design of the project. The first one is the European Song Contest and especially its concept of voting across European countries to express preferences. The second one is the Football Champions League with its idea of simultaneous groups and interlinked events (www.european-citizens-consultations). There were two main projects within the framework of the European Citizens Consultations – the first wave of European Citizens’ Consultations in 2007 followed by another one in 2009. Next I would like to present more detailed the two initiatives.

5.2.1. The Consultations 2009

In the run-up to the 2009 Euro-elections the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) 2009 gave citizens a voice in the debate over how to respond to the current economic and financial crisis by providing an online platform for pan-European dialogue on the challenges, which the EU was facing. The goal of the project was to provide input for policy-makers as the EU institutions began work on the Lisbon Agenda. ECC 2009 took place in five main phases. The first phase of the project was called "Online Debate: Idea Generation" and took place from December 2008 to March 2009. In that phase citizens have visited the online forums launched in each of the Member States generating public debate and ideas on what role the EU can play in shaping the economic and social future in a globalised world. The citizens were also able to rate the answers provided by other users, commenting on them and engaging in the debate. The outcomes of those debates provided the input for the second phase, called "National Citizens' Consultations". In March 2009 identical conferences were held simultaneously on three weekends in all Member States. They were the heart of the ECC process enabling citizens to discuss issues of common concern with each other, and with key national policy-makers. More than 1, 500 randomly selected citizens participated. The next step was the "Online Debate on Recommendations", which were debated via the websites of each project. On the recommendations voted only the citizens who have participated in the National Consultations. Following was the "European Citizens' Summit" with 150 representatives of the National Consultations, which ensured that a truly European set of recommendations was presented to key policy and decision-makers. The outcomes of the projects were debated in the final phase, via series of "Regional Outreach Events" (www.european-citizens-consultations). Next I would like to present each of the phases in detail:

- *Online Debate: Idea Generation*

ECC 2009 was officially launched on the 3rd of December 2008 under the French EU Presidency. The start of the project was marked by the launch of the 27 national websites, which made possible for members of the public to take part in the debate. The public was asked to debate and proposed ideas by answering the question: “What can the EU do to shape our economic and social future in a globalised world?”. The topics chosen by citizens for in-depth discussion at ECC were “Family and social welfare”. The national websites provided the visitors with additional information on the wider ECC process across Europe and on the activities in their own country. Also media representatives were able to get involved in the process and gave their input (www.european-citizens-consultations).

- *National Citizens' Consultations*

The National Citizens Consultations were held over three weekends in March 2009, with 30 to 130 randomly selected citizens participating in each Member State. The participants were led through the dialogue process by professional facilitators, which ensured that all voices are heard. During the two-day deliberations the citizens worked in order to draw up a list of 10 national recommendations for policy-makers. Their focus and target audience was the European level and institutions. Important point is that the weekend's events were interlinked in order to ensure an exchange of opinions between citizens from different countries. The event was closed by panel debate with representatives of the country's main political parties and citizens on their recommendations (www.european-citizens-consultations).

- *Online Debate on Recommendations*

The National Consultations were followed by an online phase, which was the basis for the European Citizens' Summit. All 270 national recommendations were drawn together in order to eliminate duplications and were then checked by some of the participating citizens. This document was posted on the ECC website. This made possible that the general public was

able to comment, debate and vote on the recommendations choosing the top 15. 10% of the participants who took part in the National Citizens' Consultations was invited to attend the European Citizens Summit (www.european-citizens-consultations.com).

- *European Citizens' Summit*

On the first day of the European Citizens' Summit participants debated the consequences of the 15 recommendations for policy-makers and developed a European declaration summarising the key economic and social concerns and expectations towards European policy-makers. On the second day, representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of the Regions, as well as the European parties and foundations, were invited to react to the recommendations and discuss them with the citizens (www.european-citizens-consultations.com).

5.2.2. The Consultations 2007

The European Citizens' Consultations 2009 builds on the success of the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) 2007. ECC 2007 established a new model for citizen participation through the first pan-European participatory project to involve citizens from all 27 Member States in the debate on the future of Europe. As the first-ever pan-European citizen debate ECC 2007 broke down the barriers of geography and language by enabling 1,800 citizens from all Member States to debate the future of Europe. The project started with an Agenda Setting Event, held in Brussels in October 2006. At this event 150 citizens from the then 25 Member States selected the topics important to them and which would be debated at the 27 National Consultations. All the ideas for the future of Europe were summarised in 27 "National Citizens Perspectives on the Future of Europe", which were the basis for a European-level synthesis, drawn up at the Final Consultation event in Brussels in May 2007. The "European Citizens' Perspectives on the Future

of Europe” underlined the importance of a proactive social Europe as well as an effective management of immigration and the need for a common European response to the energy challenge. The final document was presented to representatives of the EU institutions including a video documentation of the project as well as a citizens' feedback (www.european-citizens-consultations). Following more detailed information is presented:

- *Agenda-Setting Event*

The Agenda-Setting Event was the first stage of the ECC process and took place in Brussels on October 7 and 8, 2006. Participants from all Member States of the European Union presented their opinions by answering the question: “What Europe do we want?”. Eight different participants from each Member State were selected randomly in order to reflect the diversity of the population. Organised into small discussion groups the participants discussed over two days their experiences within and between the groups. During the first stage they identified shared topics by sharing perspectives and thinking about the future role of Europe. Next some of the topics were selected as the most important. During the second day the participants worked on enriching the topics and as result a report was made available to citizens right at the end of the event (ecc.european-citizens-consultations).

- *National Citizens' Consultations*

The agenda Setting Event was followed then from February to March 2007 from 27 national consultations, which took place in all Member States of the EU. Based on the results of the Agenda-Setting Event three main topics were discussed (Energy and Environment; Family and Social Welfare and EU's Global Role and Immigration). The outcomes of the consultations were 27 “national Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe” (ecc.european-citizens-consultations).

- *Synthesis Event 2007*

In order to make the results of the 27 National Citizens' Consultations relevant at European level, they were synthesised into a single report taking into account the diversity of 27 different Member States. There was a Synthesis Event held in Brussels on 9th and 10th of May. One citizen volunteer from each of the National Consultations accompanied by the national project partners attended the event. The result of the event was the establishment of a document called "*European Citizens' Perspective on the Future of Europe*". The citizens officially presented their results to policy-makers in the European Parliament during a press conference on the 10th of May. Citizens were joined by Vice-President of the European Commission Margot Wallström later in the afternoon in a roundtable and discussed their perspectives, implications and how they relate to current actions and initiatives at European level in the relevant fields (ecc.european-citizens-consultations).

- *Follow-Up Activities*

June 6th marked the official beginning of the follow-up process at European level. In cooperation with the European Policy Centre (EPC) a panel of policy-makers at a policy dialogue was organised. Using this panel the citizens were able on the one hand to directly confront the policy-makers with their questions about what will happen to their results. Policy-makers on the other hand outlined how they believed the citizens' results could feed into the decision-making process.

On October 3rd the European Citizen Action Service launched a debate on the question "Is the EU really listening to citizens?". The event was concentrated to show what the EU can learn from the European Citizens' Consultation project.

At national level various follow-up events took up the debate on the Future of Europe in general, and the contents and results of the three topics in particular. The European Citizens' Consultations reach out 2,000 people that have been involved in the project (ecc.european-citizens-consultations).

5.2.3. Summary

The European Citizens' Consultations are the first ever pan-European debate which involves citizens from all 27 Member States in order to debate the future of the European Union across the boundaries of geography and language. From this reason the project goes beyond most European communication initiatives. The campaign is special as the European citizens are the center of the project. Without requiring any special knowledge or language capabilities, they exchange ideas, expectations and hopes across boundaries and cultures. Not only modern technology but also innovative dialogue design as well as simultaneous interpretation into all official languages of the EU are the basic elements which overcome the typical barriers to effective participation (ecc.european-citizens-consultations). The activities within the framework of the project include the involvement of representatives of the European Parliament, Commission and Council as well as national policy-makers.

5.3. “Tomorrow’s Europe: Pan-European Deliberative Polling for Plan D”

The project *“Tomorrow's Europe: Pan-European Deliberative Polling for Plan D”*, run by Notre Europe, aims to extend trans-border deliberation as well as to encourage civic participation in the European Union. The project was sponsored by the European Commission and around 20 other partners in order to use social science for public consultation across all of Europe. As the first EU-wide Deliberative Poll, “Tomorrow’s Europe” aims to answer important questions like: “If ordinary Europeans came together in the same room, what would they think?” or “In how far would their views on the future of Europe change, after the confrontation of their different visions?”. The project took place at the European Parliament in Brussels on October 12, 13 and 14, 2007 and brought together 362 European citizens from all 27 EU Member states. The sample of 362 participants was recruited from an initial random sample of

3,500 in 27 countries. For the initial survey participants were randomly selected by country in proportion to their representation in the European parliament. All participants had first to complete a comprehensive initial questionnaire in order to participate. This made possible to compare the Representativeness of the participants and the non-participants (the ones from the original sample who did not attend) - the participants are more male and more educated, but the substantive differences on all the policy attitudes were still small. This means that if we consider the full range of possible difference between participants and non-participants on the 59 attitude questions, the actual difference was only 4% of that possible range. So even when there are statistically significant differences, the magnitude of the differences is small (www.tomorrowseurope).

Participants aged between 18 and 80 and coming from the 27 member states exchanged opinions and arguments and put questions to experts and politicians. They discussed the opportunities and the challenges facing the European Union in the medium term. The participants were consulted on issues concerning the European construction and became the opportunity to debate and exchange opinions with people from other Member States, as well as to ask questions to the experts. "Tomorrow's Europe" follows up a previous project led by *Notre Europe* on 21 May 2005, which took place few days before the French referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty. For the discussions were invited politicians and experts including Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa (the Italian finance minister); Serguei Stanishev (Bulgarian prime minister); Lord David Trimble (winner of the Nobel peace prize and former prime minister of Northern Ireland). The event was covered by media from all 27 EU member states including Die Tageszeitung, and Der Spiegel, Le Monde, the Financial Times, The Guardian, El Pais, Publico, La Libre Belgique (www.tomorrowseurope.eu). There were also television reports on LCI and the BBC. After taking part in the event the Italian finance minister and president of Notre Europe Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa noted:

"This process is an extremely important step to make EU democracy more effective."

(Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, www.tomorrowseurope.eu)

The final results of the project, presented online on the homepage of “Tomorrows’ Europe”, show that the participants became more informed and changed their views about a number of important issues regarding the EU policy (www.tomorrowseurope.eu).

5.4. “Our message to Europe”

The project “Our message to Europe” was run by the Deutsche Gesellschaft in 2007 and included 66 events with panel discussions on different EU issues. The results of the project were transmitted to opinion leaders and policy makers. Unfortunately after the end of the project all the information on homepage was blocked and in order to understand the construction of the campaign I contacted the Deutsche Gesellschaft.

Next I will present only a short description of the project according to the information, that I received from the Deutsche Gesellschaft. As a project within the framework of “Plan D”, “Our message to Europe” was developed with the help of the European Commission and was accomplished by the cooperation of 5 Member States – Germany, Austria, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia. The goal of the campaign was to stimulate the democracy, debate and dialogue and was focused on 3 key points:

- Panel discussions on European topics: The events in the five EU member states should initiate the debate on European topics with the citizens.
- Opinion surveys and interview films: Opinion polls were conducted within the framework of more than 70 events. The citizens had the opportunity to create their own video with their personal message to Europe during 20 special selected debates.
- Evaluation and presentation to policy makers: The results of the opinion polls and the individual videos were published and policy-makers were

informed (the governments, political parties and national parliaments, the national representatives of the EU Commission, the European Parliament, the European Commission).

The campaign was constructed around 12 panel discussions: enlargement, mobility, constitution, languages, immigration, role of the EU in the world, youth and education, civil society, sustainable development, research and innovation, growth and jobs and future of Europe (www.deutsche-gesellschaft.de).

5.5. “Our Europe – Our Debate- Our Contribution”

The project “Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution” is a regional initiative including 5 countries and aims to answer the challenges of today’s Europe. Its goals are mainly to stimulate debate on the future of Europe, to raise awareness of the importance of the EU policies and to encourage interaction between citizens from different countries. The project is characterized by its regional approach: Austria, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Slovakia. “Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution” is constructed respecting the national characteristics but at the same time going beyond a national vision in order to underline the importance of the common European project. The project takes place in the 5 countries from October 1st 2006 till December 31st 2007. It collects 2,500 citizens’ opinions on the EU in different forms by using innovative approaches (www.ourdebate.de). “Our Europe - Our Debate - Our Contribution” is organised by five civil society organisations from the 5 countries: The World of NGOs (Austria), European House (Hungary), ARCI Nuova Associazione (Italy), Slovak Foreign Policy Association (Slovakia) and CNVOS (Slovenia).

One of the main goals of the campaign is to collect opinions of citizens. This takes different forms from written contributions to video messages. The main instrument to collect citizens’ views and proposals on the future of Europe was a prepared for the project questionnaire. It was built on 3 questions: (1) In what forms and how is Europe present and influence your everyday life; (2)

Imagine you have the power to take decisions on the European Union. What would be your first decision and why? (3) How would Europe and the European Union look like in 10 years time, in 2017? (www.ourdebate). The questionnaire which is available in English, German, French, Italian, Slovenian, Slovak and Hungarian was distributed during the national events and also available on the website. For the distribution of the questionnaire creative methods have been used: interviews on trains in Slovenia; taxi drivers' involvement in Austria; Spring Day events in grammar schools in Hungary, etc. By the end of the project period each project partner collected 500 responses and reached the planned 2500 documented reactions (www.ourdebate).

The different conferences, discussions and panels organised locally and internationally by the project partners were a good opportunity for the collection of the written contributions. The video messages were collected primarily during the two bus tours, organised in July and September 2007 in the project countries (www.ourdebate).

5.5.1. "Get on Europe" Bus Tour

The idea of the "Get on Europe" bus tour is to go local and to bring Europe together. During the project two bus tours are organised through the 5 project countries in order to make citizens contact and to collect their opinion on EU matters.

The first phase of the bus tour took participants from all 5 project countries on tour between June 30th and July 4th. In every country a Europe Labyrinth was prepared. Walking through the labyrinth citizens from the street received questions on Europe and EU. They have been encouraged to express their opinion on the future of European Union by writing or making video. A huge Europe cake was prepared at every location where the Europe labyrinth was set up. As an innovative tool to put Europe on the everyday agenda of citizens the Europe Labyrinth was highly success. The ideas express opinions in written and video forms was also well received. Another activity within the framework of this project was the "vote with water" where EU policy areas

were represented by differently coloured water in glasses. Citizens could vote and to one of the areas by pouring a small glass of water to the bigger glass/area of their preference (www.ourdebate).

After the success of its first phase in July the bus tour II was organized in Hungary, Slovenia, Austria and Italy in September (11th – 16th) 2007. Like the first phase during “Get on Europe” bus tour II a 10 meter labyrinth was set up on the streets of the different locations with the idea to attract the attention of the public, collect views on Europe and to create an atmosphere of ownership among citizens towards European issues. Project was accompanied by serving of cakes with the logo of the project and handing over certificates to local notabilities who took part in its activities. The idea of the Europe Labyrinth, as an innovative tool to put Europe on the everyday agenda of people was also during the bus tour II definitely positive. At each labyrinth location 5-10 short video messages were collected (www.ourdebate).

The 2 phases of the „Get on Europe“ bus tour were covered by local media in participating countries (Austria, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia). The collection of the articles is available online (www.ourdebate). The printed newsletter of Group III of the European Economic and Social Committee also published an article in September/October 2007 issue with a photo of the Europe Labyrinth. During the first Agora conference held in the European Parliament on 8th and 9th November 2007 the “Our Europe - Our Debate - Our Contribution” project was presented on an exhibition stand and also on the headquarters of the European Economic and Social Committee (www.ourdebate.eu).

5.5.2. Events on national and international level

The “Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution” project was not only accompanied by many events on national level in all 5 project countries, but also presented during several events on international level. Next I would like to present some of them without getting into detail. More information could be found on the homepage of the project “Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution”.

1. *Launch event Civiliáda in Budapest 2006*

The event Civiliáda took place in Budapest in October 18th and 19th 2006 in the “Aranytíz” Cultural Centre in the heart of Budapest. In more than 100 stands over 150 civil society organisations introduced themselves to the general public and provided information on their programmes and activities. The two-day event started with a national NGO conference in the building of the Hungarian Parliament. „Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution” project was presented by project partners on a special workshop within the programme of Civiliáda. Representatives of Hungarian civil society organisations welcomed the project and expressed their interest to take part in its activities (www.ourdebate).

2. *Regional Roundtable for Democracy in Bratislava*

The Regional Roundtable on Democracy, Culture and Identity was hosted by the Slovakian project partner (Slovak Foreign Policy Association - SFPA). 130 participants including representatives from the project countries and diplomatic based in Bratislava were present. The project „Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution” was presented and debated during the first part of the roundtable, which was dedicated to the topic of challenges for further integration. The theme of culture and its use as a tool for communicating Europe was covered during the second part of the roundtable (www.ourdebate).

3. *Regional Citizens’ Panel: How to Promote Active European Citizenship through Effective Communication?*

The Regional Citizens’ Panel, called „How to promote active European citizenship through effective communication - the experience of 5 project countries” was a concluding event of the National Citizens’ Panels organised in the 5 project countries. The event took place in Italy and focused on 2 main

topics: (1) active European Citizenship and (2) national experiences on communicating Europe (www.ourdebate).

4. “Acting Together for Europe” - 2nd Regional Stakeholders’ Forum

The 2nd Regional Stakeholders’ Forum took place in the Hungarian capital in June 22nd-23th, 2007. The main aim of the event was to bring Europe and its citizens closer together and to contribute to the European Commission’s „Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate“ initiative. The event was attended by more than 120 Hungarian and 30 international participants and served as an important forum for citizens to reflect on European processes and to express their views concerning the main challenges of the EU today (www.ourdebate).

5. Civiliáda 2007

Civiliáda, the annual exhibition and conference of Hungarian NGOs, was organised in Budapest. In 2007 the main theme focused on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The event provided an excellent opportunity to take stock of the project results and to have a public debate on what has been achieved in the implementation of the project objectives. This has been assisted by a special info stand where those who were involved in the project answered the questions of the visitors. During the event the representatives of the 4 project partners were invited (www.ourdebate).

6. Presentation of the project at the Citizens’ Agora in the European Parliament, in the European Commission and in the European Economic and Social Committee

On the basis of the experience and the recommendations emerging from the project including two bus tours with the Europe Labyrinth in the region of 5 countries, presentations in the EU institution were made. Its timing was intentionally chosen to coincide with the Citizens’ Agora (an experimental

model to open doors of the European Parliament to representatives of civil society organisations from all over Europe). Representatives of all the 5 organisations attended the plenaries and all the workshops of the event in order to present the results of the project. An important part of the project presentations in Brussels was the presence in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) - info stand was set up in the reception area in order to attract the attention of the EESC members (www.ourdebate).

7. "The future of Europe – the citizens' agenda" concluding international conference

"The future of Europe – the citizens' agenda" was an event of high importance where the text of the Lisbon Treaty was finally approved. The message of the 250 participants from the 27 Member States was that they would like to see a citizens' friendly Europe. For this event 35 participants from the 5 project countries were sent to Brussels. One of the concrete contributions to the conference agenda was the set of recommendations emerging from the dialogue with citizens. Several of them found their way to the final 27 recommendations adopted by consensus by the closing plenary session (www.ourdebate).

5.5.3. Summary

As a project within the framework of "Plan D", "Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution" is based on the idea of the period of reflection. It promotes the daily and direct dialogue between citizens, NGOs and EU and national institutions including parliaments and governments. The project pays special attention to inform European citizens on the impact of various EU policies and at the same time provokes discussions through which citizens can voice their opinions, concerns and proposals on European issues. Using different instruments to collect citizens' opinion in all 5 project countries, "Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution" aims to build bridges between citizens and Europe (<http://www.ourdebate.eu>).

5.6. The construction of „Plan D” – Summary

One of the main problems regarding the construction of the European Union is the lack of citizens' involvement in the public space. The solution of this problem is simple - the gap can be filled only by enabling European citizens to deliberate on European issues beyond national borders. Unfortunately, there are limited options to transnational decision-making. Since the Dutch and French rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty several projects like the Commission's "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate" have been identified as priorities by European institutions (www.notre-europe). As a project which aims to promote deliberative democracy and to make it inseparable part of the EU policy and discourse, "Plan D" shapes communication with citizens as a two-way street. On the one hand the citizens need to better understand how European Union works for them and on the other hand decision-makers at European level need to listen more carefully to the opinions of the people. The communication strategy within the framework of "Plan D" includes many projects and initiatives at the European and national level to stimulate a public debate, to promote citizens' participation, and to generate a dialogue about European policies. (ecc.european-citizens-consultations).

6. “Plan D” and the deliberative democracy

According to Habermas’ theory, deliberative democracy not only can serve as an effective tool for creation of more inclusive European citizenship and European public sphere, but also solves the problem of democratic legitimacy of the EU. “Plan D” was proposed from the Commission after the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in order to promote deliberative democracy and to make it inseparable part of the EU policy. In order to represent the basic traits of deliberative democracy the campaign is build taking into account three principles: inclusion (all citizens should have equal access to information in the EU); diversity (all actors should have a voice) and participation (all voices should be heard) (Ivic 2011:17).

In the following chapter European Commission’s “Plan D” is examined by focusing on the question “*Does the communication strategy of “Plan D” include any deliberative qualities?*”. Using this question I am analyzing whether the “Plan D” campaign led to more inclusive conception of citizenship based on the principles of deliberative democracy. I built my analysis using six main values, which represent the main concept of Habermas’ discursive theory.

6.1. The Public debate

In order to have a functioning discursive public sphere, first conditions for public debate should be created. Next I would like to analyze the “Plan D” campaign by answering the question does the communication strategy within the framework of “Plan D” emphasize dialogue or information.

We should take into account that there is an essential difference between communication as dialogue and communication as information. Defined as dialogue, communication requires at least two active parties. According to Habermas’ discursive theory, dialogue is about listening and considering the ideas of the other; dialogue is a learning process where both parties express themselves. Information on the other hand is required as a basis for dialogue in order to provide both parties with knowledge about the issue. Nevertheless

the core element within Habermas's theory lies within dialogue. Defined as information communication means sending of a message and a passive receiving - information does not require interaction between the involved parties (Borén 2007:34). This was the main problem that the earlier communication strategies, developed by the Commission have faced.

In order to study the deliberative qualities of "Plan D" the first step is therefore to analyze if the campaign still aims mainly to inform citizens or its focus is on dialogue between citizens and the EU institutions.

The Action Plan document from 2005 can be seen as the first expression of the new communication strategy. According to this document, the Commission intends not only to listen to the citizens but also to inform them about how different policies affect peoples' everyday life. Communication should be a two way process – first informing people about Europe's role through concrete projects and then listening to people's expectations about what should be done in the future. The document underlines that people must have the right to make their voices heard and that feedback should be provided in order to summarize citizens' views and opinions (SEC (2005) 985).

The White paper is a follow-up of the Action Plan and also underlines the importance of a balance between information and dialogue. In the White paper the Commission explains that it has moved far away from its earlier one-way communication and within the "Plan D" campaign it aims to create dialogue between the people and the policy makers. Recognized that the citizens earlier were treated mainly as receivers the Commission underlines the importance of cooperation within deliberation (COM (2006) 35: 2-4). This willingness to speak and listen corresponds to Habermas' idea of dialogue.

The association European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) has a different opinion when it comes to the information part of the strategy. ECAS does not believe that "Plan D" is a two way process with equal weight on informing and listening. On the contrary they claim that EU is suffering from an information deficit. They are basing their conclusions on a Eurobarometer survey which shows that EU citizens feel under-informed and that they want more factual information about the EU. The main reason for that is "the lack of adequate factual information" about the EU (ECAS 2006: 5).

Taking a closer look at the information efforts included in the “Plan D” policy, the White paper proposes to improve citizens’ education through the Member States, which should help people to use tools such as Internet to access information on public policy and to join in the debate. According to the White paper technology is an important and accessible tool for information. Therefore the Internet-sites of the EU have been developed in order to include more interactive functions and information as well as to make the use easier and more attractive than before (COM (2006) 35:6-7, COM (2006) 212:7). Sources of information created by the Commission are for example the “Europe Direct” local offices and the “Europe Direct” free phone call and e-mail service, which are available in the all Member States languages. The Commission’s representation offices in the Member countries are important local points for information and feedback (Borén 2007:35).

Taking a closer look at the different initiatives within the framework of “Plan D”, I came to the conclusion that the efforts to develop a two way communication between the citizens and the institutions during the local programs, was successful. Not only information was given, but also feedback was collected and delivered to policy decision makers on national and EU level (see next chapter). But the connection between the open debate and the producing deliberation has still to be analyzed more in detail.

6.2. Opportunity for feedback

This chapter is focusing on the question does “Plan D” enable channels for feedback and communication between the EU citizens and the politicians. According to Habermas, the democratic system needs good channels for communication between people and politicians, which should allow the citizens to influence the political agenda and its outcomes. The deliberative qualities of the „Plan D“ campaign depend on the Commission’s efforts to stimulate dialogue and debate and possibilities for feedback.

The main goal of “Plan D” is to create more dialogue within the EU. In order to reach this goal, it was necessary to create new channels of communication between EU citizens and politicians. In order to emphasize communication on

national and regional level the Commission decided to get closer to citizens by “going local”. Good examples for “going local” are the national debates. The initiative has been taken by the Commission, but the debates have then been implemented on national level, mainly by the Member States. The role of the Commission is to give the direction by focusing the national debates on the future of Europe and suggesting concrete issues for the discussions (like jobs, the economy, transport, the fight against terrorism, the environment, oil prices and so forth). Apart from that, the debates do not follow any standardized structure (COM (2006) 212: 3). This shows that even if the idea of the national debates is clearly deliberative it cannot be said that people have been treated equally, because of the uneven implementation on national level. It is clear that in countries with low implementation or few national debates activities, it is possible that not all voices have been heard and taken into serious consideration.

Another example for the Commissions’ effort to establish good channels for communication is the reinforced role of the representation offices. They represent not only places to get information, but also generators of debate on EU through organization of conferences and meetings.

Apart from traditional face-to-face debates and the representation offices, the Commission started to use the Internet as an interactive channel for debate. Not only the Commission has developed its homepage, but also commissioner Wallström has created her own blog (ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom), where she describes her day-to-day activities as a politician in a personal way. The blog enables people to send their comments and discuss within this framework, which is a very concrete way to connect with citizens. Within the framework of “Plan D” campaign every initiative had its own homepage, translated in all languages of the Member States. Different forum discussions gave the EU citizens the possibility to express free their views, opinions and proposals about current EU issues. The Internet forums can definitely be seen as deliberative in the sense that they permit free and lively debate, but they also require access to the Internet as well as technological interest and skills (Borén 2007: 39). According to Habermas, deliberation requires all voices to be heard, but this

could not be fulfilled when it comes to information technology channels for communication.

As a result of the Commission's effort to develop channels for better communication at the end of each initiative within the framework of "Plan D" feedback from the citizens, who participated, was collected and presented to policy makers on national and European level. After the accomplishment of the "Speak up Europe" campaign the collected feedback from the debates was presented in a final report, which includes citizens' expectations regarding the actions of the Union in the future, the main points of criticism to the EU politics as well as some recommendations from the citizens (European Movement (2007)). The campaigns "European Citizens' Consultations" 2007 and 2009 are the first pan-European participatory projects aiming to involve citizens from all 27 Member States in the debate on the future of Europe. The citizens' ideas for the future of Europe were summarised in 27 "National Citizens Perspectives on the Future of Europe". This final document was presented to representatives of the EU institutions and underlines the importance of a proactive social Europe, an effective management of immigration and the need for a common European response to the energy challenge. By the end of the project "Our Europe – Our Debate – Our Contribution" each project partner collected 500 responses and reached the planned 2,500 documented reactions. Video messages were collected during the two bus tours, organised in September 2007 in the project countries. The final results of the project "Tomorrow's Europe" were presented online on the homepage of "Tomorrows' Europe" and show that the participants became more informed and changed their views about a number of EU policy issues.

Taking closer look at the national debates I can summarize that within the framework of "Plan D" channels for communication between the participated EU citizens and the EU institutions were established and as a result feedback from each initiative was collected and presented on EU level. Still even if those channels for communication existed during the implementation of the "Plan D" initiatives there is no guarantee that they are active today or in the future. Another problematical aspect is the question if the collected feedback could be seen as representative for the voice of all EU citizens.

6.3. Openness and equality of participation in the public sphere

According to Habermas, the politic debate should be open to everyone in order for a deliberative process to be fair. This means all parties which are touched by a decision should have the right to make their voice heard and be taken into consideration. An inclusive process of debating increases the legitimacy of the outcome. Habermas' idea is simple to capture, but quite difficult to put into practice. The population of the Union currently is more than 500 million inhabitants (Eurostat (Oct 2010) 23) and it seems like a tough task to permit them all to make their voice heard. As showed in chapter four the European Union is perceived as a system which favors the political elite. Citizens from all Member States feel that their opinion does not count. Next I am analyzing to what extent the Commission attempts to make the system within the framework of "Plan D" inclusive in order to create wider dialogue.

The White paper underlines the importance of the possibility to support the weaker groups in the society. From this perspective the civic education "should help people of all ages to use tools such as the Internet to access information on public policy and to join in the debate. This is particularly important in the case of minorities, disabled citizens or other groups that might otherwise find themselves excluded from the public sphere" (COM (2006) 35: 7). The "Plan D" campaign aims to connect in the political debate two additional target groups, which were not reached during the referendum campaigns - the young people and the minority groups.

In order to attract the young people the Commission focused its activities on projects such the Spring Day initiative (www.springday). This campaign was launched already in January 2001, but its 2006 version was much more successful and over 7,500 schools participated. In general the campaign aims to stimulate interest and debate among young people on EU questions. The project was implemented in different schools at national and local level in each country's language. Through school conferences and internet forums the young people were involved in the EU debate. According to Margot Wallström,

the idea of the EU as a peace project can not attract the young people. They need to be given a mission to bring Europe forward and should be engaged through modern voluntary core that can be used for humanitarian aid or environmental clean-up. A website called "Youth portal" was created by the Commission in 2001 and gives young people information about their rights and opportunities (COM (2005) 494: 3, 9-10, COM (2006) 35: 6-7, europa.eu/youth). Unfortunately there are no activities or other engagements within the Commission's communication strategy, apart from the initial engagement in "Plan D", when it comes to the involvement of the minority groups.

According to the minimum standards for consultation, proposed from the Commission in 2002, the consulted can be representatives of regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, citizens or interested parties in third countries. According to the Commission, the consultations help to improve the quality and the legitimacy of the proposals and everyone who likes should have the right to give their opinion. But the Commission is actively seeking input only from parties which are affected by the policy and will be involved in its implementation. This distinction between the public opinion and the legislative power is something which can be found in Habermas' discursive democracy. The usual procedure regarding the Commission's proposals includes the presentation of a Green paper with general ideas (on which people can give their feedback) and then a White paper with specific policy measures (also open for consultation). The White paper on a European communication policy for example has been open for a six month consultation not only through traditional consultation procedures, but also through new channels such websites open for electronic feedback and discussion. Even if the "Plan D" campaign opens up for debate and dialogue this does not mean that everyone can be involved in this debate. The number of consultations through Green and White papers have risen the latest years, but the Commission still needs to improve the tools for consultation and promote them in order to make people more involved in the consultations (COM (2002) 704: 3-4, 8, 11, 15, COM (2005) 494: 8, COM (2006) 494: 8).

Through the “Plan D” campaign the Commission aims to increase active citizenship. According to the White paper, 53% of the Europeans do not think that their voice counts in the European Union. From this reason the Commission wants to make people aware of the participation opportunities using the initiatives of the communication strategy. There is another aspect of the lack of participation issue - the participants in the most “Plan D” events are not the usual EU citizens. They represent much more the young EU elites who are more interested in their own ambitions and goals than thinking about the real future of the EU (COM (2005) 494:2-3, 8-9, COM (2006) 35: 8). In the “Plan D” campaign the Commission shows awareness of the problem with uneven participation in the EU debate. As a possible solution of this issue new tools for consultation and supports were created but an engaged elite still dominates the dialogue while common people stay outside.

The main channel for communication that “Plan D” is using in order to increase public participation is the internet. This is a useful tool for targeting young people as they generally do not have access problems by using it in comparison to other groups in society - not all European citizens have access to the internet, and many of them do not know how to use this channel for communication.

6.4. Responsiveness to criticism

In the middle of Habermas’ discursive theory is the view of democratic society and institutions where dialogue contributes to improve the quality of the decisions and strengthen the political legitimacy of the authorities (Borén 2007: 56). According to his theory, it should be possible to question not only the political goals but also the process for determining these goals. In order to study the deliberative character of “Plan D” it is relevant to take a closer look at the Commission’s responsiveness to public input.

As mentioned above the Commission makes draft propositions in the form of the two documents (Green and White papers). These draft documents are open to feedback from common citizens and stakeholders before their final propositions. The general ideas are presented in the Green paper while the

more specific details and measures are included in the White paper (Borén 2007). Also within the framework of the “Plan D” campaign citizens have been encouraged to dialogue with the Commission continuously through the creation of new policy propositions for improved communication.

From the very beginning in the elaboration stage of “Plan D” the Commission received a report called “Can EU hear me?” made by EurActiv, Gallup Europe and Friends of Europe, which proposes several ideas on how to improve the communication in the EU and how to connect with its citizens. Some of these ideas have been used by the Commission in the Green paper (for example the creation of national public forums and the focus on the young people as a target group). According to the White paper, the Commission used several sources of input by preparing the document. Such sources are the recommendations in the European Parliament Resolution on the Implementation of the European Union’s communication strategy, the views and opinions during several public events as well as contributions from different experts. (Friends of Europe (2004), COM (2006) 35: 2,5).

During the implementation of the initiatives within the framework of “Plan D” the internet forums of each initiative were open for the ideas, views and critiques of the citizens in each of all EU languages. The main points were collected and presented together with the feedback from the local programs in the final reports of each initiative. The established use of consultations before and during the implementation of the “Plan D” campaign as well as other feedback mechanisms, show clear that the Commission developed channels for feedback and critique. This was an important part of the elaboration process of the campaign and goes hand in hand with Habermas’ discursive theory. If this feedback and critique was taken into account for the future EU policy and decision making is a different topic. Unfortunately there is no information that something changed after the implementation of the “Plan D” campaign.

6.5. Influence on the political agenda

In his discursive theory Habermas visualized a political system as a representative democracy, because the institutions should filter the ideas generated by the citizens in the public debate and make sure that these views are feasible before creating decisions and laws. This means that the institutions must be responsive to the ideas which are deliberated in the public sphere. Before implementing the “Plan D” campaign the results of the Eurobarometer studies showed that more than 50% of the European citizens do not believe that their voice counts in Brussels (Borén 2007). The initiatives within the framework of “Plan D” were implemented with the goal to change this fact. Therefore it is essential to take a closer look if the ideas ventilated during the national activities were taken into consideration from the Commission.

According to the Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection, the Commission should be responsive to the citizens. In this documents is written that “the policy content of the public debate should feed into the approach taken at the end of the period of reflection” and that “the National Debates need to be structured to ensure that the feedback can have a direct impact on the policy agenda of the European Union” (COM (2005) 494: 5).

Two communications, which are based on ideas collected from the Special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe, the media, the Commission Representations in the Member States and the discussions, have followed the period of reflection - “The Period of Reflection and Plan D” and “A Citizens’ Agenda; Delivering Results for Europe”. “The Period of Reflection and Plan D” represents a summary of the collected opinions. This document shows for example that globalization has been a major issue during all National Debates. Citizens feel concerned by the social security standards and want the EU to play a more significant role in protecting against the negative effects of globalization. “A Citizens’ Agenda; Delivering Results for Europe” on the other hand proposes 12 policy initiatives. This document says that economic actions needs to go hand in hand with solidarity and therefore proposes to develop an agenda for access and solidarity as well as close coordination with the single market review. (COM (2005) 494: 5, COM (2006) 212: 4).

Accept of those two documents mentioned above there are no other publications after the implementation of the initiatives within the framework of “Plan D”. Even if the presented documents summarize the outcomes of “Plan D” there are no proposals or action plans which should translate the main points of the debates into concrete actions. In so far I can conclude that the “Plan D” campaign has not been able to influence the political agenda in order to implement relevant actions.

6.6. Strengthening the European public sphere

One of the most important elements of the deliberative democracy according to Habermas is the concept of the public sphere. Deliberation in the public sphere unites people and creates community feeling so citizens can act as a counterweight to the political institutions. One of the main problems today is that the Union suffers from a weak public sphere and many of its citizens believe that the democratic deficit and the lack of legitimacy of the EU institutions is because of the lack of a common European public sphere. Next I would like to study if the campaigns within the framework of “Plan D” contribute to a stronger European public sphere.

The lack of a strong European public sphere has been recognized as a problem in the White paper. In this document the Commission expresses concern on how this affects people’s views on European Union. The Commission’s explanation is that the absence of debate on EU level leads to public alienation from the Union. It is well known that European citizens exercise their political rights mainly at local and national level. European citizens’ participation at EU level, such as voting in European Parliament elections or referenda is not that often. Citizens are much more informed about political issues on national, regional and local level through national media and from this reason the most of the political discussions remain on national level. Because of the different geographical locations there are few meeting places where citizens from different Member States can get together and discuss political issues. Even if there are possibilities to travel, this is connected with higher travel expenses and time. Another issue is the lack of

interest in questions on a higher than the national political level (COM (2006) 35: 4-5, Borén 2007).

Within the framework of the “Plan D” campaign the Commission has focused on encouraging dialogue and debate using the already existing public spheres on national, regional and local level. According to the White paper in all “Plan D” initiatives the implementation depends mainly on the Member States:

“Europe also needs to find its place in the existing national and local “public spheres” and the public discussion across Member States must be deepened. This is first and foremost the responsibility of the public authorities in the Member States. It is the responsibility of government, at national, regional and local level, to consult and inform citizens about public policy – including European policies and their impact on people’s daily lives – and to provide the forums to give this debate life” (COM (2006) 35, 5).

The national representations of the Commission received also additional resources to increase its activities through their regional offices which should work to make people more conscious about the EU (COM (2006) 494: 5).

The Commission’s efforts to contribute directly to a European public sphere are focused mainly on creating trans-national internet forums and involvement of civil society organizations in this process. According to the “Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection”, the Commission wants to support and promote cross-border events, even if this is not the main focus of the “Plan D” initiative. Not the Commission, but NGOs created and realized the most of the trans-national initiatives related to European deliberation; the Commission had only supportive role. Regarding the development of a public sphere on EU the Commission says in the White paper:

“A working European “public sphere” cannot be shaped in Brussels. It can only emerge if the objective is backed by all key actors and taken forward at every level. The national level remains the primary entry point into any political debate, and Member States’ governments and other national actors

have a responsibility to use national channels to ensure a robust European debate” (COM (2006) 35: 11-12).

This paragraph shows the Commission’s intent to create a European public sphere through a bottom-up approach, starting by encouraging debate about Europe on national level. National authorities should cooperate with each other and develop common initiatives. The actors who are closer to the citizens are the national Parliaments, civil society, and national media. They should play an important role for generating public debate on European questions (COM (2006) 35: 11-12).

The idea used by the implementation of the “Plan D” was that a European public sphere could be created through deliberation about the EU on local, regional and national level. Even if there are NGOs that act on EU-level and connect people across boundaries, this is not enough for the establishment of a stronger European public sphere. The perspective of public sphere which is restricted to territorial divisions is contradictory to Habermas’ idea of open dialogue which transcends borders and includes all European citizens as free and equal (Ivic 2011: 19).

7. Conclusion

In my master thesis I measured the deliberative qualities of the European Commission's "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate". I built my analysis on Habermas' discursive theory by translating its main concepts into six indicators. Using the methods of content analysis and political iconography I analyzed official documents of the European Commission, the websites of the initiatives within the framework of "Plan D" and some documents of independent authors by focusing on the questions is "Plan D" providing dialogue or information, is the participation in the debate free and equal, are there channels for communication and critique and more important is the campaign influencing the political agenda of the EU. In order to answer these questions I built my thesis as a two step process – in the first phase I described five of the thirteen initiatives within the framework of "Plan D" and in the second I analyzed my empirical data for each of the 6 indicators. In this chapter I would like to summarize the results from my analysis and to discuss the deliberative qualities of "Plan D" and their effects for the legitimacy of the EU from a critical point of view.

Within the framework of "Plan D" the European Commission organized number of initiatives and projects with the goal to generate transnational deliberation of European citizens. The main purpose of the "Plan D" campaign was to help Member States to organize national debates on the future of Europe. Implementing this projects the Commission aimed at enabling a broad debate in Member States by involving not only citizens, but also civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties. "Plan D" differs in several ways from the previous communication strategies of the Commission, which have focused mainly on providing information to citizens. Commission's Vice-President Margot Wallström has developed a new approach which not only aims to inform the people, but much more emphasizes dialogue and communication with the citizens. Through my analysis I have found that there are several similarities between the "Plan D" campaign and Habermas's framework which consists of rational dialogue.

Taking closer look to the official documents of the Commission it is clear recognizable that there is an increased dialogue in order to integrate the citizens in the European project. According to the Contribution to the period of reflection the Commission aims to “stimulate a wider debate between the European Union’s democratic institutions and citizens” and that “a vision of the future of Europe needs to build on a clear view on citizen’s needs and expectations” (COM (2005) 494: 2). The White paper also underlines that “communication is essential to a healthy democracy [...] Democracy can flourish only if citizens know what is going on, and are able to participate fully” COM (2006) 35:2).

Within the framework of “Plan D” the Commission has introduced new elements with a deliberative character to European politics. It has made an effort to improve the quality and accessibility of information about EU related issues by developing a two way communication between the citizens and the institutions. The Commission provided transparency of the institutional processes and actions, in order for people to know what is going on and thereby be able to participate in a debate. Channels of communication between the EU citizens and the EU institutions were established and as a result feedback from each initiative was collected and presented on EU level. Digital technologies such as the Internet were essential for the establishment of the connection between the citizens and the EU institutions. Internet forums of each initiative were open for the ideas, views and critiques of the citizens in each of all EU languages. The Commission was open to listen to the critique of the citizens, which was expressed through the forums. It also encourages deliberative initiatives by independent actors on transnational level which can be seen as the first step in direction of an independent European public sphere.

On the other hand there are several elements of the Commission’s new communication strategy that does not fit with the Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy. One of the main concepts of deliberation is the function of the public sphere. The Commission made the first step to create a European public sphere by encouraging NGOs and independent actors to act on EU-level and connect people across boundaries. Nevertheless this is not

enough for the establishment of a stronger common European public sphere. According to Habermas, deliberation should have the power to transform preferences. Even if there was an open debate during the initiatives of „Plan D“, the campaign did not make a substantive change of European citizenship and decision making process in the EU. The main idea of deliberation is that what is common has to be decided in public. Unfortunately even if feedback was collected, there are no proposals or action plans which should translate the main points of the debates into concrete actions. Another problematical aspect is the openness and equality of the debates. The participants in the most “Plan D” represent much more the young EU elites than the regular EU citizens. The Commission also recognizes that not all groups in the society are represented in the same way in the debates. Young people and minorities seem to be still excluded.

All this examples show that the “Plan D” campaign has some deliberative qualities, but still not enough in order to influence the political agenda and to straighten the political legitimacy. Some progress was made in comparison with the earlier communication strategies of the Commission, but there is still a lot of work to be done in order to reach significant results.

Deliberation is hard to measure, especially in the case of the EU which is a complex structure with numerous actors on different levels. From this reason it is not easy to find out how the implementation of the new communication strategy functions in reality. I built my analysis from a top-down perspective, analyzing mainly the official documents of the Commission and the homepages of the initiatives. The citizens’ perspective was studied only by analyzing the final documents of the initiatives within the framework of “Plan D”. If I have used different approach like bottom-up analysis by researching the participants’ perspective through interviews, I probably would have figured out different outcomes.

Next I would like to discuss the deliberative qualities of the “Plan D” campaign from a critical point of view. In the previews chapter I presented in detail the main deliberative qualities of the campaign. Although the new communication strategy has some deliberative elements, it did not fulfill its basic purpose. According to Margot Wallström the core idea of the “Plan D”

was transformation of the EU in accordance of expectations of its citizens. The fact that Treaty of Lisbon was ratified without open and public debate shows clear that European Citizens are still excluded from the decision making process in the EU and this is contradictory to Habermas' concept of citizens as actors of political changes.

The initiatives within the framework of "Plan D" campaign improved the debate on the EU related themes, but they did not produce deliberation. Dialogue and debate do not automatically lead to deliberation. According to Habermas, deliberation is based on the idea that the common matters had to be decided in public. The process of debating does not necessarily lead to transformation of preferences and change. The result of the open dialogue and consultations during the implementation of "Plan D" is only a list of 27 recommendations, but do not include any concrete actions. These recommendations were presented to the European leaders in the December 2007, but they did not make a substantive change of European citizenship and decision making process in the EU.

Another problem is represented by the concept of the "public sphere". In the "Plan D" the public sphere is presented as a local, regional or national element. This perspective is contradictory to Habermas' idea of open dialogue which transcends borders and includes all European citizens as free and equal. The public spheres cannot be perceived as different spheres or struggles such as ethnic, class and religious. The "Plan D" campaign does not provide the opportunity of the realization of heterogeneous projects, which is the basic characteristic of Habermas' concept of a democratic public sphere.

The Commission's new communication strategy visibly aims at reconnecting with the European citizens through a deliberative approach, which is similar to Habermas's discursive theory. But in reality the process of transforming the attitudes of people and politicians is not so easy. Even though the Commission created projects and activities in order to stimulate debate and dialogue, only few common citizens were engaged in the deliberative projects. There are limits to what a communication strategy can do, and even though it led to increased debates, it did not include a reform of the EU institutions. Due to limited public participation in national project and

the lack of institutional reform, the actual impact of “Plan D” on the legitimacy of the EU is much weaker than in Habermas’s theory. In the previous chapters it is argued that deliberation leads towards more inclusive citizenship. Within the framework of the “Plan D” deliberation is reduced to a mere debate and does not lead to transformation and change. In summary, the Commission’s “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” does not reflect deliberative democracy, although it has some of its basic elements. But the failure of European Commission’s “Plan D” can serve as a good example for future European initiatives.

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