Conference on the future of Europe

ACTIVITY REPORT
July 2021 – October 2021
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................2

II. ACTIVITIES AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL.............................................................4
   A. Multilingual Digital Platform..................................................................................4
   B. European Citizens’ Panels.....................................................................................6
   C. European Youth Event (8-9 October).....................................................................9
   D. Second Conference Plenary (22 and 23 October)..............................................10
   E. Executive Board ....................................................................................................15
   F. Other activities.......................................................................................................16

III. ACTIVITIES AT THE NATIONAL/REGIONAL/LOCAL LEVEL17

IV. NEXT STEPS...........................................................................................................17
The Conference on the Future of Europe is now running at full speed. After the inaugural Conference Plenary was held in Strasbourg on 19 June 2021, European Citizens' Panels started their work, meeting for the first time in mid-September. The Panels gather some 800 randomly selected EU citizens, reflecting the EU’s diversity, in four Panels which hold discussions on key topics in various key policy fields. The European Citizens’ Panels, alongside National Citizens’ Panels, will play a key role in the Conference as their recommendations, together with contributions from the Conference’s Multilingual Digital Platform, will be debated by the Conference Plenary, which will put forward proposals to the Executive Board for the final outcome of the Conference.

The Conference’s Multilingual Digital Platform, which allows every EU citizen to have their say in any of the 24 official EU languages, has continued to gather citizens’ input with over 9,000 ideas being shared by the end of October. First reports on contributions on the platform have been published, giving an overview of the diversity of the ideas that have been discussed on the platform as well as at Conference related events organised across the EU.

The views of 16 to 30 year olds were the focus of the European Youth Event 2021 that took place on 8-9 October. The event brought together young people in Strasbourg and online, to shape and share their ideas for the future of Europe.
An important milestone was the second meeting of the Conference Plenary, held in Strasbourg on 22-23 October 2021. The Plenary met for the first time in its full composition, as the 80 representatives of the European Citizens’ Panels took up their seats. In its uniquely diverse set-up, the Plenary heard first reports from the ongoing panels’ deliberations and discussed citizens’ contributions made on the digital platform, as well as those coming from the various events and debates organised as part of the Conference. The Plenary was presided by the three Co-Chairs of the Conference: Member of the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt, Secretary of State Gašper Dovžan for the Council, and Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica.
II. ACTIVITIES AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

A. Multilingual Digital Platform

The Multilingual Digital Platform (https://futureu.europa.eu/) continues to be at the heart of the transnational democratic debate of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It gives every EU citizen the opportunity to participate in any of the 24 official languages of the EU. Citizens can put forward their ideas, endorse other peoples’ ideas and comment on them. It is also the place where everyone can share information on Conference events and report on their outcomes. Contributions are publicly accessible, as are the open data files related to the digital platform.

By the end of October there had been more than 3,6 million unique visitors, 33,213 active participants, 9,111 ideas debated, and almost 3,500 events registered on the Multilingual Digital Platform, with participation growing steadily over the past months. Further efforts are needed to promote the platform and to make sure it reaches as many citizens as possible.

![Figure 1 State of participation on 29 October (source: futureu.europa.eu)](image)

Contributions on the platform are collected and analysed and reports are prepared by a contractor and published on the platform itself. A first interim report was published in September covering contributions collected between 19 April and 2 August 2021. On 15 October 2021, the second interim report was published, covering contributions until 7 September 2021. A supplementary report on contributions on the platform per Member State was also made available at the same time.
The platform reports show that European democracy, and climate change and the environment, are the most popular topics of discussion among the participants so far. Citizens from all EU countries have also put forward a multitude of ideas on other subjects and discussed a large variety of topics at Conference events.

The reports, including the mind maps, have provided useful input to the first round of the European Citizens’ Panels, helping participants to identify and define work streams. They were also discussed at the Conference Plenary on 23 October 2021 and in the preceding Working Groups meetings.

The third interim report is due for December 2021 and will feed into the last sessions of European Citizens’ Panels and the upcoming meetings of the Conference Plenary. It will cover contributions until early November. A final report will be prepared next year, so that it can be published ahead of the final Plenary in Spring 2022. Further reports per Member States will also be published.

Moderation has allowed to keep the platform a safe space where citizens from every walk of life and all corners of Europe feel comfortable and welcome to contribute to the debate. The moderation team under supervision of the Common Secretariat ensures on behalf of the Executive Board that the Conference Charter and the Rules of Participation are respected. Only a small part of the contributions required moderation due to offensive content over the last months.
B. **European Citizens’ Panels**

The European Citizens’ Panels (ECP) lie at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe and bring together around 800 citizens from all backgrounds and corners of the EU. They have been organised by the three Institutions on the basis of the modalities established by the Co-Chairs and under the supervision of the Executive Board, and with the assistance of a Consortium. The participants to the European Citizens’ Panels were randomly selected in the summer 2021, according to the 5 criteria established in the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe (gender, age, geographical origin – nationality and urban/rural – socio-economic background and level of education). Each Panel meets for three week-ends, the first sessions in Strasbourg, the second online and the third in four cities (Dublin, Florence, Natolin and Maastricht), hosted by higher education institutes.

Four thematic Panels, each comprising up to 200 citizens, with at least one third aged between 16 and 25, selected randomly and reflecting the EU's demographic and social diversity, started their deliberations in September 2021.

The first session of each Panel was held in person in Strasbourg. The objective of the session was to define the agenda for the deliberations. The citizens participating in the Panels started by reflecting upon and building their vision for Europe, and then identified the issues to be debated, within the framework of the Panel’s main themes. Then, they prioritised the topics that they wanted to concentrate on and deepen in order to generate specific recommendations for the European Union institutions to follow up on. The discussions and collective work was carried out in two formats:

- In subgroups composed of twelve to fourteen citizens. Four to five languages were spoken in each subgroup, each citizen being able to speak in his/her own language. Subgroup work was guided by professional facilitators selected by the consortium of external service providers.
- In plenary, with all participants. Plenary sessions were led by two main moderators.

The priority topics resulting from the discussions were organised in so-called “streams” (i.e. headline thematics) and “substreams” and served as a basis for the second sessions. To this end, the participants received basic information around the topics, the relevant input, including analysis and mind maps, from the first interim report of the Multilingual Digital Platform and presentations from high-level external experts. During the first sessions, the 20 representatives of each Panel to the Conference Plenary were selected by a draw.
The first session of the Panel on “A stronger economy, social justice, jobs/ Education, culture, youth, sport/ Digital transformation” took place on 17-19 September. This Panel addresses the future of our economy and jobs, especially after the pandemic, paying due attention to the related issues of social justice. It also tackles the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation - one of the biggest future-oriented topics under debate. The Panel also deals with the future of Europe in the areas of youth, sport, culture and education. The participating citizens were welcomed by Co-chair Guy Verhofstadt, Member of the European Parliament. The work of the first session concluded with the endorsement of the five streams: “Working in Europe”; “An economy for the future”; “A just society”; “Learning in Europe” and “An ethical and safe digital transformation”. The output report of the session is available on the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Session 1 of the Panel on “European democracy/ Values and rights, rule of law, security” took place on 24-26 September. The Panel addresses topics related to democracy, such as elections, participation outside election periods, perceived distance between people and their elected representatives, media freedom and disinformation. The Panel also deals with issues related to fundamental rights and values, the rule of law and the fight against all forms of discrimination. At the same time, the Panel deals with the internal security of the EU, such as protection of Europeans from acts of terrorism and other crimes. The panellists were welcomed by Co-chair Gašper Dovžan, State Secretary for EU Affairs for the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The work of the first session concluded with the endorsement of the five streams: “Ensuring rights and non-discrimination”; “Protecting democracy and the rule of law”; “Reforming the EU”; “Building European identity”; “Strengthening citizens’ participation”. The output report of the session can be consulted online on the Multilingual Digital Platform.
The Panel on “Climate change and the environment/ Health” held its first session on 1-3 October. It is related to the effects of climate change, environmental issues and new health challenges for the European Union. These topics also relate to the EU’s objectives and strategies such as agriculture, transport and mobility, energy and the transition to post-carbon societies, research, healthcare systems, responses to health crises, prevention and healthy lifestyles. The work of the first session concluded with the endorsement of the five streams: “Better Ways of Living”; “Protecting our environment and our health”; “Redirecting our economy and consumption”; “Towards a sustainable society” and “Caring for all”. The output report of the session can be found on the Multilingual Digital Platform.

The fourth Panel dealing with “EU in the world / Migration” met for the first time on 15-17 October, discussing in particular the global role of the EU, including objectives and strategies for the EU’s security, defence, trade policy, humanitarian aid and development cooperation, foreign policy, and EU neighbourhood policy and enlargement, as well as how the EU should deal with migration. The citizens were welcomed by Co-chair Dubravka Šuica, Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography. The work of the first session concluded with the endorsement of the five streams: “Self-reliance and stability”; “The EU as an international partner”; “A strong EU in a peaceful world”; “Migration from a human perspective” and “Responsibility and solidarity across the EU”. The output report of the session is available on the Multilingual Digital Platform.
C. European Youth Event (8-9 October)

The European Youth Event (EYE2021) took place on 8-9 October and brought together 10,000 young people online and in the European Parliament in Strasbourg to shape and share their ideas for the future of Europe. EYE is a unique opportunity for 16 to 30 year olds to interact in-person and online, inspire each other and exchange their views with experts, activists, influencers and decision-makers, right in the heart of European democracy.

From May 2021, in collaboration with pan-European youth organisations, more than 2,000 proposals from young citizens around the European Union were collected online. In addition, several sessions were organised focusing on the Conference on the Future of Europe, both online ahead of the event and during the EYE in Strasbourg.

After the event, the 20 most prominent ideas among participants, two per Conference topic, were collected in the Youth Ideas report for the Conference on the Future of Europe, published in 23 languages. The report from the event was presented to the Conference Plenary on 23 October by young participants from the European Citizens’ Panels who also took part in EYE2021. All the ideas collected are available on search.youthideas.eu.
D. Second Conference Plenary (22 and 23 October)

The second Plenary of the Conference took place on 22 and 23 October 2021. More than 400 Conference Plenary Members participated either on-site or remotely.

On behalf of the Co-Chairs, Guy Verhofstadt welcomed the Conference Members to the second Plenary session and noted that there were no objections to the agenda. He gave a special welcome to the 80 citizens representing the four European Citizens’ Panels, who joined the Conference Plenary for the first time, and noted with satisfaction that the Plenary is now complete as regards its composition. Co-Chair Dubravka Šuica equally welcomed the Panel representatives, stressed the need for the Conference to be citizen focussed and offered a particular welcome to representatives from the Western Balkans. Co-Chair Gašper Dovžan stressed the character of the Conference as a citizens’ driven project and that the second Plenary meeting would be about getting and discussing feedback from the European Citizens’ Panels, National Panels and Events, the European Youth Event, and the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Co-Chair Dubravka Šuica introduced the European Citizens’ Panels. She noted that she had witnessed herself the impressive commitment of a very diverse group of citizens in the work of the Panels. The 800 participants of the four Panels met for their first sessions and have started to discuss their respective topics. They will continue their discussions in the coming months and present their recommendations to the Plenary. She then gave the floor to two representatives from each of the four European Citizens’ Panels. In their presentations, the representatives stressed that the Panels had
focused on shaping a vision for the future within their respective areas, identified work streams and related sub-topics, and will discuss these in more depth during their next sessions.

The floor was then opened for discussion. Speakers, among other topics:

- Welcomed the feedback from the first sessions of the Citizens’ Panels, stressed that these already identified very relevant topics, and emphasised the importance of listening to citizens’ ideas and putting them at the centre of the Conference;
- Emphasised that the work of the Conference should lead to concrete, tangible results;
- Called for effective follow-up on the final outcome, in a structured manner;
- Stressed that EU institutions and Member States have a vital role to play ensuring that the outcome of the Conference is implemented;
- Noted the important role that local and regional governments play in the whole process;
- Considered the Citizens’ Panels as an innovative form of participatory democracy that could continue as a more permanent, structured citizen participation in the future.

Some stressed the need to hear from and engage with citizens from all walks of life and stressed the need for diversity and inclusiveness of the

1. For streams and sub-topics and reports on the work of the Panels please see: European Citizens’ Panels - Conference on the Future of Europe
Conference. Others considered that more plenary time would be needed to discuss the range of topics identified by the Panels and the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Some speakers argued that the Conference should focus on policy-related issues and less on institutional reform and competence issues, while others emphasised the need for the EU to have the capacity to deliver results on the desired policies.

On the topics and streams presented by the eight European Citizens’ Panels’ representatives, Members touched upon a wide variety of issues, including:

- Support for building better and stronger economies, while providing social cohesion and justice, including access to health service, education, minimum income and housing for everyone;
- Action to fight climate change with a just transition;
- A fair and common approach to migration;
- Addressing challenges of demographic change;
- Development of digital technology and protection of digital rights (a safe and transparent digital society);
- The need for strategic autonomy;
- A common voice in foreign policy.

A number of Members also raised:

- The respect of rule of law and media freedom as core principles of the EU;
- The need to respect the constitutional identity of all Member States;
- The importance of common values and fundamental rights;
- The need to develop further participatory democracy, direct participation, and transparency in the EU decision-making process.

Co-Chair Gašper Dovžan invited the representatives from National Panels and Events to present their work. In their presentations, the representatives offered an overview of their ongoing and planned activities at various levels and with a variety of actors. Some had identified and reported on preliminary topics for further discussions.

Many speakers drew attention to the importance of youth participation, highlighting events involving young people, including students. They emphasised a number of challenges experienced by young people and set out some of the outcomes stemming from these events.

A number of representatives also highlighted the importance of civil society in organising many of the events taking place at national, regional and local levels, but also in ensuring that the Conference reaches the citizens in all corners of the European Union, including marginalised groups.
A number of representatives from National Panels and Events expressed concerns that the debate was less well attended during this agenda item and stressed that it is essential that all Plenary members listen to what citizens have to say and effectively follow-up on their recommendations.

Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt reopened the session in the afternoon inviting three participants in the European Youth Event (EYE), who are also members of the European Citizens’ Panels, to take the floor. They provided the Members with an overview of the 20 ‘best ideas’ selected by the young citizens participating to the EYE and which can be found in the ‘Youth Ideas Report’. They stressed that young people have a tangible vision for a shared Europe. Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt noted that the proposals are very ambitious and that some would require in-depth reforms. He suggested discussing them together with the interim reports of the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Co-Chair Verhofstadt then opened the debate on the Multilingual Digital Platform by highlighting some of the main statistics. He noted an increase of participation but felt there is still a need to increase participation further. The Co-Chair highlighted the most endorsed and commented ideas from the Platform under the different topics, as published in the Second Interim Report, and concluded that citizens are critical, but also very constructive, wanting to improve the EU.

In the debate that followed, a number of speakers emphasised the uniqueness and innovative nature of the Platform, which gives a voice to citizens and a place to debate in all EU official languages and noted the already considerable number of contributions and visitors. It was noted that despite initial concerns about censorship, only a few users had to be blocked. Others found that the number of participants should be higher and that the Platform is not yet sufficiently well-known and does not yet reach enough citizens (in particular young people and women) and more needs to be done to promote the Platform. Several called for making the Platform accessible and user-friendly for all, including people with disabilities. Some suggested to maintain the Platform beyond the Conference, possibly also in the context of a more structured citizen participation in the future.
It was stressed that many ideas from the Platform already found their way into the discussion in the Panels, and in the following debate, several interventions referenced ideas from the Platform directly. Speakers set out a broad array of priorities within the following policy topics: digital transformation, economy and competitiveness, the role of regions, financial services, social justice, health, rule of law, democracy, citizens’ participation, environment and climate, migration, energy, fundamental rights, values, foreign policy, common defence, security, education, and culture.

Some commented on the process and workings of the Conference itself. The need for concrete follow-up on its outcomes was raised on a number of occasions, as was the importance of involving the Western Balkans partners. A number of participants requested more opportunities for citizens to have interactions with other Plenary Members, in particular elected representatives. Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt took note of the concerns about citizens’ involvement and underlined that the format of the following Plenary sessions will be different, since they will be focussed on the outcomes of the European Citizens’ Panels, thus putting the citizens’ contributions in the centre.

The three Co-Chairs thanked everyone for their participation and contributions and closed the Second Conference Plenary.

On Friday 22 October, the nine Plenary Working Groups, of about 50 Plenary Members each and covering all Platform/European Citizens’ Panels topics, had met for the first time. Representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the National Parliaments each chair two Working Groups, while the President of
the European Youth Forum chairs one Working Group. During their first meeting, the Working Groups started discussing the first impressions from the various National and European Citizens’ Panels as well as the contributions on the Multilingual Digital Platform related to their respective topics.

E. Executive Board

The Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe met twice in the period July-October 2021, namely on 19 July and 20 September. For each meeting, a detailed report is available in all languages on the Multilingual Digital Platform, under the section on the Executive Board.

At its meeting on 19 July, the Executive Board endorsed the amendment to Article 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference concerning an increased representation of local and regional authorities and social partners in the Conference Plenary. The Executive Board was also informed on the updated practical modalities for the organisation of the European Citizens’ Panels, in particular in relation to the order and locations of the Panels, and the methodology to frame the topics, on the state of play of preparations for the Conference Plenary Working Groups, and on the Joint Communication Plan on the Conference on the Future of Europe.

At its meeting on 20 September, the Executive Board was informed on the European Citizens’ Panels and in particular the positive experience of the first session of Panel 1 and held an exchange of views. The Executive Board was also informed on the Multilingual Digital Platform, including interim
reports and platform moderation and held an exchange of views. Furthermore it endorsed the draft agenda of the Conference Plenary meeting of 22 and 23 October, with a grouping of topics in the morning and afternoon sessions and held an exchange of views on the inaugural Conference Plenary. Finally, the Executive Board was informed on the state of play of preparations for the Conference Plenary Working Groups and discussed the outstanding issues.

F. Other activities

Communication around the Conference on the Future of Europe is a joint responsibility of EU Institutions - the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission - and of the Member States. Promoting the Conference primarily means promoting the Multilingual Digital Platform, as the central hub of the Conference. The EU institutions have continued their coordinated efforts in informing widely about the Conference on the Future of Europe and its individual pillars and events. They have been doing so via targeted social media campaigns, including paid advertisements, organising and participating in outreach events (several hundreds of them, much more to come), and also by supporting quality coverage by traditional media.

Since September 2021, extensive communication actions have been put in place to promote and inform about the European Citizens’ Panels. These include:

- press information and packages for the media (press releases, media advisory, background documents, web streaming etc.);
- invitation to journalists to follow the first sessions taking place in Strasbourg (more than 100 presences in total);
- four technical briefings for the media (three in Strasbourg and one in Brussels);
- empowering the citizens participating in the Panels to become “ambassadors” of the Conference and actively engage, both with traditional and social media;
- series of video testimonies of citizens to be used for communication purposes.
As a result, there has been already an extensive coverage around the EU, as well as on the social media. Many of the panellists have featured with their own personal stories and ideas about the future of Europe.
The European Committee of Regions has deployed sustained communication and outreach activities, including organising more than 120 local, including cross-border and transnational citizens’ panels and several high-level events. This year’s edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities, the EU’s landmark event dedicated to regional and local stakeholders, bringing together 17,600 participants also contributed to the democratic debate of the Conference.

The European Economic and Social Committee also took action to ensure that its members and those they represent can participate fully in the first direct Europe-wide debate of citizens on the future challenges and priorities for the EU. A series of local events have been promoted, including national consultations and events organised at central level, by EESC Groups or by sections, as well as information and training sessions for the relevant stakeholders, including social partners and organised civil society, to invite them to contribute and explain the different modalities.

The Covenant of Mayors – Europe also invited all signatories to actively engage and spread the word among their citizens. Several events of the ongoing campaign around the renewed ambition of a fairer and climate-neutral Europe have been linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe and other civil society organisations and platforms at EU, national and regional level, have supported the joint effort and common goal.
According to the Joint Declaration, the Conference is a joint undertaking of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, acting as equal partners together with the Member States of the European Union. Member States contribute to the Conference through additional events, in line with their own national specificities.

Activities in the Member States are underway and include a variety of events and initiatives at national, regional, local and in some cases transnational level, which reach many thousands of participants. The key objective in organising these events and initiatives is to listen to citizens and to involve them as much as possible in the debates on the European Union. Inclusivity and reaching out to citizens is also a priority of these events and initiatives, with efforts made to include those who are not usually active or involved in EU issues.

To reach as many citizens as possible, various campaigns and initiatives have been set up to raise awareness about the Conference and its Digital Platform in Member States, and to encourage citizens’ participation. Several Member States have also set up specific websites dedicated to the Conference, to provide a hub of information at national level.

Different types of events have taken place or are being organised, with a mix between centralised and decentralised approaches, including various forms of support to bottom-up initiatives.

Activities and events in the Member States have been or are organised by different institutions and stakeholders, including national, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, social partners, associations and citizens. In some cases, non-governmental organisations, cultural institutions, think tanks, universities and research institutes also actively engage in organising events about the Conference. The Commission Representations in Member States and European Parliament liaison offices are closely associated in the organisation of many Conference activities and events.

Some of the activities organised in the framework of the Conference include online consultations, debates, series of discussions, workshops, seminars, polls and focus groups.

In many of these activities and events, special importance is given to the involvement of the younger generation, for instance through activities...
organised with students or pupils, working closely with schools, education institutes and universities.

Events are to be registered on the Digital Platform and organisers are encouraged to upload event reports in order to allow that their outcome can – as all input on the platform – feed into the Conference process through platform reports.

Moreover, several Member States are in the process of organising National Citizens’ Panels, in which citizens who are representative of the general population discuss their priorities for the future of Europe. As foreseen by the Joint Declaration, the Conference Plenary will debate the recommendations from the national and European Citizens’ Panels, grouped by themes without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy areas.

To assist Member States willing to organise National Citizens’ Panels, guidance was issued on 26 May 2021, indicating a set of principles for good deliberation.²

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IV. NEXT STEPS

The European Citizens’ Panels will hold their third sessions and come forward with their recommendations. Contributions and discussions on the Multilingual Digital Platform continue and a final report will be prepared in early 2022. The next Conference Plenary is scheduled on 21-22 January 2022 and will start to debate and discuss the recommendations from the National and European Citizens’ Panels.

More information on the Conference is available on:
https://futureu.europa.eu