



KLIMA MITBESTIMMUNG

FUTURE FORUM CITIZENS' COUNCILS WITH SURPRISING SOUNDS

On October 7, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Klimamitbestimmung e. V. and the Network of Food Councils organized the Future Forum Citizens' Councils. 75 representatives from politics, civil society, business and science came together at Robert Bosch Stiftung's premises in Berlin for the event.

In the first part of the Future Forum, the participants looked back on the Bundestag's first Citizens' Council, the Citizens' Council on Nutrition in Transition. This had submitted its recommendations to the Bundestag in February. Participants in and implementers of the Citizens' Assembly, the accompanying scientific research and members of the Bundestag from the Nutrition Committee attested to the high quality of the Citizens' Assembly.

The second part of the forum focused on the future of citizens' councils. Examples of citizens' councils in Erlangen and Kirchanschöring impressively demonstrated how municipalities can effectively tackle social challenges with the help of citizens' councils, particularly in conflict-ridden policy areas. In Erlangen's Climate Awakening, it became clear how a combination of citizens' councils and stakeholder participation can work. The experiences of the Bavarian municipality of Kirchanschöring illustrated how citizens' councils can be successful, especially in rural and conservative parts of the country.

Two panels with members of the German Bundestag and participants in the citizens' council "Ernährung im Wandel" dealt with what will now happen with the recommendations and whether there will be further citizens' councils at federal level in the future.

MPs call for decisions on energy drinks and food distribution before the end of this parliamentary term

At the beginning of the year, the Citizens' Assembly "Nutrition in Transition" [submitted nine recommendations](#) to the [Bundestag](#). According to the members of parliament, many of them need more time to be implemented. However, Renate Künast (Greens) and Daniela de Ridder (SPD) from the responsible nutrition committee want to reach decisions on two recommendations before the next elections - an age limit for energy drinks and

the passing on of food that can no longer be sold. Both recommendations were recently discussed in [public hearings in the Bundestag](#).

88% of the population support a thorough examination of the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations, according to a representative [survey by the University of Wuppertal](#). At the event, there was further support from companies, NGOs and private individuals. Julius Palm from Followfood presented an [open company letter](#), which was also signed by companies such as Oatly. Patrick Müller from BUND presented a [letter on behalf of – at present - 79 subscribing NGOs](#). And Helena Hahne & Magnus Wagner delivered the [letters from private individuals](#). All campaigns are still open to be signed. The campaign was initiated as part of the “Listen to the Citizens' Assembly” campaign by the Climate Guardians and the non-profit association Klimamitbestimmung e. V.

Surprising tones from the CDU/CSU

Albert Stegemann from the CDU/CSU approached his colleagues from the SPD and the Greens on the subject of the age limit for energy drinks. A cross-party agreement would be a strong signal to the Citizens' Council. The CDU MP was also surprisingly positive about citizens' assemblies. “Everyone knows that we had our problems with them at first,” he said, adding that now, he did not perceive the process as undermining the legitimacy of parliament. Instead, the Citizens' Assembly was a very constructive process. “When we talk in committee, we always circle around the same arguments and the Citizens' Assembly has really provided new impetus,” said Stegemann. The CDU member emphasized that citizens' assemblies “can only be an instrument because we naturally have a parliamentary democracy.” At the same time, he described the format as a gift, “and if we develop this gift in such a way that democracy is strengthened, then that is a gain for us”.

CSU mayor has little understanding for the position of the Federal Union

This is remarkable, as Stegemann, like many of his parliamentary group colleagues, has previously been critical of citizens' councils. The situation is different for CSU mayor Hans-Jörg Birner from Kirchanschöring. He regularly holds citizens' councils and spoke enthusiastically about his experiences at the event. He has no sympathy for the concerns of his conservative colleagues in the federal government. “It can only be helpful if I work on an issue together with the citizens and then propose a solution together,” said Birner. In his opinion,

there is a lack of information about the strengths of this instrument in the federal CDU/CSU and a lack of concrete experience of successful implementation, and it remains to be seen whether other representatives of the CDU/CSU parties will take a more positive view of the Citizens' Assembly instrument in future. The responsible rapporteur for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Philipp Amthor, was unable to take part in the Future Forum.

SPD would again support the Citizens' Assembly in coalition negotiations

It is questionable whether there will be another Citizens' Assembly in this legislative period. In his summer interview, Chancellor Scholz brought up the idea of a citizens' assembly to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. However, the FAZ recently reported that the SPD and FDP cannot agree on whether the Citizens' Assembly should be accompanied by a commission of inquiry or a federal-state commission. Stephan Thomae from the Liberals confirmed at the event that it does not look good for another Citizens' Assembly in this legislative period. Whether there will continue to be Citizens' Assemblies at federal level therefore depends on the next coalition.

Representative [surveys by the University of Wuppertal](#) show that a clear majority in Germany would like this, regardless of party preferences. At a time when many people perceive “those at the top” as aloof, a “policy of being heard” could be a promising election campaign topic. SPD MP Hagl-Kehl confirmed that her party will once again advocate citizens' councils in possible coalition negotiations. The Greens are also likely to do so. In the end, it will be up to the CDU/CSU. The question is, whether the conservatives at federal level will stick to their negative stance on citizens' councils or whether they will return to Wolfgang Schäuble when in government. During his time as President of the Bundestag, Schäuble campaigned for citizens' councils with the words “It is necessary”. However, the voices that have been heard from municipalities governed by the CDU/CSU, such as Kirchanschöring or the Future Forum Citizens' Councils Food Committee, indicate that the CDU/CSU is still struggling to find a position.