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CITIZENS, EQUALITY, RIGHTS AND VALUES PROGRAMME (CERV)  
DELIBERATE PROJECT 2026-2027



## Civic Dialogue Forum

*“Exploring the Roots of Democratic Disengagement”*

*3 April, 2026, Sofia, Bulgaria*

**Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski**

Venue: Rectorate Main Building, The Egg Conference Hall

**Participants from:**

**GREECE, KOSOVO, SLOVENIA AND BULGARIA**

### Overview

The Civic Dialogue Forum represents the launching event of the *DELIBERATE* project, initiating the participatory cycle that will unfold across multiple countries and activities throughout the project. The event will bring together *citizens, youth representatives, civic educators, NGO professionals, and local stakeholders* from diverse social backgrounds to explore the underlying causes of democratic disengagement and to co-develop ideas for strengthening civic participation and democratic trust. The Forum aims to create a *safe and inclusive environment for dialogue*, enabling participants to exchange perspectives, share experiences, and collectively reflect on barriers to civic participation across Europe.

The event will take place at the in Sofia, Bulgaria, and will last one full day. It marks the official launch of the project and the start of its participatory engagement cycle.

The Civic Dialogue Forum will bring together 60 participants from 4 countries – *Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo and Slovenia* (six participating organisations) representing diverse social backgrounds and underrepresented communities. The event will bring together 60 participants representing diverse communities and stakeholder groups, including:

- **Youth and young civic leaders**
- **Citizens from marginalized or underrepresented communities**
- **Migrants and refugees**
- **Residents from rural areas**
- **Civic educators and NGO representatives**
- **Local policymakers and community stakeholders**

*The Civic Dialogue Forum* aims at creating a *participatory space where citizens from different social groups can engage in structured dialogue and collaborative reflection*. The event is particularly focused on groups that are often underrepresented in democratic processes, including: *youth; migrants and refugees; rural residents; socio-economically disadvantaged citizens; members of marginalized communities*. Participatory and deliberative democratic approaches provide opportunities for citizens to discuss public issues, consider different perspectives, and collaboratively develop solutions to societal challenges. Such processes emphasize informed discussion, mutual listening, and collective decision-making. Deliberative democratic initiatives, such as citizen dialogues and assemblies, allow participants to engage with evidence, exchange ideas, and formulate recommendations on public issues through facilitated discussions. Across

Europe, democratic institutions are facing challenges related to declining civic participation, distrust in public institutions, and increasing social polarization. Traditional forms of political engagement - such as political party membership or participation in formal political processes - have decreased in many countries, particularly among younger generations. These developments highlight the need for *innovative forms of participatory democracy that allow citizens to actively contribute to public dialogue and decision-making processes.*

***The Objectives pursued by the Forum are:***

1. Exploring democratic disengagement: *Examine the social, political, and institutional factors contributing to declining civic participation and trust in democratic institutions.*
2. Promoting inclusive dialogue: *Create a safe and respectful space where citizens from diverse backgrounds can share experiences and perspectives on democratic participation.*
3. Empowering participants: *Strengthen participants' understanding of democratic processes and increase their confidence in engaging in civic life.*
4. Supporting youth engagement: *Provide young participants with practical knowledge and skills for civic participation through interactive training modules.*
5. Come up with recommendations: *Identify practical strategies and ideas for increasing civic participation and strengthening democratic engagement in local communities.*

**What to expect:** The Civic Dialogue Forum follows combines experiential learning, deliberative dialogue, and inclusive engagement design. Activities in the forum include:

- **Experiential learning on** democratic participation through interactive formats rather than traditional lectures. Group discussions, simulations, storytelling sessions, and collaborative workshops enable participants to experience democratic processes directly.
- **Learning-by-doing** strengthens confidence and fosters a sense of ownership over democratic principles and civic tools.
- **Deliberative dialogue that** emphasizes mutual listening, respectful exchange of perspectives, and collective problem-solving.
- **Inclusive participation with** balanced speaking opportunities, clear communication, and culturally sensitive approaches, ensuring the active participation of marginalized and underrepresented groups.

**Participants** will develop a deeper understanding of the challenges affecting democratic participation in their countries. The Forum will help strengthen connections between participants, partner organisations, and civic initiatives across the participating countries. They will also gain an increased confidence in expressing their views in civic dialogue; stronger awareness of democratic engagement opportunities and enhanced motivation to participate in community initiatives. Youth participants will be encouraged to share knowledge within their communities; initiate civic discussions and local engagement activities and remain connected through the project network.

**Contribution:** The event will contribute to the broader objectives of the DELIBERATE project by supporting a more inclusive and participatory democratic culture. Insights and recommendations from the Forum will feed into the *Civic Engagement Toolkit*, which will provide replicable methodologies for civic participation activities across Europe. The results will summarize participant reflections; recommendations for strengthening civic participation. The findings will be shared through project communication channels and partner networks to ensure wider dissemination and learning.