

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	SDRUZHENIE ZA INOVATIVNO MISLENE - AIM
PIC number:	890868371
Project name and acronym:	Empowering Communities for European Integration – ELEVATE

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	1		
Event name:	Open Citizens' Debate on Policy Recommendations for Empowering Local and Regional Governance's European Integration Process		
Type:	Conference		
In situ/online:	In Situ		
Location:	Bansko, Bulgaria		
Date(s):	7-9 June 2026		
Website(s) (if any):	https://aim-org.eu/elevate/		
Participants			
Female:	195		
Male:	60		
Non-binary:	1		
From country 1 [Bulgaria]:	20		
From country 2 [Greece]:	131		
From country 3 [Slovenia]:	31		
From country 4 [Romania]:	55		
From country 5 [Croatia]:	17		
From country 6 [Italy]:	2		
Total number of participants:	256	From total number of countries:	6
Description			
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>			
The Open Citizens' Debate on Policy Recommendations for Empowering Local and Regional Governance's European Integration Process of the ELEVATE – Empowering Communities for European Integration project took place in Bansko, Bulgaria , bringing together 256 participants from Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, and Romania. Organised within the framework of the project's			

Town Twinning activities, the event united local and regional authorities, elected representatives, civil society organisations, youth organisations, academics, community leaders, volunteers, and citizens to strengthen cooperation, democratic participation, and European integration at the local level.

Designed as an interactive European forum and participatory civic dialogue, the event focused on enhancing the capacity of local authorities to implement European values through inclusive governance, active citizenship, and cross-border cooperation. Participants reflected on common governance challenges while exchanging experiences, innovative practices, and policy approaches that contribute to stronger, more resilient, and citizen-oriented municipalities. The event created an inclusive environment where participants from diverse social, professional, and cultural backgrounds collaborated to develop a shared vision for Europe's future.

Throughout the programme, particular emphasis was placed on the role of local governance as a driving force for European integration. Through keynote speeches, expert presentations, panel discussions, and interactive workshops, participants explored how municipalities can strengthen democratic accountability, improve transparency, encourage citizen participation, and effectively implement European policies at the local level. The discussions highlighted the importance of empowering local authorities to become active contributors to the European project while responding to the evolving needs of their communities.

A central theme of the event was the promotion of active citizenship and democratic engagement. During the keynote session, **"Empowering Communities for European Integration: Local Action, European Impact,"** participants reflected on the relationship between local decision-making and the broader European democratic framework. The discussions emphasized that meaningful citizen participation, inclusive governance, and cross-border cooperation are fundamental pillars for building trust in democratic institutions and strengthening European cohesion.

Special attention was devoted to the exchange of good practices among partner municipalities and organisations. Representatives presented successful examples of participatory governance, citizen consultation mechanisms, digital public services, youth engagement initiatives, and community development strategies implemented within their respective regions. These exchanges encouraged mutual learning and demonstrated how local innovations can be adapted across different European contexts through town twinning and international cooperation.

The event also addressed the importance of inclusion and equal participation in local governance. Dedicated sessions focused on increasing the involvement of women, young people, vulnerable groups, and underrepresented communities in democratic processes. Participants discussed practical approaches for reducing participation barriers, promoting diversity in public decision-making, and ensuring that local governance reflects the needs and aspirations of all citizens.

Interactive workshops enabled participants to jointly identify common governance challenges and develop collaborative solutions through dialogue and peer learning. Working groups explored themes including transparent local administration, participatory budgeting, sustainable community development, cross-border partnerships, and innovative approaches to citizen engagement. These activities strengthened cooperation among municipalities while fostering long-term professional and institutional networks across Europe.

Furthermore, the event contributed significantly to the broader objectives of the ELEVATE initiative by reinforcing transnational cooperation, promoting mutual understanding among European communities, and supporting the implementation of European values through local action. The exchange of knowledge, experiences, and policy perspectives strengthened participants' capacity to develop more inclusive, transparent, and participatory governance models while encouraging sustainable cooperation beyond the project's lifetime.

The event concluded with a collective reflection on the future of European cooperation at the local level. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening partnerships between municipalities, promoting democratic participation, and encouraging citizens to play an active role in shaping the future of Europe. The closing session highlighted that empowered local communities, collaborative governance, and sustained cross-border dialogue remain essential foundations for a stronger, more democratic, and more united European Union.

Agenda

Day 1

15.00 – 18.30 Participants' Arrival in Bansko

18.30 – 19.00 Welcome Greetings and Introductory Remarks

19.00 Welcome Dinner

Day 2**10.00 - 10.30** Registrations**10.30 - 11.00** Opening Session & Event Introduction**11.00 - 11.30** Thematic Session 1: Aligning EU Policies with Local Needs**11.30 - 12.00** Thematic Session 2: Inclusive Participation & Citizen Voice**12.00 - 13.00** Interactive Workshop: Practical Tools for Implementing e-**13.00 - 13.30** Inspirational Talk: "From Local Actions to European Shared Endeavours"**13.30 - 15.30** Lunch Break**15.30 - 17.30** Study Visit: Bansko Cultural Heritage & Local Governance Roots**19.00** Dinner**Day 3****10.00 - 11.00** Closing Session: Key Takeaways & Policy Messages**11.00 - 12.00** Evaluation and Closing Ceremony**12.30 - 14.00** Lunch**14.00 - 15.00** Study Visit to the Town Hall of Strumyani**Dissemination Activities**

For dissemination purposes, the activities implemented within the framework of the **ELEVATE – Empowering Communities for European Integration** project were promoted through a comprehensive range of communication and visibility actions designed to maximise public outreach, stakeholder engagement, and awareness of the project's objectives and achievements. Project banners, roll-up displays, visual identity materials, promotional posters, information leaflets, participant packs, and branded communication materials were prominently displayed throughout the event, reinforcing the project's commitment to democratic participation, good governance, European integration, and cross-border cooperation.

Project partners actively disseminated the event through their official websites, social media platforms, newsletters, and institutional communication channels by publishing photographs, videos, participant testimonials, event highlights, and regular project updates. These dissemination activities increased the visibility of the project at local, regional, national, and European levels while showcasing the active involvement of municipalities, civil society organisations, citizens, and local stakeholders participating in the Town Twinning initiative.

Through these coordinated dissemination and visibility actions, including promotional materials, public communication activities, digital outreach, social media campaigns, and partner-led communication initiatives, the ELEVATE project successfully enhanced public awareness of European values, democratic engagement, local governance, and transnational cooperation. The dissemination strategy contributed to ensuring the long-term visibility of the project's results while encouraging continued cooperation, citizen participation, and sustainable partnerships among European municipalities and communities.

<https://www.facebook.com/100084752555004/posts/972956878872722/?app=fbl>

<https://www.facebook.com/100084752555004/posts/972953732206370/?app=fbl>

<https://www.facebook.com/100068303142528/posts/1301275275492565/?app=fbl>

Conclusions

The Open Citizens' Debate on Policy Recommendations for Empowering Local and Regional Governance's European Integration Process successfully demonstrated the importance of empowering local communities as key actors in advancing European integration through democratic governance, active citizenship, and cross-border cooperation. Bringing together 256 participants from six European countries, the event created a vibrant platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaborative learning, strengthening mutual understanding and reinforcing a shared commitment to European values.

The discussions also highlighted that town twinning and transnational cooperation provide valuable opportunities for municipalities to exchange innovative governance practices, develop sustainable partnerships, and jointly address common challenges. Participants recognised that collaboration

between local authorities, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and citizens significantly enhances the effectiveness of local governance while strengthening the sense of European belonging.

The event further reinforced the importance of integrating European values such as democracy, solidarity, equality, transparency, and respect for diversity into everyday local governance practices. Participants agreed that strengthening these values at the local level contributes directly to greater social cohesion, trust in public institutions, and long-term European unity.

Finally, the event concluded with a shared commitment among all partners to continue strengthening cross-border cooperation beyond the duration of the ELEVATE project. Participants expressed their willingness to build upon the partnerships established during the event, develop future collaborative initiatives, and continue promoting democratic engagement, inclusive governance, and active citizenship as fundamental pillars of a stronger, more connected, and more resilient European Union.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).