INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

GLOBALIZATION AND COMMUNICATION:
EU E-DEMOCRACY EXPERIENCE

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The European Parliament, understanding the importance of fast and effective communication among its diverse states and citizens, has been conducting a number of research works on e-participation and has published the following studies: «The Future of Democracy in Europe: Trends, Analyses and Reforms» in 2008 and «E-Public, E– Participation and E-Voting – prospects and challenges» in 2012 [6, c. 16].

Online discussion of political and social issues has occurred over many interactive channels, including e–mail, chat rooms, pages and groups in social media, e-petitions, e-consultations etc. «The ability of the Internet to unite those of disparate backgrounds has great potential for fostering debate and discussion of issues in the civic arena. In many cases, differences of opinion about, for example, political issues arise from lack of familiarity with the perspectives of other people» [3].

The relationship between citizens and governments has changed largely due to globalization and the increasing role of information and communication technologies. Different concepts have been adopted to describe this transformation such as e-government, e-governance, and e-democracy. Though meaning different things, they all refer to the use of electronic means to improve government's performance and citizen engagement [4].

The United Nations created a conceptual framework for e-participation:

1. E-information: Enabling participation by providing citizens with public information and access to information without or upon demand.

2. E-consultation: Engaging citizens in contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services.

3. E-decision-making: Empowering citizens through co-design of policy options and coproduction of service components and delivery modalities [6].

The European Commission has a broad definition of e-participation, stating that it helps people engage in politics and policy-making and makes the decision-making processes easier to understand. It is part of the European Commission's «open government approach» which aims to provide opportunities for public administration in becoming more efficient and effective through increased information and knowledge exchange and enhancing connectivity, openness and transparency [6, c. 16].

As Elisa Lironi states, «E-participation tools are intended to support EU citizens in exercising their participation rights through technology. Although only a few participation tools have been specifically provided for in the Treaties, the overall framework is inclusive enough to allow for more direct participation in EU policy-making through other means» [6, c. 44].

The UN also developed an e-participation index (EPI) based on this framework and conducted its first survey on digital participation in 2003, as a supplementary index to the UN EGovernment Survey. The UN states that the goal of e-participation initiatives is to «improve citizens' access to information and public services and to promote participation in public decision-making which impacts the well-being of society, in general, and the individual, in particular» [7].

The results show that political participation via the Internet still seems to be less advanced, tend to remain at an experimental stage or are confined to very specific purposes. Online voting in general elections and referendums has so far only been introduced as a regular and guaranteed feature in Estonia; online consultations offered by governments are much more common (European Commission, Canadian federal government) [2, p. 40]. Yet, compared to e-petitions, e-consultations are usually not codified in law, and can generally be characterized as non-compulsory [5]. Petition as an instrument of e-democracy is mentioned in the legislative acts of the European Council and many other governments.

The study on Potential and Challenges of E-Participation in the European Union conducted in 2016 has demonstrated that main EU e-participation tools are:

– The European Citizens' initiative, the petitions to the European Parliament and EU public consultations;

– E-participation projects co-funded by the European Commission and run by civil society organisations to investigate this field;

– The European Commission e-participation platform, Futurium, as part of its eGovernment Action Plan;

– Online EU public consultations by MEP [6].

We believe that democracy and communication rights are quite interdependent, they promote transparency, effectiveness and accountability of governmental organs and allow comfortable existence in the globalized world. New model of political communication mediated by advanced information and communication technologies changes and «upgrades» the rules of legislative procedures and political decision-making. New forms of e-democracy like e-petitioning or e-consultations demand much of linguistic and social attention as they give birth to new types of media discourse and new social practices [1]. The creation of new tools for the citizens` e-participation also needs linguistic and information technology skills, thus giving applied linguists a new area of research and practice.

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