



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

SUMMARY RECORD

Working Group on 'Digital Transformation', Chaired by Ms Riina Sikkut, national Parliaments (Estonia)

Friday 17 December 2021, 11:00 to 13:00

1. Opening by the Chair

This was the second meeting of the Working Group on Digital Transformation. The meeting was held in online format. The Chair, Ms Riina Sikkut, welcomed members together with Elina Valtonen (national Parliaments/Finland), who will take over as Chair next year. Referring to the summary record of the last meeting, Ms Sikkut stressed that the group had already identified a number of key topics relevant for a European way of digital transformation with the objective to build an ethical, safe, transparent digital society, based on a human-centred approach. She underlined the need to come up with tangible results and invited the group to have an ambitious approach. Ms Sikkut informed that due to the postponement of the third session of Panel 1 the Panel recommendations were not yet available, but that citizens will report on their discussions and that the input from the Platform is available. Given the large amount of ideas and the broad topic, Ms Sikkut suggested to structure the discussions along three pillars for now: 'Protecting our Society', 'Empowering People' and 'Strengthening the Economy' and to focus on the first in this meeting. This would cover digital sovereignty and ethics; cyber threats and data protection; digital rights and inclusion; pollution, sustainability and durability. Ms Sikkut also referred to written contributions received and invited members to use the Working Group and Conference Plenary itself to put ideas forward in oral form to be able to use these in the process.

2. Report by citizens from European Citizens' Panel 1 on the state of play of their discussions

A representative of Panel 1 reported on the discussions so far and underlined a number of key topics raised. These included preventing a possible relocation of 'smart work' outside the EU and to regulate new forms of working resulting from digitalisation. The need to address environmental impact of new technologies and digital pollution were stressed. Education was another priority, in particular to help young people to navigate the digital world. Other citizens came in as well, stressing the need for a human centred approach, with digital literacy for all. The need for digital infrastructure was also raised, for example when it comes to charging stations for electric vehicles. Issues related to digital health, cybersecurity, data protection and EU sovereignty (e.g. semiconductors) have also been discussed in the Panel.

A national citizen's representative reported of discussions in Irish Panels, that very much echoed points raised in the European Panel. Topics raised in those discussions were to support cooperation of the public and private sector, tackling disinformation and a strong role of the EU with a focus on environmental impacts of digitalisation. Ideas such as adding the vaccination pass to health insurance cards, rolling out

5G and broadband connection, digital autonomy and sovereignty, cybersecurity and fighting cybercrime, resilience and data safety were brought forward as fields of cooperation for the EU.

3. Discussion on the Third Interim Report from the Multilingual Digital Platform

Citizen's representatives were given the floor first under this point, following that all members were given the floor in alphabetical order.

Citizens stressed the need for an **inclusive approach to digitalisation**, leaving no one behind. This was seen as a priority both in terms of certain groups of the population, such as older people, but also between urban and rural areas or in relation to remote regions. Ideas put forward in this regard included a kind of 'digital service' to provide support. Citizens also called for a simplified approach to data protection (getting rid of long notices on cookie use) and underlined the importance of **education**, stressing the need to raise awareness of consumers about risks of the cyber world. It was also stressed that a better awareness is still needed in the Panel about what is already in place or under preparation at European level.

In the following discussions, Working Group members brought up a whole range of issues, many of them reinforcing and reiterating points raised by the citizens. Several Members stressed the importance to listen to the citizens' ideas and views and the need to link the ideas to information about existing or forthcoming regulation at EU level.

The importance of **digital sovereignty** of the EU and of avoiding risks for democracy resulting from digitalisation, for example through misinformation, were stressed, as was the need to ensure that European values and democratic principles were carried through and protected in the digital age. The idea for a new media platform that would ensure that quality media content was widely available was put forward.

Research and innovation was seen as one important element, for example in relation to artificial intelligence, micro and nano tech, new materials or bio tech.

Referring to the **global dimension** some members called for a geopolitical presence of the EU in the digital world and for the EU to be a global standard setter. The need to ensure that human rights were respected in consumer supply chains was equally raised.

A recurrent topic in interventions was the need for **education and the promotion of digital skills**, be it to ensure availability of skilled staff, entrepreneurs and educators, or to increase risk awareness of citizens, for example to address fake news and data security. Education was raised as an issue for schools, but also in the context of life-long learning.

The need for a robust **digital infrastructure** was seen as a crucial point by many, including access to high-speed internet connections in rural and remote areas and securing the upkeep of data highways connecting outermost regions. This was also identified as an important element for SME competitiveness and to address the digital divide.

Many members underlined the need for an **inclusive digitalisation**, leaving no one behind, avoiding a digital divide and focusing on the human side. Language technology and an EU framework to tackle linguistic exclusion was put forward as a tool to help promote access to technology also in smaller markets and to make information more accessible throughout Europe. The need to protect workers and social rights in the changing digital work environment was also reiterated.

Sustainability and addressing digital pollution and the digital carbon footprint were raised.

Members also raised **data access and a digital single market**, referring to the need of SME's to have fair and equal access to data, including free cross-border movement of data and interoperability, based on common standards and principles. Suggestions were made to demonstrate the benefits of digitalisation through practical use cases, such as the E-ID. The 'digital first' principle was put forward, as was the importance of open data.

Some members drew attention to the **risks of digitalisation**, requiring legislation at EU level to protect privacy and digital rights effectively. In relation to artificial intelligence the need to have the human always have the last decision was underlined. There were warnings against biometric recognition in public or private areas except where absolutely necessary. In this context one member also saw the need to set boundaries and ensure accountability for use of spyware by public authorities which can threaten European democracy, and to make sure there was space in Europe for cyber refugees/exiles.

Ms Valtonen welcomed that many important points were raised already and informed that work will continue in January along the three pillars identified.

4. Closing by the Chair

Ms Sikkut closed the meeting welcoming the different perspectives provided by members. She emphasizes the need for clear EU wide rules to ensure citizens' rights are protected and a human centric approach prevails. Another important component then is the availability of safe infrastructure to make sure everyone has access to information and digital services. The volume of information and data available demands clear rules on data and privacy protection. Countering disinformation by providing reliable, fact-checked information becomes more and more important. In order for everyone to be able to benefit from the digital world, there is a need to avoid a digital divide and ensure education and skills that allow everyone to participate, including through language technology. Both on the Multilingual Digital Platform and during the Working Group meeting, different ways to enable participation, share views and bring together citizens, officials and sectors through forums, platforms, portals were described. And finally, to protect our society, we need EU digital sovereignty.

In terms of process, the Chair encouraged the Common Secretariat to provide citizen in the Panels with information about existing or planned regulation at EU level. She also announced that the summary record and agenda for the meeting will be available in a more timely manner. The next meeting would take place in January.

ANNEX: List of members of the Working Group on Digital Transformation

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Chair: Riina SIKKUT (Elina VALTONEN as of 1.1.2022) (National Parliaments)

Title	First name	Last name	Component
Mr	Thomas	BYRNE	Council
Ms	Dita	CHARANZOVÁ	European Parliament
Ms	Josianne	CUTAJAR	European Parliament
Ms	Claudia	DÖRR-VOSS	Council
Ms	Jelena	DRENJANIN	Committee of the Regions
Ms	Yordanka	FANDAKOVA	Local/Regional representative
Mr	Vasco	FERNANDES	European citizens panels
Mr	Radosław	FOGIEL	National Parliaments
Ms	Antje	GERSTEIN	European Economic and Social Committee
Ms	Marietta	GIANNAKOU	National Parliaments
Mr	Antonio	GIARDINA	European citizens panels
Ms	Marketa	GREGOROVA	European Parliament
Mr	Filip	HOFMAN	European citizens panels
Ms	Eva Maria	HOLZLEITNER	National Parliaments
Ms	Assita	KANKO	European Parliament
Mr	Othmar	KARAS	European Parliament
Ms	Miapetra	KUMPULA-NATRI	European Parliament
Ms	Constance	LE GRIP	National Parliaments
Ms	Eva-Maria	LIIMETS	Council
Mr	Morten	LØKKEGAARD	European Parliament
Ms	Gisele Marguerite	MAGNERY	European citizens panels
Ms	Jánosné	MASEVSZKI	European citizens panels
Ms	Eva	MAYDELL	European Parliament
Mr	Paulo	MONIZ	National Parliaments
Ms	Noelle	O'CONNELL	National citizens panels/events
Ms	Sirpa	PAATERO	Council
Mr	Stefano	PALMIERI	European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Chrisis	PANTELIDES	National Parliaments
Mr	Alessandro	PANZA	European Parliament
Ms	Gergana	PASSY	National citizens panels/events
Ms	Sandra	PEREIRA	European Parliament
Mr	Iulian-Vasile	POPESCU	Council
Mr	Carles	PUIGDEMONT I CASAMAJÓ	European Parliament
Ms	Lucia	PUTTRICH	National Parliaments
Ms	Jessika	ROSWALL	National Parliaments

Mr	Lukas	SAVICKAS	National Parliaments
Prof.	Paola	SEVERINO	National citizens panels/events
Ms	Riina	SIKKUT	National Parliaments
Mr	Radoslaw	SIKORSKI	European Parliament
Ms	Vita Anda	TĒRAUDA	National Parliaments
Mr	Jean-Louis	THILL	Council
Ms	Rocío	TOVIO DIAZ	European citizens panels
Ms	Elina	VALTONEN	National Parliaments
Ms	Mirja	VEHKAPERÄ	Committee of the Regions
Ms	Margrethe	VESTAGER	European Commission
Ms	Veronique	WILLEMS	Social Partners