

# **Workshop Report**

## **“How to make your voice heard in European politics”**

Organized by Transparency International Hungary

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On April 1st, 2014, Transparency International Hungary organized a workshop in Budapest on the question “What can you do to be heard in European politics?”. Two young members of Transparency International’s Brussels-based chapter, the EU Liaison Office, came to Hungary as one of their stop of the ‘EP2014 Watch Europe integrity round trip’ - organized in occasion of the upcoming EP elections.

What is it that can we do to be heard in European Union politics? One very important deed is to go and vote on the European Parliamentary Elections between May 22nd and 25th. Are you not quite sure whom to vote for? Do you not really know who the candidate are? You can find your answers on the website [Europe Decides](#), which is an initiative launched by Burson-Marsteller Brussels. Here, you can find all candidates and their political parties, also, you can check the news, forecasts, poll results and many more.

Going to vote on the EP Elections is not the only way to make yourself heard in European politics. Did you know that if you need an EU document, for example, for your thesis or for a blog you are writing, but you cannot find it online, you can send a request to the respective European body and they are required to send it to you? All of the documents that are requested via the website [Ask the EU](#) are made public after they are sent to the person who needed them. The process can be very long (they have 15 working days to reply to your request), so you might not need the document any more, but just by requesting it you can help others. If someone else needs the same file, they will have access to it immediately. However, the process is not very easy, you need to sign up to be able to send in your request, then you should be very specific about what you want and from whom you want it, because if you send it to the wrong body, you might not get a response. Another way of getting information about the EU issues is to go to one of the Europe Points that are established in many European cities and ask your questions there. Another possibility is to simply address EU officials directly by sending e-mails and making phone calls. You have the right to ask questions and to get information, so exercise this right!

Another very important program is The European Citizens' Initiative. This program enables you to make recommendations to the European Commission to pass a legislative proposal. Naturally, this is not as easy as it sounds. If you have an issue that you think is a problem in the EU and should be changed, here is what you can do. First, you need to check whether this is an issue that lies within the power of the European Commission to change. For example, the fact that university diplomas are not universally accepted can cause much trouble to internationally oriented students. It would make sense to harmonize it and make them accepted in all EU countries. However, education is regulated nationally, and the Commission cannot do much about it yet. But questions about youth mobility, the environment or media and data protection are within the power of the EC to change.



After you find a problem that can be solved on a supranational level, there are several steps that need to be addressed. First, you need six other people from six different countries to stand by your idea, and to register the initiative with you on the website for [citizens initiatives](#). Second, you need to collect one million signatures from one million European citizens, to support your claim. If this happens, the Commission is required by law to take your idea into consideration and to pass a legislative proposal on the issue to the Parliament. Your purpose should be simple and stated clearly for all citizens to understand, since you seek their support. The first initiative that was launched was *Fraternité 2020*, their objective aims at increasing citizen mobility through exchange programmes, by allocating more funds to programmes like Erasmus. This initiative did not fulfill all the requirements; it did not collect one million signatures. However, the Commission realized it was valid initiative and discussed it, resulting in the Erasmus Plus program, for example.

If you prefer not to launch your own initiative, but are willing to support a particular idea, you can always assist in the open initiatives (more information can be found [here](#)). To reach an increasing number of interesting people, volunteers are always needed for these projects to translate webpages and promotional material to national languages, for example. Also, you can support an initiative by signing it, it does not cost anything apart from some of your time, and you actually did something to make your voice heard!

If you want to do something as a European citizen to make this Union a better place, and better suited for you, you can start by going to vote in May, then follow by asking your questions,

requiring information on what matters to you, and by signing one of the European Citizens' Initiatives or coming up with your own. Do it. Make your voice heard!