



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

SUMMARY RECORD

Working Group on European Democracy, Chaired by Manfred Weber, European Parliament

25 March 2022, 9:00-11:30 and 14:00-16:00

1. Introductory remarks of the Chair

The meeting took place in hybrid format and was web-streamed (recording available [here](#) and [here](#)). The Chair thanked members for their many contributions to the non-paper, following the agreement in the last meeting, and expressed the hope that the new draft clearly showing the input from different contributors would create further transparency. He noted he had had the chance to meet with the two spokesperson of the citizens' panel representatives earlier in the morning to assess the procedure to follow on that day. He was also hopeful that there could be agreement on some elements of the draft by the end of the day. As regards procedure, he noted that the working group on European democracy had advanced with the structure proposed, in a similar fashion to the majority of other working groups, based on the citizens' recommendations and other sources of citizens' participation, in a bullet-point structure. He reiterated the importance of all citizens' recommendations to be reflected in the non-paper and asked for citizens to make sure this was the case. He stressed that another version of the non-paper, including citizens recommendations word by word was prepared, however, he warned about the document becoming very long if the entire text of all recommendations were included. He therefore called on citizens' representatives to ensure that their main ideas were reflected in the paper, albeit in a shortened version. He noted that there had been discussions, and stressed that from the outset, many members of the working group shared the view of every member having the right to further build and enrich on citizens' ideas.

2. Discussion

2.1. Morning session

At the beginning of the discussion, citizens' representatives expressed general disappointment as to the working methods in the working group and took the view that citizens' recommendations were not sufficiently reflected in the revised non-paper. They considered that while citizens' representatives could accept to shorten their recommendations, some recommendations were entirely missing and for some others the text was not fully reflecting the citizens' ideas. Moreover, they noted that a large part of the paper did not seem to relate to all citizens' ideas. They suggested using from now on a similar format for draft proposals as used in other working groups. They felt that the role of the other participants in the working group was only to develop citizens' ideas and make them operational.

Some members expressed support for citizens' views. They recalled that the randomly selected citizens should be at the heart of the process and that none of their recommendations should be excluded. One member stressed that the focus of the group should be on turning these recommendations into proposals using the "grid" developed by the Common Secretariat. Other members supported the methodology of the non-paper and underlined the importance of including other ideas to complement the citizens' recommendations as well as all other sources of citizens' participations in the process of that conference. A discussion took place on the possible contribution of the other members of the working group, with some suggesting that ideas expressed by other members in the working group could be linked to the citizens' recommendations, including those brought forward by civil society and



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social partners. Members also asked clarification regarding the next steps, including how to reach consensus on the draft proposals.

The Chair concluded this session stressing that it was important to base the document on citizens' contributions and asked their representatives to suggest new formulations where their views had not been sufficiently taken into account. He noted that he was fully behind citizens' recommendations, be it from European citizens' panels, national citizens' panels, the Multilingual Digital Platform, all on equal footing as per Conference rules, and had tried to the utmost to respect them in the document, while explaining that one challenge was that his team was not allowed to directly interact with citizens. He also stressed that the European Youth event should not be forgotten. He committed to accept any suggestion for reformulation that would be made by citizens and asked participants for their concrete suggestions on how to improve the text and for them to propose the most suitable structure. The Chair then posed to the citizens one key question: whether it should be possible for other participants than citizens' representatives to provide their ideas as well.

After a 10 minutes break for the citizens to be able to discuss among themselves, the citizens' spokesperson informed other members that citizens would have appreciated to work on a different document and that they would be grateful for other working group's members to be able to build on their recommendations, to expand and improve them. The Chair was delighted by this common understanding and invited citizens' representatives to work on a new document to be put forward in the afternoon and in line with the citizens' wishes. He also noted the agreement that all recommendations from members would be welcomed, provided they are based on citizens' recommendations and aim to improve them and turn them into concrete conclusions.

2.2. Afternoon session

The session started on the basis of a new document based on the wishes of the citizens and put forward for discussion. Members asked how dissenting views and opposition to certain ideas could be raised and about the right to propose amendments.

The discussion then addressed the substance of the first three draft proposals, composed of an objective and concrete measures to achieve them.

Objective 1: "Increase citizens' participation and youth involvement in the democracy at the European Union level to develop a 'full civic experience' for Europeans and ensure that their voice is heard also in between elections, and that the participation is effective"

Concerning this objective, members asked citizens to clarify the meaning of 'exceptional cases' for the use of EU-wide referenda and what 'existing tools' of participatory democracy they had in mind. On the former, citizens referred to questions such as the need for a treaty change or for a European army or policy issues such as whether nuclear energy or gas should be considered as green. Some members noted that they could not support the idea of European referenda. One member mentioned the possibility of following the Swiss model, with for instance 2/3 of Member States having to vote in favour. The importance of using online tools and specifying who could trigger EU-referenda were stressed. It was noted that introducing referenda at the EU level, like some other citizens' ideas, would require treaty change and a suggestion was made to make this explicit in the text. Other members suggested strengthening the wording on links with organised civil society, which already has a formal role in European decision-making and acts as a bridge between EU institutions and citizens.



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When it comes to citizens' assemblies, one idea suggested that they could be linked to the State of Union address, to give them prominence and visibility. The need to ensure inclusiveness in the selection of participants was underscored, as well as the possibility of having thematic conferences and consulting civil society and social partners. Citizens recalled that the original recommendation from the European Citizens' Panel was more ambitious. They stressed the importance of having an EU law for citizens' assemblies and an obligation for EU institutions to justify if they do not follow up, mentioning also the possibility of judicial remedies. They also highlighted that at this stage the Conference should be about collecting all ideas for 'making Europe better'; looking at implementation should come as a second stage. On other points, members requested to clarify that artificial intelligence in this context should only be used to reduce language barriers and to include in the proposals the idea of youth testing of European legislation and structural support for civil society organisations. One member highlighted the role of politicians at local, regional, and national level who have an important role in bridging the gap towards the EU-level, and considered important to take into account equally all members in the working group.

Objective 2: "Make the European Union more understandable and accessible and build common European identity"

With regards to this objective, members welcomed the points on civic education on the EU and addressing the information and knowledge gap experienced by citizens. The idea of an app was praised by some members as well as creating a network of Houses of European History across Member States. Members also mentioned the importance of teaching European history and cherishing EU diversity of cultures and languages. The idea of an EU-wide public holiday for 'Europe day' was underlined, with suggestions to ensure that all workers in the EU should benefit from it, and that a European week could be organised around this date with all national Parliaments across the EU. Other members highlighted the topics of electronic voting, transparency and simplicity in decision-making, social dialogue and the involvement of organised civil society and social partners to reinforce workplace democracy.

Objective 3 : "Strengthen European democracy by bolstering its foundations, boosting participation in European Parliament elections, fostering transnational debate on European issues and ensuring a strong link between citizens and their elected representatives"

Concerning this objective, members considered important to achieve that citizens understand who is in charge and how decisions are made in the EU. Reference was made to the European Parliament's report on electoral law and transnational lists and to the need to ensure fair and free elections within Europe. According to some, transnational lists would empower citizens and contribute to creating a more European civic space, with discussions over the political direction Europe is taking, and bring European political parties closer to voters. Other members underlined that they could not support transnational lists and cautioned against increasing the distance between citizens and Members of the European Parliament and creating an imbalance between Member States. It was also pointed out that one national panel did not support the idea. The discussion also dealt with the possible lead candidate system, linked to transnational lists. One member advocated that it should be the result of a political process rather than laid down in law and suggested that the current mechanism be reversed – the Commission President should be selected and proposed by the European Parliament and the European Council could then accept or refuse the candidate. The possibility for the European Parliament to obtain the right of legislative initiative and strengthened rights of inquiry were also mentioned. Members also mentioned the importance of rule of law, with suggestions that budgetary conditionality



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should apply to all breaches of rule of law, the right of veto should be removed and that the monitoring should encompass a broader scope, including an assessment of civic space and freedom of assembly. Other issues mentioned included strengthening the role of the European Parliament, for instance by granting it the right of initiative, stronger inquiry rights, equal footing with the Council on debt and taxation, and lowering the voting age to 16, noting that the latter was not approved by the European citizens panels.

3. Concluding remarks of the Chair

The Chair concluded by welcoming the agreement on the working process and also the fact that most interventions on substance were supportive of draft proposals on the table. He then set out a provisional calendar for the next steps, aiming at closing the working group discussion in the next plenary. For doing so, he asked all members to provide their contributions to the non-paper. A new draft version, also including ideas presented by other members of the working group, would then be discussed in the April I session. He invited citizens to have a careful look to the non-paper and all components to actively and openly raise any opposition on specific aspects of the draft proposals in the next meeting, as this could help the process of reaching consensus.



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ANNEX I. Agenda for the meeting on 25 March 2022

AGENDA OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Friday 25 March 2022 – 9:00-11:30 and 14:00-16:00
(Room S2.1 - hybrid)

1. Opening by the Chair
2. Intervention by the Spokesperson of Citizens' Panels
3. Presentation and discussion on the new draft non-paper, as per the annex, with a view to presenting the state of play of the Working Group to the Plenary on 26 March
4. Closing by the Chair

Annex:

- Non-paper



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ANNEX II. List of members of the Working Group on European Democracy

Chair: **Manfred WEBER (European Parliament)**

Title	First name	Last name	Component
Ms	Chiara	ALICANDRO	European citizens panels
Mr	Borislav	ANTONOV	National Parliaments
Mr	Michalakis	ASIMAKIS	European citizens panels
Mr	Zoltán	BALCZÓ	National Parliaments
Ms	Olga	BAUM	European citizens panels
Mr	Matouš	BĚLOHLÁVEK	European citizens panels
Mr	Brando	BENIFEI	European Parliament
Ms	Mara	BIZZOTTO	European Parliament
Mr	Damian	BOESELAGER	European Parliament
Mr	Ioannis	BOURNOUS	National Parliaments
Mr	Nicolai	BOYSEN	National citizens panels/events
Ms	Martina	BRAMBILLA	European citizens panels
Mr	Gari	CAPPELLI	National Parliaments
Mr	Janez	CIGLER KRALJ	Council
Mr	Vasco	CORDEIRO	Committee of the Regions
Ms	Annemieke	DE CLERCK	European citizens panels
Mr	Bruno	DIAS	National Parliaments
Ms	Aleksandra	DULKIEWICZ	Local/Regional representative
Mr	Pascal	DURAND	European Parliament
Ms	Anna	ECHTERHOFF	Civil Society
Mr	Sandro	GOZI	European Parliament
Ms	Eva Kjer	HANSEN	National Parliaments
Mr	Pablo	HISPÁN	National Parliaments
Ms	Pat	Kelly	Council
Ms	Antonia	KIEPER	European citizens panels
Mr	Wepke	KINGMA	Council
Mr	Tomáš	KOZÁK	Council
Mr	Zdzisław	KRASNODEBSKI	European Parliament
Mr	Reinhold	LOPATKA	National Parliaments
Ms	Esther	LYNCH	Social Partners
Mr	Evangelos	MEIMARAKIS	European Parliament
Mr	Aleksandar	MILISOV	European citizens panels
Ms	Radvilė	MORKUNAITĖ- MIKULĖNIENĖ	National Parliaments
Mr	Arnaud	NGATCHA	Local/Regional representative
Ms	Dorien	NIJS	National citizens panels/events
Mr	Jorge Luis	PAZOS LOPEZ	European citizens panels
Mr	Anti	POOLAMETS	National Parliaments
Mr	Arnoldas	PRANCKEVIČIUS	Council
Mr	Paulo	RANGEL	European Parliament



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Ms	Ariane	ROBERT	European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Hans	ROTHENBERG	National Parliaments
Mr	Domènec Miquel	RUIZ DEVESA	European Parliament
Mr	Axel	SCHÄFER	National Parliaments
Mr	Kaspar	SCHULTZ	National citizens panels/events
Mr	Pedro	SILVA PEREIRA	European Parliament
Mr	Sven	SIMON	European Parliament
Ms	Lucie	STUDNICNA	European Economic and Social Committee
Ms	Dubravka	SUICA	European Commission
Ms	Wiktorja	TYSZKA ULEZALKA	European citizens panels
Mr	Apostolos	TZITIKOSTAS	Committee of the Regions
Mr	Bastiaan	VAN APELDOORN	National Parliaments
Mr	Andris	VĪTOLS	Council