

AGORA

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Editorial

We give here a description of the citizens' AGORA put in place by the European Parliament, the first meeting of which will take place on 8 and 9 November 2007 in Brussels.

Below, you will find indications of the basic themes which will be considered, VIVANT-EUROPE's contribution to the AGORA (+ its appendix) and how you or your association may submit a contribution.

This AGORA is an important step towards a form of democracy that caters for the participation of civil society.

1. THE CITIZENS' AGORA

The original aims of the European project have largely been achieved. Peace, stability and prosperity are now a reality for most Europeans.

Yet beyond reunifying the continent, the European Union now faces new challenges.

This year -- to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome -- the European Parliament has opened up a new forum for dialogue with EU citizens. Its name is the Agora and its subject is the future of the European Union.

What Europe can do for you - and what you can do for Europe

Revitalising European integration requires a strong and permanent link with EU citizens. It is not enough to tell people that Europe is being built for them - Europe needs to be built with them. Making this idea clear, and acting on it, is absolutely essential to restore trust.

The European Parliament wants not just to communicate with citizens, **but genuinely to consult them.**

The role of the Agora

What the Parliament proposes here is to combine the best aspects of direct democracy, by mobilising European civil society representatives, such as networks of associations, professional organisations and trade unions, with representative democracy, as embodied at European level by the European Parliament.

This combination could be called the "AGORA", as a tribute to the first public debating forum established by Athenian "direct" democracy, which is at the root of our European democracy.

The Agora, as a forum, would combine the voices of European citizens with those of their elected representatives. It would give its participants an opportunity to (re)define the terms of European debate and to come up with concrete policies, based on everyday experience, to tackle the problems facing the Union.

From stating the problem to achieving a consensus

The Agora is a "pre-legislative" tool. It will work during the drafting of reports in parliamentary committees, i.e. **before** a particular subject is discussed in plenary.

The Agora could also help build **consensus**.

A new way to establish dialogue between EU citizens and institutions

Parliament aims **to transcend** the traditional sector-specific structures of civil society (social affairs, the environment, development, education, and so on), so as to enable opposing points of view to be heard and either a consensus or the full range of options to emerge.

This open and broad consultation would also be **a valuable complement** to the current programme of committee hearings. Such hearings, which are an essential means of enlightening Members of Parliament by providing them with expert information, are still one-off events and are not extended to the large network of European civil society, which often feels left out of the process.

Finally, the Agoras will differ from past citizens' fora held in all Member States in that they will be open to participants from **different countries**, regardless of their national origin. Agoras will enable electors and elected, from all civil society sectors and all EU Member States, to gather together to openly discuss the future of our continent.

Relations with other EU institutions

Other EU institutions would have everything to gain from the success of this venture and are natural partners of the citizens' Agora. A concerted partnership of all the EU institutions around the Agora project could result in **a win-win situation** for each of them.

The Council could encourage its members to publicise Parliament's initiative at an early stage among civil society bodies in their respective countries so as to build popular interest in the project.

The Commission could adopt the Agora as **a new operational tool** in its continuous efforts to improve communication between the Union and European citizens. It could incorporate some of the Agora's conclusions into its own prospective political reflection, and possibly even its legislative initiatives.

The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Council, given their specific roles, could be involved in determining the work of the Agora and even be invited to express their views in an expert capacity.

Organisation of work

The Agoras will be held in the European Parliament's hemicycle in Brussels **every six months**. 500 representatives from civil society organisations will be invited to each event.

Agoras will be organised in three phases: a) preparation and drafting of the working documents with the help of the Agora web site; b) two-day debates in the Parliament, where conclusions will be drawn up; c) dissemination of the final reports to all parties.

The Conference of Presidents, which represents Parliament's political groups on a proportional basis, will decide an annual work schedule and choose issues of interest to all citizens as topics for Agora meetings.

The parliamentary committees would, on account of their expertise in specific areas, be the bodies best able to determine whom to invite. They would therefore be responsible for the accreditation of European civil society organisations. Each committee would be in charge of issues falling within its sphere of competence under the EP Rules of Procedure.

Each Agora meeting debate would be wound up by two moderators, one chosen among MEPs or representatives from other EU Institutions, and the other from the invited organisations.

By contrast, the rapporteurs in charge of drawing up workshop conclusions will instead be chosen only from among the 500 civil society members. There will be two or three rapporteurs for each of the five workshops. Their role is particularly sensitive.

Rapporteurs will be initially responsible for preparing a discussion document before the meeting takes place, with the help of the contributions sent by the participants on the Agora web site.

Moreover, they will take charge of preparing a single recto-verso page paper summing up the consensus or the range of options that emerged from the discussions. These papers are the official conclusions of the Agora and will be therefore taken on board by the Parliament.

Each organisation involved is asked to choose only one of its members to participate in the Agora. The choice of whom to send to Brussels is up to the organisation itself.

The first Agora will take place **on 8 and 9 November 2007** and focus on the future of Europe: challenges, opportunities and tools presented by the new treaties. At the beginning of next year, other themes such as climate change and the social dimension of the EU will be discussed during a second Agora.

Follow-up to Agora debates

The Agora's conclusion on a particular theme would be taken up not only by MEPs in their own reflection (e.g. in amendments) but would also be brought to the attention of Parliament's committees and/or the other EU institutions concerned. Incorporating some or all of these conclusions would clearly show that citizens' views are genuinely being taken into account.

The conclusions will be sent to the EU and national institutions and to all organisations involved. The civil society organisations will also contribute, via their networks, to the dissemination of Agora final reports.

Following the second Agora, scheduled for the beginning of 2008, the Parliamentary bodies involved will assess the results. They may decide to adjust its form and substance in the light of results to date.

On the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, the European Parliament is making a remarkable bet - and one that citizens should be ready to take.

The first Agora: the future of Europe (8 - 9 November 2007)

By the end of 2007 the EU treaties should be revised by an Intergovernmental Conference, incorporating the substance of the innovative provisions contained in the draft Constitutional Treaty.

The European Parliament therefore invites European civil society to reflect and comment freely and frankly on these institutional reforms, to voice its views and expectations and to define its role within the new framework.

With this in mind, over two days, the 500 members of the Agora will have a chance to debate five fundamental issues.

2. INDICATIONS OF THE BASIC THEMES TO BE CONSIDERED

1. Workshop A – TASKS

The European Union is to tackle new topics and new solidarity. How should it address them?

Matters to be raised (list for guidance only):

- The European social dimension
- Climate protection
- Energy supply and energy interdependence
- Immigration policy
- An integrated European diplomatic service

2. Workshop B – RIGHTS

The European Union is to establish new rights. How are these to be understood?

Matters to be raised (list for guidance only):

- Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Practical effects of the UK's opt-out from the Charter
- Introduction of a right enabling the general public to petition the Commission

3. Workshop C – TOOLS

The European Union is to acquire new tools. How should they be used?

Matters to be raised (list for guidance only):

- Nomination of the Commission President and Commissioners
- Virtually universal legislative codecision with a double majority within the Council
- Transparency of the Council's legislative process
- Stability of the European Council Presidency
- Budget procedure

4. Workshop D – BORDERS

The European Union wishes to enhance its geo-political role. How should it envisage this new relationship with the rest of the world?

Matters to be raised (list for guidance only):

- Deployment of a European diplomatic staff under a single head
- Criteria for accession to the European Union and integration capacity

- Neighbourhood relations and conflict-prevention policy
- Development policy and support for democratisation processes

5. Workshop E – HORIZONS

The European Union is to agree on an institutional compromise in order to break the deadlock in certain areas. How should the future stages of European integration be envisaged?

Matters to be raised (list for guidance only):

- Ways of consulting and informing the people of Europe and enabling them to take decisions
- The structure of European civil society and ways in which it can act
- A new power enabling the European Parliament to amend the treaties
- Simplifying the machinery of Europe's institutions and making its workings more transparent

The Agora will conclude with a special plenary session on Friday, 9 November.

3. THE TWO-DAY PROGRAMME (provisional)

Thursday, 8 November

- 08.30 - 09.30: Arrival of participants + accreditations / badges
- 10.00 - 12.30: Opening ceremony with contributions by guest speakers
 - Presentation of the Agora and the working groups
 - First plenary debate
- 12.30: Press Conference, held by the European Parliament
- 12.30 - 15.00: Lunch
- 15.00 - 18.00: Working Group meetings
- 18.00 - 20.00: Rapporteurs' meeting to draft the workshops' reports

Friday, 9 November

- 09.00 - 12.00: Working Group meetings to finalise conclusive reports
- 12.00: Lunch
- 14.00 - 16.00: Plenary session
 - Presentation of working group conclusions
 - General conclusions
- 16.00: Press Conference, held by the Agora rapporteurs

4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF VIVANT-EUROPE

**To the Agora of the European Parliament
(8-9 November 2007)**

Workshop A – TASKS

The European Union is to tackle new topics and new solidarity. How should it address them?

First proposal : to abolish taxes on work

VIVANT-EUROPE believes that it is necessary to burdening the work done by European citizens with taxes that encourage the migration of jobs.

Taxes on work kill employment, deprive Europe of its skills and endanger the funding of our social security.

The funding of European social security should come from **a consumption tax on finished products (not on services) and in a manner that does not increase prices.**

Such a reform is essential for Europe's socio-economic future, for it guarantees social security funding and by removing taxes on work gives free play to initiatives.

(See "Examples of applications" in annex.)

Second proposal : To institutionalise the unconditional basic income at the European level

The introduction of the unconditional basic income is a measure of socio-economic integration in the same way as the introduction of the EURO was a measure of monetary integration. (See annex.)

The introduction of the Basic Income should be the result of a deliberate choice – a political decision as radical as that concerning the introduction of the EURO.

Member States must therefore transfer some of their powers to the European Union, in the framework of **shared and support competences**, so as to establish fiscal harmonisation and introduce a European basic income the amount of which would be based on each country's GDP.

Such a choice would be a distinguishing feature of Europe.

By guaranteeing institutionally a certain level of purchasing power, the Basic Income would support economic and social stability and provide insurance against the risks inherent in job mobility.

The Basic Income can become the essential feature governing legislation, the economy and social affairs.

To reach that end, **steps** must be defined – as was the case on the introduction of the EURO.

Steps

The first five steps * required for introducing VIVANT's socio-economic model are carried out at the level of each Member State within the framework of **European support measures.**

****Progressive introduction of the Vivant model***

1st step : Abolition of the need for individuals to make tax declarations

2nd step : Introduction of unconditional free sickness insurance

3rd step : Introduction of the Basic Income for those of 18 to 25 years

4th step : Progressive introduction of the Basic Income for those of 25 to 65 years

5th step : Extension of the Basic Income to children and pensioners

6th step : Application of the alternative funding method at the European level

7th step : Abolition of all taxation of services

8th step : Introduction of the Basic Income in developing countries. (Introduced in Brazil from 2004)

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The European Union should be able, with political will and institutional strength, to enable all member States to reach the 7th step, which requires **fiscal harmonisation**.

At the same time as implementing this latter step, why not set up a European economic government ?

To institutionalise the Basic Income and to create the political and financial means to implement it – THAT IS VIVANT’S PROPOSAL.

VIVANT-EUROPE

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5. ANNEX TO VIVANT-EUROPE’S CONTRIBUTION

Agora 8 and 9 November 2007

A. Examples of applications

1. **When building a house** it’s the labour that really costs the money.

Under the new system (VIVANT’S socio-economic model), tax on labour is abolished while taxes on machine-made goods are increased, so that the overall cost of the house remains unchanged. For VIVANT, respect for the humanity of the individual means taxing not his labour, but what machines produce. **In this way, machines will bring freedom to men and women instead of depriving them of their jobs.**

2. **A consultation with a general medical practitioner** today costs about €20, which includes the doctor’s taxes and social security contributions.

Under the new system, the consultation costs not more than €10, which represents a saving both for the patient and for the social security system.

B. Ways of collecting consumption tax

To limit occasions for fraud, VIVANT-EUROPE **proposes two methods :**

1. To limit companies’ recuperation of consumption tax

The consumption tax paid on goods used only in the production or manufacture of finished goods is recuperable because the former, being inputs, are not consumed as end products.

All inputs into production processes, such as raw materials or intermediate materials (fuel, packaging, vehicle and machine maintenance, etc.) are considered intermediate products and any VAT or consumption tax paid on them can be recuperated because they contribute directly to the process of manufacture or transformation.

On the other hand, consumption tax paid on purchasing investments in finished products which do not necessarily contribute to manufacture or transformation (such as buildings, machines, computers, office furniture, heating, vehicles, telephonic and other equipment) is not recuperable.

2. To limit the number of actors in the market who actually collect consumption tax :

either by collection at the factory gate, as is suggested by Pierre Aunac, a French economist (“This is the whole point of a consumption tax conceived as a social VAT, paid directly by corporations to the social organisations, as social contributions now are.”)

or by collection at the wholesaler level

For example, the recuperation system should obviously apply to a wholesaler of heating equipment. But there is no point in applying it to those who install the heating systems. For control purposes, resources could thus be concentrated on the one wholesaler rather than spread between his 50 customers who install his goods. In practice, then, the latter would not have to claim reimbursement of consumption tax.

The same would apply to small retailers such as bookshops, florists, cafés and restaurants.

Collection of consumption tax will thus be carried **out more economically and effectively**, at a limited number of points in the distribution chain, and may be combined with fiscal, health and environmental traceability at the European level.

C. Consumption taxes (social VAT) and compensatory measures

The concerns of VIVANT-EUROPE are purchasing power and equity.

The measures put forward by VIVANT-EUROPE necessary for the introduction of a consumption tax (social VAT) **which will be socially just** are of five kinds :

1. A variable VAT rate (from 0 to 42 %)

2. The maintenance of purchasing power by means of an unconditional monthly basic income that may be combined with other income

(From 0 to 17 years : 150 € /From 18 to 24 years : 444 € /From 25 to 64 ans : 600 € /Beyond 65 years : 888 €

3. A progressive income tax (up to 1500 € per month there is no income tax ; beyond that a rate of 50 % applies) (see table below)

4. A tax on financial transaction (inspired by the Tobin tax) (0,1 %)

5. An inheritance tax adapted to the economic requirements of the targeted investments

6. HOW TO SUBMIT A CONTRIBUTION TO THE FORUM OF THE CITIZEN’S AGORA

In the language of your choice, you can address your contribution to VIVANT-EUROPE which will place it on the forum.

Address : jpbrasseur@vivant.org

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Send by email:

- your message in text format, (Two maximum pages)
- a maximum of 3 annexes, attached to your contribution,
- your agreement for your name and email address to be published on the forum,
- all citizens wishing to react to your contribution can then either contact you directly or send a message to the participating organisation of their choice, stating your contribution as a reference.

This organisation may either attach any submitted reactions to your contribution or decide to start a new discussion thread on the forum.

[The site of the AGORA FORUM is here.](#)

Why contribute on this forum?

Contributions placed on the forum will form the basis for summaries of the discussions carried out for each workshop. Teams of writers will be formed for this purpose, whose aim will be:

- to read and analyse the contributions made on the forum by participating organisations. The teams of writers must therefore have a clear and precise idea of the available issues and options.
- to draft, on the basis of the items posted on the forum by participating organisations, a text (2 sides per team of writers) which will act as a basis for the debates in each workshop.
- to take note of participants' reactions during the Thursday afternoon workshops, and to adapt their texts in order to take these reactions into account (what agreements are there? what differing options should be highlighted?). A working group meeting for this purpose, reserved for the teams of writers, is foreseen on the Thursday evening.
- to finalise their text "in real time" during the Friday morning workshop meeting, in terms of participants' reactions (raising any final uncertainties, agreements or differences of opinion).
- to present, in a clear manner, summaries of their workshop/s during the Friday afternoon session.
- to present the main points made in their workshop/s during the press conference concluding the Agora.

The writers are therefore both the "pen" and the spokesperson for their respective workshops in each Agora session and for the media.