



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

SUMMARY RECORD

**Working Group on Climate change and environment, Chaired by Ms Pasková, Council / Czechia
21 January 2021, 16:00-18:00 (Hybrid)**

1. Introductory remarks of the Chair

The Chair opened the meeting by reporting that the summary record of the first Working Group (WG) meeting has been adopted and should be currently online. A future WG meeting will be held on 11 March 2022 to debate more specifically on how to translate recommendations into proposals. On 25 March 2022, a further discussion will be held in the WG on proposals, with an extra meeting being potentially scheduled in the future.

First point in the agenda are reports by Citizens from the European and National Citizens' Panels, followed by four cluster discussions, namely on 1) agriculture, food production and biodiversity 2) energy, transport and climate change; 3) sustainable consumption and production; 4) information, awareness, dialogue.

2. Report by citizens - European Citizens' Panel and National Citizens Panels

Representative for the European Citizens Panel (ECP):

Out of 64 proposals prepared in Natolin, 51 have been selected with more than 70% in favour, 34 of those related to climate change and environment.

On energy; power systems should be optimised by mandatory inclusion of CO₂ filters in existing coal-powered power plants and to make best use of the over-production caused by the generation of eco-friendly fuels such as hydrogen and biofuels.

There is a need to find ways to reduce energy consumption, to motivate people to consume less energy through a bonus system to conserve power. Also, allocate funds for research on development of new ways of green energy generation. On transport, citizens recommend standardising the railway system in the EU, connecting rural areas and making public transport affordable and safe for all, as well as moving away from personal towards shared mobility. On sustainable and responsible consumption, apply restrictions to advertise environmentally harmful products, ban non-sustainable packaging and support the use of products that can be easily reintegrated in the circular economy as raw materials.

On agriculture: promote and support organic and regional farming, change the criteria for subsidizing, reduce the use of pesticide, avoid monoculture and mass animal breeding to rebalance the ecosystem. Push the development of vertical farming to gain more protected areas, train and support farmers in implementing environmentally friendly farming methods, as well as invest in reforestation efforts.

Representative for the French National Panel:

Recommendations centred on energy restraints. Consume less by avoiding use of excessive amounts of power, and through supporting research funds for innovation. Train transport should be available across the Union. Important to develop green hydrogen market, harmonise taxes and subsidies for means of transports - plane tickets should not be less expensive than train tickets. The Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) needs to favour the quality of products and developing good practices while improving the protection of natural areas and ecosystems. Furthermore, there is a need to “relocalise” production systems for short, local production chains, to improve the protection of ecosystems in nature and to create protection zones in urban and rural areas. In addition, there is a need for a carbon tax that punishes those who commit abuses through ‘greenwashing’.

Representative for the German National Panel:

Recommendations of the first official national citizens’ forum in Berlin, Germany highlight the need for a regulation on a guaranteed lifetime of products, i.e. to introduce a legal guarantee on a product-specific, maximally extended guaranteed lifespan for products produced and sold in the EU, and creating transparency for consumers. Furthermore, the establishment of climate import duties - passed on as the monetary equivalent of climate damage-, with a sustainability point system is to be introduced for certain products.

Representative of the Dutch National Panel:

68% of Dutch people think the EU should take a leading role in combating climate change and the EU should develop a clear vision on the future. Furthermore, they think that citizens should adapt their own behavior to achieve change. Instead of playing the blame game, countries need to look for agreements, exchange knowledge and create solutions together. There needs to be a better, fairer, and simple system for reducing CO2 emissions. Communication on climate change challenges needs to be clearer and also more positively, indicating equally the opportunities. Leaders should also set the example through, for instance, less air travel and more remote meetings.

3. Discussion clustered around topics

1) Agriculture, food production and biodiversity

- Set up new protected areas for species in danger of extinction.
- Meat production processes such as bovine mass breeding for meat production should be more regulated and their use be possibly reduced.
- Some argue that there is a need to tackle intensive farming; others think that for legislative purposes, the term ‘intensive farming’ must be defined carefully and accurately, to which some replied this is also covered by the EU farm-to-fork strategy.
- Avoid the excessive use of pesticides through intensive farming and use medicines only to treat sick animals, not for prevention to avoid the creation of resistant germs.
- Need to review the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to ensure subsidies promote organic farming methods. Others argued that the CAP reform has been decided until 2027 and that it already supports organic farming. Food safety aspects also need to be taken into account.
- Need for a new economic model in Europe to distribute resources more equally, not necessarily focused on increased production. The sustainable transition should not be done at the expense of the most vulnerable, need to prioritise measures for those facing energy poverty.
- Need to make clear that it is through dialogue that we can transform our society. Must seek to ensure that EU budget is used to make social contributions to a more climate friendly society

through social funds, broken down at the national and regional level, all in dialogue to achieve consensus.

- The EU needs to be particularly careful in its trade deals when looking at consequential environmental impacts. Needs strategic plans on a national level to ensure biodiversity protection and food security.
- Member States' natural environments are diverse, so it is important to take into account each region's context.
- Some citizens saw their role more in describing desirable outcomes and that politicians were responsible for designing the concrete solutions and funding needed for implementation.

2) *Energy, transport and climate change*

- Need to have an energy mix at the height of our environment ambitions, support investment and research. It takes time to reduce emissions and increase renewable energy, so there is still a need for alternative, low emitting energy sources to replace more polluting forms of energy such as coal.
- Green hydrogen is an example, even though it requires very high levels of investment due to the energy required to create it. Still the key need is to get out of fossil fuels and promote electric cars.
- On energy transition, there is a need for transitional fuels such as gas, and not overly rely on Russia as a provider, highlight new projects, new ways of bringing green energy to Europe in a way that makes Europe non-dependent on a single source.
- Some opposed the support of nuclear energy, while other participants welcomed the EU taxonomy. Still others stressed the need for safe energy as precondition for citizens' prosperity.
- Need to promote public transport and include it in the transition of our most rural areas. Need a real strategy for institutional follow-up.
- The EU did not manage to have any step forward on railroad standardisation, this is crucial. To have high-speed trains and night trains we must set a single standard of railroad energy in Europe.
- Broad support for an increase in investments in public transports, but in order for public transport to be reliable, efficient, and affordable it must stay in public hands, not private. It is important to keep in mind that many of the recommendations will have social consequences and that these social consequences should not be overlooked.
- It is important to get more people out of cars. However, these changes will have an impact on the car industry and on millions of workers, so we need to consider this issue more deeply and develop just transition plans.
- CO2 emitting facilities should be equipped with filters, while buildings should be regulated to be more environmentally friendly.
- While there is a need to invest in train transport, we will still need aviation transport in the future so need to find solution to ensure that each transport mode costs the right price and takes into account the environmental and social aspects.
- Need to promote the 'blue economy': the sea environment is degrading due to overfishing and pollution. Sea protection should be at the front stage of the global agenda.
- Need to ensure a 'just transition' more generally through a just transition legal framework and to provide adequate funding for the transition and more funding for research is also necessary.

3) *Sustainable consumption and production*

- Implementation of a standard label of products across the EU, which presents the sustainability, recyclability, disposal process and impact on health which can be shown through a QR code in a combined, easy to read format.
- The EU should have strict controls on environmentally harmful packaging. Financial incentives could be put in place to support companies to change to fully biodegradable packaging.
- Packaging should be made as compact as possible to save on resources.
- The current Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) should be expanded and improved to an even scope in all Member States, including notably plastic and glass bottles, as well as the possibility to include other types of bottles and containers.
- Need to increase current warranty time of electronics and control the costs of spare parts to promote repairing and decrease disposal.
- Need for better regulation and transparency to ensure and promote fairly produced products are put on the market.
- Important to make companies accountable and liable for their respective supply chains, including parts outside the EU.
- Use regional circuits to create jobs and strengthen the local economy, this is an important aspect.

4) *Information, awareness, dialogue*

- The EU has set many ambitious targets under the EU Green Deal and has gathered numerous solutions to meet those targets. The concern is that these targets are hardly met by Member States, not all countries have the resources to meet them. It is time to think of a pan-European collaborative approach, put experiences of Member States in a databank to share amongst each other.
- Need to make knowledge on climate change more accessible, e.g. by creating an online European platform, which publicises and constantly updates scientific information and reports, and where citizens can have a dialogue with experts to demystify climate change.
- Generally, environmentally-friendly standards can only be introduced within a more general policy framework and constant dialogue.
- Need to strengthen and further develop democracy at work, and workers and the trade unions representatives should be fully involved.
- Internationally, the EU should increase its leadership and take a strong role to promote ambitious climate action and just transition, for example in the UN framework. Such global leadership is particularly important as many sectors are in competition internationally, and adopting climate measures at EU level only might therefore negatively affect companies and their workers