

## A letter from Brussels: quite a few good reasons to vote in the EU elections

So here we are, a couple of days before the EU elections with yet another person telling you that you should vote. Should you care? I'm convinced that you should and I have quite a few good reasons why.

Basic courtesy requires that I introduce myself, because it's important to know who you are talking to. My name is Antoine Rivet and I'm the managing director of GOPA Com., one of the big and very specialized communication agencies gravitating around the EU institutions, charged with communicating their objectives and intentions to EU citizens. A few months ago, together with other friends routinely communicating about the European institutions, we decided to step out of the shadows and contribute to the [9o6 Movement](#), an initiative set up to encourage EU citizens (especially young citizens) to vote. This is a totally non-profit, independent initiative, unconnected in any way to the Commission and the other EU institutions that are our respected clients. We are not aiming for personal benefits such as fame: we've lived away from the limelight for a long time – just google my name and you'll find very little else, other than the fact I am who I say I am.

Our slogan is "Vote Anyway!" I don't know how this will be translated into Romanian, but it certainly doesn't mean "fulfil this formal obligation and then forget about it". It means that voting is the only rational option and it's necessary now more than ever. It's "vote above all, first and foremost, since this is where democracy and the future begin". Here's someone descending from the EU ivory tower – or bubble – with strange ideas and thoughts, you might say. But these thoughts are not at all strange. At a first glance, it may seem that Europe will continue regardless of whether we vote, when we vote, or how we vote, and that each vote is just a drop in the ocean. So why should we all care, as Europeans, and why should you care, as Romanians, about the vote in 2024 more than in other elections?

### Vote to legitimise the EU as a whole

We all remember 24 February 2022, the date of Russia's second invasion of Ukraine. A date that changed everything. Whatever the EU was lacking in terms of common leadership became more apparent – although, remarkably, the EU leaders were able to reach consensus to support Ukraine, in military, economic and geopolitical terms. What was at stake? What makes the EU falter in such situations? From decades of experience in Brussels, among the European institutions, I can confirm something many of you have understood. Sometimes, in the European Council, local or national interest prevails over the common European good. We know who the leaders are that "vote against" and we might be upset about this. Nevertheless, they are democratically elected leaders and they have the right to adopt positions that we may not like, thanks to one very important thing, which is called democratic legitimacy. These leaders have received this legitimacy thanks to the millions of votes they received in their countries. How can we counteract this kind of legitimacy? Within the democratic process, there is only one way to do it: with even more democratic legitimacy – millions of more votes. And this is where the European Parliament elections come into play. Any single

informed vote in the European elections is a precious drop of extra legitimacy to the EU, as a common institution.

## The EU cares about your voice and your vote

Something that I know from my decades of experience in the EU ecosystem is that politicians really care about citizens' interests – since these turn into votes and provide legitimacy. One single example that I know very well: GOPA Com. was part of the Citizens' Panels initiative that started last year. We provided media relations for panels of 150 EU citizens each, including teams from Romania, which were selected to express their opinion on EU regulations about food waste, virtual worlds or learning mobility. Nothing sensational, but policies are seldom sensational. However, the European Commission's effort to involve regular citizens in the democratic process, with a special emphasis on the 16-25 years age segment, is remarkable. Each Citizen Panel resulted in a list of precise recommendations that were taken into account by the EU legislators in their next steps. This is an example of so-called "deliberative democracy", a recent approach that incorporates the benefits of the ancient Agora of Athens ("participative democracy") into the modern mechanism of "representative democracy" – where citizens are represented by elected representatives (Members of the European Parliament, in EU's case).

What I can say for sure is that the Romanian participants in the Citizens' Panels were among the most active and knowledgeable. We are aware of that in Brussels, and we are aware of the fact that Romanians are, in general, stronger supporters of the EU than other citizens of the continent. The most recent Eurobarometer shows that 58% of Romanians tend to trust the EU, compared to an EU average of 49%, and this trust increased by 6% from the previous study.

In Europe, we are also aware of the effective support that Romania showed through Solidarity Lanes, an initiative that exported many millions of tons of grain from the war-torn Ukrainian economy through Romanian customs, mainly through the Romanian port of Constanța.

What is one ship carrying grain, no matter how big, in the ocean? Not more than a drop. But it matters. If it didn't, we wouldn't see it. But we do see it, and we see you as well. We think of you, and we recognise your accomplishments. We need them, and we need you. We challenge you to continue these achievements. Vote Anyway!