

# **Political Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority**

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De Haas, Hein (1997) *Political Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority*. ELAINE/EC. Maastricht: European Centre for Work and Society.

ELAINE: European Local Authorities Interactive Network on Ethnic Minority Policies; funded by the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs (1993/4/5/6/7).



**European Centre for Work and Society**

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Maastricht, November 1997

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# **Political Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority**

## *1. Introduction*

This document gives an overview of the different forms of institutionalised consultative political participation of migrants and ethnic minorities in ELAINE cities. The preparatory document "Political Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities" for the ELAINE workshop in Stuttgart (20-21 November 1997) only gives a brief overview of the different forms of consultative participation in European local authorities. This document contains a more detailed analysis of this issue.

Since many migrants and ethnic minorities lack direct political rights (i.e. voting rights), many local authorities have established consultative bodies, especially targeted at enabling migrants and ethnic minorities to participate in decision making on relevant matters. However, this form of participation can take many forms and experiences differ widely. This document gives an overview of the different types of consultative participation, where and why they exist and the role of the consultative bodies.

The information in this document is based on the returned workshop questionnaires for the Stuttgart workshop and additional literature. Furthermore, it contains key elements of discussions held during the two ELAINE workshops of 1997.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to make a general inventory of the different forms of institutionalised consultative participation that exist in Europe, on the basis of information received from a selection of sixteen ELAINE cities. Therefore, the information cannot automatically be generalised on European level.

## *2. Existing political rights for migrants and ethnic minorities*

On national level, the granting of voting rights to non-nationals is a very sensitive issue. Public and political opinion is often more or less opposed or reserved on this question, which explains that national governments are often hesitant to extend the rights to vote to groups of non-nationals. This explains that progress is only made very slowly. In this respect, local authorities are highly dependent on national legislation, which they have to respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Amadora, 22-24 May 1997: The Role of Self-Organisations of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority; Stuttgart, 20-21 November 1997: Political Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority.

One step forward, however, is the European-wide introduction of local voting rights for EU nationals. According to Directive 94/80/EC of the European Commission, member states are obliged to grant these rights to EU nationals living in a member state other than their own (on 1 January 1996 at the latest). In June 1997, six member states had not yet implemented this Directive, namely Belgium, France, Greece, Sweden, Austria, and Finland. With the exception of France and Belgium, these countries are currently making the required accommodations in their legislation<sup>2</sup>.

Up to now, a limited number of EU countries have granted the right to vote and sometimes to stand in local election to all non-EU nationals (the so-called *third country nationals*), namely Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and, outside the EU, Norway and the two Swiss cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel. The main condition for participation is usually that these non-nationals have legally resided in the receiving country for a certain period, mostly three to five years.

In some other countries, the right to vote for third country nationals is restricted to specific groups, often those coming from the same region or former colonies. In the United Kingdom, British Commonwealth nationals and Irish citizens may vote in local and national elections. Portugal recently extended the right to vote and to stand as a candidate to nationals of countries which have granted the same right to Portuguese citizens. In Finland and (non-EU) Iceland only citizens of the other members of the Nordic council may vote in local elections<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, there are significant differences between countries in the extent to which ethnic minorities are granted the right to vote on the local level (see table 1). In some countries, such as Sweden, migrants and ethnic minorities even have the right to vote on national level. In countries such as France, Belgium, and Germany, most non-nationals still lack any voting rights at all.

It is important to observe that electoral rights are primarily related to the question of nationality. There are remarkable differences between European countries concerning naturalisation requirements. Generally speaking, former colonial powers such as Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, are characterised by more liberal naturalisation procedures than states without such background. Naturalisation implies having the same rights as any other citizen, including all voting rights. In various countries, many migrants and ethnic minorities are naturalised and have full political rights. This factor may counterbalance or even outweigh the above-mentioned special voting arrangements for non-nationals. Therefore, it is quite possible that relatively more migrants and ethnic minorities are able to participate in politics in countries where non-nationals lack voting

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<sup>2</sup> Migration News Sheet, August 1996 & July 1997.

<sup>3</sup> For further information on local voting rights see table 1. In some countries, such as Sweden and the GB, non-nationals also have the right to vote on national level.

rights, but where naturalisation is easier. In this context, France serves as a good example.

*Table 1: Right to vote at the local level for non-nationals in EU and non-EU countries*

<i>Country</i>	<i>all EU-citizens</i>	<i>all non-EU citizens</i>	<i>Specific groups</i>	<i>Conditions</i>
Sweden	☞	✓	✗	
Finland	☞	✓	✓	Nordic council citizens
Denmark	✓	✓	✗	
Ireland	✓	✓	✗	
United Kingdom	✓	✗	✓	British Commonwealth & Irish citizens
Netherlands	✓	✓	✗	
Belgium	✗	✗	✗	
Luxembourg	✓	✗	✗	
Germany	✓	✗	✗	
Austria	☞	✗	✗	
France	✗	✗	✗	
Spain	✓	✗	✗	
Portugal	✓	✗	✓	countries which have granted the same right to Portuguese citizens
Italy	✓	✗	✗	
Greece	☞	✗	✗	
Norway (non-EU)	✓	✓	✗	
Iceland (non-EU)	✗	✗	✓	Nordic council citizens
Switzerland (non-EU)	✓	✓	✗	only in Cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel

✓ = was already implemented;  
 ☞ = currently making legal accommodations;  
 ✗ = not implemented (Situation: June 1997)

### *3. Backgrounds and reasons for establishing consultative bodies*

Since most migrants and ethnic minorities tend to settle in big cities and constitute a large and growing share of the population. Especially in big cities of countries with strict naturalisation requirements and/or lacking voting rights for non-nationals, this has led to a situation in which a large share of the population does not possess any political rights, such as the right to vote and stand for elections. The fact that these local authorities are the most directly confronted with the growing migrant and ethnic minority population, explains that local authorities are generally more favourable towards political participation of migrants and ethnic minorities than national governments. Many local authorities think that the legitimacy of their power is endangered if a sizeable share of the population does not have the right to vote.

As cities have to respect the mostly restrictive national legislature on political participation, they have looked for alternative ways to give non-naturalised migrants and ethnic minorities an (indirect) say in local politics. Thus, the main reason for establishing consultative bodies seems to be the lack of direct political rights for many migrants and ethnic minorities currently living in Europe. In many cities, this has resulted in the establishment of consultative bodies.<sup>4</sup> This is not a new development. As of the early 1970s, consultative bodies have been established in Northern European countries. More recently, this is also the case in Southern European countries with a rapidly growing migrant and ethnic minority population, such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. One important exception is France, where this phenomenon is less common, mainly because of France's preference for general, non-specific policies and the fact that many migrants and ethnic minorities are naturalised. Also in the United Kingdom, with its extensive political rights for most immigrants, consultative bodies seem to be less common.

On basis of the above-mentioned assumptions, one would expect that consultative bodies are mainly established in countries where most migrants and ethnic minorities lack political rights. However, this does not entirely reflect the actual situation. Table 2 indicates that almost all ELAINE cities without voting rights for non-nationals, have set up consultative bodies. But also some cities where non-nationals do possess the right to vote have established consultative bodies.

One explanation for this phenomenon could be that, also if they are possessing voting rights, migrants and ethnic minorities tend to be politically less active, i.e. make less use

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<sup>4</sup> There is a wide variety of terms to designate consultative bodies. To avoid confusion, in this text the term 'consultative body' is used. It refers to any forum, consisting at least partly of migrants and ethnic minorities, that is meant to consult the local authority on issues affecting migrants and ethnic minorities.

of their voting rights and are less active in political parties. This can be partly explained by the overall lack of integration and the (cultural, social) distance that often exists between migrant and ethnic minority communities and the dominant (political) culture. Regarding these specific problems, the need for a special forum where migrants and ethnic minorities can express their opinion, can still be felt in countries where most of them have full political rights. This partly explains that in Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, where non-nationals often do have voting rights at the local level, relatively many consultative bodies exist. As has been mentioned before, consultative bodies are far less common in the GB and France

*Table 2: Voting rights for non-nationals at the local level compared with the existence of consultative bodies in ELAINE cities*

City name	Voting rights for non-EU nationals	Consultative body
Helsinki (FI)	✓	✗
Århus (DK)	✓	✓
Malmö (S)	✓	✓
Leicester (GB)	✓	✗
Manchester (GB)	✓	✗
Sheffield (GB)	✓	✗
Birmingham (GB)	✓	✓
Roubaix (F)	✗	✓
Rotterdam (NL)	✓	✓
Antwerp (B)	✗	✓
Genk (B)	✗	✓
Leipzig (D)	✗	✗
Mannheim (D)	✗	✓
Stuttgart (D)	✗	✓
Ulm (D)	✗	✓
Luxembourg (L)	✗	✓

*Table 3: Year of creation of consultative body and initiating body in ELAINE cities*

City name	Year of creation	Initiating body
Århus (DK)	1996	local authority (city council)
Malmö (S)	1978	local board of immigrants
Birmingham (GB)	1990	local authority and self-organisations
Roubaix (F)	1977	local authority
Rotterdam (NL)	1993	self-organisations
Antwerp (B)	1992	local authority on demand of ethnic minority community
Genk (B)	1972	local authority
Mannheim (D)	1973	DGB ???
Stuttgart (D)	1972	the former ethnic minority council
Ulm (D)	1970	local authority
Luxembourg (L)	1989	local authority

Over half of the ELAINE cities who responded on the political participation survey, have established a consultative body, namely Genk, Antwerp (B), Roubaix (F), Århus (DK), Birmingham, (GB), Stuttgart, Ulm (D), Rotterdam (NL), Malmö (S). Although most were established in the 1990s, the history of some councils goes back to the early 1970s. The local authority is usually the initiator, although self-organisations sometimes play an important role in the establishment of consultative bodies.

In Europe, the first consultative bodies for migrants and ethnic minorities were established in the beginning of the 1970s. In this period of economic progress there was a general shortage of cheap labour in the industry of Western European countries. This stimulated large-scale immigration of labour migrants from the Northern and Southern Mediterranean and, in some countries, from (former) colonies. This migration generally started in the 1960s and reached a peak in the early 1970s. Formal recruitment of labour migrants formally came to an end after the oil crisis and the subsequent economic recession in the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, immigration has continued since then, mainly

through family reunification but also due to a continued influx of legal and illegal immigrants.

In the course of the 1970s, the presence of migrants and ethnic minorities became increasingly visible and one started to realise that most migrants and ethnic minorities would not return to their countries of origin. Therefore, some national and local governments started to develop integration policies. It became increasingly clear that migrants and ethnic minorities were disproportionately hit by economic recession and unemployment, suffered discrimination and social and political exclusion, which required a targeted approach. In many cities the need was increasingly felt to give these weak groups a special forum for discussion, so that their voice would be heard. The first consultative bodies were established in Northern Europe. Most Southern European countries, that have experienced large-scale immigration much more recently, have established consultative bodies at a later stage, generally as of the 1980s.

There are basically two models concerning the way in which consultative bodies are established. According to the first model the local authority itself takes the initiative to create a consultative body. In some countries, such as in the Netherlands and in certain German *Länder*, big cities with a certain percentage of migrants and ethnic minorities can be even legally obliged to ensure involvement and consultation of migrants in their policies. This is often done by establishing special consultative bodies. Although their formal position varies, they are mostly imbedded in the decision making structures of the local authority as an advisory council/commission, which has to be consulted on relevant proposals, prior to the actual decision making. Since their role is advisory, the local authority is expected to seriously consider these advises, but is not obliged to do so. In most cases, the consultative body can also bring out advises and proposals on their own initiative.

The second model is the creation of consultative bodies on the initiative of migrant and ethnic minorities themselves. In this process, self-organisations often play a key role. Self-organisations often play already an important role as interest groups, and act as spokespersons for migrant and ethnic minority communities. In many cases, they are united in platforms that aim to influence local policy making. Many local authorities recognise the important role of these platforms of self-organisations by regularly meeting with them, to discuss relevant issues and/or ask them for advice. When this role is formalised and recognised by the local authority, one can actually speak of a consultative council. The activities of these platforms may be quite similar to the above-mentioned official consultative bodies, which makes them often difficult to distinguish.

In most cases, self-organisations of migrants and ethnic minorities play a certain role. For example, pressure from the migrant and ethnic minority communities may incite the local authority to establish a formal consultative body. In fact, the establishment of

consultative bodies is usually the result of a combination of forces. Moreover, self-organisations also tend to play an important role in consultative bodies established by the local authority.

#### *4. Composition and tasks of consultative bodies*

There is considerable diversity regarding composition and tasks of consultative bodies. Essential is, though, that the local authority officially acknowledges the consultative body, and that it is formally integrated in the decision-making procedures of the local authority. Some consultative bodies consist exclusively of migrants and ethnic minorities. Other consultative bodies have a 'mixed' character, consisting of migrants and ethnic minorities, members of the city council, and (sometimes) independent experts or advisors. Candidates can be nominated by self-organisations, by a municipal application commission, by political parties or otherwise. In most cases, either the self-organisations or the local authority appoints the members of the consultative body. A minority of cities, especially in Germany, organises special elections for the consultative body among the migrant and ethnic minority population.

Tables 4, 5 exemplify the diversity concerning composition and appointment procedures of consultative bodies. In some cases political lists are formed and special elections among migrants and ethnic minorities are organised. However, in most cases the self-organisations play a dominant role in nominating and appointing the majority of candidates of the consultative body.

In most consultative bodies also members of the city council, local authority officers or mayor and/or aldermen are represented. The mixed character of consultative bodies would avoid that its members operate on an 'island', isolated from the political reality. It has also been argued that participation of politicians and officers in the meetings will strengthen their involvement and commitment and narrow the gap between them and migrant and ethnic minority communities. Nevertheless, there is by no means consensus on this issue. It occurs that migrants and ethnic minorities refuse to sit in a consultative body together with autochthonous people. The establishment and the actual functioning of consultative bodies is often hindered by disputes on who should be allowed to sit in the consultative body.

In some cities, like Ulm (D) and Stuttgart (D), where city councillors or local authority officers also sit on the consultative body, the number of migrants/ethnic minorities and autochthones is roughly equal. In most cities, however, the majority or all members are migrants and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, consultative bodies tend to be clearly male-dominated.

Table 4: Composition of consultative bodies

	Repre- sentatives of self-or- ganisations	Migrants & ethnic minorities elected in by-elections	City council mem- bers	Local authority officers	Representa tives of institutions (e.g. trade unions)	Mayor and/or alderman	Individual migrants& ethnic minority experts
Århus (DK)	✓			✓			
Malmö (S)	✓			✓			
Birmingham (GB)	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Roubaix (F)	✓		✓	✓			
Rotterdam (NL)	✓			✓		✓	✓
Antwerp (B)	✓	✓					✓
Genk (B)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Mannheim (D)	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Stuttgart (D)		✓	✓			✓	
Ulm (D)		✓	✓			✓	
Luxembourg (L) <sup>5</sup>			✓	✓			

Another form of consultative participation is the so-called additional councillor. This is a representative of the migrant and ethnic minority community, who participates in the deliberations of (usually) the city council and has the same rights as other members, except for the right to vote. This exists, for example, in the city of Rotterdam (NL).

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<sup>5</sup> In the city of Luxembourg, migrant and ethnic minority representatives are nominated by their respective embassies, and appointed by the local authority.

*Table 5: Appointment procedures of members of the consultative body*

City name	Appointed by self-organisations	Appointed by the local authority	Elected special elections	in by-	Other procedures
Århus (DK)	✓	✓			
Malmö (S)	✓	✓			
Birmingham (GB)	✓				
Roubaix (F)	✓				
Rotterdam (NL)	✓	✓			
Antwerp (B)		✓	✓		
Genk (B)					free application
Mannheim (D)	✓	✓			
Stuttgart (D)			✓		
Ulm (D)		✓	✓		
Luxembourg (L)		✓			

*5. Aims, working ways and support by the local authority*

All consultative bodies in ELAINE cities meet regularly, between four and twelve times per year. The local authority usually supports the consultative body by offering

secretarial staff, office facilities and, to a lesser extent, financial support, and training courses. Issues discussed are either brought up by the city council and/or mayor and aldermen, or put on the agenda on the own initiative of the consultative body. Decision making usually takes place via democratic majority voting. Within the consultative bodies, not all members do necessarily have the right to vote. Whereas migrant and ethnic minority members almost always have the rights to vote, this is not always the case for other members, who might have the right to discuss, but cannot influence actual decision making within the consultative body.

*Table 6: Support offered by the local authority to the consultative bodies in ELAINE cities*

	none	office facilities	secretarial staff	training courses	financial	other
Århus (DK)			✓			
Malmö (S)		✓	✓			
Birmingham (GB)		✓	✓		✓	✓
Roubaix (F)					✓	✓
Rotterdam (NL)			✓	✓	✓	
Antwerp (B)		✓	✓		✓	✓
Genk (B)						
Mannheim (D)		✓		✓	✓	
Stuttgart (D)		✓	✓	✓		
Ulm (D)			✓	✓		
Luxembourg (L) <sup>6</sup>			✓		✓	

The meetings of consultative bodies are usually chaired by either an elected chairperson, often of migrant and ethnic minority origin. Sometimes the the mayor, an

<sup>6</sup> In the Luxembourg consultative body migrant and ethnic minority representatives are nominated by their respective embassies, and appointed by the local authority.

alderman or a local authority officer chairs the meetings. If a local authority officer chairs the meetings, it is usually an officer responsible for migrant and ethnic minority policies within the local authority.

As the expression 'consultative' already indicates, most consultative bodies have an advisory function in the local authority. That means that the local authority has embedded the consultative body in its decision making structures. This usually means that the consultative body brings out an advice on issues relevant for migrants and ethnic minorities prior to actual decision making. They can usually also raise issues on their own initiative. In many local authorities similar target-group oriented bodies exist, e.g. special commissions for disabled people or women, and their function can be more or less compared with that of consultative bodies for migrants and ethnic minorities. The advice of such bodies is never binding, but should ideally play an important, if not decisive, role in decision making. In reality, however, this is often not the case.

Another important function that is assigned to consultative bodies is the exchange of information. Local authorities often have difficulties in reaching and mobilising migrant and ethnic minority populations, mainly due to cultural, social, and lingual differences. The idea is that by assembling the different migrant and self-organisation in one single body, one can more effectively reach this populations. Thus, consultative bodies can also be assigned an important role as information channel. On the one hand, it can identify and express problems and opinions that exist among migrants and ethnic minorities vis-à-vis the local authority. On the other hand, it enables the local authority to pass on important information on its policies and regulations to the migrant and ethnic minority population. Of course this would be the ideal situation. Whether consultative bodies can fulfil this role depends heavily on the extent to which self-organisations and other elected migrant and ethnic minorities members factually represent and maintain contact with their rank and file. In practice, the legitimacy of consultative bodies as representing the entire migrant and ethnic minority population can be questioned.

Table 7: Official roles and tasks of consultative bodies in ELAINE cities

City name	Main roles and tasks
Århus (DK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consultation concerning general migrant and ethnic minority policies.</li> <li>- Present ideas and proposals for new initiatives</li> </ul>
Malmö (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information exchange</li> </ul>
Birmingham (GB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To comment on policy proposals of the local authority</li> <li>- Improve quality of life of Birmingham's migrant and ethnic minority communities</li> <li>- Develop strategies, promote and undertake activities which respond to the need of the migrant and ethnic minority policies as well as measures that increase the capacity building</li> </ul>
Roubaix (F)	n.a.
Rotterdam (NL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exchange experience and ideas</li> <li>- Consultation of the local authorities</li> </ul>
Antwerp (B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a dialogue between the migrants and ethnic minority communities and the local authority</li> <li>- To involve migrant and ethnic minority communities in the local authority's policies</li> </ul>
Genk (B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influencing the working of the local integration centre</li> </ul>
Mannheim (D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consultation on the local migrant and ethnic minority policies</li> <li>- Co-ordination of migrant and ethnic minority policies</li> </ul>
Stuttgart (D)	-> see prepdoc!!!!!!
Ulm (D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consultation and support of the local authority in relevant matters</li> </ul>
Luxembourg (L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To ensure the participation of migrants and ethnic minorities in the local authority</li> <li>- To propose adequate solutions for specific problems</li> <li>- To promote mutual understanding between migrants and ethnic minorities and autochtones</li> </ul>

*Table 8: Policy areas in which consultative bodies are involved in ELAINE cities*

	Policies in general	Educa- tion	Culture / sports	Economy /business	Health	Housing	Employ ment
Århus (DK)	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Malmö (S)	✓						
Birmingham (GB)	✓						
Roubaix (F)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Rotterdam (NL)	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Antwerp (B)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Genk (B)	✓						
Mannheim (D)	✓						
Stuttgart (D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ulm (D)	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Luxembourg (L)	✓	✓					

If we look at ELAINE cities, the main aim of most consultative bodies is to create a dialogue between the migrant and ethnic minority communities, and to advise the local authority on relevant issues. Moreover, consultative bodies fulfil a function in making local authorities aware of the needs of the migrant and ethnic minority communities. Consultative bodies are mainly involved in the following policy areas (in decreasing order of importance): migrant and ethnic minority policies in general, education, culture and sports, housing, health, and employment.

## *6. Practical experiences with consultative bodies in ELAINE cities*

The survey indicates that practical experiences with consultative bodies are often rather disappointing. The following main obstacles can be identified: lack of continuity, individuals or some national groups dominating the council's discussions, no or insufficient information exchange between the members, missed or unused opportunities for co-operation, and few active members. Moreover, discussion is sometimes overshadowed by political conflicts in the countries of origin. There is also a more fundamental question which needs to be addressed, namely that of democratic legitimacy.

One could say that consultative bodies do not form an adequate representation of the migrant and ethnic minority population, i.e. their legitimacy is often questioned. In this context, the role of self-organisations deserves particular attention, since they are often heavily involved in consultative bodies, for example by nominating and/or appointing members. Many local authorities do see an important role for self-organisations, also in more general terms. As has been argued before, self-organisations are supposed to have better access to the migrant and ethnic minority communities. It is generally thought that they can contribute to the development of policies that are better able to meet the needs of the migrant and ethnic minority population. Self-organisations are often ascribed a 'bridge-function' between the migrant and ethnic minority population and the local authority. Therefore, many local authorities think it is crucial to involve self-organisations in the local authority's migrant and ethnic minority policies, for example by bringing the most important self-organisations together in consultative bodies.

However, this is not to say that self-organisations can automatically be considered as the only migrant and ethnic minority interlocutor. Firstly, self-organisations are not necessarily representing the migrant and ethnic minority population. Internally these organisations are not necessarily democratic. It is also not guaranteed that large, professionalised self-organisations ensure participation from 'grassroots level' and youth within their own organisations. Moreover, the high degree of dispersion and disagreement, which often characterises self-organisations, reflects the dissension rather than the unity among migrant and ethnic minority communities. It is, therefore, difficult to formulate common opinions and to define and defend common interests.

This is often reflected in the functioning of consultative bodies, in which they generally play an important role. These consultative bodies can, with a few exceptions, not be seen as democratic bodies. Particular groups tend to dominate the self-organisations and also the consultative bodies. For young people, women and particular ethnic or social groups, for example, is often no place. To a certain extent, the different self-organisations represent political, religious, ethnic, and other divides in the countries of origin. Moreover, in big cities the number of self-organisations can be very high. This

means that only a minority of all self-organisations can be represented, which often implies a kind of selection. It is often the local authority that eventually determines who should be in, and it easily leads to a dominance of certain self-organisations in the internal political arena. Discussions in consultative bodies tend to be dominated by internal competition, which hampers the discussion of policy issues and the formulation of common standpoints.

*Table 10: Description of influence on local policy making*

City name

Århus (DK)	✗	
Malmö (S)	✗	
Birmingham (GB)	✓	“members represent a wide variety of interests and concerns and over the years they have played a key role in improving the quality of life for communities by supporting and leading on various initiatives which have policy implications”
Roubaix (F)	✗	
Rotterdam (NL)	✓	The consultative council has had influence in the area of own identity and culture, education and restructuring of the local authority
Antwerp (B)	✓	The reports of the of the consultative body have served as a basis for discussion among politicians and local authority officers
Genk (B)	✓	The consultative body organised a referendum.
Mannheim (D)	✓	Took the initiative to discuss certain issues within the local authority
Stuttgart (D)	✓	Decisions of the consultative body have been made subject of discussions in the city council or decisions of the local authority
Ulm (D)	✓	Creation of an employment office for migrant and ethnic minority women. Funding for social services targeted at migrants and ethnic minorities.
Luxembourg (L)	✓	Some propositions of the consultative body are considered and/or adopted by the local authorities, e.g. in the field of education, information provision to migrants and ethnic minorities and a special magazine.

Only in the case where special elections for the consultative body are organised, one could speak of a democratic body. However, voter turnouts tend to be dramatically low, in almost any case below 50%, and sometimes even less than 20%. In Ulm (D) and Stuttgart (D), for instance, the voter turnout during the last special consultative body elections was 19% and 13.2%, which is of course disappointing. This seems an indication of low involvement and a general lack of interest. Furthermore, it seems that many people refuse to vote in 'fake' elections, as protest against lacking genuine political rights. Although voter turnout in regular elections also tends to be relatively low among migrants and ethnic minorities, these figures still tend to be significantly higher than those for special consultative body elections.

All things considered, it can be questioned whether self-organisations and consultative bodies can be considered as representing the migrant and ethnic minority population. However, they form often the only opportunity to maintain a structural dialogue with migrant and ethnic minority populations. This is particularly the case in countries where most migrants and ethnic minorities do not have the right to vote at the local level. Most local authorities feel the need to exchange information and discuss relevant issues with the migrant and ethnic minority communities.

Besides the questions of democratic legitimacy and internal rivalry, also other factors play a role in explaining disappointing experiences with consultative body. In the first place, the initial expectations seem often too high. The establishment of a consultative body can be a result of a long and difficult struggle in the local political arena, which can lead to a certain fixation on this 'solution' and the creation of unrealistic expectations. After all, the lack of societal integration of migrants and ethnic minorities is a structural problem, which cannot be resolved overnight by establishing a consultative body.

Another factor is that not all local authorities really let migrants and ethnic minorities influence decision-making. People who are involved in consultative bodies are often have the feeling that their voice is practically being ignored by the local authority, that they are not taken seriously. In other words, local authorities do mainly pay lip-service to the consultative body. This easily causes demotivation, lack of continuity and lower voter turnouts.

It is difficult to say whether particular forms of participation are more successful than others. However, consultative bodies consisting of migrant and ethnic minority representatives as well as city councillors or local authority officers appear to function better than consultative bodies that are only consisting of migrants and ethnic minorities.

However, local authority officers in ELAINE cities generally recognise that the granting the right to vote in (local) elections is essential for integration of migrants and ethnic

minorities, since this invites them to participate in the daily life and is an important positive signal of acceptance as full citizens. But as long as this right is not granted, as is still the case in many European countries, an intermediary solution is to create a consultative body for ethnic minorities, in which self-organisations play an important role. However, this 'solution' or 'substitute' is certainly not regarded as a final solution. Moreover, the establishment of formal consultative bodies are not the only means to involve migrants and ethnic minorities in local politics. Other forms of participation can be equally or more successful, such as the promotion of the involvement of migrants and ethnic minorities in 'mainstream' organisations, such as trade unions, school boards or neighbourhood platforms.

## *7. Conclusion*

Generally speaking, experiences with consultative bodies are certainly not a success story. There are many doubts on their internal functioning and democratic legitimacy. Most ELAINE cities also indicate that their influence on actual decision making is either absent or only very limited. Despite the fact that most local authority officers recognise the problems with consultative bodies, they do not necessarily see that as a reason to question continuation. In their opinion, it is of vital importance to continue the dialogue with migrants and ethnic minorities. They perceive the afore-mentioned problems as a challenge to improve things rather than as a reason to give up.

The establishment of consultative bodies can only be considered as an intermediate solution. It is widely recognised that the granting of voting rights to all migrants and ethnic minorities is one of the necessary conditions to achieve real involvement in local politics. Since this goal is not yet achieved in most European countries, many cities have developed alternative forms of participation, of which the establishment of consultative bodies is one of the most frequently occurring ones. However, the introduction of consultative bodies as such is not sufficient. The factual participation by migrants and ethnic minorities in these councils is often limited and the internal functioning of these bodies is hampered by many factors.

In order to encourage the involvement of migrants and ethnic minorities, it is important that the interests and opinions of migrants and ethnic minorities, as expressed in the consultative bodies, must play a visible and factual role in decision making. Furthermore, the local authority should carefully compare the pros and cons of the different forms of participation, and choose the most suitable form for the specific local circumstances. This should be done in close consultation with the migrants and ethnic minorities themselves.