A LOT OF DEMOCRACY
VIRTUAL CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Dear Sirs,

Electoral democracy is living an unprecedented crisis on global scale. Since 1990s voters' turnout has been declining, electoral volatility has widely increased and trust in governments collapsed. We need to test new forms of political participation to rebuild the pact between citizens and institutions. Our project is therefore based on an innovative experiment of aleatory democracy [1]. Randomly selected citizen assemblies have been tested in several countries, but the real experiment would be to shift the discussion at the European level. So far, many politicians and philosophers think that a system of representation based on sortition could restore the trust of citizens in democracy and improve its quality. Some professors of the University of Catania (Italy) have been spending years studying mathematical models dealing with the application of sortition to democracy. Their last study demonstrates that the efficiency of a democratic Assembly grows if it is composed by a number of independent citizens selected by lot and that this number can be obtained from the abstention in the elections.

Our project
Our project consists in creating a platform of various "European virtual citizens Assemblies" composed by a number of volunteers from EU countries. This number will be obtained from the datum of abstention at the European election of May 2019. In correspondence of each new issue under discussion at the EP, it will be created an Assembly and volunteers will be randomly selected as new anonymous members of it.
Each member will have the possibility to 1) access public documents related to the issue 2) join a forum with selected experts and FAQ documents 3) vote on the issue on a specific date – everything on the project's platform.
Our project aims at empirically demonstrating the results of before mentioned studies by comparing the vote on specific issues of the EP with that of a supposed unique Assembly, obtained unifying with the right proportion the EP votes and the virtual Assembly ones.

Project's goals
The main objective of our project is to put into practice the recent proposal of several researchers at the University of Catania [2,3,4,5], who suggest that the efficiency of a parliament increases by adding to it a component of citizens selected by lot and independent from parties and coalitions. The size of the random component could be effectively linked to the percentage of abstentionism at the real European elections.
The experiment aims to compare the results of the voting process of the real Assembly, made of elected MEP only, with those of a virtual one, composed by both a rescaled MEP component (taking into account the random legislators) and the new independent members. These members should be changed by repeating a new random selection for each discussed act and informed through our platform before the vote. The final comparison between the effectiveness of the voting behavior of the two Assemblies will be realized by means of one or more surveys among all the EU citizens.

Project's steps and actions

We will carry out the project in four main steps.

The first will be the realization of the virtual Assembly's online platform. Our purpose would be to realize it also for blind people. It will be composed by at least four session: registration, online learning and training, documents storage, FAQ session and virtual Assembly.

Second, the promotion of the project for inviting people all over EU countries to join the platform as volunteers. The promotion will be achieved with our European partners through both virtual and non-virtual means, such as social media and public meetings.

Third, the general management of the platform, in particular during the registration, the random selection and the vote processes.

Finally, the analysis of data from votes of both the EP and the various virtual Assemblies held on the platform. There will be many kinds of compared analysis to demonstrate that in a hypothetical unique European Assembly composed by both elected and random selected common citizens, efficiency and representativeness would be stronger than in the EP.

Target group

Our project's target group is simply composed by European citizens older than 18 years. Our purpose is to involve as many people as possible of all ages from potentially all EU countries and to convince them to join the platform. We will follow two main strategies for it.

Firstly, through internet, thus social media posts, videos, advertisements etc.

Secondly, with non-virtual activities, such as public meeting, conferences, events, organization of stands in cities' squares etc.

We will get people involved by explaining that they would participate to the hugest democratic experiment never realized before in the European Union. An experiment which could change the democratic perspective of many European citizens, especially of those who don't longer trust democracy and politics. By joying the platform and becoming a potential member of one of the virtual Assemblies, they would realize that their commitment, ideas, participation and vote can do the difference and that democracy needs them.

Communication strategy

We will carry out the project communication through different "moments".

Firstly, trying to build an online reputation through the empowerment of the platform's website, which will be the place where to share studies on aleatory democracy and contents related to the project. Our purpose is to launch the promotion on May 1st 2019.

Together with the launch of the Assemblies online platform, we will start the promotion inviting citizens to become its member for a short period. To do so we will work on the online communication, targeting a specific audience with: tutorial videos in english as well as in many european languages as possible; engaging posts on social network platforms (FB, TW, LK, IG) in all EU countries; spread of project contents in online forums on policy making, scientific publications and online newspapers. In a third moment, and for the entire duration of the project, we will strengthen an offline communication with articles on the main european newspapers, public meetings and conferences, seminars in schools and universities to involve the youngsters.

Evaluation of project's success

After a given period of time, during which several voting acts have been performed by the two Assemblies, the real one (with only parties) and the virtual one (with both parties and independent members chosen by lot), we will test the appreciation of the common EU citizens towards the different results obtained in order to verify which Assembly is more representative of the electorate. This test could be realized through one or more surveys commissioned to independent european agencies. Scientific articles and publications will be realized on the project during and after it by a "Scientific Committee" composed by professors Andrea Rapisarda and Alessandro Pluchino - 2 of the authors of the theoretical model - and other members from Universities all over EU involved in the evaluation of project's results.

Concrete actions and timeline

Our activities are mainly focused on the recruitment of volunteers with various communication strategies and in the management of the platform. Thus, in providing and uploading in the platform: 1) multi-language documents taken from the EP website and 2) simplified and synthesized versions of it in english and potentially in all EU languages, realized by specialized technical staffs selected by us with a particular attention on their impartiality and fairness. All these documents will be needed by the drawn members for deliberating on the Assembly's topic.

The project will officially start on May 1st 2019 and will end one year later on May 1st 2020. The timeline of the Project would be as follows: until May 1st 2019 it will be developed the platform or at least its basic structure for the enrollment of volunteers; on that date it will start the recruitment campaign; with the European elections of May 26th it will be known the number of members that each virtual Assembly will have, calculated from the datum of abstention; since that moment, virtual Assemblies will be created through random selection of registered volunteers for each issue under discussion at the EP; on December 31th there will be a fist compared study; on May 1st 2020 there will be the last and more complete study, followed by scientific articles and publications.

Evaluation of outreach

If the experiment will give positive results, i.e. if the independent surveys will demonstrate that the virtual Assemblies (consisting of both parties and independent members chosen by lot), will definitely be more representative of the European citizens needs than the real one consisting of elected members only, we can say to have found a new way to correct the present electoral systems, providing also a feasible solution to the problem of abstentionism which is a common plague of any election and at the moment is around 50% on average. This will also force parties to have better Parliament members in the future who are closer to the people desires and will also reduce the protest populist movements against parties all around Europe, consolidating the birth of a new and more democratic European Union.

Project's budget

The estimated necessary budget for the realization of the Project is at least 100.000 euro.
The budget required is explained in details as follows:
- online platform also accessible for visually impaired people: 30.000

- communication: 25.000 euro
- staff involved in the project full time: 25.000
- surveys (in at least 3 european languages) and final publication of the project (probably only in English): 10.000
- external experts: 10.000

We will establish partnerships with Think tanks and Universities all over Europe to help us with the data collection, and will obtain the extra budget needed through the launch of a european crowdfunding campaign with the aim of spreading the message of the importance of democracy in Europe in 2020.

Partners of the project
- Associazione Luca coscioni
- Science for Democracy
- ODERAL - Organizzazione per la Democrazia Rappresentativa Aleatoria: "Organization for the Representative and Aleatory Democracy" (www.oderal.org) is an Italian organization created in September 2018 by Samuele Nannoni and Marco Sciolis with the support of professors Alessandro Pluchino and Andrea Rapisarda. Following the experiences around the world, it deals with the promotion in Itay of citizens Assemblies composed by common people selected through sortition, i.e. randomly selected. Until March 2019, ODERAL has elaborated some projects and proposals mainly for Municipalities, getting in touch with mayors and politicians around Italy.

[1] Frey, Bruno S. and Osterloh, Margit, Aleatoric Democracy (December 12, 2016). CESifo Working Paper Series No. 6229. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2905045

[2] A.Pluchino, C.Garofalo, A.Rapisarda, S.Spagano, M.Caserta, "Accidental Politicians: How Randomly Selected Legislators Can Improve Parliament Efficiency", Physica A 390 (2011) 3944–3954

[3] M.Caserta, C.Garofalo, A.Pluchino, A.Rapisarda, S.Spagano, "Democrazia a sorte. Ovvero la sorte della democrazia", Malcor D'Edizione (2012)

[4] A.Pluchino, A.Rapisarda, C.Garofalo, S.Spagano, M.Caserta, "L'efficienza del caso", Le Scienze (2013)

[5] M.Caserta, A.Pluchino, A.Rapisarda, S.Spagano, "Why lot: How sortition came to help representative democracy", arXiv:1712.04194 [physics.soc-ph]