REPORT

SYNTHESIS

Belgium in the Conference on the Future of Europe
The report reflects the deliberations and recommendations made by participants at the various events organised in Belgium in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

9 May 2021 marked the official launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe. A large-scale exercise initiated by the European Union, one of its main objectives was to involve citizens more closely in defining the challenges facing the Union. At European level, the Conference is organised around three channels: a digital platform, citizens’ panels and a plenary. The digital platform is a tool open to everyone, where ideas can be exchanged and events shared.

For the European citizens’ panels, 800 citizens were randomly selected at European level to represent the sociological diversity of the European Union. Each of the four panels is composed of 200 European citizens, who formulate ideas and recommendations during consultation sessions. These feed into the general deliberations of the Conference: the plenary sessions, the report and the final results. The topics discussed by the four panels were: “A stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation”; “European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security”; “Climate change, environment / Health”; “EU in the world / Migration”.

Finally, the Conference Plenary is composed of representatives of the different European institutions and ambassadors from the European citizens’ panels. Representatives of the governments and parliaments of the Member States also sit in this assembly, as well as one citizen per Member State representing the national initiatives. The plenary is responsible for formulating conclusions, based on the contributions of the digital platform and the recommendations made at European and national level by the citizens’ panels and other initiatives.

In order to increase the participation of citizens and Member States in the Conference process, the European Union invited all Member States to set up their own initiatives to provide national contributions to the Conference. The various Belgian authorities responded positively to this request and several initiatives were set up. This report aims to provide an overview of the many initiatives taken in Belgium by the different levels of government and by civil society, and therefore of the Belgian contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

First, the report will briefly look at the contribution of Belgian residents to the digital platform. Finally, we would like to point out that you will find a list of the initiatives identified in this report and a glossary in the appendix. All terms in the glossary are marked with an asterisk in the main body of the text.
Conference on the future of Europe

Citizens’ input

Member States conference / events / panels

The multilingual digital platform

European Citizens panels

Conference Plenary

Executive Board

European Parliament
Guy Verhofstadt

Council
Rotating presidency (Minister/State Sec.)

European Commission
Dubravka Suica

+ 2 MEMBERS + 4 OBSERVERS PER INSTITUTION

Working Groups

Joint Presidency

European Parliament
Roberta Metsola

Council
Rotating presidency (Head of State or Government)

European Commission
Ursula von der Leyen

Member States can send:
- 2 representatives at ministerial level
- 4 members of parliament
- 1 citizen to the Conference Plenary

Final report (by consensus)

Common Secretariat

The common secretariat should assist the work of the working groups and provide the secretariat of the chairs of the different working groups.

June 2021

European Parliament

1. Climate Change & Environment
2. EU in the World
3. Digital Transformation
4. Migration
5. Health
6. Values, Rights & Rule of Law
7. Economy, Social Justice & Jobs
8. European Democracy
9. Education, Youth, Culture, Sports

+ 2 MEMBERS + 4 OBSERVERS PER INSTITUTION

European Commission

+ Representatives from the European Citizens’ Panels
+ 3 representatives from national events or panels to WGs

European Parliament

Roberta Metsola

Council
Rotating presidency (Head of State or Government)

European Commission
Ursula von der Leyen

May 2022
THE ROLE OF BELGIUM AND ITS CITIZENS IN THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

OBJECTIVES FOR BELGIUM

For Belgium, playing an active role in the Conference on the Future of Europe was self-evident. On the one hand, its contribution responds to the concern with strengthening trust in politics as a positive force. For this, democratic functioning must be modernised through simplification and opening up to new forms of participation. More direct citizen participation in political decision-making enriches our representative democracy.

On the other hand, Belgium is a founding member of the European Union, a traditional supporter of the European project and the seat of the EU institutions. In the context of this ambition for democratic renewal, Belgium has every interest in ensuring that citizens do not lose their trust in the Union. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a very useful exercise in this regard. Indeed, Belgium sees it as a unique opportunity to make participatory democracy a systemic element of European policymaking.

By experimenting with new forms of citizen participation, Belgium therefore wishes to contribute to the strengthening of participatory democracy and democratic renewal in the European Union. These new forms include citizens' dialogues and mixed panels in which citizens are selected, either by sortition or otherwise. For these reasons, our country committed itself to organising national citizens' panels, youth debates, citizen dialogues and a hackathon* in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Belgians and the European level of the Conference

Before focusing on Belgian contributions to the Conference at national level, the report provides an overview of the Belgian contribution to the Conference at European level. Both at the political and civil society levels, Belgium is indeed very well represented in the Conference as a whole.

Firstly, there is the Conference Executive Board. It is responsible for the work and running of the Conference. It also prepares the plenary meetings and reports to the Joint Presidency of the Conference, which is composed of the presidents of the three European institutions. As a representative of the European Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt co-chairs the Executive Board with two other representatives of the Council and the Commission. He is therefore an important Belgian figure throughout the whole process. Furthermore, Belgium, as a future Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2024, is an observer in the Executive Board.

The European Union also organised several different panels of European citizens. Belgian citizens were of course selected to take part in these panels. Of the 800 participants in these panels, 24 were Belgian: ten men and fourteen women. They were selected to ensure a representative sample based on professional situation, geographic origin and their level of education.

Finally, the Conference plenary brought together citizens, policymakers and civil society representatives on several occasions. Many Belgians were naturally involved. Some of the 24 Belgian panelists had the opportunity to take part in these plenary meetings, as well as a citizen representing the national initiatives. At the January plenary session, Dorien Nijs – one of the participants in the federal citizens’ panels discussed later in this report – presented, as rapporteur of these panels, the Belgian recommendations on European democracy and how to better involve citizens. On the political side, representatives of our federal and federated parliaments and governments were present. Lastly, Belgian civil society was also represented.
The Conference on the Future of Europe relies on a mix of online and in-person events organised by the EU institutions; national, regional and local authorities; and civil society organisations and citizens. The results of all these events are collected, analysed and published on the multilingual digital platform. This allows participants to engage in dialogue amongst themselves and discuss their proposals with other citizens from all other Member States of the EU, in the 24 official EU languages. This aims to allow as many people as possible, from all walks of life, to help shape their future through the platform.

Between 19 April 2021, the launch date of the multilingual digital platform, and 20 February 2022, a total of 43,734 contributions were posted as ideas, comments and events. The breakdown of activity is as follows:

- Ideas: 16,274
- Comments: 21,264
- Events: 6,196

These two graphs highlight the significance of Belgian activity on the digital platform.

In terms of volume of contributions, Belgium is ranked fifth out of the 27 Member States. Moreover, when looking at contributions proportional to the population, Belgium is ranked fourth, with 218 contributions per million inhabitants between 19 April and 20 February 2022.

**Figure 2** – Volume of contributions per country (19/04/2021 – 20/02/2022)

**Figure 3** – Volume of contributions per country, proportional reflection per 1M inhabitants (19/04/2021 – 20/02/2022)

Nine topics:

- Climate change and the environment
- EU in the world
- Digital transformation
- Migration
- Health
- Values and rights, rule of law, security
- A stronger economy, social justice and jobs
- European democracy
- Education, culture, youth and sport
- Other ideas

**Belgian activity on the platform**

During the period under analysis, the participants who indicated that they resided in Belgium registered a total of 2486 contributions (ideas, comments and events). The breakdown of their activity is as follows:

- Ideas: 813
- Comments: 1229
- Events: 444
When comparing the contributions by topic at European and Belgian level, we can observe that the most popular topics are the same. In the first two positions we find, in order, European democracy and climate change and the environment. It should be noted, however, that in Belgium the popularity of the theme ‘European democracy’ is proportionally higher than in the EU as a whole. Similarly, the ‘Other’ category, which ranks third in both cases, is 2.5 percentage points higher in Belgium than at European level. In the middle of the table, differences appear between Belgium and the European Union. Nevertheless, we can see that the categories ‘Education, culture, youth and sport’ and ‘A stronger economy, social justice and jobs’ occupy roughly equal positions. At the bottom of the ranking, the digital transformation is the least-discussed topic in Belgium. This topic ranks second-last at European level, with health taking the last place.
Map for Belgium

As highlighted previously, the many Belgian contributions to the platform fell mainly under two topics: European democracy and climate change and the environment. These two topics are quite important, as they represent more than one-third of all Belgian contributions. It is therefore important to provide more detail on the major themes proposed on the platform on these topics by Belgian residents. For European democracy there are two recurring elements. On the one hand, the wish to reform EU institutions: for instance – and unsurprisingly given the Belgian political system – several contributors raise the idea of federalisation of the EU. On the other hand, possible solutions are suggested to increase citizen participation in and engagement with the EU. For climate change and the environment, contributors residing in Belgium touch on a range of subjects, from pollution to the European Green Deal* and promoting biodiversity. They also discuss consumption, insisting on the importance of buying local, and energy, suggesting for example investing in hydrogen-fired power plants.

NATIONAL LEVEL

The Member States play a constitutive role in the European Union and their participation in this reflection on the future of Europe is therefore indispensable. The EU thus encouraged its Member States to contribute to the Conference, a call to which Belgium responded favourably. The following section aims to present several Belgian initiatives in order to provide visibility to the Belgian contribution to the future of Europe.
NATIONAL INITIATIVES AND EVENTS

The Belgian contribution to the Conference naturally refers to the citizens’ panels organised by the federal government over three weekends. Nonetheless, given the stratification of the Belgian state structure, this Belgian contribution cannot be reduced to a single initiative but to a series of events organised at different levels of power. Thus, for this report, 26 events have been listed.

From a methodological point of view, this report is intended to be a synthesis. Not all of the recommendations formulated at the different events will be found in the text. For the sake of conciseness and clarity, the recommendations in the report are therefore examples and a non-exhaustive summary of Belgian citizens’ recommendations. Moreover, the different events are discussed according to which of the nine topics of the Conference they belong to. On the one hand, this allows the report to fit within the thematic structure of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and particularly the multilingual digital platform. On the other hand, parallels between the aforementioned contributions and the contributions of the events listed below can more easily be drawn. If their structure and the recommendations require so, events will be covered by more than one topic. The structure of the event will always be explained in the first topic where it is discussed, and cross-references will clearly indicate that multiple themes were covered in the frame of the event.

However, the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium, in collaboration with the European Parliament Office in Belgium, the Belgian Europe Direct Centres and various local authorities, organised twelve independent citizens’ debates. Given the scale of this series of debates, we offer a brief explanation of the structure of these multiple events below. The individual debates are also presented under the different topics. The presence in the title of the following symbol (★) will indicate that these debates belong to this group.

These twelve citizens’ debates took place between October 2021 and February 2022, each for a half-day or an evening. The recommendations resulting from these debates are the subject of a joint report drawn up by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium. Unless otherwise stated, the methodology used for these events was identical. After receiving explanations related to the Conference on the Future of Europe and the theme of the event, the participants took part in a World Café* in three rounds. For each event, participants were asked three questions related to the topic. Five of these events were about climate change and the environment (Sint-Niklaas, Ostend, Wilrijk, Genk and the province of Hainaut); one about the issue of digital transformation (the province of Luxembourg); one dealt with the economy, social justice and jobs (German-speaking Community); three events dealt with European democracy (Saint-Gilles, Louvain-la-Neuve and Aarschot); one discussed education, culture, youth and sport (Liège); and the online brainstorming allowed Flemish youth to discuss climate and migration issues.

At the end of these twelve events, a closing session was organised on Saturday 19 February 2022. This lasted for one day and brought together politicians and citizens. For each of the twelve events, three citizens were randomly selected among those interested in taking part in the day. They first presented the conclusions and recommendations of the event in which they participated. On the basis of these recommendations, the citizens then engaged in more in-depth discussions with the politicians present. These discussions led to the formulation of nine concrete ideas that can inspire the European Union. These recommendations are naturally close to the conclusions of each of the twelve events. However, they will be explained under the corresponding topic (see the recommendations on climate change, democracy, economy and education).
CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

★ Is Sint-Niklaas #Futureproof? – Sint-Niklaas, Europe House Ryckevelde, Europe Direct East Flanders – 12/10/2021

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: City of Sint-Niklaas, Europe House Ryckvelde, Europe Direct East Flanders.
- Participants: 62 residents of the municipality of Sint-Niklaas, registered in advance.
- Topics of the evening: biodiversity, local food strategies and mobility.

Three main recommendations emerged from this evening. First, in terms of mobility, participants wanted to see the development of ‘Mobipoints*’ in all European cities. These ‘Mobipoints*’ aim to make urban traffic safer and more sustainable, the general objective being to reduce the CO₂ emissions of the transport sector. Secondly, at the urban planning level, it is necessary to encourage the renaturing of land*. This would make it possible to limit the risks of flooding and could be accompanied by a European label to combat land artificialisation. Finally, it is important to encourage citizens to consume locally, sustainably and healthily. To achieve this, the participants proposed creating an application with a practical and educational function as it would provide information on the origin of a product and its positive impact on the environment. It would also contribute to sustainable development by connecting sustainable producers, reducing food waste and raising consumer awareness.

Limburg youth debate in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe – Model European Parliament, Embassy of the Netherlands, FPS Foreign Affairs – 25/10/2021

The Model European Parliament, the Embassy of the Netherlands to Belgium and the Belgian Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs organised a half-day debate on three topics: climate change, European democracy and cross-border cooperation. About fifty young Dutch and Belgian residents, aged between 16 and 23 and living in the cross-border region of Limburg, took part in this event. They were able to register via a form without any condition other than their age and the location of their residence. In addition to the debate, the young people were able to visit a law firm specialising in European law, and the ‘House of the Dutch Provinces’, a platform for the joint advocacy of the Dutch provinces in Brussels. These two visits allowed the participants to be better informed on the political and legal level before starting their discussions.

On climate change, the young people first proposed investing heavily in a trans-European rail network to reduce the use of air travel within the EU. Second, half of the participants were in favour of the use of nuclear energy. They felt that this source of energy is a significant asset in the fight against climate change. On the other hand, the other half were opposed to this solution, pointing out certain major disadvantages such as the cost and duration of the construction of a power plant or the management of waste.

The Egmont Institute organised two citizens’ panels as part of the Moving EuropE Together (MEET) project coordinated by the European Policy Centre and supported by the European Parliament. These two debates took place in Liège and Ghent, each during one afternoon. The participants (18 in Liège and 36 in Ghent) were selected from a list of registrants to ensure a certain representativity. After being briefed on the Conference as a whole and on the climate issue, they were split into two groups to draw up a number of proposals. They then summarized these together afterwards. A closing session, open to the public and bringing together the participants of both panels, took place on 26 March 2022 in Brussels.

During these two debates, numerous recommendations were made. Some of these recommendations were formulated in both Liège and Ghent and therefore deserve to be highlighted. The participants argued for young people to be educated on climate issues, particularly through school programmes. In addition, they proposed that citizen participation at European level be increased and simplified. In addition, free trade agreements should include a climate component in order to guarantee healthy competition for companies. The participants also insisted on the need for the EU to have a real energy policy to move towards independence. Finally, they called for European investment in public transport, proposing in particular the establishment of a European rail network.

Debate on the future of Europe – Ecolo/Groen – 16/11/2021

The Green parties of Belgium (Ecolo and Groen) organised an evening dedicated to the future of the European Union. All Green party members of the federal government took part (vice-Prime Ministers De Sutter and Gilkinet, ministers Van der Straeten and Khattabi and Secretary of State Schlitz). They were accompanied by Ms Frassoni, former Member of the European Parliament. Moreover, around 150 people participated in the event. They registered beforehand through a Facebook event, without any particular condition required to participate. The debate was organised around six roundtables, each with a specific topic relevant to the competences of the politician present. A moderator ensured that discussions ran smoothly. Depending on the roundtables, debates were held in French, Dutch and English. The topics discussed include the climate transition; green mobility; energy and the green economic recovery; gender equality; the digital transformation and the role of citizens in EU decision-making.

In terms of mobility, the participants stressed above all the importance of trains, which they consider to be a clean and sustainable mode of transport for the future. It is therefore necessary for the EU to develop a railways policy and to encourage Member States to improve and increase their rail services. In this way, Europe could work towards the development of intra-European rail links with the aim of reducing air travel. The participants also stressed the need to encourage the use of bicycles (shared bikes, easy reservation, bike storage, etc.) with a view to multimodality. Still on the topic of climate change, the participants insisted on the need for a socially just transition. They thus considered that financial transfers are necessary to establish solidarity between countries, regions and generations. It is also necessary to support the SMEs that suffer most from this transition. The participants also proposed reducing the deadlines for reaching our climate objectives, promoting equal opportunities and gender equality in the transition and including civil society to a greater extent.
Hackathon* ‘The impact of a healthy lifestyle and climate change on quality of life’ and ‘Obstacles for young people on the job market’ – organised by the Walloon Parliament – 20-21/11/2021

The Walloon Parliament organised a hackathon* for Walloon citizens to create a better Europe together. 36 participants were selected through a call for participation open to all citizens living in Wallonia and through specialized organisations. Aged between 22 and 36 years old, they were invited to propose an operational and innovative project related to one of the two selected themes: ‘The impact of healthy lifestyles and climate change on the quality of life in Europe’ and ‘Barriers to youth employment in Europe’. Experts supervised the work and gave advice, and a jury was asked to select the best project for each topic.

In the category on the impact of healthy living and climate change on the quality of life in Europe, the ‘Think Mobility’ project was selected. Its initiators proposed to create a mobile application based on geolocation technologies and QR codes to encourage the use of low-emission transport modes by citizens and to advise them on how to reduce their carbon footprint. Various proposals can also be highlighted among the other projects. For example, one group wanted to bring citizens into the political and scientific world by institutionalising exchanges between these actors. The participants also proposed raising awareness among citizens about reducing their personal carbon footprint. In concrete terms, the idea is to develop an application that would allow us to know in real time our carbon emissions according to our activities.

Panel ‘Digitalisation and a sustainable economy’
– Flemish government – 23/11/2021

This event was organised by the Flemish government in collaboration with Vleva, the liaison agency between Flanders and the European Union. In person, it brought together five experts, representatives of Flemish civil society and members of local and provincial administrations. The discussions could also be followed live online by the general public. In total, around 140 people took part in or attended the discussions. The panel was based on the observation that digital technologies are an excellent lever to accelerate the transition to a sustainable, circular and more resilient economy in Flanders. A digital transition must also be sustainable in itself. With this in mind, the five Flemish experts from various sectors first presented what the green transition and digital transformation mean to them on the basis of a number of best practices. The five experts then explained how they are responding to the opportunities of the ‘twin transition’ but also how they are tackling the associated challenges. In doing so, they discussed the policy measures they believe the EU can take to better support or strengthen such projects in the context of the ‘twin transition’. After their presentations, the five experts responded to comments and questions from the floor.

All these discussions made it possible to identify a series of very concrete suggestions on how the European Union can support the ‘twin transition’. Among the many proposals some of them concern digital transformation and others are linked to climate change and environment. For the latter, participants proposed the establishment of a European framework for ‘Carbon Contracts for Differences*, the encouragement of the use of waste as a raw material and the establishment of an Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI)* for low-carbon technologies were among them. Finally, they wanted to see the EU invest in research to identify new, more sustainable techniques in energy or recycling, for example.
This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Flemish Youth Council, JINT (a Flemish organization that coordinates academic and volunteer exchange programmes) and Europe House Ryckevelde.
- Participants: 29 participants aged 16-30 years old, registered in advance.
- Topics of the evening: climate change and the environment; migration policy; education, culture, youth and sport.

Among the recommendations formulated during this evening, three have been selected: two for the category of climate change and one relevant to migration. On climate and environmental issues, the young people proposed to develop a European energy network that meets the energy needs of all countries and citizens in the EU. The aim of this network would be to reduce the EU’s dependence on fossil fuels from third countries. To achieve this, the emphasis should be on research and development, especially in terms of renewable energies. The participants also insisted on the social dimension, stressing that energy must be accessible, affordable and reliable for every citizen of the Union. Furthermore, citizens proposed to develop public transport in order to improve its organisation and make it affordable for all EU citizens. This measure is a key element in the fight against climate change. For example, it should reduce the use of air transport in favour of rail links.
Brainstorming: Ostend for a sustainable future; food and biodiversity in the EU – Ostend, Europe Direct East Flanders, Europe House Ryckevelde – 18/01/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: City of Ostend, Europe Direct East Flanders, Europe House Ryckevelde.
- Participants: forty people registered beforehand.

Among the many ideas put forward, three ideas were voted for. Citizens felt that local and dynamic food markets should be developed. These should operate with a clear strategy against waste. To help this development, the EU could provide a platform to facilitate knowledge sharing. It could also set up an action plan to support these initiatives and local agriculture in general. A second proposal was the introduction of a European ‘renaturing’ label for cities, to encourage cities to renature* open spaces and create green corridors in the urban landscape. Finally, a ‘greening’ quota for European cities should be created. This would enhance biodiversity but above all well-being in our cities. It is also important that these greening plans are built together with the citizens.

Brainstorming for a sustainable and inclusive future: the future of Genk and the EU – Genk, Europe House Ryckevelde – 20/01/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: City of Genk and Europe House Ryckevelde.
- Participants: 24 people registered in advance
- Topic of the evening: the EU has great ambitions, the future must be greener, more sustainable but also more inclusive. How can we involve everyone in achieving these goals?

Due to the public health situation, this event could not take place in person. The methodology was therefore lightly adapted. Participants were able to discuss the topic together and formulated 3 propositions. They first suggested that a Green Deal* should be put in place adapted to each citizen. The European Green Deal* and all the EU’s objectives are too often abstract for citizens. In order to get them more involved, the Green Deal* must be made concrete, stimulating local and participatory implementation. Citizens need to know what they can do at their level, to empower regions and the European population to act and to exchange good practices. Second, the participants considered that energy production, storage and distribution must be done locally. To achieve this, they proposed to develop a European action plan for energy cooperatives. A regulatory framework should be created that facilitates and encourages the local management of these competences. In addition, participants stressed the need to make renewable energy accessible and affordable for all. Finally, the EU must invest in sustainable mobility for all its citizens. In doing so, it should pay particular attention to regions that are currently poor in transport and to transnational connections.
The residents of Wilrijk talk about climate and environment – Wilrijk, Europe Direct Antwerp Province, Europe House Ryckevelde – 24/01/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Wilrijk municipality, Europe Direct Antwerp Province, Europe House Ryckevelde.
- Participants: nineteen people, registered beforehand.

Due to the health situation, this event could not take place in person. The methodology was therefore slightly modified. The participants discussed the theme together and proposed ideas. Three of these ideas received strong support.

Participants proposed firstly to create European energy cooperatives in which citizens and government should be shareholders. This would make it possible to generate more efficient, greener and cheaper energy that is accessible to all. This measure should also be accompanied by a European energy policy based on solidarity. This would mean, for example, the abolition of energy transport costs for individuals. Secondly, the citizens wanted to set up a European network to develop knowledge about the climate and the environment. This network would of course work together with local and national initiatives. Finally, participants stressed the need to raise awareness in Europe in the context of a sustainable future. This would require governments to implement effective policies on sustainable food, energy or mobility. Citizens should also be heard through the development of citizen dialogue at local level, all of which should be encouraged by the EU.

Conference on the Future of Europe: climate change and environment – Europe Direct Hainaut, University of Mons, Hainaut développement – 17/02/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Europe Direct Hainaut, University of Mons, Hainaut développement (the economic and environmental development agency)
- Participants: 31 students in 2nd and 3rd year Bachelor Law or Social Sciences studies at the University of Mons, registered beforehand.
- Topic of the evening: What is going well and what is not going well in current waste treatment? What proposals do you have for improving waste treatment? In an ideal world, what could Europe put in place to better facilitate waste treatment?

At the end of the discussions, three proposals were voted for. Participants proposed harmonising waste management by creating a European body. This would mean, for example, similar waste parks throughout Europe or the same price for refuse bags. The EU should also ban the practice of over-packaging. In the long term, a ban on the use of petroleum-based plastics should be introduced. Finally, measures on waste treatment should be harmonised at European level. Participants proposed to move towards free waste parks and bin bags to avoid illegal dumping. Other suggestions included a ban on exporting waste outside the EU, raising awareness among children about sorting and recycling, introducing a can deposit system or promoting small local actions (collective composts, water fountains in public places, legislation on bulk sales, etc.).
Closing session of the twelve events organised by the Representation of the European Commission – Belgians work together in Brussels for the future of Europe – 19/02/2022

The exact course of this event has already been explained in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

On climate and environmental issues, the participants made several suggestions. First, they stressed the need for **sustainable and accessible transport for all EU citizens**. This proposal would imply the development of a more extensive rail infrastructure with connections between European capitals. In the same vein, they wished to **renew public transport**, notably by reducing its costs. Second, they proposed the promotion of **sustainable food in the EU** through subsidies to encourage local trade and production. The panellists also proposed that a **European action plan on energy** be put in place, for example by creating a European Energy Agency. Finally, they suggested setting up a **reference framework for cities according to levels of biodiversity and ‘greening’**.

THE EU IN THE WORLD

Conference/debate on the EU’s place in the world – FPS Foreign Affairs – 08/10/2021

After an introduction by federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Wilmès, four panellists (an academic, a student, a journalist and a representative of a non-governmental organisation) presented their vision on the role of Europe in the world. This presentation was followed by questions and reactions from the audience. The audience of about 100 was selected on a voluntary basis with no preconditions. The whole event lasted two hours. The main conclusion of the panel was that there are two areas of tension regarding the role of the EU in the world. On the one hand, there are internal issues such as unanimity or qualified majority voting and external issues such as the dynamics between actors on the geopolitical scene. On the other hand, there are the interests and values of the EU. The central statement of the problem is that a necessary balance between these two areas must be found for common European action.

In addition, various concrete proposals from the participants could be identified and classified according to the external-internal division. From an internal point of view, the participants wanted to see an **increased role of the European Court of Justice**, a **revision of the unanimity rules** or a **strengthening of discussions with third countries**, particularly via the Jean Monnet Dialogue*. The citizens also proposed that the Council should focus on a **smaller number of topics** so that they could be analysed in greater depth. On the external side, the **EU’s role abroad should be strengthened**. This could be done, for example, by developing a moderate but assertive EU strategy and by making better use of EU delegations abroad. Participants also suggested increasing the physical presence of EU leaders abroad in a role of representation of the Union or increasing the role of European parliamentary delegations in relations with third countries.
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**Debate on the future of Europe – Ecolo/Groen – 16/11/2021**

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

The participants were primarily concerned about the reinforcement of the digital divide. For them, it is therefore necessary to **allow sufficient time for everyone to adapt to the new technologies**. The new technologies should also be as simple as possible. This also means **investing in retraining opportunities** for people whose jobs are threatened by the new technologies. Second, **the European Union must assert itself in the digital field**: both by harmonising and attempting to export European security standards, and by **developing its strategic autonomy**, notably by manufacturing its own electronic components. Finally, **the digital transition must be green and sustainable**. This requires European standards for the twin transition and investments in recycling techniques.

**Panel ‘Digitalisation and a sustainable economy’ – Flemish government – 23/11/2021**

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

Regarding the digital transition, the experts recommended strengthening efforts to **harmonise standards** and **facilitate the exchange of information**. Finally, they wanted to see the EU **invest in technological research** and, together with the Member States, become **a strong player in the digital field**. They also insisted on the **development of smart cities**.


This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Europe Direct Luxembourg province, Merci Foundation, Tintigny municipality, Nature Park Gaume and the Athénée Royale d’Izel.
- Participants: 43 students in the final year of secondary school at the Athénée d’Izel.
- Topic for the half-day: What role does digital technology play in your daily life? (What do you do digitally? How important is it?) What do you hope for the future of digital technology in the EU? What measures should Europe take to limit/minimise the ecological impact of digital?

Three suggestions were voted for by the participants at the end of the debates. **Programmed obsolescence should be reduced or even eliminated**. The EU should act to make this practice illegal, as it encourages consumption. Second, the panellists were **opposed to 5G**. They see 5G as unnecessary for everyday life, while driving consumption and leading to significant ecological and economic cost in terms of infrastructure. Finally, there is a need to **invest in the possibilities of repairing electronic equipment** and facilitating sales after reconditioning. Other proposals were put forward, such as the **obligation for companies to reduce their ecological impact**, to encourage a **reduction in the number of purchases made online** or to **raise awareness of the energy cost of digital technology** for all generations.
MIGRATION

★ Brainstorming: Young people speak out – Flemish Youth Council, JINT, Europe House Ryckevelde – 15/12/2021

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

For the participants, the way in which migration issues are currently dealt with in the European Union should be reviewed by insisting on the positive nature of these flows. The citizens propose three main lines of action: the creation of safe migration routes, the harmonisation of integration standards and the sharing of best practices in terms of solidarity. These new guidelines should make it possible to improve the security, integrity, wellbeing and image of refugees.

A STRONGER ECONOMY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND JOBS

Limburg youth debate in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe – Model European Parliament, Embassy of the Netherlands, FPS Foreign Affairs – 25/10/2021

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

Some participants wanted the EU to invest in cross-border regions with two main objectives in mind: job creation and crime reduction. For the majority, however, greater investment is not necessary; instead, they wanted to see financial resources used more effectively. Moreover, the young people insisted on the need to make the cross-border region more dynamic by creating jobs, ensuring greater cross-border cooperation at administrative level, investing in infrastructure or guaranteeing access to quality public services on both sides of the border.
More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

This round table focused on the energy issue and the greening of the economy. In general, the participants insisted on the need for the **Union to display real ambitions in this area through a real European energy policy**. This policy must be **built together, with the citizens and the Member States**. Many investments must be made in terms of infrastructure to produce, store and distribute energy. In view of the high costs involved, citizens stressed the need for **transparent communication**, particularly on the impact of energy policy on state budgets. Second, citizens proposed to **better tax polluting products** imported into Europe through clearly established competition rules. Finally, the **circular economy** should play a central role.

One of the six roundtables was dedicated to the means to be implemented at European level to fight against gender-based violence. First, the participants considered that it was urgent for the European Union to **ratify the Istanbul Convention**. Legally binding instruments must also be put in place to **ensure the full implementation of this Convention**. Second, the citizens proposed to create a gender strand in the Council to bring together the European ministers responsible for this issue. The **adoption of a European directive on the subject** should also be one of the objectives of the Belgian Presidency of the Council in 2024. Finally, **more investment should be made in the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**.
This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

Entities involved: Europe Direct German-speaking Community, Parliament and Government of the German-speaking Community, European Committee of the Regions and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Compared to the other eleven events, the methodology of this event was somewhat different. It took the form of a citizen dialogue gathering 15 people on the first day and a morning of exchanges between citizens (30 people) and political representatives on the second day. The participants were selected on a voluntary basis, with the only condition being that they were citizens of the German-speaking community.

The discussions focused on living in a cross-border region and its many implications. They took place in two stages. On the first day of the debate, the participants formulated a series of challenges. On the second day of the event, they presented these to the other participants and to several political representatives who were able to react. From what was exchanged during these long hours of discussion, several elements can be highlighted. First, it is important to underline that the border does not exist or hardly exists in the daily life of citizens of the German-speaking Community. They cross it very regularly to work, study, shop, seek medical care and so forth. Nevertheless, financial and administrative obstacles still exist, and these have been reinforced by the pandemic. Citizens mentioned, for example, administrative difficulties in terms of equivalence of diplomas, financial differences in terms of salaries or pensions, poor coordination and communication in terms of border control in the context of COVID.

Faced with these observations, the German-speaking citizens proposed several possible solutions. They suggested strengthening the Euroregions* and reducing administrative obstacles. To this end, they proposed creating Europe-wide information networks specifically for border residents or implementing the European Cross-Border Mechanism*. This legal instrument would facilitate cooperation along the EU’s internal borders. Second, the European Union must work to strengthen the promotion of languages by facilitating language exchanges or by encouraging intercultural dialogue, for example. In the same vein, it should strengthen the European cultural sector through concrete actions such as the removal of geographical barriers or by further promoting common values. Citizens also suggested facilitating mobility within the Union by, for example, increasing the availability of cross-border public transport or working towards greater uniformity in terms of prices. In general, the participants in the debate wanted to see the emergence of a European social policy and the establishment of a more transparent decision-making process, particularly with the abolition of the veto right resulting from the unanimity rule.
Hackathon* ‘The impact of a healthy lifestyle and climate change on quality of life’ and ‘Obstacles for young people on the job market’ – organised by the Walloon Parliament – 20-21/11/2021

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

For the category on barriers to youth employment in Europe, the project “Build your Future” was selected. Its creators proposed concrete actions to better inform young people about the diversity of skills they can develop and to showcase a wide range of often underestimated jobs. Among the other projects, other proposals can be highlighted. For example, one project proposed to set up a classification system for companies according to their societal engagement. This would, on the one hand, stimulate companies to improve their performance in this area and, on the other hand, make it easier for employees to find better and more meaningful jobs. Finally, one team proposed to train responsible, active, critical and supportive citizens through coaching during the school years to tackle the many causes of employment difficulties.

Closing session of the twelve events organised by the Representation of the European Commission – Belgians work together in Brussels for the future of Europe – 19/02/2022

The exact course of this event has already been explained in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

At the economic level, participants proposed that a European framework for the circular economy* be put in place (investment in recycling, extension of the guarantee period, ban on the export of waste outside the EU, etc.).

How to reform European tax rules; the EU Stability and Growth Pact – FPS Finance – 22/02/2022

Federal Minister for Finance Van Peteghem’s office organised a debate between 35 students from the MSc Economics at Ghent University. In the framework of the course on public policy, these students debated for 1.5 hours on taxation issues.

Three concrete solutions were voted for. The participants wanted monetary union to be complemented by a fiscal union. There should also be a debate on Eurobonds*. Second, productive investments are a rather broad concept, which makes it difficult to classify growth enhancing investments ex ante. To remedy this, the participants proposed to set up a quality label for investments issued by a European institution. Finally, the rules on debt and deficit should be reviewed to make them more realistic.

The Social Europe of tomorrow: our aspirations for the future of Europe – Socialist parties of Belgium – 26/04/2022

Originally scheduled for 26 November 2021, this youth debate initiated by the socialist parties in the federal government has been postponed due to health conditions. It will be held on 26 April 2022.
‘Europe is listening to you!’ – Youth Forum of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation – 22/09 & 29/09/2021

The Youth Forum of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation organised meetings between young people and Belgian politicians. Titled “Europe is listening to you!”, they aimed to bring together young people from different backgrounds to formulate and discuss policy recommendations on youth participation in European democracy with political representatives active at European level. The recommendations proposed and discussed at these events were included in the official communication of the Forum, published in December 2021, at the end of the Youth Dialogue cycle. In a first step, around ten young people, aged 18-30, participated in an interactive workshop co-facilitated by the Young European Federalists, where they learned about European democracy before discussing and drafting policy recommendations. On the second evening, these were presented to three Belgian policy makers (two MEPs and a senator) with whom the participants were able to exchange views in order to consolidate their proposals.

The recommendations made by the young people at the end of the two days were summarised in four points. Firstly, the young people proposed to increase the funding of youth organisations and to consult them when the European Commission introduces legislation that affects the youth sector. Second, a school curriculum on European subjects should be created and freely integrated by the Member States into their own school curriculum. The young citizens also suggested creating a European media where a large place would be reserved for young people. Finally, the links between young Europeans should be strengthened by extending the Erasmus programme to secondary school pupils and by creating new travel channels, starting from primary school.
**Belgian citizens’ panels (federal level) – Belgian Federal Government –**

23-24/10, 13-14/11, 11-12/12

As an EU Member State, Belgium decided to participate in the Conference on the Future of Europe by organising citizens’ panels at national level.

Fifty citizens were randomly selected to ensure representativity among the Belgian population on the basis of several criteria (age, gender, socio-economic background, geographical origin and language). Over three weekends, these Fifty citizens met to debate one of the nine themes of the Conference: European democracy, and more specifically civic participation in the European Union. The G1000* methodology was used.

During the first weekend, participants were able to learn about the European Union and its democratic decision-making processes through the joint presentation of two political journalists from public broadcasters VRT (Rob Heirbaut) and RTBF (Annick Capelle). They also heard a presentation by Maaike Geuens, a specialist in participatory and deliberative democracy. In small groups, they then defined the main themes that they wished to discuss during the next sessions. Five subtopics were identified. Four of them were discussed during the second weekend, while the fifth was discussed during the third and final weekend. For each of these subtopics, citizens formulated a series of questions, summarising their main concerns:

**Improving communication about the EU**
- How can we bring the EU closer to citizens? What and how to communicate? How can information about the EU be made more accessible? How to ensure the quality and objectivity of information? Which target groups should be targeted, and how can they be better reached?

**Detecting and countering disinformation and fake news about the EU**
- How to measure the extent of disinformation and fake news? How can we protect ourselves from this? How to control the media most likely to spread disinformation or fake news?

**Citizens’ panels as a participatory instrument**
- How to ensure the representativity of citizens’ panels? What are the right methods to organize these? For which subjects is it appropriate to use them?

**Referenda in European affairs**
- How can we make referendum culture more positive? For which subjects should referenda be used? How to avoid misuse and manipulation? What conditions should the referendum meet if it is to be used at European level?

**Existing participatory instruments**
- How can we improve the democratic effectiveness of elections, the European Ombudsman, public consultations, the European Citizens’ Initiative and the right of petition?
These five subtopics were discussed over two weekends. Some topics were clarified by experts. For each theme, the participants formulated several problems to which they tried to provide concrete answers. At the end of the debates, numerous recommendations emerged. These recommendations were then presented to all the participants before a vote was taken on each of them. For each theme, this report provides a general comment and some concrete proposals. For those who are interested in the full recommendations, they are the subject of another report published by the Belgian Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs. They are also available online on the platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In terms of communication, the European strategy needs to be reviewed. Citizens felt that the European Union, its functioning and competences remain too obscure. In concrete terms, participants insisted on the need for the Union to communicate on what does and does not fall within its competence. They felt that the EU should work towards simplified, comprehensive and accessible communication. The greatest number of citizens should be reached, which implies the use of various communication channels. The EU should, for example, develop training tools to be included in school curricula.

The second subtopic focuses on identifying and combating disinformation about the European Union. Citizens felt that Europe should do more in this area. Specifically, they proposed that the EU should set up a European regulator to fight disinformation. A major campaign against disinformation could also be launched at European level. Finally, the media should be obliged to cite their sources and information should be flagged as unverified when sources are not cited.

Citizens wanted to see more use made of citizens’ panels. They see them as a useful and effective tool for involving citizens in democracy. However, several practical conditions are necessary. A certain representativity of the population must be ensured among the participants. Furthermore, the support of experts is an important asset, as it allows citizens without prior knowledge to take part in the debates. Finally, the final decision on the implementation of the recommendations should be clearly communicated and justified.
The participants proposed to organise referenda for the whole European population. Again, some conditions must be met to make this participatory tool a success. The questions asked must be neutral. To ensure this, a scientific committee could be asked to draft them. Citizens must also have prior access to quality information on the implications of a given question. For the participants, whether a referendum is binding should depend on the rate of participation. Finally, the panel considered that the initiative to hold a referendum should be able to come from policymakers or from citizens themselves under certain conditions.

Finally, the participants looked at the participatory instruments that already exist at EU level (elections, European Ombudsman, consultation, European Citizens’ Initiative and the right of petition). They pointed out a clear lack of communication about these. They also proposed a simplification of the procedures to facilitate their use. Citizens stressed the need to communicate on the follow-up to a particular citizens’ initiative. Policymakers should clearly justify their decision on whether or not to implement recommendations from participatory processes.

Limburg youth debate in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe – Model European Parliament, Embassy of the Netherlands, FPS Foreign Affairs – 25/10/2021

More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

With regard to European democracy, two concrete proposals were made. Firstly, the young people called for greater solidarity between Member States in times of crisis. To achieve this, they proposed increasing the EU’s competences in crisis situations, while taking care not to create unclear procedures. The second proposal is to introduce direct democracy mechanisms. The participants wished to avoid the use of referenda, however, as the binary and unsubstantiated answers (yes or no) they imply make them inappropriate.
More details on this event have already been provided in the section on climate change and the environment.

The discussions led to the formulation of four concrete proposals. Firstly, the decision-making process in the Council must be improved by increasing the use of qualified majority voting. This should be accompanied by a right of initiative for the European Parliament, allowing it to bypass the Commission’s blockages. Secondly, it is necessary to increase transparency in the European decision-making process. Third, the EU must be intransigent in the respect of values within the Member States. Finally, the Union must be made more interesting to the citizens through school programmes or major cultural events.

**Participatory democracy: Belgium vs Europe – UCLouvain, Civix – 07/12/2021**

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Civix (an non-profit organisation) and UCLouvain.
- Participants: 23 UCLouvain students, registered in advance.
- Topic of the evening: Is the current system of participation well designed, what are its shortcomings? How could citizen participation strengthen democracy in its current form? What would be your proposals for even more participatory democracy, in an ideal world?

At the end of the evening, three proposals were voted for by the participants. First, there is a need for more training in terms of participatory democracy, particularly in schools. Second, it is necessary to focus on awareness-raising to prepare young people and give them a voice. Finally, a binding petition system should be put in place, involving, for example, an obligation for the European Parliament to take up an issue proposed by means of a petition. Other ideas were put forward, such as setting up a citizens’ consultation platform, taking blank votes into account or even a negative referendum to block certain decisions.

**Brainstorming on the future of European democracy – Aarschot, Europe Direct Flemish Brabant, Europe House Ryckevelde – 25/01/2022**

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: City of Aarschot, Europe Direct Flemish Brabant and Europe House Ryckevelde.
- Participants: 26 people, registered in advance.
- Topic of the evening: What does the future of democracy in Europe look like?

Due to the public health situation, this event could not take place in person. The methodology was therefore slightly modified. The participants discussed the theme together and proposed ideas, of which three received strong support. First, it is necessary to promote a culture of debate and citizen participation within the EU. This involves school education in order to involve young people as early as possible; better information for citizens on European policies; and the participatory construction of policies, whether local, national or European. The second measure focuses on young people, whose participation is essential. The participants proposed to create a youth parliament in every school in the EU to help them to acquire democratic skills such as listening to each other or formulating opinions. This desire to focus on youth led the participants to formulate a third proposal. This is to create a uniform frame of reference at European level for citizenship education courses. This measure would also be accompanied by funding for educational material or campaigns encouraging reflection on European citizenship.
EU Future Conference: Flanders in Europe – Flemish Parliament, Vleva – 03/02/2022

The Flemish Parliament, in collaboration with Vleva, the liaison agency between Flanders and the European Union, organised a one-morning hybrid panel. This event brought together members of Flemish civil society, academics and Flemish diplomatic representatives to the EU to discuss the relationship between Flanders, its citizens and the European Union. The general public was able to follow the debate online, react to it and ask questions. In addition, the recording of the discussion is still available online for those who wish to watch it offline.

This debate led to many recommendations, most of which can be classified by sector. The **social and cultural sectors** wanted to be more involved in the European decision-making process and to be taken into account to a greater extent in EU policies and funding. They also called for much more transparent decision-making. The social sector also proposed to fight against technological monopolies. The **agricultural sector** called for fair competition rules based on the strengths and weaknesses of each Member State. It also wanted more time and alternatives to meet green ambitions. In the area of **trade and business**, the deepening and improvement of the internal market was desired. Participants also stressed the importance of clear and effective trade agreements and regulations in order to ensure the twin transition for companies, but also in terms of foreign policy (export instrument for European standards). Finally, and more generally, the panellists wanted the EU to more explicitly recognise the role that different regions can play. They felt that closer collaboration between the regions and the EU is absolutely necessary.

Citizens’ panel ‘Europe? Youroupe!’ – Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region – 05-06/02/2022

Over one weekend, the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region organised a citizens’ panel to discuss European democracy. Around 30 people, aged between 18 and 30, took part in this event. The participants were selected on the basis of a stratified sortition among those who voluntarily registered.

At the end of the two days of discussion, a large number of recommendations were formulated, divided into five themes. With regard to **European identity**, the participants proposed, for example, giving the European Parliament right of legislative initiative; strengthening exchanges between European citizens, particularly through school trips or a strengthening of the rail network; introducing a “Europe week” to celebrate and discuss the EU; opening up the right to vote for European nationals in regional elections, starting with Brussels and then extending this possibility to the other regions of the Union. With regard to the **European institutions**, the citizens wanted to see certain social rights standardised at European level, combined with EU ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights. Also, in this area, they wanted the institutions to communicate more and to be more attentive to the demands of civil society organisations. In terms of **education**, there is no shortage of ideas with European community service programmes, a multidisciplinary course of European civic education, common to all Member States. The participants also insisted on the need for Belgians to know two of the three national languages. In terms of **citizen participation**, two main trends emerged. On the one hand, taking young people’s opinions into account, for instance by introducing the right to vote from the age of 16 in European elections; on the other hand, introducing direct democracy mechanisms such as referenda on the EU’s major political decisions. Finally, the citizens proposed, in terms of information, to create a European media, to invest in combating disinformation and to increase the visibility and clarity of European decisions.
Closing session of the twelve events organised by the Representation of the European Commission – Belgians work together in Brussels for the future of Europe – 19/02/2022

The exact course of this event has already been explained in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

On European democracy, participants suggested fostering a European identity, for example by introducing a European passport, creating a European television channel or setting up a single European electoral roll. They also proposed to strengthen democracy in the EU through a permanent civil dialogue and the disappearance of veto rights in the Council.

EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORT

★ The Conference on the Future of Europe: education and youth – Saint-Gilles, Europe Direct Brussels – 20/01/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: Saint-Gilles municipality, Europe Direct Brussels.
- Participants: fifteen residents of the municipality of Saint-Gilles, selected to ensure representativity in terms of age, gender and origin.
- Topic of the evening: What needs to be put in place by 2030 to help young people’s wellbeing? What role can education play in this? What initiatives should the EU put in place to meet these desires and challenges?

At the end of the evening, four recommendations were selected by a vote among the participants. They proposed the introduction of an orientation course and personal guidance that would allow students to better know themselves, to better define their study choices and to improve their wellbeing. They also wanted the value of Erasmus grants to be increased to ensure access for the most disadvantaged. Secondly, eco-vouchers (écochèques) should be distributed to citizens from the age of 18 to enable them to travel and engage in cultural activities. Finally, language learning should be reinforced from primary school onwards. Other, less popular, proposals were also put forward during the evening. For example, the development of a European radio or television channel for young people, the introduction of a European civic service, the participation of young people in the European decision-making process or a universal allowance for all young Europeans.
The Conference on the Future of Europe: culture and youth – Liège, Liège Province, Europe Direct Liège province – 26/01/2022

This debate was one of the twelve events organised throughout the country by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium in collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium.

- Entities involved: City of Liège, the province of Liège and Europe Direct Liège province.
- Participants: ten people, registered beforehand.
- Topic of the evening: What does culture mean for the participants? What does culture bring to the participants and how does it contribute to their wellbeing? How can Europe help young people to contribute and/or benefit from Europe’s cultural wealth?

At the end of the evening, the participants voted on three recommendations. They wanted to set up European grants for creation and artistic development. They then proposed to organise major moments of sharing and exchange such as a festival of youth creators. Finally, the last proposal was to set up a ‘cultural safe ticket’ which, in the form of tickets, vouchers, etc., would allow children under 12 to have free access to cultural activities. In addition to these most supported proposals, 25 other ideas emerged during the discussions, such as the creation of a European radio station, the development of European communication on common cultural values and the possibility for European citizens to become better acquainted with the different cultures present in Europe.

Closing session of the twelve events organised by the Representation of the European Commission – Belgians work together in Brussels for the future of Europe – 19/02/2022

The exact course of this event has already been explained in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

The participants felt that the development of a European action plan on education was needed. This plan would include increasing the value of Erasmus grants and standardising the system for recognition of higher education diplomas.

OTHER IDEAS

Proposals and recommendations of young people and the youth sector in Flanders: a contribution to the future of Europe – Flemish Youth Council; Department of Culture, Youth and Media; JINT; the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium; the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium; the Representation of Flanders to the EU – 15/02/2022

This debate was the culmination of several events in which young people played a role. It was organised by various Flemish entities and lasted one day. The aim was to explain the previous recommendations and to deepen the role played by young people in the Conference and the way their interests and wishes are represented at European level. About fifty people who had registered in advance were able to take part in the discussions. Several suggestions were made during the debate. However, they will not be detailed in this report. First, they still need to be discussed and made more concrete at a future event. Second, we wish to avoid repetition. Indeed, as the aim of this event was to summarise the contributions of Flemish young people to the Conference, some of the proposals made at the event are already included in this report. This is the case, for example, for the recommendations made at the event organised on 12 October 2021 in Sint-Niklaas or at the online brainstorming, “Young people speak out”, on 15 December 2021.
CONCLUSION AND TRENDS

The main objective of this report is to provide an overview of the initiatives implemented on Belgian soil in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Certain trends and ideas have emerged from the Conference. For example, two themes were the most discussed, namely climate change/the environment and democracy. As highlighted in the first part of this report, this trend of thematic preference is also reflected in the Belgian contributions to the multilingual digital platform of the Conference. Belgian citizens and civil society are therefore clearly engaged with climate, environmental and democracy issues. They are also in a position to make interesting recommendations in this respect. Not only were many recommendations made on these themes, but proposals labelled under other themes are often directly related to climate change or democratic functioning. We would therefore like to use this conclusion to highlight some of the most discussed ideas for the two most popular themes. Some ideas from the other themes will also be briefly summarised here.

On climate change, citizens were very interested in mobility issues, stressing that a sustainable and accessible solution is essential. They focused on rail transport, suggesting an increase in intra-European links. The participants were also concerned about energy issues. They wanted the European Union to assert itself in this field in order to guarantee access to green energy for all its citizens. They also emphasized the importance of local consumption and awareness-raising about this. Finally, many participants were concerned about social justice issues in relation to the climate transition.

Concerning European democracy, the idea of creating a European media was raised at several events. Participants also insisted on the importance of education and communication. For example, they called for a common course on the European institutions. The EU’s communication needs to be reviewed with a focus on transparency, simplification and reaching as many people as possible. Delighted by the experience of the Conference, the citizens felt that it was desirable to develop more direct democracy mechanisms within the Union and its Member States.

In relation to other issues, citizens made several recommendations to develop the circular economy. They also proposed that the Union should invest in employment by simplifying administrative procedures in a cross-border context or by focusing on jobs in short supply and youth employment. In reading this conclusion, we can see that each citizens’ recommendation generally refers to several themes. Thus, choices of classification sometimes had to be made for the drafting of this report. This highlights notably the fact that “health” issues are mentioned in the climate section and that the theme of “values and rights, rule of law, security” is present in the section on democracy.

The importance of these initiatives and their clearly shared priorities should not be underestimated. Many of these initiatives took place independently of each other. This is especially true when we consider the different ideas and events on the digital platform where participants often had nothing in common other than their country of residence. Despite the diversity of participants’ profiles, it appears that the priorities and concerns of these citizens are often closer than expected. From their different backgrounds and experiences, citizens share their expertise and vision with each other. They then come up with and support recommendations that are often closely related to the recommendations and priorities formulated at events that took place at a different time, in a different place and with different participants. The perspectives that Belgian citizens put forward in these initiatives are therefore the most powerful element of this report: they form the shared vision promoted by Belgian society for the future of Europe.
Annexes

List of All Events by Organising Body and in Chronological Order

Youth forum of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation
- Europe is listening to you! – 22 & 29/09/2021

FPS Foreign Affairs
- Conference/debate on the EU’s place in the world – 08/10/2021

Representation of the European Commission in Belgium, European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium
- Is Sint-Niklaas #Futureproof? – 12/10/2021
- Living in a cross-border region – 20-21/11/2021
- Participatory democracy: Belgium vs Europe – 07/12/2021
- Brainstorming: young people speak out – 15/12/2021
- Ostend for a sustainable future; food and biodiversity in the EU – 18/01/2022
- Brainstorming for a sustainable and inclusive future; the future of Genk and the EU – 20/01/2022
- Education and youth in Saint-Gilles – 20/01/2022
- The residents of Wilrijk talk about climate and environment – 24/01/2022
- Brainstorming on the future of European democracy in Aarschot – 25/01/2022
- Culture and youth in Liège – 26/01/2022
- Digital affairs in the European Union, Luxembourg province – 09/02/2022
- Climate change and the environment, Hainaut province – 17/02/2022
- Closing session: Belgians work together in Brussels for the future of Europe – 19/02/2022

Belgian Federal Government
- National Belgian citizens’ panels – 23-24/10, 13-14/11 & 11-12/12/2021

Model European Parliament, Embassy of the Netherlands to Belgium, FPS Foreign Affairs
- Limburg Youth Debate – 25/10/2021

Egmont Institute
**Belgian Green parties (Ecolo and Groen)**

- Debate on the Future of Europe – 16/11/2021

**Walloon Parliament**

- Hackathon* “The impact of a healthy lifestyle and climate change on quality of life’ and ‘Obstacles for young people on the job market’ – 20-21/11/2021

**Flemish Government**

Panel ‘Digitalisation and a sustainable economy’ - 23/11/2021

**Flemish Parliament & Vleva**

- EU Future Conference: Flanders in Europe – 03/02/2022

**Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region**

- Citizens’ panels ‘Europe? Yourope!’ – 05-06/02/2022

**Flemish Youth Council; Department of Culture, Youth and Media; JINT; the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium; the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium; the Representation of Flanders to the EU**

- Proposals and recommendations of young people and the youth sector in Flanders: a contribution to the future of Europe – 15/02/2022

**FPS Finance**

- How to reform European tax rules; the EU Stability and Growth Pact – 22/02/2022

**Belgian socialist parties**

- The social Europe of tomorrow: our aspirations for the future of Europe – 26/04/2022
GLOSSARY

**Carbon Contract for Differences (CCfD):** A contract whereby public authorities commit to compensate an industry for the difference between the cost of a tonne of carbon avoided in a given sector and the price of carbon on the EU ETS. This scheme aims to accelerate the decarbonisation of certain industrial sectors.

**Circular economy:** An economic and industrial system that aims to keep products, their components and materials in circulation for as long as possible within the system, while ensuring the quality of their use.

**Eurobonds:** Debt securities issued in the name of the Eurozone. They thus allow the joint financing of the debt of the Eurozone member states through public or private investors.

**Euroregions:** A cross-border territorial entity that brings together partners from several border regions in different EU Member States. They provide a framework for cooperation to implement joint policies and projects.

**European Cross-Border Mechanism:** Mechanism allowing the legal provisions of one Member State to be applied in another Member State in a cross-border region, when the application of the legal provisions of the former would constitute a legal obstacle to the execution of a joint project.

**G1000:** Event organised in Belgium in 2011 and 2012. The aim was to allow several hundred Belgian citizens to discuss various social issues together and to draw up a series of recommendations.

**Green Deal (or European Green Deal):** A set of proposals and initiatives adopted by the European Commission to adapt European climate, energy, transport and taxation policies with the aim of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, and to net zero by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels).

**Hackathon:** A competition in which multidisciplinary teams compete for 24 hours with the aim of developing concrete solutions to a problem.

**Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI):** Cross-border innovation and infrastructure projects with the aim of achieving certain European objectives and having a positive impact on the economy and citizens of the EU. Funded by the Member States, they are supported by the European Commission.

**Istanbul Convention:** Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. This international treaty of the Council of Europe was adopted in April 2011 and has been ratified by 34 countries, including Belgium.

**Jean Monnet Dialogue for Peace and Democracy:** A mediation instrument set up by the European Parliament with the aim of developing a dialogue between political leaders. It allows consensus to be reached while generating trust and a culture of parliamentary democracy.

**Mobipoints (or mob points):** Mobility centres that combine different types of shared and sustainable mobility. Adapted to the realities of the field, they provide tailor-made multimodal solutions.

**Renaturing:** This is a way to tackle soil artificialisation, which is the process of transforming natural or agricultural land into land covered by infrastructure. Renaturing is therefore an action aimed at restoring a land area to its natural function and character.

**World café:** A creative process that aims to facilitate the exchange of views by recreating the atmosphere of a café through small group discussions. The participants change tables at regular intervals, except for one participant, who is responsible for explaining to newcomers what has been said so that the debate can continue.