

**Participation Now!**  
**Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change**

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**Report**

**Forum 1**  
**Vote Match/ Voter mobilisation**

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**Inputs:**

Diego Garzia, European University Institute, Florence (Italy)

Ana Cinthya Uribe, Ramon Llull University/ elecciones.es (Spain)

Haytham El Wardany & Paola Stablum, Media in Cooperation and Transition (Germany)

**Moderation:**

Jochum de Graf, ProDemos – House of Democracy and the Rule of Law (the Netherlands)

**Summary:**

Generally spoken, the mood was concentrated on the topic, pragmatic and friendly. The debate was concretely oriented on details and practical meters. The whole workshop was more technical than controversial or debating. That was because most of the participants already had experience with this project.

The moderator Jochum de Graf from ProDemos – House of Democracy and the Rule of Law from the Netherlands indicated as the main target of the Workshop to: a) introduce how the Vote Match and other Voting Advice Applications (VAA) are functioning in different countries and b) to openly discuss the different approaches and share experiences and inspiration with use of it. There was also indicated a target to introduce and improve network functioning of Vote Match Europe, which was however postponed to the focus group later.

At the second session, in the rerun of the workshop, only five participants did appear. The presenters, the moderator and representers of the bpb being all partners in the network Vote Match Europe, under the auspices of NECE, decided to combine the meeting of the Focus Group with the Workshop. Vote Match Europe is an existing network from partner organizations in seven European countries aimed at the European elections 2014. The network did receive a grant for mobilities to networking conferences from the Grundtvig Life Long Learning Programme of the European Commission. Vote Match Europe is already

functioning as a NECE Focus Group. The first conference with this regard took place in Berlin in October 2012; the next conference is scheduled for mid February in London. In Córdoba the present partners did exchange some practical information and made an arrangement to proceed with a list of potential partners in other European countries to be discussed at the next conference.

### Part I:

The first part was the session “Voting Advice Applications in Europe: The State of the Art”, from the speaker Diego Garzia from the European University Institute from Florence in Italy. He started with a general introduction of the Voting Advice Applications (VAA). The most important points are:

- VAA should give you an advice - not to tell you whom to vote. It should be informative and work as an assistant when you are looking for your own opinion.
- It helps users casting a vote by comparing their policy preferences on major issues with the programmatic stands of political parties on such issues.
- It helps to match the answers given by voters and given by the party. This inspires the voter’s reflection about elections by making him/her think about topics he/she didn’t recognise before.

### Practical use and development:

The operation of the tool was demonstrated by the practical use of it. Thus, the participants of the workshop could better imagine how it works. Nowadays it is being used in many countries. VAA are becoming an alternative to the traditional informational media as another source of information. It has a socio-political background, which consists of:

- The fast spread of Internet – as a precondition
- A Decline of cleavage voting.
- The Increase of issue voting for people are not that much interested in the leader of a party but the important issues.

VAA can support meaningful issue voting by giving qualified “vote advice” after one goes through the process. The voters don’t have to go through all the parties’ political programs. Through this process, the tool creators already went through. Afterwards, the voters can develop clear policy preferences based upon competing proposal over the same topics.

### The mobilization effect of VAA:

According to some researches, it has been found out that after the use of VAA some people decided and went voting. The question is why? To reply to this, Diego Garzia presented some explaining theories:

- Low-information rationality theory (Popkin, 1994):
  - Voters’ instrumental orientation towards politics implies that voters will decide from election to election whether they will vote or not

- The probability for such instrumental voters to cast a vote is inversely proportional to the effort required to gather enough information
- Representative deficit theory (Alvarez, Mair & Trechsel, 2011)
  - Perfect match between the user and one of the parties may incite him to turn out and vote for the party suggested by the VAA.
  - A user finding him-/ or herself on a corner of the political space where no party can be found may feel a sense of “political solitude”, and this could exert in turn a negative effect on his willingness to take part in the election.

The findings were that about 40% of users declared that using VAA had a decisive or at least slight influence on their decision to go to the polls. Spoken in concrete numbers, the use of Vote Match was responsible for a 3% increase in the Netherlands’ national elections and 14% in EU elections.

### Discussion – questions and outcomes:

The following questions were proposed to the audition:

- 1) *Should we rely more on the party’s promises or on their real voting record when filling the tool?*
  - This differs in every country. In the Netherlands it is quite OK to work with programs. In Spain, for example, it is necessary to work with the past (see below).
- 2) *Question of horizontal matching – some additional function of VAA: the comparison between users, identifying people with the same views and the possibility of helping with forming new party (for those who wish).*
  - On this the response was quite strong: it could be tricky due of the loss of independence. There should be maintained a strong security. And even now the VAA programmers are from time to time accused of being storing the data – which they only did for scientific purposes, besides the fact that anyone could ask for them.
  - It is important that people don’t have to register when using the tool – it helps avoid political marketing.
- 3) *Is there any other tool that only summarizes the information without matching one with the information?*
  - There are tools like that but mostly they give you both. But you can always skip it.
  - And it wouldn’t be so successful without matching. For matching is the crucial part – it gives you each part, all the information and you can compare and decide.
  - It’s not an aim to do a complete test. Just about the very relevant questions. Result should make people more aware of some topics. It isn’t the position you should vote for. VAA should strengthen your ideas what to think of.

## Part II:

The second speaker Ana Cinthya Uribe is from the Ramon Llull University in Barcelona and responsible for the content coordination and executive management for elecciones.es. She and other students were looking for an Internet tool (VAA) for the use in Spain. They wanted to achieve that people become more focused on political programs than on politician's appearance. So they started their own little NGO trying to adapt StemWijzer with some differences to the Spanish environment. They tried to invent a more attractive design and started.

Some lessons they got:

- After they managed to get a media push in 2010 they realized that it is not only the Internet users but also the others that you get from media.
- After receiving support from British partners they had over three million users in 2011.
- When it came to regional elections in Andalusia in 2012 they got very small media coverage and less than 30 thousand visitors.

When it came to unexpected elections in Cataluña they decided to change the strategy and work with just one question and answer on 5-position scale. The voter was just looking for the party in the parliament, which is aiming the same position related to the one question.

Their conclusions were the following:

- It isn't always possible to work with all the parties – they don't answer the questions. Moreover they don't publish their programs. So the only way is to work with their past deeds and not with the future promises when making the tool.
- Politicians don't trust us and don't think they need us. Therefore it is difficult to get their input.
- It is a great problem from who you receive the money for making the tool. Especially in countries like Spain or Greece – it is not possible to get it from grants. The only way is to finance it from private sources. But in this way, you are losing your independence.
- It is good that VAA helps the people to discuss.

Their notes for the future – and inspirations for other VAA makers:

- We should pay more attention for cooperating with media.
- We need to be more prepared for mobile platforms.
- We have to have on the web still something new so people see there is still something happening.
- We have to find funding.

### Part III:

The moderator Jochum de Graaf from ProDemos – House of Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Netherlands, introduced the history of VAA's in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Because of the successes of StemWijzer in the Netherlands and Wahl-O-Mat in Germany he was years ago approached by the German organization MICT (Media in Cooperation and Transition gGmbH). They implemented projects for the media in Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia and Egypt – moreover, it resulted as a kind of capacity building for journalists where a Vote Match was introduced. An upcoming VAA project in Libya was still in the planning phase where parliamentary elections were foreseen before Summer 2013.

The discussion in the combined Workshop/Focus Group was focusing on the similarities and differences of implementing the tool in European democracies and the new Northern African democracies in development.

Paola Stablum and Haytham El Wardany from Media in Cooperation and Transition from Germany analysed the political situation in Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia in 2010 there were just three proper parties. And they had to set their agenda in seven months before the election of the constitutional assembly – which implicates that the use of the tool has been quite different. In Egypt, before the revolution there were twenty-four official parties in Egypt – but in fact – just one ruling party. In both countries there were some tens of parties established, immediately after the fall of the dictators. So the first task was to decide which parties should be taken into the tool, on the basis of objective criteria as having a party manifesto, a good chance on seats in the parliament e.g. In several round table sessions the Electionnaires were developed. In Tunisia they worked with an expert panel, political experts from different political origin, while in Egypt they worked with experts from a number of partner organizations and journalists.

The Implementation was realized in the following steps:

- Step 1: Identifying controversies and formulating questions (local context, subject).
- Step 2: Questioning the parties and technical implementation (who is officially established party and who isn't – interesting, how parties were suspicious).
- Step 3: Promoting; the Electionnaire (launching event, cooperation with media)
- Step 4: Implementation.

These were the following outcomes:

- In numbers: in Egypt 31 parties took part, in Tunisia 29. In Egypt there were 129.000 users, in Tunisia 62.000 (mostly in first two weeks).
- It has been considered as voter and parties' education – one of the main additional values. In comparison with the European tools the Electionnaire supplies extra information on party profiles and the electoral system in the countries at stake.
- The understanding of the tools differentiates: the young people understood it since the beginning.
- The tools listed most users in the first weeks that it was online, right after the launching. This stands in contrast with the European tools where the number of users was increasing enormously just before the Election Day.

- There is still a lot to win with a better promotion and cooperation with all kinds of media, where some extra funding might be needed.

**Conclusion:**

The resume is that MICT could function as an associated partner of the Vote Match Europe network, exchanging activities and experiences. This was foreseen in the upcoming project for Libya where MICT will work with the consult of StemWijzer.