



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

## SUMMARY RECORD

**Working Group on 'Digital Transformation', Chaired by Ms Elina Valtonen, national  
Parliaments (Finland)**

**Friday 11 March 2022, 09:00 to 11:00**

### **1. Opening by the Chair**

This was the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Digital transformation. The meeting was chaired by Ms Elina Valtonen and took place in hybrid format. The Chair provided members with an overview of the process, recalling that in the first phase since October 2021 the Working Group had discussed the input on digital transformation from the platform, structured around three pillars ('Protecting our Society', 'Empowering People' and 'Strengthening the Economy'). Now, with the recommendations from the European Citizens' Panel "A stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation" and of national Panels in place, these recommendations will be the main basis of the work. Work will therefore focus on clusters that reflect the recommendations of the citizen's panels. The chair presented the clusters:

1. Access to digital infrastructure,
2. Digital skills that empower people,
3. Safe and trustworthy society, and
4. Digital innovation to strengthen the economy.

### **2. Presentation by citizens of the recommendations from European Citizens' Panel 1 "A stronger economy, social justice and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation" and National Citizens' Panels relating to "Digital Transformation", followed by a discussion**

Representatives of the European Citizen's Panels presented their recommendations. They explained recommendations relating to a **right to digital education and access to internet for everyone**, including older people. The importance of access to computers for children against the background of virtual schooling during COVID was stressed. Digital education should be mandatory from primary school, with a joint curriculum. The importance of training to enter the labour market was raised. The EU should invest in high capacity **digital infrastructure** to ensure competitiveness and avoid strategic dependencies. A representative explained that mobility infrastructure will also require digital infrastructure and the need to avoid that foreign entities monopolise the provision of EU digital infrastructure.

Citizen's representatives also presented the recommendation for the EU to have more extensive competencies and more resources to tackle **illegal content and to combat cyber criminality**. Online platforms should be more responsible for their content, and authorities should be able to help children

against online sexual harassment. As regards digital skills and work, a recommendation for workers get digital training to be fit for the labour market and raising awareness on what existing platforms can do was presented. Another recommendation concerns **smart working** and raises **concerns over the offshoring of European jobs**, which should be prevented by incentives to be socially responsible. Another recommendation would oblige social media companies to implement better algorithms to distinguish reliable and false information while not having financial incentives to promote unreliable information and avoiding censorship. Another citizen panellist pointed to the physical and mental problems related to teleworking and suggested that companies should provide their employees with ergonomic seats and desks. Digital education throughout all stages of life was also recommended, with a highlight on soft skills and internet use.

A representative of the **national citizen panel of the Netherlands** presented three national recommendations. First, everybody in Europe should have a **fast, secure and stable internet connection**. Protection against **online crime** is extremely important to tackle at national and European level. Secondly, EU should ensure that **internet purchases are equally secure in all EU countries**. Power of large internet platforms should be limited by clear EU legislation. Thirdly, **privacy rules should be combined with practical implementation and explanation**, mainly through guidance provided by the Member States. The representative also called for including the youth in the decision-making on digital legislation, especially on media literacy and critical thinking.

In the discussions, several members referred to the **aggression against the Ukraine**, considering that this reinforced the need for many of the recommendations and the value of such a deliberative process on the future of Europe. The meeting was broadly structured around the four clusters and the following points were made in the discussion:

#### **Access to digital infrastructure**

- Members were overall supportive of the respective recommendations, stressing the need for everyone to have access to digital infrastructure and to leave no one behind. Reference was made to internet access as a human right or that the EU should make affordable high speed internet a fundamental right to all EU citizens. Access to internet in less developed areas and in rural regions was considered essential and would require further funding. Ongoing initiatives were presented, such as work on making 5G and fibre accessible to more people, including high speed broadband to every household. The benefits of high speed internet for the single market and job opportunities was underlined.
- There was a call for the EU to ensure that digital infrastructure, in particular 6G, is firmly in European hands to guarantee the safety and security of Europeans and to ensure strategic autonomy. In relation to the recommendation for infrastructure to be a state asset to prevent monopolies, it was stressed that there are other ways to control monopolies and also ways to incentivise private companies to ensure wide coverage, for example by only giving companies access to radio spectrum if they cover the whole country or through public-private partnerships.

### **Digital skills that empower people**

- The need to ensure access to digital training and education was widely supported by members. Work on the Digital Education Action Plan was referred to.
- Digital skills were considered crucial from several angles. They were for example seen as a way to handle fake news and safe internet use or to enable participation in the job market. Citizens should also be educated on their online rights, such as a right not being subject of algorithmic decision making. Digital skills and competences were seen as allowing citizens to become part of digital society. Inclusive digitalisation and access for more vulnerable groups was underlined as a priority, as well as the need to also focus on soft skills and netiquette in education.

### **Safe and trustworthy society**

- Cyber security was considered as a key priority by many and people's awareness of existing efforts and institutions should be increased.
- Fake news and misinformation were equally raised and the work ongoing in the context of the Digital Services Act proposal was referred to, which would introduce obligations for content moderation based on democratic principles while ensuring that fundamental rights are respected. Attention was drawn to the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO).
- A code of conduct to fight fake news in addition to existing measures was suggested.
- One member suggested better EU-level coordination structures to avoid a disproportionate role on national authorities based on the country-of-origin principle.
- It was suggested that citizens should work more together with policymakers through participation. Digital transformation should reflect the fundamental rights of citizens, ensure protection of personal data and prevent discrimination.
- Not only what is illegal offline should be illegal online, but also human rights applicable offline should apply online.
- There was a suggestion to ban mass surveillance and facial recognition.
- Algorithms should be transparent, and agreeing on the legislative proposal on an Artificial Intelligence Act was seen as an important step.
- The possible misuse of cryptocurrency to avoid sanctions was stressed in the context of the Ukraine and the proposed Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation (MICA).

### **Digital innovation to strengthen the economy**

- In relation to the recommendation on smart working, some members stressed the need for technological developments to benefit workers physical and mental health, improve their life and to not be used as an opportunity by companies to reduce workers' rights.
- Transparency of introducing digital tools in the work place was considered important and workers should be included in the digitalisation at work.
- There was a suggestion to closely control surveillance at work and to prohibit mass surveillance and biometric recognition, as well as to have an enforceable right at EU level against decisions taken by AI algorithms.
- Cross-border telework in the EU should not face obstacles.
- Support for increasing Europe's resilience and reduce strategic dependencies was voiced.

- One member called for the European economy to be open, stressing the importance of reinforcing the internal market and removing trade barriers. Concerns about geo-blocking practices and effects on smaller countries were mentioned.
- The Chips Act was mentioned as an example of an initiative to ensure European digital sovereignty and leadership in new technologies, including R&D and manufacturing and the proposed AI regulation was referenced as a first of its kind in the world.
- In order to fully use digital possibilities, the need for a trustworthy European digital identity was stressed, which could provide for a safe way to share personal data.

### **3. Closing by the Chair**

The Chair referred to the presentation of the citizens' recommendations and debate at the Plenary on 12 March. She explained that the preparation of draft proposals will be the next step with a view of their discussion and feedback on them during the next Working Group meetings and the presentation of the proposals to the Conference Plenary, with a conclusion of the Conference on 9 May.