



## Conference on the **Future** of Europe

### **Executive summary of the Conference on the Future of Europe events in Estonia**

For Estonia, the aim of the Conference on the Future of Europe has been to engage citizens to raise the topics and propose ideas that shape their lives and the future of the European Union.

Numerous events, seminars and debates were organized under the auspices of the Conference on the Future of Europe in Estonia by the Government Office of Estonia together with the European Commission Representation in Estonia (summaries of the 10 events can be found on the Conference' digital platform), by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other ministries as well as by the civil society, youth organizations and others<sup>1</sup>. Some events were held in virtual or hybrid form due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To specifically promote the Conference' digital platform and to encourage our citizens to directly share their opinions and ideas, a special digital and social media advertising campaign was conducted during autumn 2021.

The Conference on the Future of Europe kick-off [event](#) in Estonia took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 2021 featuring our **Prime Minister K.Kallas** and European **Commissioner K.Simson** debating on Europe's future and the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The European Youth Parliament Estonia also organized a discussion on Europe's Day, where Undersecretary for European Affairs **M.Volmer** spoke on the future of Europe. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with Back to School Non-governmental Organization, organized two virtual lectures for high-school students on the EU and specifically on climate change. In August, another high-level [debate](#) on Europe's future took place at the Opinion Festival by a panel featuring our former **President K.Kaljulaid** as well as opinion leaders, entrepreneurs, and Members of the European Parliament. In September, the French Minister of EU Affairs **C.Beaune** and the Estonian Undersecretary for European Affairs M.Volmer held a public seminar on Europe's future at the University of Tallinn.

During the autumn of 2021, from September to October, the Government Office of Estonia together with the Commission Representation in Estonia, organized **five citizen debates in five different regions across Estonia** (summaries can be found here: [Tallinn](#), [Tartu](#), [Pärnu](#), [Võru](#) and [Hiiumaa](#)). The debates were open to all citizens and were held in Estonian. The debates were organized alongside local events to ensure the widest possible participation. The events were streamed online. Each debate was moderated by a local moderator and featured an expert panel including national and local politicians, including ministers, entrepreneurs, representatives of youth, culture, education. Citizens' ideas and proposals from the debates were presented in a summary of each event on the Conference' digital platform. Citizens were free to raise topics of their interest. Most of the citizens' proposals touched upon the topics of climate change and environment, but there were recommendations also made on digital transition, security, health, education, and social policy. The Commission Representation together with the Government Office also organized **three thematic debates in three regions**

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<sup>1</sup> \* Executive summary focuses only on events organised by the government and the Commission Representation. It doesn't include events organised by civil society and others.

(summaries can be found here: [Pärnu](#), [Kuressaare](#) and [Võru](#)) focusing mainly on climate change and green transition. These thematic events were moderated by a local moderator and co-organized with the Finnish, Danish and Swedish embassies in Estonia.

During January and February 2022, the Commission Representation, together with the **Estonian National Youth Council**, organized **three citizens' debates** in [Tallinn](#), [Narva](#) and [Pärnu](#), with the focus on the youth. The aim of the debates was to make young people better aware of the Conference as well as to discuss the role that the youth should play in shaping the EU in a broader sense.

This overview summarizes citizens' proposals on Europe's future, made during the discussions at the events described above. Proposals from the events are grouped thematically.

### **Citizens' proposals and ideas were the following:**

#### **Climate change, environment, and transport:**

- Green transition must take place **globally**, not only in the European Union, to ensure Europe's competitiveness. Green transition must be seen as an **opportunity**, not as a cost.
- More **R&D** and **involvement of scientists** is needed at both local and international level to make the green transition a success.
- The EU has a major role to play in energy production, not just as a producer of energy, but as a combined force: in **energy production, transport, and storage**. Coordination between the EU and its Member States is crucial.
- It is important to achieve independence from **energy price volatility** and to ensure **security of electricity supply**. Estonia (and each Member State) should strive for **energy independence**; increase capacity to produce green energy.
- Member States have put in place different measures to alleviate **energy poverty**. A single, unique solution for all Member States is needed.
- Different **climate and geographical specificities** need to be exploited for energy production in the EU, such as coastal windy areas or sunny areas.
- Creation of **energy cooperatives** is needed to reduce energy consumption. Through an energy cooperative, everyone can become a partner in a solar or wind farm and thus earn a long-term stable income in an environmentally friendly way.
- The transition to **renewable energy** needs to be supported; there is a need to speed up building **solar parks** and **wind farms** as well as the development of **hydrogen technology**, small new technology **nuclear power plants**, and other green solutions. The EU should invest more into nuclear energy.
- **Nature conservation** and protection of local life must be considered when building wind farms. All the possibilities/workforce associated with the construction of wind farms must be used, e.g. the maintenance of wind farms should be done by local people. Tolerance fees should be paid to local people.
- It is important to increase investment in **sustainable transport**, including from EU funds. Public transport must be climate-friendly and then climate-neutral. Hydrogen technology and electric transport must be introduced. There is a need to build more tramways, cycling tracks and pedestrian paths; increase the use of electric trains and ferries. The EU should provide incentives for electric vehicle purchases. New infrastructure, e.g. for charging electric cars, needs to be built simultaneously. Property developers should not build car parks for every new development, but bicycle parking.

- The use of carbon-neutral transport should be encouraged instead of facilitating air traffic, for example better connected **networks of railways**. All railway infrastructure in the EU should be standardized and connected.
- To reduce carbon emissions, **old houses need to be renovated and insulated**.
- Citizens' overall **environmental awareness** needs to be increased.
- There is a need to develop more **green spaces in urban environment**. Greater emphasis must be placed on health, which can be done by paying more attention to **air quality**. The urban car speed should be limited to 30 km/h.
- It is paramount to prepare for **all kinds of natural disasters**, such as forest fires.
- The EU could take on the role of a decision-maker in **forestry**.
- There is a need for more **diversified forest use**, i.e. the forestry value chain should include land use, support the living environment, and include both innovation and renewable energy. The **planting of new forests** must be encouraged. Deforestation must be significantly reduced.
- **Organic farming** must be developed to draw more attention to environmental protection and ecological balance. Organic farming should cover crop and livestock production, beekeeping, and aquaculture.
- **Genetically Mutated Organisms** should be banned or heavily restricted in Europe and the EU should bring forward alternatives to pesticides.
- Fossil materials could be replaced by **biomaterials** in production process. Wood ash can be reused in forest road construction, crushed bark as a material in road construction and composting.
- In **waste management**, packaging could have specific **colour or QR codes** on it to make it clearer what kind of waste it is and how to handle it. Good practices and existing waste management systems could be shared and replicated between Member States.
- **The share of transport** should be reduced in waste management, as transport is one of the main emitters. If possible, waste should be used on site, instead of transporting the waste for long distances. Most factories send their pollution water to a local plant, but plants could clean their water on site.

### Digital transition, Internal Market, and financing:

- It is necessary to develop **high-speed Internet connections**, as this will create prerequisites for the consumption of Internet-based services provided by the state and local governments as well as the development of teleworking opportunities and entrepreneurship.
- Green transition must be amplified through digital transition - that is why there is a need to make **high-speed Internet affordable** for everyone.
- **E-governance** and **e-voting** should be scaled to the EU level, as these are time- and cost-efficient solutions.
- Member States must have a **single digital identity**. Citizens are living more and more in the digital world, so states have to be there too.
- **Free movement of data**, in addition to free movement of goods and services in the EU, needs to be fully enabled, as it will provide a significant boost to the EU economy.
- There is insufficient **open data** available. **Big data** must be made machine-readable via the Open data portal.
- There is a need for a **revision of the Internal Market** to analyze what works and what doesn't, to make it fully-functioning. The EU should work to deepen and **enforce more efficiently the four freedoms**, it is not necessary to add a new freedom.

- The EU as well as European companies themselves must **invest in new technologies**, in **research**; European universities must explore new theories, engage in innovation. The achievements of science must be brought into production more quickly.
- **Friendly environment for foreign workforce** should be ensured.
- Entrepreneurs who lost their income due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** (i.e. tourism, accommodation and catering companies) should be supported during the crisis, if necessary.
- The EU should focus more of its **financial support measures directly to local authorities** rather than go through the state. To make better use of European co-financing, local authorities' capabilities should be strengthened, including in the field of international cooperation and communication.
- The **EU's budget** should be used to develop **transport networks**, such as Rail Baltica, and to provide **housing** for young people.
- Member States whose energy production doesn't come from renewable energy could benefit from a smoother transition to green energy by **being subsidized by the EU**.
- The **Recovery Fund** must contribute to the **cultural values** of various regions.
- Increased investment should be directed towards **EU-wide media**, as it would create a more coherent public voice for the EU.

#### Health, social, cultural and education policy:

- The **European Health Union** should play a stronger role, especially in the pharmaceutical industry. **Access and affordability of medicines** is important and can be achieved through joint procurement. The **functioning of supply chains** needs to be improved. At the same time, regional pharmaceutical industries need to be developed.
- In the case of **rare diseases**, cooperation with the EU is indispensable, as is the exchange of experience in data analysis and practice.
- It is important to establish more **care homes**, so people can live in dignity and security throughout their lives.
- A special program for **sparsely populated areas** should provide better living conditions for families living in rural areas to help to **maintain the population in rural areas**.
- It is important to **increase vaccination rates**, but not to put pressure on the minority who, for various reasons, have not been vaccinated.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on **mental health**, especially for the older and younger generation. More effort should be made to **spread public information on mental health**, i.e. through campaigns and leaflets. Mental health must be **part of the education system**. The EU should contribute to increasing the number of **mental health professionals** to alleviate the growing problem with the lack of counselling.
- Investment in **education** is needed. A modern person should have at least a secondary education, basic education is not enough. School systems should promote **effective learning for all children**, including children with different levels of capabilities and needs. The **educational models** of EU Member States need to be reviewed. **Grant-based funding** for education does not lead to the best results.
- Additional **digital solutions** should be integrated into public education curricula.
- The EU should set up a comprehensive and user-friendly **portal for students** to search for student exchange activities and various learning opportunities within the framework of **Erasmus+**.
- **Internships** should be paid in the EU and a **minimum grant** set to cover the associated costs.

### Security, defence, and EU governance:

- The construction of Estonia's **external border** is a priority. The construction of border infrastructure must include state-of-the-art surveillance technology, manning and other associated facilities.
- The EU benefits from **unity** – currently there is too much competition between Member States; the Member States should work together and focus on competing with Asian and American economic areas. The EU Member States are small countries on a global scale. If the EU wants to have a say on global issues, the only way is to do it together.
- The **EU's decision-making process** needs to be made faster and easier. The amount of **bureaucracy** should be diminished, as the process of the realizing the ideas proposed by civil groups is overly time-consuming.