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|  | Organising Meeting group: Mrs. Jacki DAVIS, Moderator Mr. Johannes GREUBEL, European Policy Centre Mrs. Elisa LIRONI, ECASMrs. Serge PAGOULATOS, High Level Advisory GroupMrs. Corina STRATULAT, European Policy Centre  **1. Background** The Conference Observatory (<https://conference-observatory.eu>), a joint initiative by an international consortium comprising the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, the King Baudouin Foundation and the Stiftung Mercator, aims to observe, analyse and inspire the deliberations on the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.The Conference on the Future of Europe (<https://futureu.europa.eu>) is a citizen-led series of debates and discussions. In this first-of-a-kind pan-European democratic exercise, citizens from all across Europe are sharing their ideas on how to shape the future of Europe. At their third and last meeting at the European University Institute, in Florence, around 200 EU citizens adopted their 39 recommendations for the future of Europe in the fields of European democracy, values and rights, rule of law and security. These are the first [recommendations](https://futureu.europa.eu/rails/active_storage/blobs/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBZytPIiwiZXhwIjpudWxsLCJwdXIiOiJibG9iX2lkIn19--58a1a5c78927e77d982dfba9a25dd67cb151e8cb/Panel%202%20recommendations%20FINAL.pdf) from the European Citizens’ Panels in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. They are scheduled to be presented and discussed at the Conference Plenary early 2022, where the Conference's proposals will continue to be shaped.The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have committed to listen to Europeans and to follow up, within their sphere of competences, on the recommendations made. By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe.**The Conference Plenary will be composed of 108 representatives from the European Parliament, 54 from the Council (two per Member State) and 3 from the European Commission, as well as 108 representatives from all national Parliaments on an equal footing, and citizens. 108 citizens will participate to discuss citizens' ideas stemming from the Citizens' Panels and the Multilingual Digital Platform: 80 representatives from the European Citizens' Panels, of which at least one-third will be younger than 25, and 27 from national Citizens' Panels or Conference events (one per Member State), as well as the President of the European Youth Forum**. **18 representatives from the Committee of the Regions and 18 from the Economic and Social Committee, 6 elected representatives from regional authorities and 6 elected representatives from local authorities, 12 representatives from the social partners, and 8 from civil society will also participate**. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy shall be invited when the international role of the EU is discussed. Representatives of key stakeholders may also be invited. The composition of the Conference Plenary shall respect gender balance.Their exchanges will be structured thematically around recommendations from the Citizens' Panels and input gathered from the Multilingual Digital Platform. In due course, the Plenary will submit its proposals to the Executive Board, who will draw up a report in full collaboration and full transparency with the Plenary and which will be published on the Multilingual Digital Platform.**2. Discussion on the Outcome of the recent European Citizens Panel, Florence**The meeting group went through the organization and results of the recent Conference in Florence. Mr. G. PAGOULATOS referred to the difficulties and obstacles encountered with this historic initiative and noted that mobilization takes time. The platform is getting more visits and comments throughout the initiative. Despite a common feeling that politicians are a “self-serving class” which tend to manipulate the process, it needs to be underlined that politicians rely on citizens.Mrs. E. LIRONI expressed a rather pessimistic view and concern regarding the Florence meeting organization as well as the legitimacy of the process. In the plenary session there were merely short presentations but no debate. She regretted the poor preparation and conduct of the meetings.Mr. J. GREUBEL stated that the depth and nature of the recommendations were quite different, some of them relating to EU Directives or regulations, others more unspecific. Generally, citizens overall had requested more competences.Mrs. C. STRATULAT confirmed that the conduct of the meeting in Florence showed some flaws:There was little time available, processes were not adequately informed to citizens, there were session-specific problems, etc. However, the model would have potential.The Plenary with short 3-5 minutes presentations did not work as speeches were not appropriate. Better preparation, a specific agenda, moderation with guiding questions, more dialog in reaction to the speeches and adequate preparation in the working groups were requested.Upon the question about lessons learned, Mrs. E. LIRONI stated that the process must be solid, clear and transparent at the beginning, which however had not been the case. The meeting president would need to provide structure and leadership. **Transparency**: how are the experts chosen, how are the citizens chosen ?**Communication**: work on this already at Member State level, otherwise the event is perceived as another “Brussels-based exercise”.**Methodology**: put in action lessons-learned from previous events/panels.On the initiative itself this cannot be changed, however, the next Panels could be better organized. Maybe citizens should be given the possibility to reflect about the proposals once they have been formulated in the Plenary. Democracy is all about discussion. More visibility.On the question of the overall timetable, the group expected some delay, also with regard to the upcoming French EU presidency, which might want to intervene in the process.Mr. G. PAGOULATOS stated for the functioning of the working groups, to work on the following: how to formulate proposals of citizens; go back to citizens after Plenary to review the recommendation; allow for more time (process could be prolonged with the new French presidency), a more visible process; give importance on what happens in the MS; some elements should become permanent and allow for more participation of citizens in formulations. The question was raised by a meeting participant whether the format could have some legal weight or become more legally binding. Mrs. E. LIRONI stated that the purpose was for the Institutions to listen and to emphasize that the civil society stands together. However, the group feared that the Citizens Panel would be pushed away, with no solid processes and according to their experience.A question was raised by a meeting participant about which topics came out most for citizens. It was noted that information on that is expected in the Panel report. Topics like education on EU matters, media freedom and media coverage would be addressed in many discussions.Mr. G PAGOULATOS expected that the recommendations would have a very limited outlook with low ambition regarding follow-up for actual policy decisions. Also, the Council has a veto. A standard reaction would be that the recommendations are taken care of in a specific Directive or Regulation or in the EU decision making process.Citizens Panels should be expanded.Citizens mentioned they want to get together again.The question was raised whether citizens could continue to be in contact. Mrs. C STRATULAT stated that this was not foreseen, also mentioning the obstacle of translations. It was noted that there is a new political process now to follow.On the question whether civil society could or should boycott the process so that “classic politicians” should not be part of the process, Mrs. E. LIRONI felt this should not be done. With challenges and weaknesses known, meaningful feedback to improve the process in the future should rather be given. More participation in a representative democracy would be needed in the future. Mr. G. PAGOULATOS confirmed this, stating that the process moved to democracy and should be continued. More citizens participation was needed but also involvement of politicians for filtering processes, consensus and dialog.On the question of communication, it was noted that more communication channels had been requested. Citizens sometimes have too less information about topics they were asked to comment on.Mr. J. GREUBEL noted that more interaction was needed. Also, Working groups could not be for open discussions where everybody just makes comments. It was again emphasized that active meeting presidencies were needed to moderate sessions: synthesizing comments and calling for debates.The path should be to continue for more participatory democracy in representative democracy to make it a constant solid process. Mr. G. PAGOULATOS stated that the goal should be to mobilize more citizens to ensure that everybody is better represented and to make Europe stronger in the world and promote its values.It was noted that the Observatory will continue its work and the High Level Advisory Group is working on a publication for next year. |  |