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Launch of CandidateWatch Ireland And Irish
Portal For European Votematch

Tuesday, May 5th 2009



CandidateWatch.ie

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DEMOCRACY@TASC

Launch of CandidateWatch Ireland and Irish Portal for European Votematch

TASC – the think-tank for action on social change – today launched a new project designed to increase voter participation in the forthcoming European Elections. **democracy@tasc** (www.tascdemocracy.ie) will be the portal for two voter tools which are already very popular across Europe: Candidatewatch and Votematch.

Candidatewatch – www.candidatewatch.ie

The principal behind Candidatewatch is quite simple: it acts as an online forum, enabling voters to ask European candidates questions online, and receive answers through the same platform. During the next few weeks, European election candidates will be criss-crossing their constituencies



canvassing voters. Candidatewatch Ireland will allow voters to canvass the candidates - online. Candidatewatch originated in Germany, where it is run by the non-profit organisation Parlamentwatch e.V. This year, Parlamentwatch is collaborating with institutions in three other European countries to run national versions of the platform in advance of the European elections: TASC in Ireland (www.candidatewatch.ie), Politik Transparent e.V. (Austria) and Politikercheck ASBL (Luxembourg). Candidatewatch.ie is currently the only English-language version of the platform.

Votematch – www.votematch.eu

This year, TASC will be acting as the Irish portal for Votematch Europe, but we intend to develop a specifically Irish Votematch before the next General Election.



The principle behind European Votematch is simple. Last month, representatives from all the institutions involved across Europe got together and developed 25 key statements relating to the European elections and European politics. All the European parties, or groupings, were then contacted to ascertain their views on these propositions. Users of European Votematch state whether they agree or disagree with each of these statements, or whether they are neutral. They can also assign extra weight to certain statements - for example, an Irish user may decide that European defence policy is of particular importance. Once a user has run through all the propositions, the Votematch programme 'matches' him or her with the party/grouping closest to the user's views.

The statements cover a range of issues. Do you believe the production of GM food should be banned within the EU? Do you believe there should be a European Minimum Wage? Or perhaps

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DEMOCRACY@TASC (CONT.)

you believe that public services should be exposed to free market competition? Votematch will tell you which European political groupings are closest to your own views.

Speaking at the launch of [democracy@tasc](#), **TASC Director Paula Clancy** said:

“Candidatewatch Ireland and Votematch Europe – the two voter tools available through the [democracy@tasc](#) portal, [www.tascdemocracy.ie](#) – are about giving voters information. Why should we vote for a particular party or candidate? What do the parties stand for? What do the candidates stand for? How close are they to my own views?

Measures to increase political participation are particularly important in a time of crisis. A strong and vibrant democracy will be vital to ensure that an economic crisis does not turn into a political crisis – a crisis of confidence in government itself.

Also speaking at the launch, the co-founder and Director of [Parlamentwatch e.V.](#), Gregor Hackmack – who is coordinating this cross-European project from Hamburg – said:

“The candidatewatch platforms – now available in four European countries – are intended to help build a „Europe of Citizens“. I believe that citizens will gain a new enthusiasm for Europe if they are able to engage in a direct dialogue with those seeking election to the European Parliament. The web-based dialogue between voters and dialogues is intended to facilitate transparency on a European level.

“We are hoping that, following the European Elections, it will be possible to continue maintaining the platform in all four countries to facilitate dialogue between citizens and their newly-elected MEPs, so that voters can judge whether the MEPs are living up to their campaign statements.

The launch of [democracy@tasc](#) and CandidateWatch Ireland was also attended by members of the Candidatewatch Ireland Board of Trustees: Fintan O’Toole, Sr. Bernadette McMahon and Senator Maurice Hayes.

Gregor Hackmack is an Ashoka Fellow, and both TASC and Parlamentwatch e.V. wish to acknowledge the assistance of Ashoka Ireland in implementing this project.

For further information please contact Alex Klemm:
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For photographs of the launch please contact Tommy Clancy:
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About VoteMatch

VoteMatch – originally developed in Holland by our partners IPP, and now widely used across Europe – is an online voting tool which allows voters to match their own beliefs with those of different political parties or groupings.

How to play



VoteMatch has put forward a number of statements, divided into different policy areas. The voter/player has the option of agreeing or disagreeing with the statements, or of voicing no opinion (skipping).

All participating political groupings have also been asked to express an opinion on the same statements.

But this matches me up with European political groupings. What does that have to do with Ireland?

All Irish political parties are members of a European political grouping. For example, Fine Gael is a member of the European People's Party and Fianna Fail belongs to the European Liberal Democratic and Reform Party, while Labour is part of the Socialist Group. Sinn Fein belongs to the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, and the Greens belong to the European Green Party.

1. What can I do on CandidateWatch.ie?

candidatewatch.ie enables you to:

- Find out which candidates are seeking election to the European Parliament on June 5th.
- Question the candidates in public.

None of these functions require prior registration and they are, of course, available completely free of charge.

2. How can I submit a question?

Each candidate has a profile page. There is an input field at the bottom of the profile page through which you can submit your question.

3. How can I access a candidate's profile page?

There are two options:

- You can click on your constituency in the map to see a list of candidates.
- You can enter the name of a candidate in the search field at the top right.

4. How do you ensure an objective and fair dialogue on CandidateWatch.ie?

All questions and answers are read by a team of moderators and checked to ensure that they comply with our moderation Code of Conduct. This process ensures, for example, that questions which are abusive or intrusive, or e-mails with de-humanising content, are not published on candidatewatch.ie. In the case of messages which have not been cleared („moderated“), both the questioner and the candidate are informed of the reason for the message not being cleared. The process is thus completely transparent. You will see a link to the moderation Code of Conduct on each profile page below the question input field.

5. Who is behind CandidateWatch.ie?

candidatewatch.ie is a collaborative partnership between the German non-profit organisation Parlamentwatch e.V. and TASC, the Irish think-tank for action on social change. Parlamentwatch e.V. is non-partisan and institutionally independent. It is mainly financed through sponsorships and donations from private individuals. The project is implemented by a not-for-profit company, Parlamentwatch GmbH. Parlamentwatch GmbH is obliged to donate any profits to charitable projects. Further information about candidatewatch.ie can be found by clicking on “About us” in the left-hand menu bar.

6. How is CandidateWatch.ie financed?

The dialogue with voters is offered free of charge to candidates. In addition to the basic information provided, candidates can book a profile upgrade. This is offered in return for a once-off contribution of 100 Euro, and offers candidates the option of including a photo, a CV, a summary of their political objectives and a campaign calendar in their profiles. A profile upgrade is merely an additional option. The inclusion of basic profile information, such as name, party, constituency, professional qualification and occupation, as well as the dialogue with voters, is naturally offered free of charge.

Code Governing the Moderation of Questions

CandidateWatch and **ParliamentWatch** are intended to facilitate non-partisan and unbiased communication between individual citizens and their elected representatives. The following stipulations apply both to the citizens asking questions, and to the candidates or elected representatives answering them.

All questions and answers received through CandidateWatch/ParliamentWatch are read by a team of moderators. Provided they do not breach this code, they are then cleared. Questioners must provide their full names as well as a valid e-mail address.

In the event of repeated breaches of the Code, the CandidateWatch/ParliamentWatch management team reserves the right - following consultation with the Board - to exclude the person and/or political party (political grouping) from the website. We also reserve the right to take legal action.

The following, in particular, will be deemed to be in breach of the Code and will not be cleared:

- * Questions which are racist, sexist or inflammatory, or which disrespect or deride the victims of totalitarianism, discrimination or persecution.
- * Questions worded in an insulting, abusive or dehumanising manner
- * Questions which intrude into someone's private life
- * Questions covered by professional confidentiality
- * Contributions which do not constitute a question or a request for a position, but merely express an opinion
- * Spam
- * A disproportionate number of questions per questioner/candidate/elected representative
- * Several supplementary questions (generally more than one)
- * Questions from persons working for a candidate, elected representative, party office or political group, and questions posed by the addressee
- * Questions submitted using a pseudonym or false e-mail address.

Candidates/elected representatives and questioners will be notified of all rejected questions or answers. Anonymous questions will not be submitted to the addressee.

Members of the moderator team and the Board may not submit questions themselves.

In order to ensure that CandidateWatch/ParliamentWatch are readable and accessible for users, questions should not exceed 2000 characters.

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