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Subject:	Report on the third Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Delegations will find attached a report on the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe held on 21 - 22 January 2022 in Strasbourg.

Report on the third plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The third session of the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) took place in a hybrid format in Strasbourg on 21-22 January. It was preceded by a series of meetings, including preparatory meetings and working groups' meetings (which were, for the first time, webstreamed). The plenary discussed the recommendations of EU citizens panels 2 (European democracy/values and rights, rule of law, security) and 3 (Climate change, environment/ health), as well as corresponding recommendations of national citizens' panels. The structure of the debates and most of their content was welcomed by citizens. However, they felt that debates did not always focus enough on their recommendations, and that some members of the Plenary only focused on recommendations that coincided with their priorities.. Citizens indicated that they expect a follow-up to be given to all recommendations. The key stakeholders, including the Western Balkan partners were also invited to attend the last part of the session.

1. Opening by the Co-Chairs and agenda as proposed by the Executive Board

The agenda proposed by the Executive Board was approved. The Co-Chairs opened the Plenary by paying tribute to the late EP President David Sassoli, underlining in particular his commitment to the Conference.

2. Presentation of the Recommendations by European Citizens' Panel 2 and related National Panels, organised in two distinct presentations and debates:

Each topical part followed the same structure:

- Presentation of the recommendations from the European Citizens' Panels (ECP)
- Presentation of the recommendations from the National Citizens' Panels (NCP)
- Intervention from the Chair and spokesperson, a participant of the ECPs, of the relevant Working Group
- Debate, including blue cards and dedicated feedback moments from the citizens of the ECPs to comment on the debate.

– “Values and rights, rule of law, security”

Co-Chair Beaune chaired this item.

Four representatives of the European Citizens' Panels presented the recommendations by European Citizens' Panel 2 on those issues. The citizens recalled that the Panel had adopted 39 recommendations, and in particular highlighted their ambitions on:

- Media independence
- Rule of law
- Animal rights
- Data protection
- Combatting fake news
- Fighting against any type of discrimination
- Strengthening cyber security

DE, FR, NL citizens' representatives presented the related recommendations of their respective National Citizens' Panels, covering the following issues: EU values and identity (DE), strengthening values, the fight against discrimination, and proposals for a Commissioner for EU defence and security, the creation of a permanent EU army, and the implementation of common sanctions against countries not respecting fundamental rights (FR), rule of law, the right to education and employment for all, and the consideration of enlargement only if there was an added value for the EU (NL).

Vice-President Jourova, Chair of the Working Group on values and rights, rule of law/security acknowledged the work of the citizens, praised the constructive discussions held in her WG, and called

on the consideration of all recommendations. She also underlined the need for a coordinated approach between all WGs, to allow for a transparent and fluid process. The spokesperson of the WG mentioned the need to create bridges between institutions and citizens, and called on the members of the Plenary to assess and implement citizens' recommendations.

The ensuing interventions allowed a dynamic exchange of views covering mainly rule of law and the conditionality mechanism, the importance of common EU values, independence of the media and media pluralism (as well as fighting disinformation), fight against discrimination, ensuring work-life balance.

Co-Chair Beaune concluded by saying he understood that the format of the plenary debate could lead to some frustration for citizens. He said that recommendations were being discussed in Working Groups and would be summarised and compiled in a report to be adopted by the plenary, with some form of validation by the citizens.

– **“European democracy”**

Co-Chairs Verhofstadt and Šuica co-chaired this item.

The representatives of the European Citizens' Panel 2 presented their recommendations on issues related to European democracy. They highlighted i.a. their recommendations on:

- More effective EU decision-making (reassessment of unanimity voting)
- Harmonisation of electoral law, transnational lists
- A multilingual platform where citizens can vote and participate in polls
- Reopening discussions about an EU constitution
- Changing the names of EU institutions
- Education, information and communication about the EU
- Organising citizens' assemblies on a regular basis

Citizens' representatives of BE, FR and NL presented the related recommendations of their respective National Citizens' Panels, covering communication and participatory democracy (BE), communication, transparency and efficiency of EU decision-making, with mixed views on transnational lists (NL), and information and institutional/electoral matters such as EP right of initiative, uninominal elections and direct elections for the Commission President (FR).

The Chair of the Working Group (Manfred Weber MEP) outlined some issues raised in the WG, such as education on democracy, and the important role of representative democracy, to be complemented by modern citizen participation. He stressed that all contributions – from European and national citizens' panels, the digital platform and the different components of the Conference – needed to be taken into account in the discussions. The Spokesperson of the WG on European Democracy stressed that, for the first time, citizens had participated in panels and formulated their recommendations for improving European democracy. He urged politicians to listen to citizens and to work with them to come up with proposals.

In the ensuing debate, various topics were discussed, some of them gathering divergent views. Some interventions focused on the harmonisation of electoral law, creation of transnational lists and the EP's right of initiative. Other topics covered included transparency, media literacy, communication and education, enhancing participatory democracy and a continuation of the current participatory exercise, as well as working towards a new Constitution for Europe and organising European referendums. Commission Vice-President Jourova gave a brief overview of the initiatives the Commission had already taken or was planning, noting the intention to integrate citizens' recommendations already in some of them.

Co-Chair Šuica concluded the debate by stressing that the CoFE exercise had made the EU institutions more open and transparent.

3. Presentation of the Recommendations by European Citizens' Panel 3 and related National Panels, organised in two distinct presentations and debates:

– “Climate change and the environment”

Co-Chairs Šuica chaired this item.

Four representatives of the European Citizens' Panels presented the recommendations by European Citizens' Panel 3 on those issues. The citizens summarised the work undertaken by their Panel, which resulted in the adoption of 51 recommendations, relating in particular to the following:

- Sustainable agriculture, respecting the environment and animal welfare
- Protecting soils, seas and rivers from pesticides
- Improving and expanding public transportation to rural areas
- Raising awareness to change behaviours
- The circular economy
- Unified labelling system for all products
- Creating an EU platform with fact-checked information on climate change
- Massive reforestation
- Better access to healthy food

Citizens' representatives of DE, FR, NL presented the related recommendations of their respective national citizens' panels, covering guarantee extended lifespan for products, long-term EU campaign for sustainable consumption and lifestyle, linking trade agreements with climate policy (DE), reducing energy consumption, investment in research into renewable energy (including hydrogen), ensuring train tickets are cheaper than airline, an “EU environment police”, carbon tax (FR), combatting climate change – better international cooperation, clear and positive communication, political leaders to set an example (NL).

The Chair of the WG, Ms Paskova (Council) highlighted the need to create inner consensus to implement necessary measures in a just way and respecting regional differences. She mentioned that several general agreements were found in the WG, and that sensitive topics like energy and agriculture had also been discussed. She also asked for clear guidance for the future work of the WG. The spokesperson of the WG mentioned that many members in the WG agreed with citizens' recommendations and acknowledged that, while their recommendations do not paint the full picture, they should be considered as the starting point for the work with members of the Plenary.

In the ensuing debate, the central issues were the urgency of action, but also the importance of social justice/fairness (linked by some with the “polluter pays” principle). Other issues covered were the impact of climate change on migration flows, the importance of renewable energy, the impact of climate change on jobs (job losses versus job creation), energy (in)dependence, level of implementation (EU, national, local), the role of farmers, forestry, the “blue economy” (maritime).

– “Health”

Co-Chair Verhofstadt chaired this item.

Four representatives of European Citizens' Panels 3 presented the recommendations on health. They stressed in particular:

- The need to reinforce healthcare systems and EU competences;
- The importance to achieve equal access to healthcare, while respecting differences among MS.
- The need to invest more into research, to set up common health databases and to focus more on health prevention, in particular on mental health.

Citizens' representatives of FR and NL also presented the related recommendations of their respective national citizens' panels. The FR representative pleaded for a common healthcare policy to improve accessibility to healthcare, for the development of a proper nutritional scoring and labelling and for the reindustrialisation of the health sector in the EU. The NL representative called for better coordination of pandemic-counteracting measures at EU level, while considering that healthcare should remain primarily a national matter, and for access to affordable and reliable medicines for everyone.

COM VP Šefčovič, Chair of the Working Group on Health, summarised the discussions held in the Working Group, reported on concerns on what the next steps should be and proposed to further structure the work ahead. The Spokesperson of the Working Group, felt that discussions had remained too general and not sufficiently focused on the recommendations.

In the ensuing debate, interventions covered the need to ensure equal access to healthcare and pharmaceuticals, the strengthening of healthcare systems and coordination mechanisms at the EU level, for a common definition of public health care systems at EU level, and for specific attention to be given to mental health.

COM VP Šefčovič advised that discussions on the Citizens' recommendations should take place on the basis of an informed analysis, screening them according to areas where work was already being done but actions are not visible and areas where work would need to be done.

Co-Chair Verhofstadt concluded that the European citizen recommendations would be the basis of the upcoming work. There will be an obligation for the plenary to reply to each recommendations on the basis of the preparation in the Working Group.

4. Exchange of views with stakeholders

The last debate of the Plenary was an exchange with key stakeholders. The European Ombudsman., the Conference of European Churches and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU, the European Humanist Federation and Đorđe Radulović from the Western Balkans partners intervened.

5. Closing of the Conference Plenary meeting by the Co-Chairs

Co-Chair Šuica closed the Conference Plenary on behalf of the Co-Chairs.