



► Colin Scicluna is Head of Cabinet for Vice-President Šuica and co-head of the Common Secretariat of the Conference

The Future of Europe: Plenary brings citizens and political leaders together

Conference to conclude before end of French Presidency

by Krzysztof Nowaczek, Member of the CoFE Common Secretariat

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The Conference on the Future of Europe's schedule has been extremely busy as it has moved through the various stages of its work since the signing of the Joint Declaration on 10 March 2021. The next two-day Plenary meeting kicks off tomorrow, so I asked Colin Scicluna, Head of Cabinet for Vice-President Suica, as well as co-head of the Common Secretariat of the Conference on the Future of Europe, to give the latest updates.

Where are we nine months after the start of the Conference?

We are entering the final stretch. The point of departure is the hub of all the ideas: the multilingual digital platform. So far, there have already been nearly 13,000 ideas shared and nearly 42,000 participants registered. We expect even more input on the digital platform as the Conference enters a more substantial phase. It is still not too late to contribute, and I would invite all Commission colleagues to encourage their contacts and stakeholders to do so.

Two out of four European Citizens' Panels have concluded their work with the adoption of recommendations - which will be presented to, and discussed by, the Conference Plenary. The final sessions of these two panels took place in hybrid format. One in Florence on 10-12 December 2021 on European democracy, values and rights, rule of law and security, and the other in Natolin/Warsaw on 7-9 January 2022 on climate change and the environment, and health. I attended both panels and was struck by the dedication, commitment, hard work and personal investment of the nearly 400 citizens. Representing the diversity of EU societies, they truly stand for what citizen engagement is about.

In parallel, several national citizens' panels either concluded their work or will do so soon.

What will be discussed at the next Conference Plenary?

The focus this time will be the debate on the substance in an interactive and lively mode. The main purpose of the Plenary of 21-22 January is to listen to and discuss the recommendations of the two European Citizens' Panels which have already finished their work. During the thematic discussions, the content of the Conference's multilingual digital platform, which already served as the basis for the work in the panels, and the results of national citizens' panels, will also be taken into consideration.



► State of participation as of 18 January (source: futureu.europa.eu)

The two European Citizens Panels have formulated a total of 90 recommendations. They are very concrete and focused. They range from ideas on how to safeguard animal rights to ways to overhaul the EU elections.

What are the most-favoured topics by contributors?

The trends evolve over time. In early January, we saw that European democracy, climate change and the environment, a stronger economy, social justice, and jobs had remained the topics with the most engagement. Interest in values and rights, the rule of law and security, the EU in the world, education, culture, youth and sport has also been increasing. It is also important to mention that the platform welcomes ideas on any topic where contributors would see that the EU has a role to play.

What have been some of the challenges you faced?

We are doing something that has never been attempted before. It requires a joint effort from all three institutions, all of which have their own vision and working methods. Then there are the logistical and operational aspects of the Conference. Think of organising an event for 200 citizens speaking all EU languages split into 15 parallel groups and going through daily COVID tests. We have plenaries with over 450 participants, in person and online.



► Participants at the European Citizens' Panel on climate change, environment and health in Warsaw on 7 January

Then there is the handling of stakeholder and media interest. We need to coordinate the Commission's response, together of course with colleagues in the Secretariat-General and all the other DGs. We work particularly closely with DG COMM on many aspects of the exercise.

And of course, on top of that, I still also have my duties as VP Šuica's Head of Cabinet. So it is rather hectic, but it works out through good preparation and great teamwork. And I am fortunate to lead a small but excellent team of outstanding Commission officials to make all of this happen.

Any pleasant experiences along the way?

It has been a truly enriching experience for me, in so many ways. I already mentioned a robust engagement by citizens. This is truly impressive. They are indeed our ambassadors of what the EU is about. They are ready to devote their time, mainly over the weekend, and share their concrete ideas for Europe in 2050.



Who leads the Conference on the Future of Europe?

The Conference is placed under the authority of the three main EU institutions, represented by the President

of the European Parliament, the President of the Council and the President of the Commission, acting as its Joint Presidency.

The Joint Presidency is supported by an Executive Board, which is co-chaired by the three EU institutions, namely: Vice-President Šuica, Guy Verhofstadt MEP, and Clément Beaune, State Secretary for EU Affairs for the French Council Presidency.

A Common Secretariat, of limited size and made up of officials representing the three institutions equally, assists the work of the Executive Board.

As the political ownership of the Conference is shared between three institutions (see box), I work daily with my European Parliament and Council counterparts. We sometimes differ in our views but always manage to find a constructive compromise. Our support team in the Common Secretariat, composed of colleagues from the three institutions, is doing excellent work. It is not often that we bring these institutions so close together, and it is indeed a model for inter-institutional cooperation.

Finally, inside the Commission, the work on the Conference is really breaking down silos. We cooperate with all DGs as all topics are being discussed during the Conference.

What are the next and final stages of the Conference?

The European Citizens' Panels are scheduled to conclude their work in February. And the final Plenary meeting will probably take place in early April. Afterwards, the Executive Board will draw up and publish the conclusions of the Conference Plenary and present the final outcome of the Conference in a report to the Joint Presidency and their three institutions. So more follow-up work will be needed once the official part of the Conference draws to a close, to react to the report and keep strengthening the EU democratic process. This process should be completed before the end of the French Presidency of the Council.

Conference on the future of Europe multilingual digital platform (<https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>)

([https://futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/6/EN -](https://futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/6/EN_-_JOINT_DECLARATION_ON_THE_CONFERENCE_ON_THE_FUTURE_OF_EUROPE.pdf)

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Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe Conference (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en)

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Topics: COMM, EMPL, Dubravka Šuica, A new push for European democracy, Conference on the Future of Europe, European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union,



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Krzysztof is a member of the Commission's team coordinating the Conference on the Future of Europe. Previously, he worked as a deputy head of the Coordination unit in DG EMPL, a team leader in the European Semester team, and in the Committee of the Regions.

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