



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

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD

Working Group on EU in the World

Chaired by Ms Asees Ahuja (SE), 25 March 2022 09:00 to 11:30 and 14:00 to 16:00

Opening of the meeting

The Chair, Ms Asees Ahuja, Director from the Swedish Prime Minister's Office, greeted the group and took her official seat as Chair of the working group replacing Minister Hans Dahlgren of Sweden. She stressed the citizen focus of this process and her role as chair given the mandates afforded her by the Swedish government would be to facilitate the deliberations of the group. She also informed participants that Minister Dahlgren would continue to follow the proceedings of the working group and the conference closely and remains a member of the Conference Executive Board.

Ms. Ahuja introduced the documents which set out the basis for the discussion and addressed concerns about methodology and next steps. Reaching an agreement on the way forward, the group maintained that the citizens recommendations should form the core of any output by the group. The secretariat and the citizen component would take the responsibility for any redrafting given the inputs of the working group, an exercise both had already commenced prior to the meeting,

The Spokesperson of the Working Group, Mr Mansaf Campos, then took the floor and presented the five clusters generated by the citizens and the corresponding preliminary draft proposals drawn up by the secretariat:

Cluster I: Reducing dependency of EU from foreign actors;

Cluster II: Defining standards within and outside the EU;

Cluster III: Decision making and cohesion within the Union;

Cluster IV: Transparency of the EU and its relations with the citizens and members states;

Cluster V: the EU as a Strong Actor on the World Scene.

Cluster I

On reducing dependency of the EU from foreign actors, the focus was on strategic autonomy. Citizens stressed the need for other components to give their input on all proposals. The Spokesperson intervened to present citizen desired edits and additions to the current cluster (which was later done for all following clusters). Citizens stressed the need to look at this cluster within the context of the Green Transition.

Working Group members from other components first voiced some concerns and queries about the working methods of the group. In her first meeting as official Chair of the Working Group, Ms Ahuja addressed all of the main concerns of the Working Group members. She stressed again that the citizens would hold the pen in this process – but of course all components would have their voices heard. The point in the process has come for this, and Components were urged to voice their opinions on the current proposals as concretely as possible in the meeting as well as submit written suggestions for the Common Secretariat to then integrate them and present to the Spokesperson. Keeping the citizens in the center of the drafting process they would approve any changes in coordination with the secretariat. Any diverting views could be transparently presented. Many members of the Working Group responded positively to this exchange and expressed their understanding that there is still time to contribute and shape the proposals with the citizens.

Returning to the policy issues of this cluster, other group members stressed the importance of Research and Development activities and the need to diversify supply chains as a sustainable way for EU companies to move forward. Other members stressed the need to break EU dependency on fossil fuels, especially those

from outside the EU. Several members indicated it will be necessary to look at what is being discussed in other Working Groups that have overlap in order to ensure there is a unified approach. One member stressed that the impact of high prices on vulnerable groups should be reflected in the proposal. Other members lifted the need to weigh in the advantages of an open global economy, citizens stressed this cluster is not about shutting the EU off from the world but rather being strategic in order to be a leader on the world stage. Self-sufficiency and diversity of supplies were both potential tools, as appropriate to the sectors concerned, as was the potential for common purchases of imported gas and energy.

Cluster II

When looking at defining standards within and outside the EU, a focus was on environmental protection efforts, human rights, and keeping in mind how goods are made before sourcing and buying. Members stressed an EU wide process that can inform citizens about ethical impacts of trade as well as the need for the EU to take a role as a leader on corporate social responsibility. Further discussion took place between citizens and other members in order to determine if certain draft proposals could be modified or relocated. It was stressed that the EU should be a leader in promoting human rights within and outside of its borders. It was also important to acknowledge the role of trade for developing countries.

Cluster III

The discussion on decision making and cohesion within the EU focused on switching from unanimity to Qualified Majority Voting and whether there should be exceptions where the unanimity should still be required. The need for faster action in times of international crisis and a balanced approach to enlargement were mentioned. QMV was further explained and examined by group members. Some members also mentioned potential drawbacks of QMV, considering that it could undermine the voice of smaller countries in major decisions or weaken the Union's unity behind decisions. For the purpose of this Working Group, it was recommended it be specified QMV is desired in particular for foreign affairs and security, while other WGs would look at it as regards other fields. In relation to enlargement, the need to consider differentiated integration was brought to the table. Citizens stressed they were not seeking to block any new members from entering the EU, but rather want the EU to work on strengthening its unity and decision taking capacity among current states in order to be a more stable and strong organisation when welcoming new members. The citizens undertook to work on rephrasing this proposal in order to make this as clear as possible.

Cluster IV

Citizens stressed the need to focus on information, education and citizen participation about the EU and its role in the world. Citizens also stressed the need to further modify current proposal language to better reflect their desire for the EU to be transparent and engaging with citizens. In this cluster discussion, it was discussed whether or not it was more appropriate for this to be discussed in the Education Working Group. Other members stressed that transparency is only helpful if decision making processes are simpler and easier to understand. This must be a focus moving forward as well for truly citizen friendly policy.

Cluster V

While looking at the EU as a Strong Actor on the World Scene, collective security of many forms were addressed – joint armed forces, a European army, the Article 42.7 obligation of mutual aid and assistance – and importance was attached to the EU as a strong partner for strong values and principles across the world. Citizens brought up that this cluster can't just look at defence. Other members pointed out that defence and protection could come in many forms. In order to achieve this there need to be common and accepted rules by all. EU values and laws must be binding and enforceable. Citizens stressed that any form of collective or shared defence must not focus on aggression but rather be a means of defence and strengthening collective resources in order for the EU to be a defender of peace in the world. The EU relationship with NATO was discussed, and while important, some members argued for a stronger European identity within this transatlantic partnership. Other participants raised the issue of common efforts to protect cybersecurity and the recent adoption of the EU's "Strategic Compass".

Concluding Remarks

Ms Ahuja concluded the meeting indicating that the Common Secretariat will edit the preliminary draft proposals to take account of the suggestions made by the members and components of the Working Group. Citizens will remain at the heart of these proposals, and should there be popular recommendations from other components that do not align with Citizen priorities, they will be indicated. In this plenary debate and

future plenary debates, the Chair will explain the current state of play of the Working Group, while the Spokesperson will take the lead in presenting the proposals and the thinking behind them. .