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German-speaking Community of Belgium becomes world's first region with permanent citizen participation drafted by lot

Ambitious model for innovating democracy designed by G1000

Eupen, 26th of February 2019. *The German speaking community of Belgium is to have a permanent system of political participation using citizens' drawn by lot, next to the existing parliament. Following a model designed in collaboration with experts from the G1000 organization, a permanent Citizen Council will decide each year on the topics needing consultation. Each of them will be debated by an independent Citizens' Assembly leading to concrete policy recommendations. Both bodies will be composed of citizens drafted by lot. The Parliament of the German-speaking community engages itself to implement these recommendations in their policy-making process.*

A milestone for deliberative democracy

During its plenary session last night, 25th of February 2019, the Parliament of the German speaking Community of Belgium in Eupen has voted with a large majority to institutionalize citizens drawn by lot in political decision-making.

With this decision, the smallest region in Belgium and Europe is writing history: nowhere in the world will everyday citizens be so consistently involved with shaping the future of their region.

In times of historic low trust in party-politics, the German-speaking citizens of Belgium will have the competence to put issues on the political agenda, propose their own policy proposals and monitor the follow-up of these recommendations by their parliament and government. Politicians in turn will be able to submit difficult and thorny issues to independent Citizens' Assemblies.

A worldwide trend

Ever since the [G1000 Citizen Summit in 2011](#), the idea of a permanent citizen council drawn by lot has been receiving increasing interest as a solution for the

current democratic crisis. Cities such as Gdansk and Madrid are already drafting people by lot on a regular basis for public deliberation. (The murdered Polish mayor Paweł Adamowicz was a strong supporter of the idea.) Ireland has used Citizens' Assemblies using random samples of about one hundred citizens for a number of important constitutional changes on topics such as gay marriage and abortion. In both cases, the proposals put forward by everyday citizens were ratified in a national referendum.

The German Speaking Community of Belgium already experimented with a Citizen Dialogue on childcare. The results were so encouraging that several political parties started looking for ways of making this citizens' dialogue permanent.

The “Ostbelgien Model”: A long-term Citizen Council combined with short-term Citizens' Assemblies

As of September 2019 a Citizen Council (*Bürgerrat*) consisting of 24 members will propose policy recommendations to the elected parliament on its own initiative or after a request. In doing this, the Council will rely on recommendations drafted by regular, independent Citizens' Assemblies drawn by lot (*Bürgerversammlungen*). Parliament has to respond to the recommendations.

Members of the Citizens' Council hold their seat for a year and a half. They are drawn by lot from previous members of the Citizens' Assemblies and convene once a month. A Citizens' Assembly on the other hand will normally last about three weekends over three months and has a maximum of 50 members. The Citizen Council will be able to decide how large a specific a Citizens' Assembly needs to be and how long a given topic should be debated. Participation by citizens is not mandatory, but a daily fee will be given to those who do. The composition of both bodies, Citizen Council and Citizen Assemblies, needs to be representative in terms of gender, age, education and residence. Extra criteria can be added, if needed.

The regional Parliament will fix an annual budget, based on a proposal by the Citizens' Council. The work of the Citizen Council and the Citizens' Assemblies are supported by a Permanent Secretariat.

G1000 developed and designed the “Ostbelgien Model”

The vote of the German-speaking Parliament was based on a model developed by researchers from the Belgian G1000 organisation together with international experts in the field of deliberative democracy. Prof. David Farrell, one of the architects of the Irish Citizens' Assemblies was one of them, as was Dr. Marcin Gerwin, who has developed the deliberative processes used in the city of Gdansk.

At the invitation of regional Parliament, the G1000 platform brought together 13 experts (names below) from Belgium and abroad in Eupen, the capital of the German-speaking region. They developed the “Ostbelgien Model” after extensive consultation with the different political parties and the public administration. The

result is an ambitious model for a permanent representation of citizens through sortition as a complement to the existing political institutions and processes.

The G1000 and the panel of experts

The panel consisted of prof. David Farrell (University College Dublin, architect of the Irish processes), dr. Marcin Gerwin (Gdansk, architect of the Polish processes), prof. Graham Smith (University of Westminster), Luca Belgiorno-Nettis (newDemocracy, Australia), Claudia Chwalisz (author on deliberative processes in Canada and Australia), Carsten Berg (European Citizens' Initiative Campaign) en dr. Brett Hennig (Sortition Foundation).

For the G1000 were present: prof. Min Reuchamps (UCLouvain), dr. Yves Dejaeghere (UAntwerpen), dr. David Van Reybrouck (author), drs. Christoph Niessen (UCLouvain), Katrin Stangherlin (legal expert and co-author of a book on the German speaking region) and Benoît Derenne (CEO of the Foundation for Future Generations Generaties). Moderation was done by Cato Leonard (Glassroots).

Quotes:

G1000-cofounder en author **David Van Reybrouck**: *"This is a world premier. With this decision, the German-speaking region of Belgium effectively becomes a laboratory for the rest of Europe. With its 76.000 inhabitants, it is one of the smallest regions of Europa, but its powers are comparable with those of North Rhine-Westphalia, Catalonia and Scotland. Let Europe learn something from what is going on in Eupen (the capital of the region).*

G1000-director **Yves Dejaeghere**: *"Policy makers at all levels in Europe are struggling these days in how to respond to ever more vocal and critical citizens. The German-speaking community has made a timely start of looking at solutions to this tendency. It has chosen to give each citizen an equal opportunity to help develop future policy in an informed and structured way. From now on, Eupen will be the place where people will go and see how we can do politics in the 21st century."*

G1000-cofounder and CEO of the Foundation for Future Generations **Benoît Derenne**: *«This is a crucial step in democratic innovation. The model is based on many years of experience, but precisely because it is plugged into the existing political system, it is one of the most far-reaching models to date. The views which non-elected citizens and elected politicians hold of each other will evolve positively – as will the relationship between them. Citizenship in Ostbelgien will change for the better this way. That's our deepest wish.»*

A press conference (mostly in German) is scheduled Monday the 25th of February at 4.30 PM at the parliament of the German-speaking community ahead of the vote in plenary session. Please contact Miss Pelzer of the communication staff of the Parliament for more details (Myriam.Pelzer@staff.pdq.be)

About the G1000

The G1000 is a platform for democratic innovation. We develop, support and promote new forms of deliberation that strengthen democracy, from the local to the international level. We believe that a modern democracy should provide more opportunities for regular citizens.

See www.g1000.org for more information

Since its foundation, the G1000 has been adopted by the Foundation for Future Generations, a stable partner with over twenty years of experience in the field of sustainable development and deliberative democracy. The Foundation is in charge of legal, administrative, financial and fiscal aspects of our work.

See <https://www.foundationfuturegenerations.org/en> for more information.

To keep its political independence, the G1000 uses support from citizens and foundations.

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Appendix: Scheme of the proposed model

