



FUTURE OF EUROPE OBSERVER

Vol. 10 No. 2 May 2022

The Conference on the Future of Europe - The Closing of an Unprecedented Citizen Participation Process

This issue of the Future of Europe Observer focuses on the Conference on the Future of Europe. A year ago, at the beginning of the conference, ZEI presented 25 ideas, which are now supplemented by 15 more at the end of the conference. In addition, an overview of the Conference and its results is provided, as well as a text dealing with the political theory of deliberation as the basis of the citizen participation process and a contribution on a possible follow-up.

Contents

Overview	2
A European deliberative experiment	3
Ideas from ZEI	5
Results	13
A catalyst for change?	14

We are at a defining moment of European integration and no suggestion for change should be off-limits". These were the words used by the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, at the closing event of the Conference on the Future of Europe in Strasbourg on 9 May to describe the starting position of the European Union and the implicit hopes placed in the year-long citizens' consultation. The Conference was held with the aim of providing a platform for the wishes, ideas and expectations of the citizens of the European Union, and to reshape and further develop the EU in accordance with these. The aim of this unprecedented civic participation process was to unleash the democratic potential of the Union and thus provide a decisive impulse for further European integration. Whether this was successful or whether the EU failed because of its own demands is, however, still very speculative at this point.

The Conference included European Citizens' Forums, numerous decentralised events and a multilingual digital platform. The aim was to involve all member states, population groups, genders, age groups and people of different socio-economic backgrounds in the process. Young citizens in particular were to be motivated to participate in shaping the EU. At the end of this process, there is now a final report containing 49 proposals. These include concrete goals and more than 320 measures spread over nine themes. The Centre for European Integration (ZEI) also participated in the participation process and contributed numerous

ideas. Already a year ago, at the start of the Conference on the Future of Europe, an issue was dedicated to it, in which 25 in-house ideas were presented. This is now being brought to a conclusion with the publication of 15 further ideas, also from our side.

How the proposals of the final report can be implemented in concrete terms while respecting the Treaties and what the exact follow-up measures of the EU institutions will look like is, however, still open at this point. This follow-up will determine the difference between symbolic politics and real added value with regard to the conference. Or in the words of Commission President Von der Leyen, "Today, their message has been received loud and clear. And now, it is time to deliver". This is the standard against which the EU will have to measure itself in the coming months, and which will determine the value of the past Conference on the Future of Europe. For real profound change, the EU treaties would have to be changed in any case, which would require a constitutional convention, for which Emmanuel Macron, among others, has already signalled his willingness. However, parallel to the closing event, 13 EU states have already published a paper in which they spoke out against a constitutional convention. Which of the two groups, those willing or unwilling to reform, will prevail remains to be seen and is an ongoing dispute that will continue to be followed and observed with great interest by the entire European Union and also by ZEI.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*



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

Future of Europe Observer

accompanies the debate on governance and regulation in the European Union. Authors are ZEI Scholars, Master of European Studies Fellows, and Alumni.

The Conference on the Future of Europe - Overview

General information

- Announced at the end of 2019
- Start: 9 May 2021
- End of the Conference in Strasbourg: 9 May 2022
- Intentionally labelled as “Conference”, not as “Convention”
 - Demarcation of the failed European Convention in 2004
 - A “Convention” includes the preparation of contract changes, which could be part of the results, but they are not representing a goal of the Conference
- The Conference should be a bottom-up process, which allows the European citizens to present their expectations to the EU
- Project of the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of the EU
- Goal: a discussion 17 years after the last European Convention with the institutions of the EU, the member states, and the European citizens
- Especially young citizens shall be motivated to participate in shaping the European future

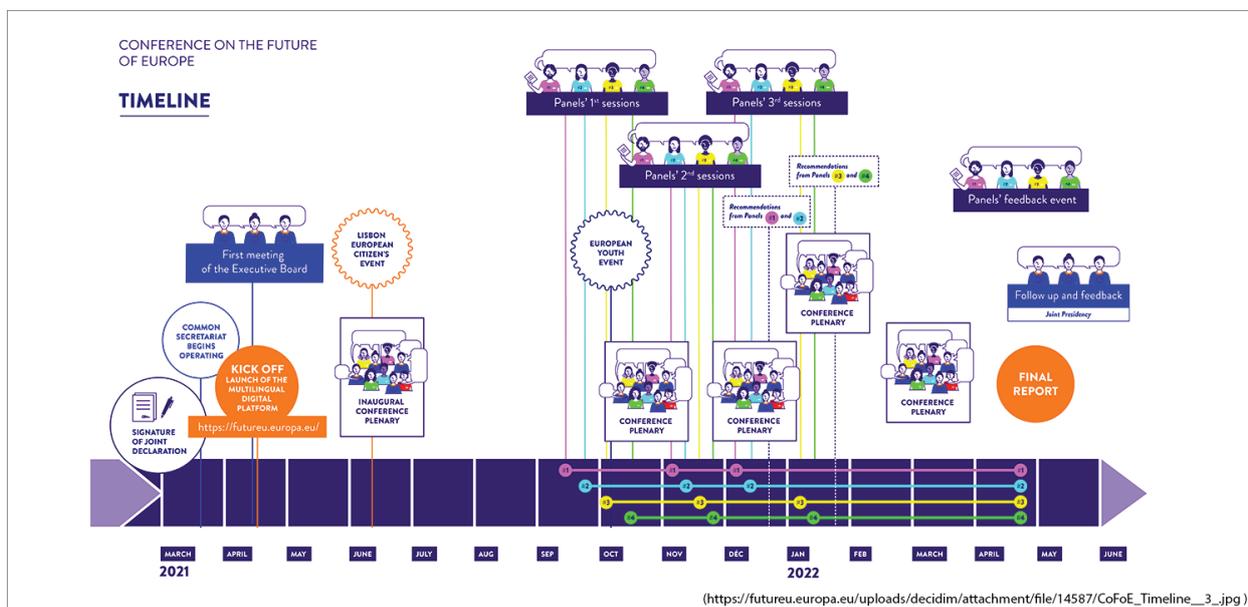
Elements of the Conference

- Multilingual, digital platform
- Decentralised events
- European citizen forums: representing the composition of the citizens in Europe in case of origin, age, gender, socioeconomic background and/or educational level; 1/3 young people (age 16-25); at least one citizen from every member state
- Plenary meetings with live broadcast: members of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the Commission, national Parliaments, 108 citizens, representatives of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, the High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy as a visitor in case of topics relating to the foreign and security policy, and more

Topics

- The platform for the Future Conference presents nine different topics for discussion: Climate change and the environment, Health, A stronger economy, social justice, and jobs, EU in the world, Values and rights, rule of law, security, Digital transformation, European democracy, Migration, Education, culture, youth, and sports
- Thus, a broad range of topics is covered, aiming at the internal constitution of the EU as well as at foreign policy issues and the role of the EU in the world. Additionally, under „other ideas“, other topics can also be brought into the discussion.

(Emilia Dette and Sandra Hoof, *Students of Politics and Society at the University of Bonn.*)



The Conference on the Future of Europe - A European deliberative experiment

The Conference on the Future of Europe: a European deliberative experiment

In the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, EU institutions consulted with citizens for a year to develop proposals for a better and more democratic Europe. Until now, our understanding of democracy has been shaped by nation-state mass democracies and the institutional and procedural patterns that go with them, even though social and political reality has long since transcended these territorial boundaries in many areas. The European Union is probably the most prominent proof that modern democracies are no longer exclusively organised along nation-state lines in order to be able to cope with the diverse challenges of our time. For the EU to succeed, a spatial transformation of democracy towards supranational processes of legitimacy and problem-solving is necessary (Buchstein, 2016). The approach to democratic norms should always be understood as an incomplete process. Political practice should be permanently subjected to critical analysis and measurement against democratic standards, which seems all the more necessary the further a system is from democratic ideals (Roth, 2022).

The Conference on the Future of Europe should make a significant contribution to the further development of European democracy. According to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, it should ensure that it is not just an intellectual political exercise and that all voices are heard, whether critical or laudatory, and that everything agreed upon is actually implemented (European Commission, 2021).

In addition to the classic way of political participation, the election, referendums have been increasingly used in the EU to legitimise fundamental decisions regarding European integration. However, the partly negative results of these referendums in the recent past have tended to stall the EU integration process or, in the case of Brexit, even turned it into the opposite. Starting with the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty by the Danish population in 1992, the rejection of the Treaty of Nice by the Irish (2001) and the failure of the referenda on the European Constitutional Treaty in France (2005) and the Netherlands (2005) up to the surprising vote of the British against remaining in the EU in 2016, led to more cautious tendencies towards direct democratic procedures (Lichteblau & Steinke, 2017). In order for new reform impulses to be implemented in the EU, based on a broad legitimacy base among the citizens of the Union, the Conference on

the Future of Europe tried out large-scale procedures for the first time. This originated in the deliberative theory of democracy.

When considering the promising core elements of deliberative democracy, the choice of the new approach is initially quite convincing. In the context of profound social conflicts and great uncertainty, understanding or even consensus is to be reached through the exchange of arguments in a power-free discourse. The political solutions produced should come from a factual and morally rational conclusion (Landwehr, 2012). The approach of deliberative democracy theory pursues the goal of binding political decisions to public opinions articulated by civil society, as this is the only way to justify a claim to democratic legitimacy. Deliberative democracy relies on the active participatory involvement of all citizens. The discourse, which consists of discussions and deliberations, must in principle be public and equally accessible to everyone, and must take place without pressure. The actors only have to comply with a uniform language as well as the procedural mode of argumentation as a prerequisite for communication. Whereby all topics that can be regulated in the general interest are relevant for political discourse (Habermas, 1992). A central component of deliberative democracy is that individual interests cannot go unchallenged, but are filtered through public discussion. The reasons expressed in the deliberative process must in principle be transferable and generalisable. Overall, the deliberative democracy model relies on informal networks of civil society associations and emphasises plebiscitary and grassroots democratic elements (Kost, 2013).

Although deliberative democracy is primarily a normative theory, it should not be neglected to also consider its basic empirical assumptions, since the normative claim that something specific “should” be, also implies that it “can” be. The normative claim must always be measured against real conditions in order to generate actual added value (Landwehr, 2012), which is crucial for the meaning and purpose of the Conference on the Future of Europe. In concrete terms, a digital discussion platform, some decentralised events and numerous citizens’ forums in the different member states as well as a series of plenary sessions were launched (European Commission, 2022). In the practice of deliberation, three supporting elements are particularly important: inclusion, i.e. free and non-discriminatory access to the deliberation arenas for all; a moderator who ensures that all participants are given equal opportunities for discussion and that no dominance structure

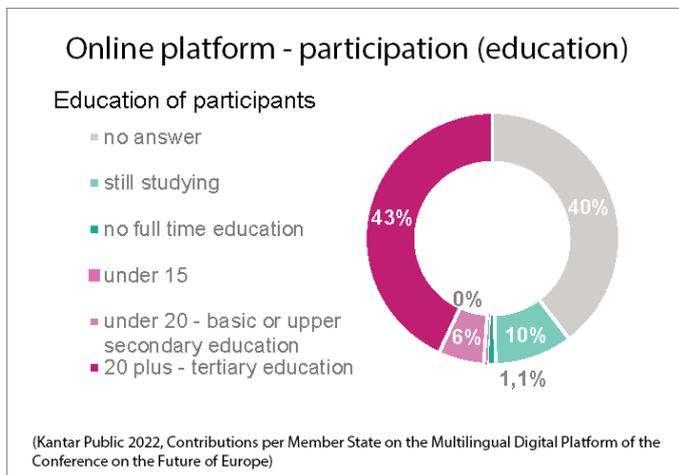
The Conference on the Future of Europe - A European deliberative experiment

emerges; and the randomness of the selection of deliberation participants in order to form a representative cross-section of the population (Kneip & Merkel 2017).

Without negating the legitimising power of deliberation, however, clear criticism must be levelled at the sometimes very utopian ideal conceptions. First of all, the argumentative exclusion of particular interests leading to consensus must be critically assessed. A free, regulated, but definitely conflict-oriented political dispute regarding different interests is an essential component of democracy, which at its end usually results in a compromise and not in consensus. Negating different interests tends to run the risk of concealing opposing realities instead of resolving these oppositions. In order to reflect the interests within the EU as adequately as possible, the composition of the citizens' forums should represent a representative cross-section of the EU. Therefore, the selection of participants

erative process that the asymmetry of the participants does not distort the discourse. However, this assumes a very high level of competence for the moderators and immediately raises the question whether they should also be controlled to ensure that they do not influence the discourse too much in their own sense (Kneip & Merkel, 2017). In fact, the representative composition of the forums can be strongly doubted, as the response rate to the tens of thousands of discussion invitations was in part very low. For example, of the 12,000 people invited to the German Citizens' Forum, only about 600 responded. Moreover, according to experience reports, it was only insufficiently possible to convince citizens with an EU-critical attitude in large numbers to devote their free time to deliberations on the future of Europe (Jacobsen, 2022). Another particularly critical aspect is that citizens' forums are usually not a permanent institutionalised part of the decision-making process without real decision-making power. For citizens' forums to be truly meaningful, they would have to be held in their thousands. They would have to take place docked at the different levels of decision-making, and their results would have to develop a binding character for the political actors that is more than mere recommendations that can be passed over without further ado. In most cases, the function of citizens' forums does not exceed the status of a vague consultation without a concrete mandate. In these cases, deliberation quickly degenerates into a political placebo that makes no truly relevant contribution and, in the worst case, tends to turn into frustration and alienation from the political system. This fate also threatens the Conference on the Future of Europe, as the mandate defined in advance and the associated goals of the conference were only vaguely outlined (Wuermeling, 2021). Apart from this, it is doubtful whether citizens' forums, whose participants are chosen by random lottery and are rather amateur political events, are believed to have more legitimacy and efficiency than elected representatives. The latter at least have political experience and are subject to accountability and the transparency requirement (Kneip & Merkel, 2017). Therefore, the performance of the deliberative theory approach should not be overestimated, which can also only unfold its full power under the right framework conditions and a successful implementation. Accordingly, despite a promising European approach, it should be noted that the potential of deliberative procedures is very great in theory, but has clear limits in practice.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*



should consider origin, age, gender, socio-economic background and level of education (European Commission, 2022). This raises the problem, that the different qualifications of the participants in the deliberations must be taken into account. The intended social cross-section leads to striking differences in education and knowledge, rhetorical skills or simply in political interest. This results in an uneven distribution in terms of the ability of citizens to participate and exert influence in the course of the citizens' forums. Although expert hearings are supposed to counteract this shortcoming, the suspicion is that this will only reduce the informational differences in questions of European financial, climate, industrial or foreign policy to a limited extent. The same applies to rhetoric, since a lawyer, for example, has entirely different possibilities to assert his interests than a baker due to his professional training. To ensure that these arguments are not so decisive, the moderator should ensure during the delib-

Strengthen European presence in Central Asia

Due to its geographical location, Central Asia is a very important region in which the great powers Russia, China and the EU meet. In competition with China and Russia, it is difficult for the EU to assert its (energy policy) interests of diversifying its import sources and transport routes in Central Asia. This is shown, for example, by the efforts to reach an agreement on the affiliation of the Caspian Sea or the failed NABUCCO pipeline project. Since the diversification of energy sources and transport routes is only possible to a limited extent due to Russia's presence in the region, the EU should focus on promoting sustainable energies. The 2019 Central Asia Strategy talks about energy sector reform and the will to provide technologies and expertise to Central Asian countries. What is fundamentally missing from the strategy, however, are concrete objectives. These concrete objectives must also be differentiated for each of the five Central Asian countries, due to the different capacities of each country. Concrete projects should especially support sustainable SMEs and start-ups in rural regions in order to achieve a participatory effect. Therefore, the EU should expand financing opportunities and make them more visible for small enterprises. The Central Asia Invest-Program should have an even greater focus on the financing of sustainable projects.

Paula Fierdag, *Student Assistant at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

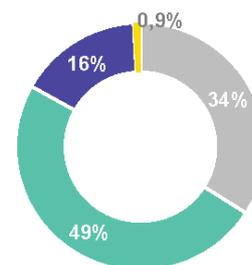
Intensifying European cooperation with Africa

It is often said in Europe: 'We won't be safe until everyone is safe', referring to COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing how interconnected the world is. The same goes for the environmental degradation & climate change, which see no borders, showing us the essentiality of cooperation with other regions. Africa is of particular significance because of the historical bonds as well as migration, environment, and health challenges that unite us. Due to its size, geographical location, fast population growth and vast natural resources, Africa is considered an attractive investment destination and a key partner. The EU represents a great role model for the African Union, with the Africa-EU Partnership striving to bring

Online platform - participation (gender, age, occupation of participants)

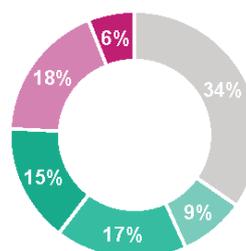
Gender of participants

- no answer
- man
- woman
- non binary



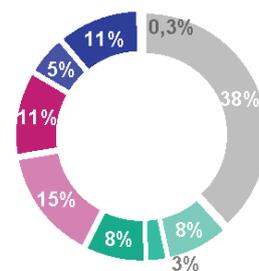
Age of participants

- no answer
- 15-24 y.o.
- 25-39 y.o.
- 40-54 y.o.
- 55-69 y.o.
- 70+ y.o.



Occupation of participants

- no answer
- student
- unemployed
- self-employed
- professional worker
- retired
- manual worker
- manager
- house worker



(Kantar Public 2022, Contributions per Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe)

the two closer together by strengthening economic cooperation and promoting sustainable development. Nevertheless, in order for the partnership to further advance and flourish more concrete objectives should focus on investing in sustainable industry (particularly SMEs and startups), building energy infrastructure, such as solar panel networks and cooperation in other key sectors, including health and security. Achieving inclusive and smart goals in accordance with the European Green Deal would not only lead to more prosperity and a higher standard of living in African countries, but would subsequently result in less migration to Europe, making a fundamental positive change for both parties and deepening the potential for vital further growth and innovation.

Dušan Brujić, *Student of the Masters European Studies at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

More Transparency with FRONTEX

Human rights institutions and civil society organizations regularly report cases of illegal pushbacks at the European border. Frontex is often accused of being involved in these incidents. Previous measures regarding Frontex have mostly not been very effective and have not brought any major changes. Although Frontex has a complaint mechanism, it has not yet resulted in any consequences. Frontex's Fundamental Rights Officer, who is responsible for monitoring the compliance of fundamental rights within Frontex, relies on employees reporting violations themselves, which makes truly effective monitoring difficult. Therefore, independent monitoring of fundamental rights at the European border by independent institutions should be strengthened and made possible. So far, lawsuits against Frontex have only been brought before the CJEU. Since the EU itself has not signed the European Conventions on Human Rights, an EU institution

cannot be sued before the European Court of Human Rights. Another obstacle to a lawsuit against Frontex is the question of responsibility and accountability because Frontex with its executive functions exceeds the actual European model of subsidiarity and as a pan-European independent agency, is difficult to control. Therefore, mandates need to be clear so that the persons/institution concerned can be held accountable. Consequently, a revision of the Frontex mandate is needed.

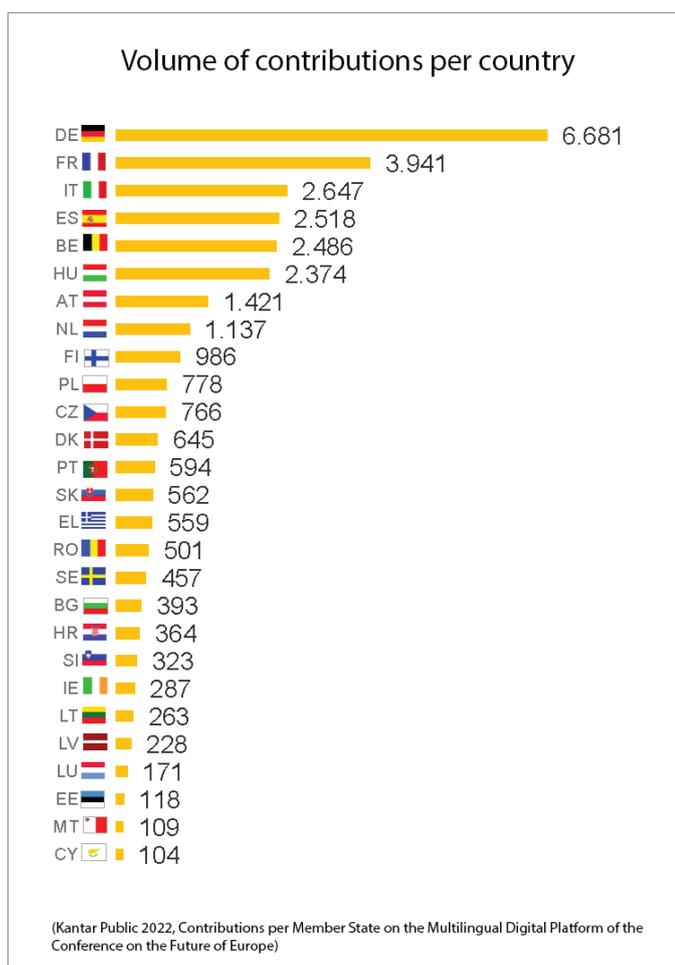
Paula Fierdag, *Student Assistant at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

One European voice in the UN and NATO

If the EU is to achieve the frequently mentioned goal of strategic autonomy, it must be able to speak globally with a single voice. The EU should be able to act globally and to assert its own interests against others. If the EU wants to be recognized and taken seriously by competitors and partners on the international stage, it must strive for a real unification of its foreign and defence policy. At present, the disunity of European Member States can be exploited too easily, which is not to the long-term advantage of any of the EU member states.

Crucial steps in the direction of a strong European voice in the world would be the conversion of France's permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council into a joint EU seat and the claiming of an EU seat on NATO's North Atlantic Council. As a result, the EU would be represented in the central supranational organizations, which would recognize the EU as a relevant international player and, especially in NATO, could represent a serious counterweight to the United States. The weakening of the national voice in NATO should be considered secondary, because the influence of most EU member states on the decisions of the defence alliance is very limited anyway. Only France would have to share the power that comes with a seat on the UN Security Council with the other EU countries. However, to win France's approval, they could permanently provide the EU ambassador to the UN.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*



European elections – Youth suffrage for a better Europe

Young adults have increasingly been mobilizing around civic movements such as “Fridays for Future” and “Black Lives Matter”, voicing their frustration with the handling of pivotal issues. Introducing youth suffrage for all Europeans between the ages of 16 and 18 would not only counteract such concerns, but further encourage political participation among the youth. EU’s Commission previously stated the intention of engaging its youth in matters of climate change within the Conference on the Future of Europe, demonstrating the importance of integrating young citizens in politics. Considering that younger generations are the ones living with the consequences of current decisions, it is just consequent that they should get the opportunity to shape their future as well improve the Union. Moreover, given that some youngsters get into the workforce by the age of 16, and are therefore taxed as adults, elections can directly affect their lives. Persuading voting at an early age can also lead to higher voter’s turnout due to the formation of “habitual voting”. This in turn can, in addition to elevating civil discourse, prevent voter’s disengagement.

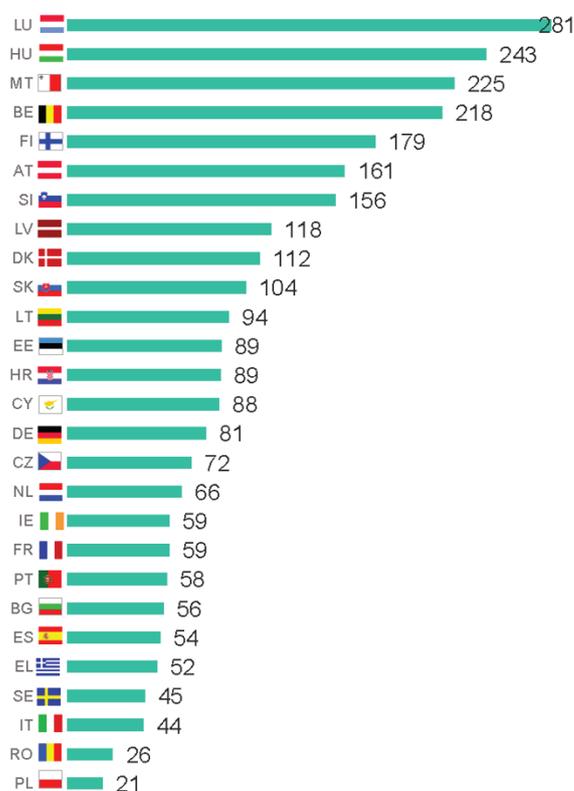
Educational changes, such that introduce civic education for high schoolers with weekly discussions on current political events are a prerequisite for the prosperity of youth suffrage. Simulating parliament and mock trials for electing school board members and student representatives can further enhance political expertise.

Mara Nazaretyan, Student Assistant at ZEI, University of Bonn.

The EU needs to establish “European Studies” as a school subject

Although the EU forms part of our everyday life, there is a lack of knowledge about the Union, its history and member states in the European society. The missing awareness about the structure of the EU can be explained by the curricula of the member states, which contains little content about the EU. While the social elite is taught in-depth knowledge at universities, the general public still lacks basic knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a school subject called “European Studies” in all European secondary schools. The common school subject would insure an equality of all European Students in terms of political

Volume of contributions per country, proportional reflection per 1M inhabitants



(Kantar Public 2022, Contributions per Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe)

education. The content should focus on the structures, actors and decision-making processes of the EU, but also on the common history of integration. It is also important to make clear the influence of the EU on the different member states and their economies as well as the influence on the individual. The school subject can connect to existing political education initiatives and ongoing exchange programs, significantly strengthening them.

This creates shared experiences and a common knowledge basis in the EU, which are key prerequisites for a transnational European identity. Additionally, it is likely that this will increase voter turnout at the elections of the European elections. Overall, the politicization of the citizens and the development of a common identity as “European” could reduce the increasing estrangement between the EU and its citizens.

Marlene Wißkirchen, Student Assistant at ZEI, University of Bonn.

The European Semester should be binding

The European Semester serves to coordinate the economic and social policies of the member states within the EU. Its main purpose is to ensure economic convergence within the EU and thus stabilize the common currency area. The importance of the European Semester is currently reinforced by the fact that in 2020 it became the central element within the Recovery Instrument (“Next Generation EU”), which is why enormous capital is now tied to the mechanism of the Semester (750€ bn). However, the country-specific recommendations of the Semester by the Commission are mostly noted at best. The recommended implementation of measures to reduce asymmetry in the EU are neither followed up nor sanctioned in case of non-compliance. Although the possibilities for this are certainly laid out in the European Semester (Art. 2a Regulation No. 1175/2011) and could be expanded. Therefore, coordination in this area too often remains pure assertion.

For this reason, the European Semester should be legally binding and the existing mechanisms should be applied consistently. This would make the European Semester a meaningful and strong instrument and would also be a decisive contribution to the long-term goal of deepening the common economic and social policy. This would fulfill a reform promise made during the debt crisis.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

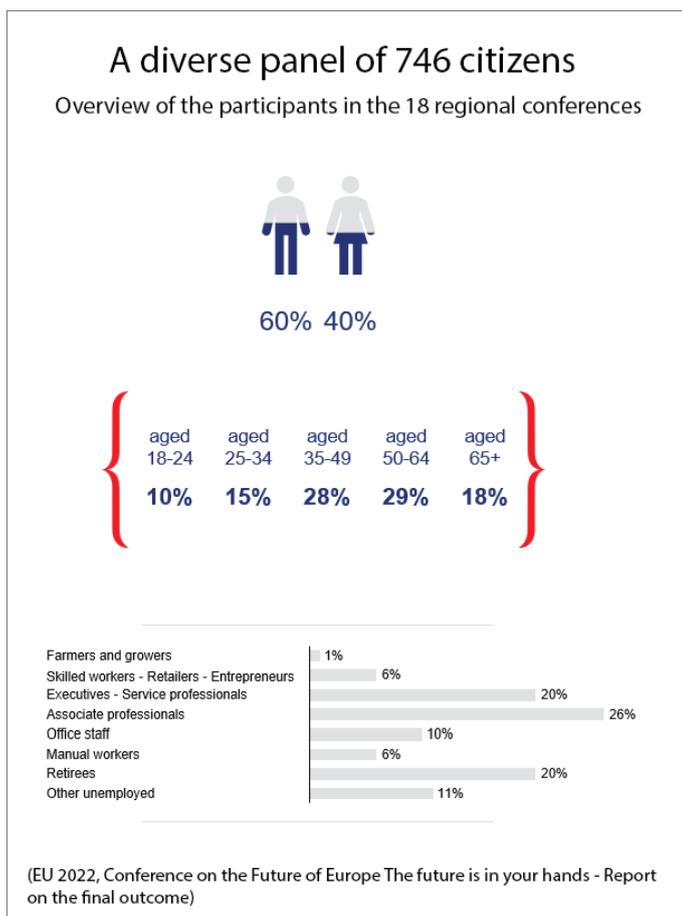
Holistic but individually adapted communication strategy for the EU

European ideas and actions hardly reach the attention of the broad majority of EU citizens. This is clearly visible in the current case of the European Pillar of Social Rights. A survey from the European Barometer of 2020 revealed that 88 per cent of the respondents considered a social European approach as personally important. However, only 8 per cent indicated that they knew what the European Pillar of Social Rights is actually about.

While the EU addresses topics that are personally significant to the vast majority of EU citizens, these same citizens are often not aware of the impact of EU policy. This might be caused by the fact that there is no common public within the EU which, however, could be achieved through a common European media. Further, individual member states have different communication approaches towards their citizens, as topics strongly vary in importance and acceptance in each member state.

Therefore, the EU needs a holistic but individually adapted communication strategy for the respective member state. Hence, each individual member state could be taken into responsibility to establish an office which would be accountable for the communication between the EU and its citizens. Thereby, the EU would get a personal and national representation which would be closer to the people and their needs. This bridge could contribute to a better understanding and acceptance of European matters, as well as more participation by EU citizens.

Bianca Berndt, *Student of the Masters European Studies at ZEI, University of Bonn.*



ZEI Discussion Paper C 272 / 2022

Political parties at the European level are still largely unknown to most citizens in the European Union, even 30 years after their inclusion in primary law by the Maastricht Treaty. The introduction of these so-called Europarties was linked the mission of forming a European awareness and expressing the political will of the union's citizens. It was accompanied by the hope that the parties could be a driving force for European integration, especially regarding a European society. So far, the Europarties have largely failed to fulfill this task. After giving an overview on the current situation of parties at the European level, the article presents proposals for reform and possible opportunities that would arise from party politicization at the European level.



E-highway for hybrid trucks in Europe

Across Europe, trucks are responsible for more than a third of CO₂ emissions from road transport. To achieve the EU's climate targets, the greenhouse gas emissions from road transport must be reduced and more climate-friendly transport modes must be created.

What has so far been just a short test track on the A5 highway in Germany could revolutionize the entire truck network in Europe in the future. On the test track for electric-assisted heavy-duty transport, hybrid trucks can use electricity from the overhead line to charge their batteries for the hybrid system. The trucks have a hinged pantograph on the roof that docks with the overhead line in the area of the track. The hybrid then runs on the electricity and recharges its batteries during the five-kilometer trip. According to initial evaluations, the hybrid trucks used were able to save diesel fuel by as much as around 10 per cent. In the EU, two-thirds of truck journeys are shorter than 100 km, and there are already e-trucks on the market with a battery range of 300 km. For the electrification of road freight, EU countries must step up their measures and focus on electric trucks, especially for companies that operate in regional transport. Especially here, the distances are much shorter than in interregional or international transport. The overhead lines for trucks can contribute to a breakthrough of electromobility in the commercial vehicle sector throughout Europe and a successful achievement of the climate agreement.

Marie Mechela, *Student of the Masters European Studies at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

Digital Driving Licence

In her State of the Union on 16 September 2020, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, among others, presented her vision that the Commission would propose a secure European e-identity.

Following the idea of being fit for Digital Age along with European e-identity, digital driving licence could be introduced and if applicable, be incorporated into the same digital application. Once strictly aligned with the GDPR, the digital driving licence would display all relevant information about the holder. Digital driving licence would provide the respective data in two languages – in the language of the country of origin, namely the respective Member State, and in English. If required, the digital driving licence could be easily verified by use of a special QR-code.

Another feature package that could go along with the digital driving licence is the option to both receive and inspect the potential fines in case of a traffic offence. That alternative would reduce to a large extent the red tape procedures in terms of preparing and delivering traffic tickets to the mailbox. In return, not only that would considerably decrease the usage of paper, but also would provide the information in a faster mode. The integrated system comprising the digital driving licence along with the additional option of fine payments will ultimately upgrade the European citizens' standards towards a more comfortable life fit for the Digital Age.

Kateryna Khalabuzar, *Student of the Masters European Studies at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

The European military should be communitized

A European military should be communitized. In concrete terms, this means that the European army should be led exclusively by European institutions and consist of European male and female soldiers. With such a structure, the EU would be able to pursue a serious foreign and security policy. The current soft power approach to foreign policy could be complemented by serious hard power, which would, for example, make it easier to deal with non-democratic governments and strengthen the EU as a global player.

Other proposals for structuring the EU military would entail numerous long-term problems that are difficult to solve. For example, it is proposed that national armies be integrated and merged into a large European army or that national armies only send so-called “battle groups”. However, this would hardly clarify who holds the supreme command and which industry dominates the procurement of defence technology products. There would permanently be a strong tension between, a common European decision-making structure and armies that continue to be integrated into national command structures. Moreover, countries that have agreed in principle to participate in such a European combat unit could withdraw their contingent.

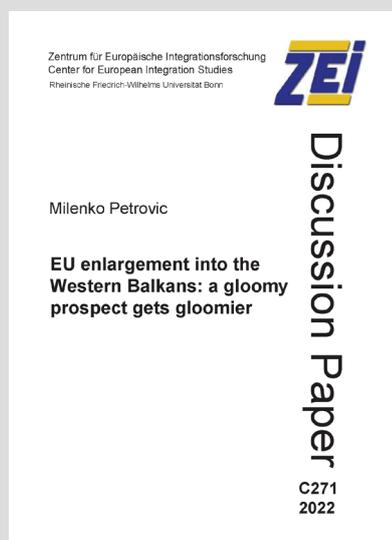
Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

EU-Directive on the Standardization of Armaments

The development of a European army is a crucial step in order to establish the strategic autonomy of the EU, to remain capable of action and to be able to protect its own interests. The basic prerequisite for this is the standardization of armaments within the EU. Currently, the member states use numerous different systems, which is extremely inefficient and very costly. For example, the EU has 17 different types of battle tanks, whereas the U.S. has only one. Each individual combat system requires its own manufacturing processes, maintenance personnel and materials, as well as its own training for soldiers to use the equipment. Although standardization in this area has long been a goal, the number of different weapon systems has been reduced only very slightly in recent years because it is done on a voluntary basis. In order to achieve a significant change in the foreseeable future, an EU-Directive on the Standardization of Armaments is needed. It would also be useful to include standardization as a central project of PESCO in order to improve coordination. The commitments of PESCO are legally binding for the member states, which means that more pressure can be built up and the goal of the “European Defence Union” can be achieved more quickly. Legally binding target agreements would make it possible to establish a timetable with verifiable milestones and thus drive standardization forward in a structured manner.

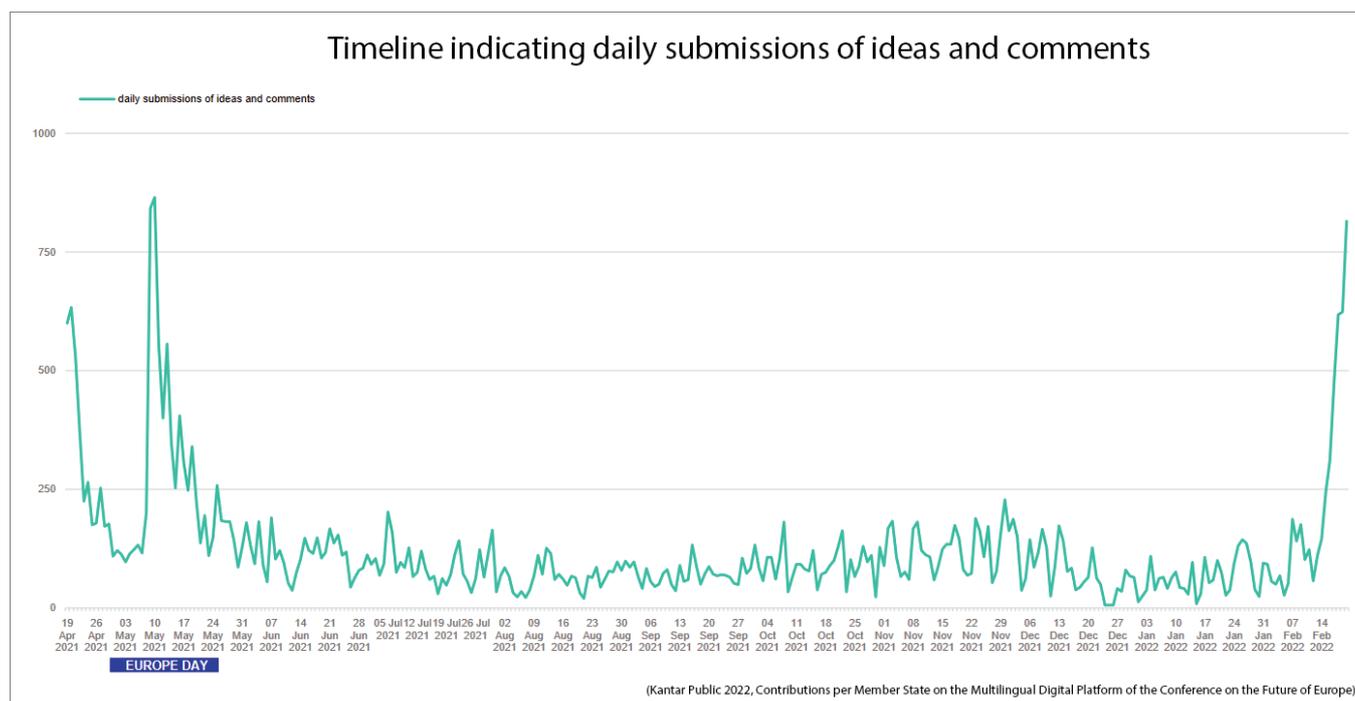
Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

ZEI Discussion Paper C 271 / 2022



Nearly two decades after the EU stated in the 2003 Thessaloniki agenda that all the Western Balkan states ‘will be an integral part of a united Europe’, Croatia is the only one of them to have succeeded in reaching this goal. Of the remaining Western Balkan states, only Montenegro and Serbia have opened the accession negotiations with the EU, albeit with very slim prospects to close all 30+ negotiation chapters any time in the foreseeable future. The others are further behind; they are either still waiting to open accession negotiations (as is the case with the other two official candidates for EU membership – Albania and Macedonia) or even achieve full candidate status (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). Facing post-2004/07 ‘enlargement fatigue’ and numerous internal problems and crises since the late 2000s/early 2010s, the EU’s political elite and wider public, particularly in its core member states, seem to have lost any interest in further enlargement and in assisting the Western Balkan hopefuls to become part of ‘a united Europe’. Prospects for acceleration of any Western Balkan state’s accession process in the 2020s are very slim..

The Conference on the Future of Europe - Ideas from ZEI



The democratic legitimacy of the European Semester should be improved

The main instrument for coordinating the economic and social policies of the member states within the EU is the EU European Semester. The primary aim is to stabilize the common currency area of the EU and to increase the economic convergence of the member states. In recent years, reforms in the areas of growth, employment and fiscal policy, as well as social and labor policy, have been integrated into the European Semester. Moreover, enormous capital (750€ bn) was linked to the Semester in 2020 with the “Next Generation EU” recovery instrument. However, despite its increasing importance in shaping the entire European Union, its linkage back to democratic decision-making is extremely weak.

To remedy this problem, the European Parliament could be given the right to approve all plans, since the budgetary right is usually that of the Parliament. The European Parliament could proceed with the approval of country-specific recovery and resilience plans in a similar way as it does with the approval or rejection of EU Commission candidates. In other words, the Parliament could approve or reject the plans in their entirety without being able to block individual details. Coordination progress within the EU would thus be better linked to the will of the electorate and also more traceable and verifiable, strengthening accountability in the institutional structure and enhancing the legitimacy of the EU as a whole and of the European Semester

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, Uni Bonn.*

Establishment of a European Labour Agency

The communitarisation of European monetary policy through the Euro is only opposed by the relatively weak principle of coordination in the area of economic policy, which means that the EU’s European Economic and Monetary Union is based on an asymmetrical architecture. The conditions of the common currency area are suboptimal, which is why it is relatively unstable.

An active European policy on training, employment and social security is needed as an important corrective to the economic asymmetry in the monetary union. Therefore, the aim should be to establish a European Labour agency that could coordinate and facilitate the exchange of labour supply and demand between the different member states, thereby increasing labour mobility and making the labour market more flexible. This would favour a production-dependent adjustment of wages within the EU, which is beneficial for a stable currency area. Furthermore, it would also be helpful in reducing the partially very high unemployment in the southern member states. In addition, a European Labour agency could also help to ensure fair working conditions and wages throughout Europe.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*

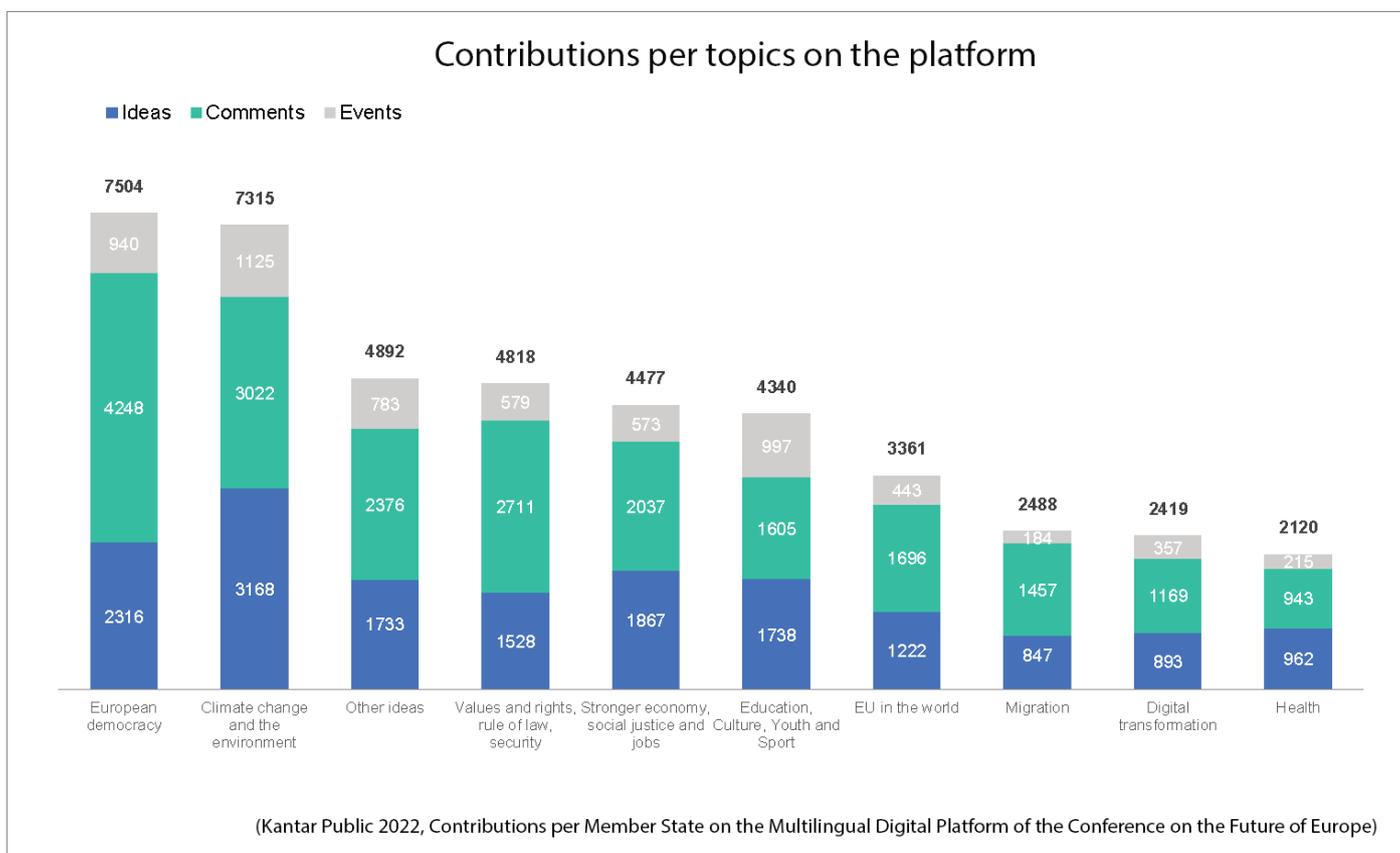
Reforming the EU electoral system

The EU elections themselves do not fulfil the democratic demands that the EU has on its Member States. The election of the European Parliament has clear deficits with regard to its electoral law, which varies from one member state to another and contradicts the fundamental electoral principles and leads to an inequality of citizens and their votes cast. This weakens the legitimacy of the Parliament and the principle of accountability. Moreover, European election campaigns are mostly dominated by national rather than European issues, this defeats the purpose of an election based on principles altogether, since the issues to be decided are not discussed in the run-up to an election and do not build a deciding factor.

In order to permanently strengthen European legitimacy, the EU electoral system needs to be reformed. Electoral law should be harmonised across the EU and efforts should be made to strengthen EU-parties

in order to prevent the national fragmentation of European elections. This could be done by introducing a common deadline for drawing up national electoral lists, a common closing time for polling stations in all member states, a harmonised minimum voting age and improved visibility of European parties by placing their names on ballot papers. However most important would be the introduction of a transnational electoral list, as EU-parties would gain public visibility on the ballot paper and subsequently in the election campaign.

Henrik Suder, *Research Fellow at ZEI, University of Bonn.*



The Conference on the Future of Europe - Results

Results overview

- Platform participants: 52,346
- Event participants: 652,532
- Ideas: 17,671
- Comments: 21,877
- Events: 6,465
- Endorsements: 72,528

The highest number of contributions (ideas, comments, and events) can be found in the topic area „European Democracy“ (7,504). Secondly, with 7,315 contributions, is the topic area „Climate change and the environment“. In third place are the contributions under „Other ideas,“ and they are followed by „Values and rights, rule of law, security“ in fourth place and „A stronger economy, social justice, and jobs“ in fifth place.

Results in detail

- Agreement on 49 detailed proposals
- These include concrete goals and more than 320 actions spread across nine themes for EU institutions to follow up on
- Nine topics (Selected proposals):
 - *Climate change & environment*: protect and restore biodiversity, the landscape and oceans, and eliminate pollution
 - *Health*: ensure that all Europeans have access to education on healthy food and access to healthy and affordable food, as a building block of a healthy lifestyle
 - *A stronger economy, social justice and jobs*: address the challenges arising from the demographic transition, as a critical ingredient of Europe's overall resilience
 - *EU in the world*: the EU should reach more autonomy in the field of energy production and supply, in the context of the ongoing green transition
 - *Values and rights, rule of law, security*: Guarantee a more protective and citizen-oriented data treatment policy
 - *Digital transformation*: the EU should ensure that all European citizens can benefit from digitalisation, by empowering them with the necessary digital skills and opportunities
 - *European democracy*: make the European Union more understandable and accessible and strengthen a common European identity
- *Migration*: Strengthen the EU's role on legal migration
- *Education, culture, youth and sport*: In order to promote a culture of exchange and foster European identity and European diversity across different areas, the Member States, with the support of the European Union
- The proposals are a consensus accepted by the representatives of the European Parliament, Council of the European Union, Commission and attending citizens
- On Europe Day (9th of May), the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Commission and the President of the Council received the final report with proposals for EU reforms.
- At the closing ceremony in Strasbourg, EU Parliament President Roberta Metsola (on behalf of the Council Presidency), French President Emmanuel Macron and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen received the final report from the co-chairs of the conference's Executive Committees

What's next?

Within their areas of responsibility, the three institutions are now examining how these proposals can be implemented in concrete terms while complying with the treaties. A feedback event will be held in the fall of 2022 to update citizens.

(Results by Emilia Dette and Sandra Hoof, Students of Politics and Society at the University of Bonn.)

The Conference on the Future of Europe - A catalyst for change?

The Conference on the Future of Europe: a catalyst for change?

Dancing in the plenary, young musicians playing Beethoven and solemn speeches - the Conference on the Future of Europe ended on 9 May in the European Parliament in Strasbourg with pathos in all its forms. European citizens presented 49 proposals with more than 300 individual measures to the leaders of European politics. More environmental and climate protection, a social and digital Europe, but also new forms of citizen participation and institutional changes can be found in the package of proposals. Will the Conference, long ignored by the media and political observers, become a catalyst for change?

The beginning did not look very promising from the stands. Although the Conference was announced as the EU's biggest reflection process for a decade, the initial impression was that the whole undertaking was not so much about how to improve EU democracy and shape the EU's future but rather about institutional wrangling. Representing very different expectations and interests about the Conference, the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament all sought to make sure that their stakes would not be circumvented. In the end, this led to a rather complex and somewhat counter-intuitive institutional set-up with an Executive Board and a Joint Presidency, triggering skepticism right at the beginning.

The criticism prevailed throughout the Conference – limited visibility, low degree of digital participation, complex procedures and uncertainty about the CoFoE's ability to produce tangible political results. After all, the Conference has been the biggest exercise in citizens' participation in the EU ever. Its purpose was to involve citizens in an unprecedented way and to lead to concrete policy changes and reforms in the EU. So did it deliver?

The EU riding the “deliberative wave”

A “deliberative wave”, as the OECD succinctly states, has been growing recently in many countries around the world. With the Conference on the Future of Europe the EU has not only tried to catch the wave, but to apply it to a multilingual, complex political environment. The CoFoE is by far the most comprehensive case of citizens' participation the EU has ever undertaken. Three instruments were key: 1) a Multilingual Digital Platform (MDP) where all Europeans had the opportunity to share ideas for the future of the EU; 2) decentralized national citizens' panels; and 3) Europe-

an Citizens' Panels (ECPs).

The idea was that MDP, the national panels and the ECPs produce contributions and recommendations for the Conference Plenary. This plenary was equally composed of representatives from the European Parliament, national parliaments and European citizens (plus some representatives from the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, the social partners, civil society and the Presidency of the European Youth Forum). The Conference Plenary's job has been to discuss the recommendations developed by MDP, national panels and the ECPs and to transform them into concrete proposals. At the end of the Conference, these proposals were handed over to the Executive Board, which drew-up and published the conclusions of the Conference Plenary and presented the final outcome of the Conference in a report to the Joint Presidency and its three institutions.

When we evaluate the impact of the three different participatory tools, we find a mixed picture. The MDP, which was supposed to work as a digital hub with numerous Europeans feeding in their ideas, has not been able to fulfill its aspired function. Although an innovative tool, just some 53,000 Europeans contributed within the one year of its existence. This is a number way too small to name the platform a success. The national events have been very heterogenous in nature as it was left to the member states how to organize them. Notwithstanding that some of these panels indeed witnessed enthusiasm and great commitment, the lack of common rules of procedure led to deliberations that varied highly in quality and quantity. Finally, the most promising instrument of the CoFoE have been the European Citizens' Panels as a genuinely European key element of the Conference's participatory architecture. 800 randomly selected citizens from all member states met over three weekends and discussed a broad range of policy challenges and priorities for the EU in four thematic citizen panels.

The ECPs were far from perfect. The broad topics, a lack of time, ambiguities about their intended purpose as well as a weak interlinkage with the national panels were clear hindrances. But the citizens' panels delivered concrete results and can be considered as a success. The random selection of citizens across all member states made sure that the EU's social diversity was represented in the ECP's debates. The logistics and the organization, quite a mammoth task, have been rather smooth. Particularly, the simultaneous interpretation

The Conference on the Future of Europe - A catalyst for change?

in all 24 official EU languages proved to be a trailblazer for eye-level discussions and worked without much hassle. Furthermore, the overall mood of the participants has been overwhelmingly positive. The citizens engaged appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas, as well as to hear from others. This, together with the provided expert inputs and a professional moderation, turned out to be a crucial precondition for the ECP's ability to develop remarkably concrete recommendations for EU action at the end of the third session of all four panels.

The outcome: more citizens' participation and a rejuvenated Convention discussion

Will the CoFoE lead to real political change? It is still early days, the process of feeding the results of the CoFoE into the realms of European policy making is just about to start. However, the solemn event on 9 May, when the 49 proposals were handed over, is a first indication of what to expect. We see three areas of influence: First, new forms of citizens' participation have reached the European level. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged, "that in future we give citizens' panels the time & resources to make recommendations before we present key legislative proposals." Changing the way European citizens can participate in EU politics is a clear and tangible output of the Conference.

Second, what influence does the Conference have on EU policies? The plenary of the Conference has transformed the manifold ideas of citizens and other stakeholders into a comprehensive catalogue of 49 proposals clustered around the 9 thematic themes of the ECPs. Each proposal consists of 2 to 21 recommended policy measures, summing up to some 300 suggestions of how to improve the EU's future. The spirit of the measures clearly implies a deepening of European integration leading into the direction of a more federal Europe. For example, among the proposed measures are the replacement of unanimity with qualified majority voting in the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as in social, fiscal and budgetary matters, an expansion of the EU's competencies in social policies, a right of legislative initiative for the European Parliament, the demand to make health a shared competence and a pitch to finance European investments through new own resources based on common EU borrowing. Ursula von der Leyen will respond to these ideas in her next State of the Union address in detail and outline how the Commission will follow-up with concrete measures.

Third, the Conference has triggered a new debate about treaty change and a Convention. Many of the cit-

izens' proposals would require treaty changes. Not surprisingly, the European Parliament was happy to take up the ball. It is the first of the European institutions to also call for a Convention. In a sense, this is a logical step. Given the far-reaching nature and the federalist spirit of the proposals, the only way of implementing them altogether would be a treaty change based on a constitutional Convention. French President Emmanuel Macron is also in favor, but at the same time, right before the closing event of the Conference, 13 member states have already voiced their opposition – as history shows, it is a long, bumpy and risky road to treaty changes. But: the question on how to reform EU-institutions to make them fit for purpose is back on the table.

There is magic in the Conference's ending

"There is magic in every beginning", as the German poet Herman Hesse once wrote. In fact, the Conference has been an accelerator on the debate of new forms of citizen participation in the EU. Citizens experienced direct involvement in eminent debates, Europeans from different parts of the continent came together. However, for most of the time the Conference operated in the shadows. Unnoticed and conceived as yet another EU bureaucratic exercise. Now that it has ended, it seems like there could be magic in its ending. It has rejuvenated the debate on the EU's democratic future and its need to adapt its institutional set-up. The policy focus of the EU institutions need to be complemented with a revived focus on the European project itself. In this sense, the Conference delivered.

Note: Parts of the text are based on the [paper](#) "Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?" which has been published as part of the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe Observatory. The [Conference Observatory](#) is a joint initiative by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, the King Baudouin Foundation and Stiftung Mercator.

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann & Dr. Malte Tim Zabel, Senior Experts on participation in Europe and co-directors of the Future of Europe programme at the Bertelsmann Stiftung.



**Conference
on the Future
of Europe**

ZEI Master of European Studies



[Find out more](#)

Follow ZEI on Social Media



IMPRINT

ISSN: 2196-1409
Center for European Integration Studies
Genscherallee 3
53113 Bonn
Germany

Editor:

Henrik Suder
henrik.suder@uni-bonn.de

The Future of Europe Observer is published three times a year. Authors are responsible for the views expressed in their contributions. For references please contact the editors.

www.zei.uni-bonn.de