



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

SUMMARY RECORD

Working Group on Values and rights, rule of law, security

Chaired by Věra Jourová, Vice-President, European Commission

Friday 11 March 2022, 09:00-11:00, Strasbourg – hybrid format

1. Introductory remarks of the Chair

Chair Věra JOUROVÁ started by recalling the tragic international situation, emphasising the EU's efforts to weaken the Russian aggressor and to welcome Ukrainian refugees as a show of European unity and resilience.

The Chair then provided clarifications on procedure and next steps, outlining that this meeting would serve as a last round of discussions and input gathering on citizens' recommendations. Discussions would be structured around on five clusters of recommendations relating to Values and rights, rule of law and security, namely: (i) Animal rights and agriculture, (ii) Anti-discrimination, equality and quality of life, (iii) Media, fake news, disinformation, fact-checking, cybersecurity, (iv) Data protection, and (v) Rule of Law, Democratic values and European identity.

Chair JOUROVÁ finally specified that the meeting's discussions would feed – alongside all the input received so far, in accordance with the rules of the Conference – into the draft proposals that will be prepared by herself and the group's two Spokespersons, with the assistance of the Common Secretariat, ahead of the next meeting on 25 March. These draft proposals will then be discussed at the next meetings as part of the upcoming Conference Plenaries with a view to 9 May as a date of delivery of the final report.

2. Discussion

The Chair then opened the discussion, structured by cluster, each time giving the floor to citizens to open the debate.

2.1 Animal rights, Agriculture

Citizens called for concrete and fast actions to provide rights and dignity to the lives of animals.

They also advocated that sustainable farming and agriculture in the EU should be further developed in order to properly protect the environment, in particular through incentives to be given to companies that respect environmental standards and disincentives for those which do not respect them.

Trade relations with third countries were also mentioned; according to citizens, these should be consistent with the measures and standards applying inside the EU. Therefore, priority should be given to imports of products from third countries that are aligned with our environmental policies.

2.2 Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life

The Chair observed that some overlaps exist under this cluster with the WG on Social Affairs and these would have to be fine-tuned at a later stage.

On substance, it was recommended that the EU should develop an anti-discriminatory policy in the job market, especially for young people and the elderly, and that subsidies and tax breaks should be awarded to companies that comply with this policy. It was also pointed out that trade unions should be involved in ensuring that companies respect these rules in the work place, and that qualifications and trainings should be provided on this matter.

Some participants also called for introducing EU legislation providing subsidies for young people to become independent and emancipated, as well as a job period guarantee. They also called for giving benefits to companies that guarantee a good work-life balance.

A number of participants expressed their wish to broaden the notion of rule of law in introducing social rights matters, in order to ensure that social rights are above economic rights. The issue of protecting vulnerable citizens should be at the heart of the rule of law and European values.

The lack of implementation of existing rules related to anti-discrimination was also brought up, with some participants emphasizing that such rules are already set out in the Treaty and especially in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Some called to prevent opt-outs requested by individual Member State regarding the provisions of the Charter.

Finally, the need for a full implementation of the Istanbul Convention was raised by a couple of speakers.

2.3 Media, Fake news, Disinformation, Fact-checking, Cybersecurity

Chair JOUROVÁ pointed out some overlaps in this cluster with the Working Group on Digital transformation.

According to many participants, citizens need independent, objective and balanced media to combat disinformation, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, which is also an information war. To achieve this, several participants advocated in favour of minimum EU-wide standards on media independence, as well as the promotion of media pluralism and the prevention of monopolies in the media sector.

Many speakers also called for a system of fact-checking and verification of the information, which should be put on an online platform accessible to all. Such a platform could be run either by an EU Institution or a private company commissioned for that. Moreover, the role of civil society organisations in debunking manipulations of the information was recognized and should be reinforced; the issue of the monetarization of disinformation needs to be tackled urgently. Another widely raised element was the need to develop education on media, civic education and the history of the EU in schools.

On a different angle, the debate also touched upon cybersecurity matters, where efforts should accordingly be pursued in order to strengthen the EU and Member States' defense capabilities, including through better implementation and new measures in this field.

2.4 Data protection

While participants acknowledged that there are already substantial EU regulation on this topic, they noted that progress should still be done in particular when it comes to protection of minors online. Additional measures, such as stricter penalties against abusers, were also raised.

In general terms, the need to uniformly apply the GDPR across all Member States was pointed out by many participants, and the link existing between personal data and disinformation purposes was brought up.

2.5 Rule of Law, Democratic values and European identity

Several participants advocated that, within the conditionality mechanism, further fields should be monitored in connection with any kind of violations of rule of law - such as violation of freedom of speech, respect of LGBTI rights, or access to health care were in particular mentioned.

Referring to a possible annual conference related to the European Commission's rule of law report, some participants highlighted the importance to involve EU citizens and civil society, as well as the different levels of governance, including regional and local levels, as well as National Parliaments, in the process. The European Commission could for instance present its yearly report in each Member State before the National Parliament.

Some participants raised the issue of the unanimity principle, which accordingly impacts the decision-making process in this field.

Finally, several participants insisted on the need to supplement the European citizenship with further substantial elements coming from EU secondary law for instance.

3. Concluding remarks of the Chair

Chair Věra JOUROVÁ closed the meeting by thanking all participants for their valuable input. She emphasised that members' contributions will be duly taken into account and looked forward to the meeting of 25 March, before which the members will receive first draft proposals for a discussion.