



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

SUMMARY RECORD

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

1. Introductory remarks of the Chair

Following the opening of the meeting by the Chair, the Chair reminded the Members that the meeting had been called to allow the continuation of the discussion of the last meeting, held on 17 December 2021. Four of the voted topics were discussed previously, namely: i) energy; ii) transport; and iii) sustainable consumption and production. The remaining topics to cover are: i) agriculture; ii) biodiversity; iii) landscape and construction; iv) creating change in attitudes and behaviours; and v) subsidisation and taxation.

The Chair reminded the Members that the European Citizens' Panel on 'Climate change and environment / Health' will take place in Poland during the weekend and that their recommendations will be discussed in the next Working Group meeting.

The Chair repeated that, as in previous meetings, the floor will be given to citizens first on each of the topics. She also stated that the draft summary of the December meeting will soon be circulated to the Members of the working Group.

2. Discussion clustered around topics

Agriculture:

- The common agricultural policy should be adaptable to regional contexts, be less centralised and more ambitious.
- Call for greater scrutiny of subsidies, also at EU level, on whether funds are being used as intended / as claimed by recipients. Support should be directed to young farmers and innovative production techniques and compensate higher costs. Smaller farms create more jobs and make rural areas attractive.
- Responsible agriculture should take into account climate impacts and adapt accordingly. Research should identify crops adapted to areas prone to flooding or wildfires to avoid failed harvests. Soils need to be protected in agricultural capacity; too often they are re-assigned to construction and sealed.
- Need for an EU wide concept of sustainable forests to extract resources sustainably, create jobs and safeguard forest biodiversity, whilst promoting reforestation.
- Further points raised: i) Strict rules for clear original labelling with country of origin in supermarkets; ii) EU independence regarding seed production; iii) EU-wide approach to water and wind erosion of soils; iv) ending EU market approval of glyphosate and addressing the issue of the targeted use of pesticides and fertilizers, especially in proximity to organic farms, v) stop GMOs and industrial farming and vi) maximize local production and reduce import of food.



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- 70% of greenhouse gas emissions in the agriculture sector stem from animal farming. As a consequence, there needs to be a reflection on reducing meat consumption.
- Need to subsidise those that are farming and particularly, if they contribute to biodiversity, food safety and food availability. Food prices should reflect costs of CO₂. At the same time, environmental issues should not be shifted to other parts of the world by shifting production and consumer prices have to remain affordable.
- Subsidies should go to services and quality and not to areas farmed. There should be a modern view of agriculture that can ensure food safety, including reflection on new breeding techniques to make agriculture more environmentally friendly, while also making it more efficient.

Biodiversity

- Various pollutants were addressed – from kerosene dumps from aviation above the Spanish Mediterranean coast to pesticides and endocrine disruptors. Particularly the effects of the latter on European bee populations were of great concern. Concerns were raised over overfishing, also as a result of limited access to UK waters, and insect extinction
- Need to increase funding for biodiversity projects and awareness of biodiversity laws in the international stage.
- Policies, such as those presented in the Farm to Fork strategy, need to have legally binding objectives (on reduction of use of pesticides or space for biodiversity in farming). An EU soil legislative framework should be adopted as soon as possible. Threats and types of pollution affecting species that are not well known, such as light pollution, should be discussed.

Landscape and construction

- Concerns were raised over the effects of renewable energy sources on the landscapes (wind or solar farms). Windfarms should be recyclable.
- There is a need to address the increasing lack of raw materials. Apart from developing new construction materials (avoiding concrete and wood as limited resources), emphasis should be placed on recycling materials and refurbishing existing buildings rather than constructing new ones – the polluting effects of quarries (air and noise pollution) were also mentioned in this context.
- The usage of brownfields for constructions or unused buildings was raised.
- Focus on the reduction of energy consumption, including through insulation. The construction sector is an important source of greenhouse gas emissions and the Commission's renovation wave could be coupled with a solar wave. Greater emphasis on green architecture in cities (green walls / green roofs).
- There is a need to consider the costs of all green measures.

Creating change in attitudes and behaviours, subsidisation and taxation (*topics debated jointly*)

- Wasteful behaviour needs to be addressed by subsidising behavioural changes and making education the basis for those changes, with a focus on schools and the young generations.



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- Space and energy should be used as little as possible to avoid overconsumption in a world with a population of 7bn people.
- In addition to individual behavioural changes, public policy needs to support structural changes, e.g. by gearing public tenders towards positive change.
- Critique was aimed at the EU's focus on the energy import model as well as the EUR 19bn paid in subsidies to fossil fuel producers in Italy alone. These funds should be directed towards renewable energy sources and towards buffering the effects of high-energy prices on people struggling to pay.
- A more plant-based diet would be a positive behavioural change.

3. Concluding remarks of the Chair

The Chair thanked all Members for their participation and announced that the next Working Group meeting and Conference Plenary will take place on 21 and 22 January.