



Debates at the European Parliament on the digital society

In view of the fast-moving developments in the digital society and their far-reaching implications for private and professional life, the European Parliament has decided to hold three separate debates on 12 and 13 September: on blogging, on the Internet as an opportunity for the formation of new political communities and on the use of the Internet as a tool of government information.

Weblogs - competition, challenge or chance? Who's afraid to open Pandora's Blogs?

If anything has skyrocketed in cyberspace it is surely the use of weblogs. At the moment there are some 31 million weblogs, to which some 80,000 new ones are added each day. In spite of - or perhaps because of - its popularity "blogging" raises a host of practical and ethical issues. Probably the most obvious is how to see the wood for the trees or how to separate the sheep from the goats. With 31 million weblogs, how can anyone find those that are reliable and worthwhile, especially since the contents of blogs range from the highly political to the highly personal?

A hot issue in the field of blogging is, of course, its relationship with traditional journalism. Some argue that blogging is the ultimate democratisation of news dissemination. Bloggers may provide information that journalists will not, due to the time constraints, professional conventions or company policies they face. Others will counter that the unfiltered information from blogs will leave people bewildered and is in many cases irrelevant. Moreover, there is no guarantee that bloggers' information is reliable. A provocative question in this respect is whether traditional journalists can also be bloggers.

To these, and other questions, a panel of experts - both bloggers and non-bloggers - will try to find an answer. The panel consists of Richard Corbett, MEP and himself an ardent blogger; Aidan White, the general-secretary of the International Federation of Journalists; Karlin Lillington, technology journalist at the Irish Times and also a blogger; and Thomas Burg, editor of BlogTalk.net and former head of the Centre for New Media at the Danube University Krems. The debate will be led by Guido Baumhauer, a journalist at Deutsche Welle.

New political communities on the web - a challenge to politicians?

A remarkable feature during the referendum campaigns on the EU constitution in France and the Netherlands was the extensive - and successful - use made of the web by the 'No' supporters. Equally successful was the web campaign waged by the organisation behind the 'Live8' event and the Global Campaign Against Poverty in the run-up to the G8 summit in July.

This phenomenon raises the question of how effective the internet can be as a political tool and whether it will strengthen established political institutions or weaken them. Should governments and parliaments attempt to take the lead in using the internet as a means of providing political information and stimulating political discussion, or should they encourage others to use the internet as a political forum? Can the web be a useful instrument for governments and parliaments to sense out public opinion and emerging political trends?

The debating panel will take a closer look at the actual campaigns and discuss their implications. The panel consists of Martin Gill, head of New Media at Comic Relief and a contributor to the MakePovertyHistory and Live8live campaign; Guilhem Fouetillou, who as a member of the research group RTGI studied the French "Non" campaign on the web; and Ann Zimmermann, a PhD candidate who has worked on several research projects on internet-based political communication. The panel debates will be led by Bill Hayton, a journalist at BBC World.

E-government - how feasible for countries, how practical for citizens?

Increasingly, national governments and the EU institutions are making an effort to put their information on the web and to make it easier for citizens to cope with administrative procedures, in other words to create an electronic administration. For example, several governments have made it possible to fill in tax returns through the internet. This "e-government" is intended to bring the institutions closer to the citizen. But is every country equally able to bear the cost of such an exercise? And will it in the long run really reduce administrative cost and time or will it merely add another layer to the bureaucratic apparatus?

E-government risks creating a new divide, between those who have access to information technology and those who don't. Other sensitive questions concern the security of government information systems. Is the privacy of personal data sufficiently guaranteed? What will happen in the case of a system break-down or a cyberterrorist attack? Are the information systems sufficiently secure against electronic espionage?

Speakers at this final debate in the series on the digital society will be Alejo Vidal-Quadras, MEP and Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for information; Ivar Tallo, president of the e-Governance Academy in Estonia; Oliver Ryan, director of the Irish government agency Reach; and William Davies, senior research fellow on digital society at the Institute for Public Policy. The debate will be led by Olivier Da Lage, journalist at Radio France International.

Questions and Answers

At the end of each debate there will be ample time for members of the audience to contribute to the discussions and put questions to the panels.

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CVs of the participants in the debates

Weblogs - competition, chance or challenge? Who's afraid to open Pandora's Blogs?

Guido Baumhauer was born in 1967 in Cologne, Germany. He is currently the editor-in-chief of the online section of Deutsche Welle, where he began his career as a reporter and presenter of several TV programmes, including Focus on Europe, Journal, Germany Today and Europa Aktuell. He has also been the EU correspondent in Brussels for Deutsche Welle. His main fields of expertise are the internet and New Media.

Karlin Lillington, was born in 1959 in Winnipeg, Canada, and has a PhD in Anglo-Irish Literature. She is currently based in Dublin, where she works as a columnist and technology reporter for the Irish Times, the Guardian and other media. She has a weblog called techno-culture.com. Lillington regularly speaks in public on technology issues and was awarded the Technology Journalist of the Year Award in 2001 by the Irish Internet Association. Her main fields of expertise are data privacy issues; technology and culture; cryptography and security; and women and technology.

Thomas N. Burg was born in 1964 in Vienna, Austria. From 1997 until July 2005 he was the Managing Director of the Center for New Media at the Danube University Krems. Burg is the editor and author of BlogTalk.net, he has written a book on weblogs and he has also organised a conference on blogs. He is currently working on a private start-up company that specialises in software development and consultation. His main fields of expertise are social software, weblogs and knowledge management.

Aidan White was born in 1951 in Derry, Ireland. He is currently General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, which he joined from *The Guardian* in 1987. Today he campaigns for the rights of journalists worldwide. White is an international consultant on press rights and journalistic ethics. He has produced reports for UNESCO, the ILO, the Council of Europe and the European Union. His main fields of expertise are governance and mass media policy in Europe and globally; journalism and law; media development in Eastern and Central Europe; media and ethics and human rights.

Richard Corbett was born in 1955 in Southport, UK, and has a PhD in political science. He is a member of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, having been re-elected for the third time. Corbett is spokesperson both for the Labour Party and the larger Socialist Group on the reform of the European Union and is also Parliament's rapporteur on the EU Constitution. Corbett was the first Member of the European Parliament to start a weblog.

New political communities on the web - a challenge to politicians?

Bill Hayton has been working as a journalist since 1995 and has been employed by various BBC radio and television news departments since 1998. He has also worked for Associated Press Television, European Business News, Al Jazeera and other news organisations. He currently works for the Europe Region of BBC World Service Radio as its Planning Editor. His main fields of expertise are European current affairs, the Middle East and ideologies and techniques of news production.

Ann Zimmermann was born in 1975 in Basel, Switzerland. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Free University of Berlin working on a research project about the Internet and political public spheres in Europe. Zimmermann has studied the internet as a new potential tool for European political communication. Her main fields of expertise are political communication and mobilisation on the internet; on-line public spheres; European integration and European public spheres; social change and technological development.

Guilhem Fouetillou was born in 1979 in Bordeaux, France. He is a PhD candidate specialised in monitoring on-line communities at the University of Technology of Compiègne (UTC). As a member of the RTGI research group (Networks, Territories & Information Geography) he has studied the role played by French websites in swinging public opinion against the EU Constitutional Treaty. His main fields of expertise are social networks, on-line communities and web datamining.

Martin Gill was born in 1973 in Brighton, UK. He is head of New Media at Comic Relief, an NGO working to end world poverty and social injustice. He is responsible for corporate partnerships and interactive fundraising campaigns. His team and key members of the voluntary and technology sectors recently provided the supporter recruitment and inclusion strategy behind the UK's largest on-line campaign, MakePovertyHistory and the world's largest interactive music experience, Live8. His main fields of expertise are cross-media marketing campaigns and user-focused accessible design.

Marielle de Sarnez was born in 1951 in Paris, France. She has been a member of the European Parliament since 1999 and became chair of the UDF delegation in the Parliament in 2004. De Sarnez was secretary-general of the UDF group in the French National Assembly in 1997 and 1998 and has been secretary-general of the European Democratic Party since 2004. De Sarnez is currently rapporteur for the Parliament on the protection of minors and human dignity from undesirable content on the Internet.

E-government - how feasible for countries, how practical for citizens?

Olivier Da Lage was born in 1957 in Saint-Cloud, France. He is currently working for Radio France International as an editor and head of the internet news team. Da Lage has worked as a reporter and columnist for numerous newspapers and magazines, including *Le Monde*, *l'Express* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*. He has a special interest in Arabic culture and is an author of various publications on the Middle East. His main fields of expertise are the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula and copyright of journalists' work.

Ivar Tallo was born in 1964 in Tartu, Estonia. He is the director of the e-Governance Academy Foundation in Estonia. In his former capacity as an MP he worked on IT legislation and public administration reform. As a member of the Estonian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tallo was rapporteur on the Cybercrime Convention. He is also a co-author of the Estonian public information law. Tallo is a PhD candidate in political science. His main fields of expertise are public administration, e-government and public ethics.

Oliver Ryan was born in 1947 in Kilkenny, Ireland. He is the director of the Irish government agency Reach, which is developing a strategy for the integration of public services and is responsible for the implementation of the e-government framework in Ireland. Before starting at Reach he was an assistant director-general at the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and he has a broad experience in the civil service. His main fields of expertise are public service management and Information Technology.

William Davies was born in 1976 in London, UK. He is currently working as a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research and heads the Digital Society team, which focuses on e-government, knowledge-based economy and contemporary policy agendas relating to new technology. Davies has managed and promoted the "Manifesto for a Digital Britain". His main fields of expertise are e-government, e-democracy, the role of IT in supporting new types of communities and political behaviour.

Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca was born in 1945 in Barcelona, Spain. He is a member of the European Parliament and the Vice-President responsible for information. He is a member of the group of the European People's Party and European Democrats. Vidal-Quadras is Professor of nuclear and atomic physics at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and lecturer at CRN in Strasbourg and the University College of Dublin. He has been chairman of the parliamentary group of the Partido Popular in the Catalan Regional Parliament and a regional senator. He is also the author of various books and a regular columnist for *La Razón* and *Epoca*. In 1983 he received the nuclear energy prize of the Spanish nuclear energy council.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

12 AND 13 SEPTEMBER 2005: DEBATES ON THE DIGITAL SOCIETY
LAUNCH OF THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S WEBSITE

12 SEPTEMBER

3-4.30pm

"Weblogs - competition, challenge or chance? Who's afraid to open Pandora's Blogs?"

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|-----------|-------------------|---|----|
| Moderator | Guido Baumhauer | Journalist: Deutsche Welle | DE |
| Speakers | Richard Corbett | Member of the European Parliament | UK |
| | Aidan White | General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) | BE |
| | Karlin Lillington | Irish Times technology journalist | IE |
| | Thomas N Burg | Editor and author of BlogTalk. Former Head of the Centre for New Media at the Danube University Krems | AT |

Room: Yehudi Menuhin (PHS building, 1st floor, Open space)

13 SEPTEMBER

10am

Launch of the new website by EP President Josep Borrell Fontelles

With Q&A session

Breakfast

Room: Yehudi Menuhin (PHS building, 1st floor, Open space)

11am
12.30pm

"New political communities on the web - a challenge to politicians?"

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|-----------|--------------------|--|----|
| Moderator | Bill Hayton | Journalist: BBC World | UK |
| Speakers | | Member of the European Parliament | |
| | Martin Gill | Head of the New Media at Comic Relief; has worked on MakePovertyHistory Campaign and live8live campaign on web | UK |
| | Guilhem Fouetillou | Member of research group RTGI who studied the French anti-EU-constitution campaign on the web | FR |
| | Ann Zimmermann | PhD candidate who has worked on several research projects of Internet-based political communication | DE |

Room: Yehudi Menuhin (PHS building, 1st floor, Open space)

2.30 - 4pm

"E-government - how feasible for countries, how practical for citizens?"

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|-----------|--------------------------|--|----|
| Moderator | Olivier Da Lage | Journalist: Radio France International | FR |
| Speakers | Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca | Member and Vice-president of the European Parliament | ES |
| | Ivar Tallo | President of the e-Governance Academy in Estonia | ET |
| | Oliver Ryan | Director of Irish government agency Reach | IE |
| | William Davies | Senior research fellow on digital society, Institute for Public Policy | UK |

Room: Yehudi Menuhin (PHS building, 1st floor, Open space)