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# Electronic Participation Policies and Initiatives in the European Union Institutions

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## Abstract

Electronic participation (eParticipation) is increasingly employed by governments worldwide to broaden and deepen political participation. This is evident from the large number of relevant policy documents, initiatives, and platforms. In Europe, besides national governments, European Union (EU) Institutions are also actively promoting eParticipation. In this article, the authors investigate the eParticipation policies and current initiatives in the EU Institutions and introduce a theoretical framework upon which eParticipation-related documents and initiatives can be evaluated against parameters generated by democracy and governance theory. The main results of the survey indicate that the emphasis on hierarchical governance modes and emerging network elements employed by the EU in its rhetoric and implemented via eParticipation initiatives proclaimed the will to ensure legitimacy and expand connectivity between strong and weak publics in an open communication strategy.

## Keywords

eParticipation initiatives, European governance, democratic theory, European institutions, European legislation, mode of governance, participation rationale

## Introduction

While the original proposal for a united Europe was based on an economic rationale and the completion of a common market, over the years the focus was reallocated to the civil, social, and political constituents of the concept of citizenship. European citizens do not possess direct influence on the European institutions, as the democratic regime of the Union was based on representative democracy. However, a number of structural problems related to decision-making ramifications led to a legitimacy crisis and the democratic deficit, primarily invoked by the perceived lack of

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democracy and the inaccessibility of the European Union (EU) bodies to citizens due to their opaque *modus operandi*<sup>1</sup> (Lebessis & Paterson, 1999).

After the Treaty of Maastricht, EU institutions came across a paradox: citizens seem to share European ideals but at the same time manifest an increasing mistrust toward EU institutions and their activities. This mistrust is mainly rooted in the failure of the institutions to explain the reasons behind policies, which resulted in the declining image of the European edifice (European Commission COM (2001)354, European Commission, (2006) 189b).

In its first attempts to rectify this paradox, the EU has been geared toward reconnecting Europe with its citizens by building more effective policies, increasing transparency, and revisiting its communication policies. (Dunkerley & Fudge, 2004; European Commission, COM (2001) 428). The emergent need for transparency became evident due to the deficiency of European democracy and technocratic decision making and both Member States and the Commission committed to transparency and openness to enable citizens to monitor the exercise of powers in the institutions (Diamandouros, 2006; Héritier, 2003).

At the same time, the rapid penetration of the web prepares the ground for facilitating these attempts. Specifically, the emergence and development of Electronic Participation (eParticipation) can help address the democratic deficit and reinforce good governance. New, technologically empowered forms of communication could allow citizens to express their views, form communities, and partake in the decision-making process as well as fortify the relationship between citizens and elected representative bodies. Additionally, the current debate on Europe elicits the need for involving citizens in a permanent dialogue (European Commission, COM (2007)568).

In this article, the authors explore the use of eParticipation in EU institutions on a theoretical as well as practical level. In particular, the central objective is to introduce a theoretical framework upon which eParticipation-related documents and initiatives can be evaluated against parameters generated by democracy and governance theory. For this purpose, the legal documents generated by the EU and the eParticipation platforms in EU institutions are identified and examined.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: the first section presents the theoretical background, where the connection between the importance of citizens' participation in different modes of governance and their corresponding role in eParticipation is discussed, while the second section outlines the methodology. Sections 3 and 4 present the results of the survey in EU legislative documents and eParticipation initiatives in the European institutions as well their linkage with the theoretical section. Finally, in the discussion section, the authors reflect on the main findings of the previous sections. Having analyzed democratic and participation aspects, the authors apply a taxonomy to the policy documents and initiatives identified with respect to their participation rationale and their assumed mode of governance in order to elucidate linkages between theory and practice and then comment on the potential contribution of eParticipation initiatives to the benefits identified above.

## Theoretical Background

If eParticipation is defined as “the use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives” (Macintosh, 2004), then we need to specify how technology-enabled initiatives relate to existing democratic institutional arrangements. These can usefully be theorized in terms of the way they combine three archetypal modes of governance—market, hierarchy, and network (Frances, Levačić, Mitchell, & Thompson, 1991)—since the intended benefits and possible democratic effects of different types of political participation will differ in different modes of governance. It is also suggested that the dominant mode of governance in the EU combines hierarchical elements, notably the European Parliament, with a more pronounced network *modus operandi*

centered on the committees and expert groups used extensively in policy formulation by the European Commission (Smith, 2009). Similarly, participation is ascribed a different value according to different models of democracy: for example, the representative tradition reveals a preference for the liberties of private citizens, whose will is aggregated through market-like mechanisms such as elections and referenda; the assembly model stresses political participation of active citizens who come together as a community in search of mutual understanding; and the deliberative tradition insists on the formation of critical public opinion independent from, but guaranteed by, the state (Auberger & Iszkowski, (2007). In the deliberative model the heart of the politics is the public sphere where fairness of decisions is guaranteed by procedures that derive from structure of communication (Kies, 2010).

Bearing in mind that what counts as political participation is not a constant (Schwartz, 1984),<sup>2</sup> it is therefore possible to identify the mode/modes of participation that any given eParticipation initiative aims to generate, and then to evaluate how well or badly this corresponds to the relevant mode/modes of governance.

A critical source of variation is the role played by intermediaries. Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978) demonstrated how the strength and structure of institutional intermediaries such as parties and voluntary organizations can produce an equalizing effect on political participation, as institutional mediation either makes up for a lack of individual resources which would normally inhibit one or another mode of participation, or restricts the conversion of socioeconomic resources into political participation to the organizationally affiliated. However, their thesis assumes that what matters is direct participation and intermediation is an explanatory variable. An alternative model views affiliation to a political organization as an important form of participation in itself, regardless of whether or not it makes an individual more or less likely to vote, campaign, or cooperate with other members of a political community. This rests on the assumption that the mediating role of political organizations extends to the physical and/or symbolic representation of social interests and identities. Morales found that some “political opportunity structures” are more open than others to this form of participation, and that “two dimensions of openness—the fragmentation of political elites and the porousness of interest representation systems—seem to be clearly [positively] related to political membership” (2009, p. 183).<sup>3</sup> This finding is significant since it cautions against the crude opposition between participation and representation which often characterizes debates about elite versus participatory democracy (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 7), instead viewing acts of participation and acts of representation or delegation as integrally connected within a given mode of governance.<sup>4</sup> In fact this position also finds support in Robert Dahl’s elucidation of democratic theory from a pluralist perspective. Dahl first exposes the practical limitations to “assembly democracy” with regard to space–time coordination, limits which he insists are not overcome through electronic communication (Cohen & Arato, 1994, pp. 105–106), but more importantly, what Dahl calls “effective participation” is actually achieved through forming or joining organizations and electing representatives in addition to expression and information (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 92). Effective participation is normatively defined as follows: “Before a policy is adopted by the association, all the members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be” (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 37). Hence, the practical task for democratizing our society at a national or an international level is conceived in terms of making more robust the forms of “popular participation and control” (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 113) that are intrinsic to representative systems of government and to elite bargaining (a form of network governance), both of which are seen as essential elements of any system of good governance on a large scale.

Structural theory of social practice also provides strong arguments for viewing participation and representation as complementary dimensions of a political system. For example, Bourdieu’s critique of democracy rests on an identification of two moments of dispossession in orthodox liberal democratic arrangements: one form of dispossession is inherent in aggregative mechanisms of direct democracy like the vote, the poll, the referendum, or the opinion survey, which alienate social agents from

their opinions by mechanically aggregating preferences without their direct involvement, or at best reduce citizens to consumers, able only to choose between externally defined policy options, and furthermore, the political competence to form a personal political opinion on the basis of which one can make an informed choice is a socially determined disposition which is unequally distributed in class-divided societies. The (interim) solution to this form of dispossession is the “social technology” of delegation, which produces public opinion by constituting a social group with a collective will and its own species of symbolic capital. Delegation therefore empowers, and it particularly empowers the most deprived groups in society who are unable to express political opinions in language that the political system recognizes except through delegation (Bourdieu, 1973/2000). For all its strengths, however, delegation in turn generates a second moment of dispossession, since the delegate (the legitimate spokesperson for the group) is always liable to usurp the right of expression by interpreting collective opinion unilaterally, for example, in accordance with their own personal interests. In this case, the only solution lies in the creation of adequate means of communication between delegate and group such that the former can be held to account (Bourdieu, 2001). Democratizing this relationship would require a means of communication which could serve to integrate a group on an enduring basis and develop the capability of each individual to “produce” political opinion within a collective context, the latter obliging participants to publicly justify individual opinions—in other words, to translate or extrapolate their opinion into a general will (Bourdieu, 2001).

One important sphere in which this process could be pursued is the sphere of functional representation, whose “corporatist forms . . . are, in principle at least, open to more democracy and participation” (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 416). Since structures of functional representation—a type of “segmented public” (Eriksen, 2007)—fulfill a crucial role in EU policy making, they constitute an important target for efforts to democratize (albeit indirectly) representative democracy and bureaucratic decision making in the EU. The logic of this approach is to target civil society for democratization in the first instance, assuming that this “necessarily helps open up the framework of political parties and representative institutions,” while respecting the structural differentiation of modern polities which, though it limits direct participation in the state, is actually crucial to the latter’s democratic legitimacy (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 19).

Once it is accepted that it is possible “to defend existing forms of democracy while simultaneously demanding further democratization” (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 415), a version of deliberative democracy looks more realistically achievable within certain modes of governance. For example, experiments with local participatory institutions in France produced an “unanticipated effect . . . [in] that ‘natives’ [who participate in them] can progressively technicise [their modes of expression] and lose their quality of ‘native,’ at the same time as the technicians of the city or the elected representatives can be prompted to ‘speak native’” (Lefebvre, 2006, p. 17). This convergence between the lay and the professional discourse is a common characteristic of deliberative forums which can, in a “politics of presence,” stimulate the appearance and the apprenticeship of new spokespeople for broad social constituencies, including the most deprived, who would not participate directly through other channels. They nonetheless require safeguards against abuse of power by delegates, such as mechanisms for a regular renewal of spokespeople or small-scale participatory fora for dialogue within social constituencies to renew the symbolic power of delegates (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 418; Phillips, 1995). These mechanisms are designed to install a continuity between political society and civil society and so to ensure that “delegated authorities are controlled by viable public spheres with general access and real power” (Cohen & Arato, 1994, p. 417, 411).

The citizens’ role in the public sphere is also a vital parameter of the contextualization of citizen participation in democracies. The public sphere is perceived as “the sphere that mediates between the domains of the family and the workplace—where private interests prevail—and the state which often exerts arbitrary forms of power and domination, which consists of social spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and

oppressive forms of social and public power” (Habermas, 1992). Other authors stipulate that the public sphere consists of a “space that, not only enables autonomous opinion formation but also empowers the citizens to influence the decision makers” (Eriksen & Fossum, 2004, p. 351) as well as a “common space for free communication that is secured by legal rights to freedom of expression and assembly, where problems are discovered, but also thematized and dramatized and formed into opinions and wills that formal decision-making agencies are to act upon” (Eriksen & Fossum, 2002, p. 403). Decisionmakers are thus “compelled to enter the public arena in order to justify their decisions and to gain support” (Eriksen & Fossum, 2002, p. 403). Yet, while the EU has channeled increasing resources toward the formation of a common communicative space, it is not yet established that a single European public sphere has emerged, rather some segmented publics evolving around policy networks in certain policy areas (Eriksen & Fossum, 2002).

Since decision making in the EU is porous with respect to organized interests (in the committees and expert groups maintained by most Directorate Generals) and since the European party system is highly fragmented in comparison with most national systems, we can characterize the European mode of governance as displaying the kind of openness that favors mediated political participation, whether through traditional (e.g., trade unions and political parties) or via new (e.g., environmental organizations) forms of political association (Morales, 2009). The EU’s governance arrangements are unlikely to foster mass democracy at the European scale, and the EU’s broadly regulatory rather than redistributive role arguably does not require this for its normal operation<sup>5</sup> so problem solving through the strong and segmented publics of the European public sphere will continue to feature strongly in the EU’s participation repertoire. But in addition, the longer term health of the EU as a democratic regime depends on popular participation in problem-framing (i.e., in defining the European project itself), and on the capacity of the political system to tap into innovative ideas that may surface on the margins of the public sphere. Based on this analysis, eParticipation could deliver benefits for better EU governance in five broad directions: facilitating dialogue within the “strong publics” of policy networks and making them more accessible to new participants; democratizing the structures of functional representation by supporting the internal dialogue of social movements, political associations, interest organizations, or other “segmented publics”; maintaining (and participating in) public forums for political debate as part of an “open” communication policy; encouraging and protecting independent public sphere enclaves where alternative discourses can emerge and develop; and improving the overall connectivity of the system.

## Methodology

In attempting to address the article’s goals, the authors employ the following research methods:

First, for identifying the main eParticipation platforms at European institutions level, desktop research at official EU websites was utilized. All community institutions, including agencies of the EU and Consultative bodies were scrutinized to identify potential eParticipation settings. At a second stage, for performing the updates after March 2010, the authors have accessed the central page of the “take part” page of the EU portal ([http://europa.eu/take-part/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/take-part/index_en.htm)) which lists the means through which citizens can participate in an online debate or consultation and learn about policies on blogs and video clips. The survey included the investigation of institutions and bodies with an inherent role in the decision-making process; therefore we refer to the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council. From the specialized bodies, we include the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, as well as 23 Community Agencies. The selection of websites has been made on the basis of a working definition of eParticipation which, for our survey purposes, restricts eParticipation to “the use of ICT to support the democratic decision-making processes” (Macintosh, 2004).

Hence, we have disregarded institutions without a role in the decision-making process, that is, the Court of Auditors and the Court of Justice. The survey took place from March 2009 to December 2010. It has to be clarified that the authors do not attempt an in-depth analysis of the initiatives identified, since information on each initiative varies significantly, but rather rely on available data such as texts and data on users, number of consultations, and so on. A more thorough and scrupulous qualitative analysis of the initiatives would require the deployment of a research design which would include interviews and ethnographic means.

Second, for exploring documents pertaining eParticipation issues, we principally use the EUR-lex database which grants access to EU law. Desktop research complements the survey for obtaining other documents such as Commission Communications, White Papers, and other types of European legislation. The survey was performed from 2007 to December 2010. This part of the survey is not confined to a specific type of legal document, but instead covers EU primary legislation, EU secondary legislation, and other types of documents. Examining the legal documents from which eParticipation activities stem serves as an instrument to examine the legal requirements of eParticipation within European institutions.

The identified initiatives were evaluated across some key eParticipation parameters to complement the analysis. A short analysis of each parameter follows:

1. Stage in policy making: Macintosh (2004) describes five stages where eParticipation activities can be implemented: agenda setting, analysis (i.e., identifying challenges and opportunities of a specific agenda item), policy creation, policy implementation, and policy monitoring. In most cases, the stage in policy making of each eParticipation initiative cannot be clearly delineated without a more vigilant analysis utilizing further evaluation methods.
2. eParticipation level: Although the process of participation comprises several levels, for this article, we distinguish between four: informing (provision of information), consulting (one-way interaction between citizens and policymakers), active participation (two-way interaction between citizens and policymakers), and transfer of power (empowerment of citizens to make final decisions; Macintosh, 2004).
3. eParticipation area: Existing literature classifies eParticipation activities within areas of citizen engagement in the policy-making process (Fraser et al., 2006; OECD, 2001; Smith, Macintosh, & Millard, 2008; Tambouris, Liotas, & Tarabanis, 2007). For the purposes of the present survey the authors decided to take on the categorization according to Fraser et al., (2006) as follows: information provision, community building/collaborative environments, consultation, campaigning, electioneering, deliberation (ICT to support virtual discussions, allowing reflection and consideration of issues in a moderated or unmoderated manner), discourse (conversation and dialogue between citizens and elected representatives), mediation, spatial planning, polling, and voting.

In turn, we classify both the initiatives and the policy documents identified according to a theoretical schema (indicated below) that operationalizes them according to their participation rationale and mode of governance. The three modes of governance in Table 1 describe archetypes which “have a general applicability that transcends any particular geographical space or temporal order” (Frances et al., 1991, p. 1), so they are appropriate for theorizing the role of participation in political systems at an abstract level or across political cultures. The *target public* defines the type of public or public sphere we should expect to be instituted through an initiative operating according to a given governance mode, using Eriksen’s (2007) typology of strong, weak/general, and segmented publics. *Participants* define the type of actors we should expect to be represented in the online space. *Intermediation* defines the way that public demands should be converted into political decisions. *Symbolic representation* defines the grammar of public demands, or how they are represented

**Table 1.** Table for Operationalizing Modes of Governance in Relation to European eParticipation Legislation and Initiatives

Participation Rationale	Problem Solving	Relegitimizing	Decoupling
Communication	Intersubjective (one-to-one) or group	Broadcast (one-to-many, many-to-one)	Interactive broadcast (anyone-to-many)
Architecture (internal)	Horizontal networking space	Vertical accountability space	Horizontal networking space
Architecture (external)— integration in World Wide Web	Node	Channel	Enclave
Symbolic representation	Knowledge resources	Interests + Identities	Identities

symbolically as they are processed by the system. The three participation rationales in Table 2 describe, from a system perspective, the intended outcome of European eParticipation. The *problem-solving* rationale is typically associated with more depoliticized policy making, and/or areas in which European institutions share competences with other levels of government and other actors. Typified by the use of expert groups and committees, it has a long tradition within EU policy making. The *relegitimizing* rationale is typically associated with more politicized policy areas, especially where European-level decisions have redistributive impacts on society. It seeks to stimulate broad-based participation in framing policy objectives and has grown in importance both as EU competences have expanded and in response to the “democratic deficit.” Finally the *decoupling* rationale acknowledges that eParticipation can assume different meanings from a social actor perspective. It emphasizes the intrinsic benefits of public political participation and the tendency of contemporary social movements to “uncoupl[e] themselves from the ‘big’ political problems in favour of a variety of ‘small’ projects of local involvement,” thus creating locales for relatively autonomous political governance “whether on the Internet or in new global movements (like Attac)” (Bang & Dyrberg, 2003, p. 234). It also refers to incursions by political powers into non-political spaces in order to engage with demobilized citizens and ostensibly decoupling this dialogue from formal political arenas. Accordingly each of the three rationales could be associated with the predominance of a particular form of communication (in terms of the balance between speaker and audience roles), with distinct architectural patterns (how a space is organized internally, and how it is integrated into the rest of the websphere), and with an orientation toward certain types of symbolic resources in public discourse. Given that we have not observed the use of the initiatives in any detail, the properties identified for each initiative reflect upon its potentials and design, acknowledging that their actual use could, in principle, subvert these intentions or reveal unanticipated potentials.

## eParticipation in European Legislative Documents

The analysis is performed at three levels of community law with a special focus on EU policy documents to illustrate and explain the transition from citizen participation to eParticipation.

In the primary pieces of legislation examined, citizen participation is referred to indirectly and in the context of representative democracy, as political parties contribute to shaping political awareness and expressing the political will of European citizens. However, when the Treaty of Nice entered into force, the “Dialogue on Europe” era was inaugurated with the Commission attempting to stimulate public debate about the future of Europe. All pieces of primary legislation reinforce the principle of proximity, as “decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen” whereas how European citizens can directly contribute to policy making is not explicit. The principles of “Democratic life” and “European citizenship” are encompassed in the Treaty establishing the European Constitution. In the same vein, the Draft Constitution (Treaty establishing

**Table 2.** Table for Operationalizing Participation Rationales in Relation to European eParticipation Legislation and Initiatives

Document	Proposed Mode of Citizen Participation	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Proposed Action Related to eParticipation
The Treaty on the European Union (Maastricht Treaty; 1992)	Petitioning and closed consultations	Relegitimizing/Problem solving	Hierarchy and network	None
The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)	Consultation prior to legislation and social dialogue	Relegitimizing/Problem solving	Hierarchy and network	None
Treaty establishing a constitution for Europe (Nice Treaty; 2004)	Participation of citizens in democratic life and implementation of consultations	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	None
The Treaty of Lisbon (2005)	Institutionalize opportunities for citizens, new forms of inter-action between citizens and institutions	Mostly relegitimizing with some problem solving	Hierarchy	None
A White Paper on reforming the Commission (2000)	Visibility of actions, access to information, feedback from citizens to policy making	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Better public services and access to information through ICT,
Framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the EU (2001)	Civil dialogue, stronger partnership with the public, citizen-centric information strategy	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Interactive policy consultation elements of the Europa portal and audiovisual services for better communication
White Paper on European governance (2001)	Promotes a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue, more involvement in policy making.	Relegitimizing	Network	Establishes minimum standards for eConsultations and the IPM platform for feedback and debate
General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties (2002)	Better regulation and facilitation of consultations, monitoring of policy making	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Outlines a framework for effective eConsultations with the public

**Table 2 (continued)**

Document	Proposed Mode of Citizen Participation	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Proposed Action Related to eParticipation
Action plan to improve communicating Europe	Wider participation by improvement of consultation mechanisms, systematic feedback on policies becomes a priority, "going local" strategy to listen to the citizens	Relegitimizing (communication aspects), limited decoupling elements in intermediation modes	Primarily hierarchy in locus of decision making, network elements	Better visual communication through the Europa portal
The plan-D for democracy, dialogue, and debate (2005)	Plan D proposes 13 specific EU initiatives and actions in order to strengthen and stimulate dialogue, public debate, and citizen participation	Relegitimizing in outcomes, problem solving in purpose. Some elements of decoupling in creating space for collective action, although not autonomous	Hierarchy and network, depending on the nature of the action	More effective eConsultations, use of Internet technology to actively debate and advocate its policies without elaborating further
White Paper on a European communication policy (2006)	Enhancement of dialogue and debate, strengthening of communication activities, connection of citizens with each other and policy makers	Relegitimizing—emphasis on communication	Hierarchy (network elements are present in some activities)	Forums for debate, channels of public communication, and optimization of the Europa site
European transparency initiative (2006)	Consultations publicity and transparency, rules for interest representation	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy and network	eConsultations procedures amelioration
Plan D—Wider and deeper debate on Europe (2006)	Higher transparency and more effective consultations, stimulating debates, maximize accessibility to EU public spaces	Relegitimizing mainly, emergence of decoupling	Mainly hierarchy and network to a lesser degree	Establishment of audiovisual means to mobilize younger people, relaunching Internet debates, deliberative consultations
i2010 eGovernment Action Plan: Accelerating eGovernment in Europe for the benefit of all	Advocates the strengthening of participation in decision making and involvement of citizens in debates	n/a	n/a <sup>a</sup>	Underlines the potential of ICT to involve citizens in debate and decision making

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Document	Proposed Mode of Citizen Participation	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Proposed Action Related to eParticipation
Communicating Europe in partnership (2006)	Establishment of permanent dialogue with citizens, development of public sphere, consultation inclusiveness	Relegitimizing mainly, reinforcement of decoupling	Mainly hierarchy and network to a lesser degree	Urges the redevelopment of Europe to improve interactivity. More audiovisual is proposed
Communicating about Europe via the Internet, engaging the citizens (2007)	Dialogue generation and more effective consultations	Relegitimizing (communication aspects), limited decoupling elements in symbolic representation and communication	Hierarchy and network to a lesser degree	Upgrading of Europe to communicate policies and create a sense of European public sphere, envisages the creation of Internet-based social networks
Communicating Europe through audiovisual media (2008)	Formation of public sphere, inclusiveness of communication policies	Relegitimizing mainly, reinforcement of decoupling in communication and architecture	Hierarchy, network in communication aspects	Promotes the broadcasting of EU content to encourage citizenship and debates
Building on the experience of plan D for democracy, dialogue, and debate (2008)	Establishment of a bottom-up approach to citizen participation, more consultations, promotion of citizenship, connecting debates with decisionmakers	Problem solving and decoupling	Network and market to a lesser degree	Promotes the enhancement of direct debates, recommendations to decisionmakers and creation of public spaces
Ministerial declarations	Participation of citizens in policy definition and decision making	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy and market	Encourages the exploration of ICT-enabled solutions to involve citizens in policy making at national and European level

<sup>a</sup> As the nature of the document relates to eGovernment, the discussion on participation concerns ICT-related issues of participation, such as the testing of ICT tools, therefore the classification is not applicable in this case.

a Constitution for Europe)<sup>6</sup> establishes the rights associated with European citizenship and defines the democratic foundations of the Union based on the principles of democratic equality, representative democracy, and participatory democracy. The Treaty of Lisbon anchors democratic equality, representative, and participatory democracy to include new interactions between the institutions and European citizens, such as the citizen initiative.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, primary legislation cements citizens' rights as the democratic kernel of the Union, in order to enhance the process of European integration.

Regarding secondary legislation, eParticipation, as defined here, is not embedded in individual regulations or decisions, except for regulations institutionalizing access to documents associated with principles of good governance and transparency (Dalakiouridou, Tambouris, & Tarabanis, 2008).

Other documents such as communications and action plans started to define transparency and freedom of information from 1994 onwards, however, emphasis on citizen participation dates back to 2001 when technological means to assist policy feedback commenced with the inaugural use of the interactive policy-making tool.<sup>8</sup> The White Paper on reforming the Commission (European Commission, COM(2000)/200) and the Communication on a new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy (European Commission, COM(2001)/354) begin to place greater emphasis on the communication policy and strategy of the Union as a means to approach citizens. In this context, according to the European transparency initiative a high level of transparency ensures that the Union is "open to public scrutiny and accountable for its work" (European Commission, COM(2008)/158/4). As elaborated in the same document, "Democracy depends on people being able to participate in public debate, to do this, they must have access to reliable information on European issues and scrutinize policy processes in their various stages."

The EU perceives openness and transparency and the proper communication of policies as catalysts for the legitimization of policies, but in 2005 the institutions embarked on a different era by launching a two-way communication process between citizens and the institutions on the assumption that "European citizens want to make their voices heard and their democratic participation should have a direct bearing on EU policy formulation" (European Commission, 2005, Action Plan to improve communicating Europe).

Meanwhile in 2005, the White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, COM(2001)/428) articulates efforts to deliver information by making use of networks. According to this document, effective communication is a "precondition for generating a sense of belonging to Europe." However, it is still stated that better consultations complement decision making by the institutions, by nurturing mutual learning and the exchange of good practices, not by their replacement. During this period, the Commission aspires to better communicate EU policies to citizens by adopting a number of documents such as the Action Plan to improve Communicating Europe (European Commission, COM(2005)). Hitherto, interaction between the European institutions and society was based on links between the Parliament and the elected representatives through advisory bodies and less formalized contacts with interested parties.

The EU heralds a more citizen-oriented approach to communication activities and building capacity for dialogue with the adoption of Plan D for democracy, dialogue, and debate (European Commission, COM(2005)/494) that followed the European Parliament elections and the nonratification of the draft constitution. In this framework, Plan D stipulates: "Inherent in the idea of partnership is consultation and participation to generate pan-European debate," though most of the envisaged actions relate to the "going local" rationale, involving local authorities. It is orientated toward citizen empowerment and signals a response of the EU to the climate of the legitimacy crisis. The White Paper on a European Communication Policy (European Commission, COM(2006)/35) revisits communication policy by "giving Europe a human face to make citizens understand why the EU is relevant to them."

At this stage, limited emphasis is still given to the direct relationships of citizens and the European institutions, but the revamping of Plan D in 2006 (European Commission, COM(2008)/158/4) focuses on online debates to stimulate dialogue on the basis of enabling citizens to directly articulate their wishes to decision makers and thus winning public support. In 2007, the “Communicating about Europe via the Internet” and the Communicating Europe in Partnership documents reposition citizen empowerment on the basis of new Internet platforms and audiovisual networks to support the formation of a public sphere and embark on an approach directly linked to eParticipation. This is achieved by stressing the potential of Internet technologies to mobilize people around the “Citizen’s initiative” anchored in the Treaty of Lisbon as well as the role of social networks on the Internet for the formation of public spheres. Audiovisual media are equally identified as critical to the empowerment of citizens. The role of the Internet is more visible in this document: “The Internet can help EU Institutions to understand public opinion by supporting a genuinely European public debate, with common themes, discussed openly and in real time by people from different countries who recognise each other as EU citizens with a legitimate stake in the debate” (European Commission, SEC(2007)/1742).

In retrospect, the main developments traceable in the Commission’s communications rely on *openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence* (European Commission, COM (2006)/35) principally to strengthen representative parliamentary democracy on a local and European level. Citizen participation in the participatory democratic process is mainly founded on the ideal of a well-informed citizen who is empowered to participate in consultations and other events.

The EU has recently established participatory elements and techniques to strengthen the concept of participatory democracy that actually act in a subtle supplementary manner to political processes. (Dalakiouridou et al., 2008). The eParticipation initiatives established so far mostly correspond to principles of good governance, access to information, and the attempt to form a European public sphere. The guidelines of the EU strategies on eParticipation demonstrate a conceptual linkage with the guidelines on good governance, in the sense that the principles of a transparent public sector, institutional accountability, user-focused services, and access to documents are not altered (Dunkerley & Fudge, 2004; Forcella, 2006). The underlying principle of the legislative documents evolves around legitimacy and its components rather than collective political empowerment, although the relationship between democracy and legitimacy is by no means straightforward in the case of the EU (Lord, 2000). Rather, the EU seems to have employed a “*legitimacy-enhancing deliberation*” logic (Fung, 2006, p. 17), whereby the institutional eParticipation offerings reinforce deliberation among participants but without bestowing direct authority. In the EU, there are no pragmatic opportunities for inclusive public debate, as “the civic-institutional infrastructure is deficient” and the realm of European politics does not leave room for self-regulating citizens (Eriksen & Fossum, 2004, p. 19). In addition, there is no evidence whether the political rhetoric and increased opportunities to participate did in fact generate intensive and informed public deliberation. According to Moravcsik (2006), informed public deliberation, trust, identity, and legitimacy are generated where the issues in question are highly salient.

Table 3 applies the main principles identified in the theoretical section to the legislative documents reviewed above by referring to the proposed mode of citizen participation (what kind of citizen participation does the document envisage?) as well as the proposed actions pertaining eParticipation. The table also attempts to classify each document according to the dominant mode of governance and the relating participation rationale, which enables us to conceptually enhance the notion of eParticipation and look for contrasts based on the theoretical schema previously presented.

## eParticipation Initiatives in European Institutions

This section presents an overview of the eParticipation initiatives identified in the European institutions. Current as well as closed initiatives are included for the sake of clarity and to allow a holistic

**Table 3.** Critical Overview of eParticipation-Relevant Legislation

eParticipation Parameters				
eParticipation Initiative	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Stage in Policy Making	eP Level/Area
European Parliament ePetitions	Relegitimizing	Market	Agenda setting	Consulting/ campaigning
European Parliament's citizen agora (closed initiative)	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy with network elements in participation	Agenda analysis and policy creation	Consulting/ deliberation
European Parliament's multimedia library	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Policy creation	Informing/informa- tion provision
European Parliament's Europarl TV	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	All items included	Consulting/informa- tion provision and community building
Europarlament's presence on social networks	Relegitimizing/decoupling	Hierarchy, elements of network	All items included	Information provi- sion/discourse
European Commission consultations	Relegitimizing/decoupling/prob- lem solving according to nature, but mainly problem solving	Hierarchy	Agenda analysis and policy creation	Consulting/ consultation
European Commission blogs	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	All items included	Information provi- sion/discourse
Your voice in Europe social networks	Decoupling	Hierarchy, elements of network	All items included, mainly agenda analy- sis and policy monitoring	Information provi- sion/community building
European Commission's debate Europe (closed initiative)	Relegitimizing—elements of problem solving and decoupling	Hierarchy and market elements	Agenda analysis, policy implementation, and monitoring	Consulting/ consultation
European Commission's EUTube	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy, elements of network	Policy implementation and monitoring	Informing/informa- tion provision and community building

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued)**

eParticipation Parameters					
eParticipation Initiative	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Stage in Policy Making	eP Level/Area	
European Commission's ePolling	Relegitimizing, elements of problem solving	Market	Not defined	Consulting/polling	
Europa chats	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	May vary	Consulting and active participation, discourse	
European Commission's MyParl.EU (closed initiative)	Relegitimizing with elements of decoupling	Hierarchy	Not defined	Informing for citizens/deliberation, community building	
European Commission webcasts portal	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Policy creation	Informing/information provision	
European Council webcasts	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy	Policy creation and monitoring	Informing/information provision	
European Council social networks	Relegitimizing/decoupling	Hierarchy, elements of network	All items included, mainly agenda analysis and policy monitoring	Information provision/community building	
European economic and social committee blogs and social networks	Relegitimizing/decoupling	Hierarchy, elements of network	All items included, mainly agenda analysis and policy monitoring	Information provision/community building	
Eur. centre for the development of vocational training (CEDEFOP) online communities	Decoupling	Network	Agenda setting, analysis, policy creation, policy implementation and monitoring	Active participation/community building	
Eur. agency for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders (FRONTEX) forum and audiovisual	Relegitimizing, problem solving	Hierarchy, elements of network	Policy implementation and monitoring	Consulting/deliberation, discourse	
The European training foundation (ETF) forums and social presence	Relegitimizing with decoupling elements	Hierarchy, elements of network	Policy implementation	Consulting/consultation	

**Table 3 (continued)**

eParticipation Parameters				
eParticipation Initiative	Participation Rationale	Governance Mode	Stage in Policy Making	eP Level/Area
European aviation safety agency (EASA), European food safety agency (EFSA), European chemicals agency (ECHA-REACH) and European railway agency (ERA) consultations	Problem solving	Hierarchy and network, depending on the nature (open vs. closed)	Agenda item analysis, policy creation	Consultation, discourse
European Union fundamental rights agency (FRA)	Relegitimizing with decoupling elements	Hierarchy	Policy implementation and monitoring	Informing/consulting/information provision
European agency for safety and health at work blog and social presence	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy, elements of network	Policy implementation	Informing/community building
European environmental agency (EEA), European centre for disease prevention and control (ECDC), European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (EUROFOUND) social presence	Relegitimizing	Hierarchy, elements of network	All items included, mainly agenda analysis and policy monitoring	Information provision/deliberation
The European institute for gender equality (EIGE) social presence	Relegitimizing with decoupling elements	Network	All items included, mainly agenda analysis and policy monitoring	Information provision/community building
EU office for harmonization in the internal market (OHIM) social presence and online discussions	Relegitimizing with decoupling elements	Network	All items	Information provision/deliberation

approach to the development of the initiatives throughout the period of the survey. All the cases identified are grouped by institution.

## 1. European Parliament

- a. *E*-petitioning system: As petitioning remains a fundamental right of European citizens, there is a standardized form to allow citizens to submit a request or proposal for the adoption of parliamentary positions. According to Parliament's data, about 3.770 petitions were received for 2008 and 2009. *E*-petitions appear to outnumber petitions submitted by post.
- b. The citizens' agora (closed initiative): The agora includes a forum to establish dialogue with citizens on specific debates. The electronic system only complements the Parliament-based offline agora events, which include up to 500 representatives from civil society. The initiative was perceived by the Parliament as a formidable pool of expertise and opinion-formation in European debates.
- c. Multimedia library: The Parliament includes online live streaming of videos, plenary sittings, podcasts on briefings, as well as entertainment activities on the elections. Recorded plenary debates are accompanied by information on the speaker and subject.
- d. The Europarl TV: The Europarl is a web television channel, which supports understanding of the Parliament's functions structured in a four-layered manner to include decision making by activity, questions by citizens, news of the week for young people, and live transmission of plenaries. Its editorial charter stipulates that it is designed to contribute to the democratization of the EU and the development of a European public space.
- e. Europarliament's presence on social networks. The Parliament and its President maintain profiles on Facebook, My Space, Twitter as well as video-sharing sites. The Parliament's Channel on YouTube currently counts 1,500 members and more than 96,000 views.

## 2. European Commission

- a. Your voice in Europe consultations: The consultation segment consists of specific policy activities for consultation through an open or targeted process. It has been set up in the context of the interactive policy making initiative to improve European governance and implement the better regulation initiative.<sup>8</sup> About 38 policy areas are covered by consultations with a focus on audiovisual, information society, environment, and internal market policies. From 2001 onwards, the number of online consultations has exponentially increased, culminating in about 73 consultations in 2010.
- b. Your voice in Europe EU blogs: Through the available blogs, citizens can be connected to five Commissioners and three other representatives.
- c. Your voice in Europe social networks: Seven Commissioners, the EU Presidency, and the Commission maintain a profile on Facebook to allow for deliberative discussions. In addition, 8 EU delegations and Liaison Offices and 16 Commission Representations are active on Facebook. One Commissioner maintains a profile on Hyves and seven Commissioners are active on microblogging services (such as Twitter). The presence on social networks is complemented through support groups for EU policies (16 at the moment on Facebook and 9 on Twitter). Certain commissioners and delegations also use YouTube for video and speech dissemination.
- d. Debate Europe (closed initiative): An online moderated forum permits deliberation on three broad themes (climate change, future of Europe, and general issues).
- e. EU Tube: The EU Tube corresponds to a specific YouTube channel of the EU that broadcasts clips on specific policy areas of competence. It has about 13,500 members and more than 3 million views.

- f. ePolling (closed initiative): A polling mechanism could be accessed through the Debate Europe portal to gauge public opinion on a number of issues. At present, polls can be added to any existing web page of the EU without rendering a central access page necessary.
  - g. Europa chats (closed initiative): Chats were previously accessible from the Debate Europe portal involving instant cyber talk with European Commission staff at predefined dates. At present, certain Directorate-General's (DG) provide chats separately to establish an open dialogue between the Commissioners and the general public.
  - h. Myparl.eu (closed initiative): This initiative comprised a social networking site to facilitate discourse among Member of European Parliament's (MEP) and Member of Parliament's (MP) across Europe, open to the public.<sup>9</sup>
  - i. European Commission webcasts portal: The portal allows web streaming of various events, discussions, and votes as part of the "Communicating Europe" strategy. Chat rooms and ePolling are also available depending on the event and its purpose. This portal has incorporated the Europa chats and ePolling facilities available in the previous Debate Europe portal.
3. European Council: The European Council's page includes some elements of webcasting such as live streaming of public sessions and webcasts to enhance public access to information about its initiatives and Council policies in general. In addition, the Council and its President maintain a profile on social networks such as Facebook, Vimeo, and so on. The Council's Presidency also maintains a profile on Facebook.
  4. European Economic and Social Committee: The President and Vice President maintain blogs as well as profiles on Facebook.
  5. Committee of the regions: no specific eParticipation activities identified through the survey.
  6. Community agencies<sup>10</sup>
    - a. The European centre for the Development of Vocational training operates virtual communities for promoting deliberation and dialogue on vocational training development issues. Centre for the development of vocational training (CEDEFOP) has established 13 virtual communities, out of which 9 Communities are related to policy development, 2 serve as internal collaboration spaces and, 2 Communities are affiliated with the Directorate-General Education and Culture. Each community employs its own set of tools and working methods, but the exchange of information among the communities provides a common space for interaction.
    - b. The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders operates a technical forum as an online meeting place. Audiovisual activities are also included.
    - c. The European Training Foundation maintains three forums on different aspects of training and has accounts in social networks.
    - d. The European Aviation Safety Agency operates online consultations for policy adoption at regular intervals.
    - e. The European Food Safety Agency also engages in online public consultations at specific periods.
    - f. The European Railway Agency maintains consultations to consult with social partners.
    - g. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency maintains an online forum for deliberation purposes and has social network accounts on Facebook and Twitter.
    - h. The European Institute for Gender Equality maintains a Facebook page to host discussions.
    - i. The European Chemicals Agency regularly engages in online consultations, though it aims at specific stakeholders.

**Table 4.** Critical Overview of eParticipation Initiatives in European Union Institutions

Governance Mode	Market	Hierarchy	Network
Target public Participants	Weak Consumers/voters	Strong + Weak EU representatives or officials + Citizens	Strong + Segmented Experts or delegates + Citizens
Intermediation	Aggregating opinion	Channeling demands vertically	Connecting networks horizontally
Symbolic representation	Interests	Interests + Identities	Interests + Knowledge resources

- j. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work maintains a blog and a Twitter and YouTube account.
- k. The European Environmental Agency maintains a profile on Twitter and YouTube.
- l. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and the European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions both maintain a Twitter account.
- m. The EU Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market has a Twitter account and runs online moderated discussions to obtain public opinion on certain issues.

In turn, Table 4 operationalizes the main principles identified in the first section by including the participation rationale and governance mode for each initiative. eParticipation parameters (stage in policy making, eParticipation level and area) are used to further conceptualize the notion of eParticipation. At this point, we note that each initiative is classified in categories based upon the authors' own subjective evaluations.

## Discussion

The eParticipation offerings by European institutions have established several routes to dialogue and consultation and the role of eParticipation in their decision-making strategies has evolved over time. Both the documents and the initiatives encourage the use of ICT to involve citizens in policy making. Initially this was achieved in isolation from a central European eParticipation prism, while after 2009 a central page of the European Commission has been solely dedicated to eParticipation. The use of ICT has challenged the institutional settings of European democracy since eParticipation in the EU can restore a sense of ownership on the part of citizens by stressing the institutions' accountability and stimulating participation through electronic groups that can be considered as partners in decision making (Forcella, 2006; Lord, 2000).

### *Main Principles Outlined in the Legislative Documents*

By comparing the eParticipation features in each of the documents examined and in turn the actual eParticipation offerings, we observe that the institutions have managed to a large extent to turn their propositions into action, but the articulated emphasis on connecting networks and mobilizing the public sphere has largely been limited to hierarchical modes of governance with vertical channels for the connection of EU representatives with citizens.

Relegitimizing appears to be prominent as the participation rationale, especially in primary legislation. The Maastricht treaty had allowed for consensus building against the background of the legitimacy crisis which confronted the EU in the 1990s and primary legislation as well as most of the derivative documents reflected the EU's interest in new forms of legitimization through European

citizens, although still using representative procedures. This verifies the hierarchical structure of governance indicated in the majority of the documents. Some network elements began to appear before the introduction of Plan D, which reoriented the EU toward mobilizing knowledge resources from strong and increasingly also from weak publics, most obviously through the development of communication means (e.g., audiovisual media, interactive use of Europa, live broadcasts).

From Plan D and beyond, the underlying rationale for participation relied upon the generation of dialogue and effective consultations and networks were placed in the centre of governance arrangements. The EU appears to endorse a sort of public sphere that corresponds to the Habermasian concept,<sup>11</sup> since citizens are empowered to influence decisionmakers (Habermas, 1992).<sup>12</sup> The increasing tendency to create public spaces inside institutions reveals a partial commitment to Plan D up until 2007. From 2007 onwards, the EU has, to some extent, sacrificed citizen empowerment and prioritized the proper communication of policies, as it came to the realization that the formation of a public sphere precedes deliberation and more active involvement of citizens in policy making. This is demonstrated through the extensive use of social media to visualize and communicate policies, which limits the scope of eParticipation to the decision-making process but appears also to have an impact in connecting networks of strong and segmented publics. Some of the programming documents began to argue that formation of a stronger sense of citizenship would benefit the emergence of a European public sphere within which citizens share common ideas, thus nourishing the process of European integration, but it is with the Plan D that a general framework for this has been put in place. Thus, some elements of decoupling begun to surface along with Plan D, where emphasis started to be placed on creating spaces for collective action.

According to Diamandouros (2006), “accountability and transparency are embedded in legitimate forms of democracy.” Until the introduction of Plan D, the legitimizing force of eParticipation initiatives rested on public acceptance and transparency rather on deliberation. It can thus be inferred that the dominating notion of transparency related to the input-oriented goals of democratic legitimization rather than the output-oriented goals which relate to policy performance, as supported by Hérítier (2003, p. 3). Transparency appears to be the kernel of institutional preoccupations, with the aim of bringing Europeans closer to decision making (Beasley, 2006). The overall direction of the documents was to actually increase the quality of democracy by emphasizing structures of functional representation and supporting dialogue, association, interest organizations, and segmented publics and by enacting equivalent improvements in the connectivity of networks and systems, that is, restoring civic-institutional infrastructure, as well as encouraging an open communication policy on behalf of the institutions based on transparency, accountability, and openness.

### *Main Principles Outlined in the eParticipation Initiatives*

The actual deployment of eParticipation tools within the EU appears to have followed several different rationales, which we have characterized elsewhere as problem solving, re-legitimizing, and decoupling (Smith, 2009). For example, in some instance, it seeks to stimulate the direct engagement of individual citizens in consultation linked to problem solving (e.g., open online consultations); or to instigate more open forms of discussion driven by the need to re-legitimize EU institutions (e.g., Plan D initiatives and Debate Europe); or to facilitate the operation of channels that provide access for organized interests to “strong publics” (e.g., Interactive Policy Making [IPM]). Indirectly, the EU’s initiatives could also support the intraorganizational communication between political associations or social movements and their members, supporters and constituents, effectively decoupling eParticipation initiatives from a direct connection to decision making. In general, as our analysis has shown, initiatives focus on re-legitimizing as the main participation rationale, while hierarchy emerges as the underlying governance mode with the vertical channeling of demands and links between EU representatives and officials. Decoupling is restricted to eParticipation offerings that employ social networks and dedicated online

communities, as a means of connecting networks, experts, delegates, and citizens, which seems to be interrelated with the network governance mode. Purely nonhierarchical modes of governance are only present in three community agencies which are attempting to mobilize knowledge resources from strong (and weak) publics. The EU's policy networks focus on problem-solving capacities rather than decision-making authorities. The stage in policy making also varies between initiatives, but the different governance modes with which we associate the initiatives do not appear to be interconnected to their position within the policy-making cycle. This may be because although networks of experts are particularly important at the policy formulation and implementation stages, actual decisions are still taken according to the hierarchical mode of governance.

The majority of the initiatives identified correspond to the principles of openness, transparency, and partially to civic involvement, implicit from the eParticipation level which involves levels of consulting in the majority of cases. The participatory potential of citizens is released around online fora and discussions but these are not based on a clear implementation strategy, as they are rather included in principles of accountability and transparency, as also indicated by Beger (2004) and Dunkerley & Fudge (2004). Although some authors have argued that transparency provides an impetus for European citizens to partake in the policy-making process (Beasley, 2006), the mere provision of information cannot produce democratic legitimization, since it does not change decision-making patterns (Héritier, 2003). Héritier (2003) combines transparency and accountability (an element repeatedly stressed in European legislative pieces), to assert that transparency fits in negotiative democracy and legitimacy in an indirect manner. Lord (2000), on the other hand relates legitimacy to the performance of the institutions, the conformity to democratic values of representation, and accountability and political identity. Thus, theoretically derived notions of legitimacy, transparency, and openness have been implemented in actual eParticipation settings, as the relevance and effectiveness of the EU policies is perceived to depend on ensuring wide acceptance throughout the policy chain and creating confidence in the end results achieved by the institutions.

Consultations, the use of multimedia and audiovisual media, as well as blogs and social networks, have grown considerably as a form of citizen involvement, as most of the initiatives engage in community building and deliberation, which is reflected in the generally low eParticipation level of the initiatives. The interactive policy-making tool and the Europa website illustrate the link between the European Commission's eParticipation activities and the documents previously discussed. Though it is alleged that the consultations taking place either by electronic means or otherwise aim at finalizing proposals with the contribution of external expertise or at ensuring acceptability of the proposals at a specific stage in policy making (since major modifications in the policy cannot take place; Beasley, 2006; Berger, 2000; Grande, 1996), consultations remain the main means of citizen involvement. Up until 2002, the EU focused on democratic legitimization based on transparency and communication, and the introduction of the IPM tool opened up new possibilities for participation which nevertheless reflected separated powers within policy networks, a concept indicated in Lord (2000). Debates remain in the hierarchical governance mode with some network elements, as seen, for example, in the attempt to promote public discussion through the parliament offices and thus to create European public spaces (Plan D, 2006 version). It was here that a focus on civil society, social partners, and strong publics begun to take shape. Internet debates have been launched to allow citizens to choose the subject which concerns them and designed to link discussions to locally relevant subjects as well as to maximize accessibility to EU public spaces.

### *New Forms of Legitimacy and Citizen Participation*

The establishment of a different approach to citizen participation and the connection of debates with decisionmakers have been pursued by employing isolated means on certain occasions (e.g., EU Tube, Commissioners' blogs, etc.) that might be hierarchical in nature but additionally

address the network elements of governance and so function both as vertical accountability spaces and, to a lesser extent, as horizontal networking spaces. The EU agencies have adopted a series of cutoff consultations isolated from the Debate Europe framework which seem to provide space for active involvement, and interest representation is a significant element to this process. Recent endeavors on behalf of the majority of agencies focus on the use of social networks and online communities as a means to create networks with segmented publics and thus result in networking spaces characterized by openness and transparency. These forms have emerged mostly during 2010, thus proclaiming the intention of the institutions to keep up with the emerging trends of Web 2.0 and social networks. Nevertheless, these recent endeavors do not necessarily entail a “network-oriented” approach since consent in the EU is reached through institutions that work on a consensus principle and not through aggregation (which also entails limited applicability of the market mode of governance). Establishing and enhancing networks of structured dialogue with civil society suits the regulatory role of the Commission where the stakeholders tend to be clearly identifiable. Although the multitude of actors involved makes a strong argument for network governance, the sectoral arrangements still signify the preponderance of regulatory over redistributive policy making.

Such a mode of governance does not necessarily restrict citizen participation. eParticipation can have an indirect benefit for representatives and bolster the hierarchical component of the governance regime, as it enables stronger vertical deliberation between representatives of social interests and citizens. Yet, the emergent network elements carry a stronger participatory dynamic by attempting to diffuse deliberation into new arenas and build consensus. An underlying rationale supporting the EU’s promotion of network elements in eParticipation would be to connect segments of the public sphere so as to create economies of scale in eParticipation benefits (although this is dependent on complementary “offline activities” by civil society organizations, issue networks, and local government. Seeming to acknowledge the fact that the problem-solving capacities of strong publics cannot deliver legitimacy if the problems addressed in participation settings are not of salience to the general public (Smith & Dalakiouridou, 2009), the Commission has also tried to encourage the development of a network of civil society and private or public sector websites which promote contact with or between European citizens by supporting websites that devote particular attention to European affairs and stimulate debate on EU policy issues (European Commission, SEC (2008) 506/2).

As Eriksen and Fossum claim, “the EU moved forward from the problem solving regime because indirect and performance-based legitimation does not suffice to account for the present day EU in democratic terms to a value-based community, since common identity is needed in securing trust and legitimacy.” Further democratization would then be possible if people were enabled to come together to discuss who they are and what their common goals are, and to take stands on collective problems or from a “federal” perspective, and if a wider conception of democracy, premised on the notion that decisionmakers will be forced to pay attention to a wide range of popular opinions to obtain legitimacy, was viable. According to this line of reasoning, only deliberation can ensure democratic legitimacy, as it entails justifying the results to the people who are affected by them (Eriksen & Fossum, 2004). This could mean that although the network elements put forward by the Commission do not transfer decision-making authority to citizens, they may spur further democratization by forming the kind of citizenship that would benefit the emergence of a European public sphere within which citizens share common ideas. This argument does not appear in all the programming documents—it is with the Plan D that participative projects were mobilized and a general framework put in place. It has thus become a priority for the EU to realize a shift toward the creation of network elements so as to rectify the fragmented communication channels between institutions and citizens, having realized that it had launched eParticipation initiatives targeting decision making without first considering the features that a public sphere actually requires. Ultimately, the ability of online public

spaces to revive a genuine public sphere is linked to the capacity of the former to promote the emergence of new ideas in the political debate, their ability to stimulate the appearance of new political communities, and their capacity to foster genuine and inclusive forms of political debate. This partly explains the insistence of the EU on cultivating the Europa website as a means to foster the resurgence of a public sphere, although the efficiency of this dynamic (efficiency and democratization of the public sphere) has not been robustly established (Kies, 2010).

As the direct engagement of individual citizens, supported by the EU eParticipation offerings, might have a role for legitimization and problem solving, eParticipation was widely used to support involvement in political associations and dialogue within strong and segmented publics, since eParticipation attempts would benefit from the involvement of other stakeholders (media, civil society). From 2001 onwards, the EU has embarked on more “politicized” forms of policy making that may not call for direct input from citizens to policy making but provide opportunities to citizens and weak publics to connect and voice their opinions, which for the European institutions is the kernel of legitimacy. From the previous analysis, we can also infer that the EU has managed to reap significant benefits from eParticipation by rendering networks accessible to weak publics and facilitating system connectivity, maintaining public forums for debate as part of the open communication policy, and by encouraging public sphere enclaves, notwithstanding that a single and straightforward eParticipation strategy has not yet been formulated.

## Conclusion and Future Work

This survey has focused on the role of eParticipation in EU legal documents and the main eParticipation initiatives employed by the European institutions viewed through a theoretical prism which links participation in traditional democratic theory and eParticipation. The legal documents examined primarily underline improvements in connectivity of networks and the encouragement of an open communication policy. A commitment to democracy and legitimacy has been revealed since the 1990s where the standards of legitimacy, openness, and accountability have been raised. Citizen involvement in policy making and the use of eParticipation tools began to emerge after 2007–2008 in-line with the legitimacy crisis provoked by the nonratification of the Lisbon Treaty, to which for the European institutions responded by strengthening network modes of governance. The initiatives examined demonstrate a commitment to the key policy principles by taking considerable steps toward using online communication tools and creating the institutional arrangements for participation. However, there is no easy measure of whether actual participation is adequate, since the role of citizens was not clearly delineated. The taxonomy of initiatives reveals a tendency on behalf of the EU to include network elements within a general hierarchical mode of governance and enhance the participation rationale with decoupling elements so as to prepare the ground for informed public deliberation within the EU as the basis for further (and possibly renewed forms of) participation. Thus, the role of direct engagement by individual citizens remains contested notwithstanding the creation of additional space to support dialogue within strong and segmented publics. These initiatives need to be further evaluated using a framework capable of explaining whether the initiatives under question serve legitimacy or truly empower citizen to shape policy making. This would need to involve a range of research tools in addition to the design-focused evaluation, which we have carried out.

We therefore argue that one of the main challenges for the future lies in theoretically linking participation, legitimacy, and the EU to eParticipation under a unified theoretical framework. Another priority would be to scrutinize all eParticipation initiatives relative to public sphere characteristics in order to identify how the nascent European public sphere is internally divided (e.g., existence of enclaves or political patterns).

## Appendix

### European Official Documents Consulted

#### Primary Legislation

- Articles 138a and 138d of the Treaty of the European Union, Official Journal C 224 of 31 August 1992.
- Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities, Official Journal C 340 of 10 November 1997.
- Treaty of Nice, amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts, Official Journal C 80 of 10 March 2001.
- Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Official Journal C 310 of 16 December 2004.
- Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, Official Journal C 306 of 17 December 2007.

#### Secondary Legislation

- Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Youth meeting within the Council of 8 February 1999 on youth participation, Official Journal C 042, 17/02/1999 P. 0001 - 0002.
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### URL's of eParticipation Initiatives Identified (Correspond to Numbering in the Section "eParticipation Initiatives in European Institutions")

1. 1a: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=49>
2. 1b: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=70&language=EN>
3. 1c: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/see-and-hear>
4. 1d: <http://www.europarltv.europa.eu>
5. 1e: [http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index_en.htm)
6. 2a: [http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm)
7. 2b: [http://europa.eu/take-part/blogs/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/take-part/blogs/index_en.htm)
8. 2c: [http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index_en.htm)
9. 2d: <http://ec.europa.eu/archives/debateeurope/index.htm>
10. 2e: <http://www.youtube.com/user/eutube>
11. 2f: [http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/services/interactive\\_services/evoting-polls/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/services/interactive_services/evoting-polls/index_en.htm)
12. 2g: [http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/services/interactive\\_services/chat/](http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/services/interactive_services/chat/)
13. 2h: <http://myparl.eu> (stopped)
14. 2i: <http://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eutv/portal/index.html>
15. 3: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu/> and [http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index\\_en.htm#102](http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index_en.htm#102)
16. 4: [http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/take-part/social-media/index_en.htm)
17. 6a: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/extranets.aspx> and <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/index.aspx>
18. 6b: <http://www.frontex.europa.eu/> and <http://www.esurveyspro.com/Survey.aspx?id=255f8b19-a200-406f-adab-f310a0d4d8a9>
19. 6c: <http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Debate>
20. 6d: <http://easa.europa.eu/rulemaking/rulemaking-directorate.php>
21. 6e: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/calls.htm> and <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/consultations/call/ppr101027.htm>
22. 6f: <http://www.era.europa.eu/Core-Activities/Consultations/Pages/Home.aspx>
23. 6g: [http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/about\\_fra/about\\_fra\\_en.htm](http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/about_fra/about_fra_en.htm)
24. 6h: <http://www.eige.europa.eu/>
25. 6i: [http://echa.europa.eu/consultations\\_en.asp](http://echa.europa.eu/consultations_en.asp)
26. 6j: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/blog>
27. 6k: [http://www.eea.europa.eu/multimedia#c3=&b\\_start=0](http://www.eea.europa.eu/multimedia#c3=&b_start=0)

28. 6l: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/> and <http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Pages/home.aspx>  
 29. 6m: <http://oami.europa.eu/ows/rw/pages/index.en.do>

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### Notes

1. See [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/democratic\\_deficiten.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/democratic_deficiten.htm) for official EU information on the roots of the democratic deficit.
2. Even an act of participation as straightforward as voting is invested with slightly different significations and political effects in different political systems (Verba et al., 1978, pp. 60–61).
3. In this case, the assumption is that a political system which is relatively open to social demands, or which actively seeks to mobilize civic resources in policy making, will typically prefer (or have a superior capacity to absorb) demands which are formulated collectively, and which are likely to be expressed more appropriately by the professional political communicators of organizations and associations. Hence, although one could distinguish different types of openness of a political opportunity structure—according to which some systems might favor individual participation and others organized participation by groups—in practice, it is likely that the overall level of openness is more significant, and that greater openness will tend to encourage collective rather than individual action, as an intrinsically more effective means of influencing political decisions. Conversely, the most significant effect of an impermeable political opportunity structure might be to increase the perceived costs of collective action and thus make the joining and forming of political organizations appear less viable (Morales, 2009, p. 123).
4. Representation has been described as a filter for political participation. Talpin (2003) suggests that it is more a philosophical than a sociological question whether this filter operates efficiently and legitimately or censorially and illegitimately—that is, whether representation is “good” or “bad” for democracy.
5. Regulatory powers tend to stimulate the involvement of “segmented publics”—the groups directly affected by a particular policy or decision.
6. The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was rejected. The Treaty of Lisbon was ratified and entered into force in 2009.
7. The citizens’ initiative refers to the embedded right of a specific number of citizens to initiate legislation, in terms of requiring the European Commission to adopt a position on the issue.
8. According to the European Commission, “Better Regulation is a broad strategy to improve the regulatory environment in Europe—containing a range of initiatives to consolidate, codify and simplify existing legislation and improve the quality of new legislation by better evaluating its likely economic, social and environmental impacts.”
9. The IPM tool is used in the context of evaluating the impact of new proposals on business, which includes companies of all sizes and sectors dispersed throughout the Member States. The IPM technology has been also used as a feedback mechanism to collect problems relating to different EU policies that citizens and business encounter through a network of contact points. Consultations via the IPM can be either closed (restricted to a specific stakeholder group) or entirely open to the public.
10. This initiative was stopped in late 2008.
11. Virtually all community agencies provide online information and audiovisual offerings, however, the survey methodology does not consider the above as eParticipation offerings. The agencies are grouped according to activity for consistency and clarity. In addition, social network activities are grouped and referred to as presence on social networks.

12. In the Habermasian view, the public sphere can be described as a network for communicating information and points of view and reproduced through communicative action.

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