



Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Hanns Seidel Foundation,
Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Re-new EU



Recovery, Reopening and Revival

PAPERS

from the Ninth International Scientific Conference
of the European Studies Department,
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence,
Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University
"St. Kliment Ohridski"

Sofia, 2022

Papers from the Ninth International Scientific Conference
of the European Studies Department,
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence,
Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“

**RE-NEW EU –
RECOVERY, REOPENING
AND REVIVAL**

Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“,
Hanns Seidel Foundation,
Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Sofia, 2022

Scientific review:

Prof. Ingrid Shikova, PhD
Assoc. Prof. Kaloyan Simeonov, PhD
Assoc. Prof. Nikolina Tsvetkova, PhD
Assist. Prof. Gergana Radoykova, PhD
Maria Yurukova, PhD
Ana Lazarova, PhD

English proofreading:

Sonya Yurukova

This is a joint publication of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and the Hanns Seidel Foundation.

This publication receives funding from the European Parliament. The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the European Parliament assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or any subsequent use of the information contained therein. Sole responsibility lies on the author of the publication.

The processing of the publication has been finalised in 2022.

*The Ninth International Scientific Conference of the
European Studies Department and this publication are
dedicated to:*

*Bogdan Mirchev - Representative of the Hanns Seidel
Foundation in Bulgaria*

Content

Introduction	9
FIRST PART: RECOVERY, REOPENING AND REVIVAL IN ORDER TO RE-NEW THE EU	
European Political Community - Revival of an Unrealised Idea for European Confederation? <i>Prof. Ingrid Shikova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	13
The Euro Area Enlargement amid Different Crises - is it Possible? <i>Assoc. Prof. Kaloyan Simeonov, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	24
The Debate about the European Union Polity in Light of the War in Ukraine <i>Linka Toneva-Metodieva, PhD, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	37
The European Union and the war in Ukraine - is a Common European Defence System Possible? <i>Assoc. Prof. Hristo Hristev, PhD, International Law and International Relations Department, Faculty of Law, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	48
The Recovery and Resilience Facility - United in Diversity or more Multi-Speed Integration <i>Chief Assist. Prof. Monika Moraliyska, PhD, „International Economic Relations & Business“ Department, University of National and World Economy</i>	58
Nudging: Peculiarities of the Green Deal Planning and Implementation <i>Assoc. Prof. Krassen Stanchev, PhD Public Administration Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	69
Transforming EU Energy Policy - New Challenges and Opportunities in 2022 <i>Roxana Triffonova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	80

European Policy Making after Covid-19: „Governance with Government“ <i>Prof. Tatiana Tomova, DSc, Public Administration Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	91
Rural Cohesion: A Catalyst to the revival of the EU in a post-Pandemic Europe <i>Prof. Kshitij Naikade, PhD, DAAD Scholar, Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Law School, Pune Symbiosis International University</i>	98
SECOND PART:	
EU ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY	
Reconsidering the EU Enlargement Process. Assurance of due Process, Credibility of Prospects, Efficiency of Outcome <i>Jaroslav Pietras, PhD, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies</i>	111
EU Enlargement Policy in 2022 - Challenges or Perspectives? <i>Assist. Prof. Monika Panayotova, PhD, University of National and World Economy</i>	121
Economic Convergence of Western Balkan Countries to the European Union <i>Assist. Prof. Nikolay Velichkov, PhD and Assist. Prof. Dimitar Damyanov, PhD Department of Economics, University of National and World Economy - Sofia</i>	132
Is the Heterogeneity of the EU Measurable? <i>Dimitar Pehlivanov, New Bulgarian University</i>	141
The Specificities of the Commission’s Approach towards the Western Balkans: Lessons learnt from the Eastern Enlargement <i>Lubomira Popova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	152
EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans: Fabricating Reforms in Public Administration <i>Rexhep Vasolli, MA, Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers of Kosovo & Vanina Jakupi Kalemi, PhD Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania</i>	163

**THIRD PART:
EUROPEAN IDENTITY, EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

The Conference on the Future of Europe: Facing Challenges from Citizen's Perspectives <i>Assoc. Prof. Angela Maria Romito, Department of Political Science, University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy, LLM Pitt, School of Law (2000)</i>	179
Dynamics in Identity Issues: The Role of Interpretations of History <i>Assoc. Prof. Albena Taneva, PhD, Public Administration Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	189
Populism, Ontological Security and the Sense of Belonging at Times of War and Energy Crisis <i>Assoc. Prof. Plamen Ralchev, PhD International Relations Department, University of National and World Economy</i>	197
„Euro-“ or Russia: Paradoxes of Bulgarian Euroscepticism <i>Ildiko Otova, PhD New Bulgarian University</i>	207
Today's EU: „Sexy“ or „Dull“? <i>Assist. Prof. Miruna Andreea Balosin, PhD Faculty of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Romania</i>	215
Countering Disinformation in Bulgaria: What is Achieved under the EU framework and Why not More? <i>Mariya Yurukova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	222
EU Policy on Access to Cultural Heritage and the Protection of the Public Domain <i>Ana Lazarova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	236
Facilitators of Internationalisation at the Doctoral Degree Level <i>Assist. Prof. Desislava Karaasenova, PhD, European Studies Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“</i>	249

Introduction

The Ninth International scientific conference „Re-new EU – Recovery, Re-opening and Revival“, organised by the European Studies Department of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ with the kind support of Hanns Seidel Foundation and Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies took place in Sofia on 13-14 October 2022.

It is clear that Europe will have to continue to operate in the foreseeable future in a complicated environment. But the idea behind the title of the conference stays relevant. We have understood that we need Europe more than ever, that European unity as well as peace need daily care because they should not be taken for granted. I can't but quote Antynio Guterres – the Secretary General of United Nations: „Let's have no illusions. We are in rough seas. A winter of global discontent is on the horizon. A cost-of-living crisis is raging. Trust is crumbling. Our planet is burning.“

The questions and challenges facing the European Union are numerous, the answers and solutions are fewer. Never, since the Second World War, has Europe been that essential. Yet never has Europe been in so much danger. How to achieve a more united, more sovereign, more democratic Europe? Shall European union move forward only in responding to crises? How to act in order to defend EU's interests and values in these unusual times? The climate crisis is a global problem. Security risks create instability. How to make EU stronger, more autonomous and more influential?

We as researchers have a duty to seek answers and solutions because the EU should develop common solutions to common problems. We had to recall the famous phrase of Jean Monnet: „Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises“. But is this statement from Jean Monnet's 1976 memoirs still valid in modern conditions? Some academic research underlines the strengthening of the EU through crises, while other publications point out that the crises have a negative impact on EU unity.

This conference took place during the European Year of Youth. It is barely a coincidence that most of the authors in this volume are young researchers. The presentation of their research during the conference sparked interesting and lively discussions. Combined with the knowledge of more experienced academics, they turned the conference into a remarkable event within the activities of the Department of European Studies. The participants from Poland, Italy, Romania, India, Albania, Kosovo contributed to looking at Europe from different angles and hearing different points of view, which made the conference even more interesting. The questions asked by the students who attended the conference also enlivened the discussion. Despite the diverse topics and different points of view, presented during the conference, we all agreed that preserving the achievements of the EU as well as taking Europe forward and defending its model is an everyday responsibility.

I cannot but express my gratitude to everyone who helped to hold the conference – Hanns Seidel Foundation, Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies, the members of the organising committee, the House of Europe, the speakers, the students and all the participants in the discussions.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that the Ninth International scientific conference „Re-new EU - Recovery, Reopening and Revival“ contributed to the achievement of the permanent aim of the Department of European Studies as well as of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence to ensure the excellence of the conference debates as well as high-quality proceedings. At the same time, this conference fulfilled another goal – to attract the interest of young people to science and research in the field of European Studies.

To conclude, it is obvious that today we need imagination and dedication to follow the wise advice of Albert Einstein: „We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them.“

***Prof. Ingrid Shikova
President of the Scientific Committee
of the Ninth International Conference
„Re-new EU - Recovery, Reopening and Revival“***

THIRD
PART:



EUROPEAN
IDENTITY, EDUCATION
AND CULTURE

THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: FACING CHALLENGES FROM CITIZEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Assoc. Prof. Angela Maria Romito

*Department of Political Science,
University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy, LLM Pitt, School of Law (2000)*

Abstract:

The article examines the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), discussing the process that combines bottom-up participatory features and top-down elite decision-making mechanisms and questioning whether the CoFoE has set a new model of citizens' participation in Europe. Starting with an analysis of the architecture of the Conference, this article will first highlight its participatory tools; in a second step, it will briefly present the proposals presented to the leaders of European politics. Hence it will focus on some critical remarks. In the conclusion, the article draws some critical conclusions regarding the actual outcomes.

Key words: Conference of the Future of Europe, European identity, Democracy, EU reform, integration process.

1. Introduction

On 9 May 2022, the Conference on the Future of Europe (hereinafter also CoFoE), formally ended and the outcomes of the largest pan-European democratic consultation experiment were collected in a final report addressed to the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission: 49 proposals and 326 detailed recommendations on very different topics to improve EU. The CoFoE has been an invitation to all citizens to 'make their voice(s) heard' for the development of the Union and it is by far the most comprehensive case of citizens' participation¹ the EU has ever undertaken.

¹ In accordance with article 16 of the Conference Rules of Procedure the transnational debate was open to European citizens as well as political actors (European, national, regional public authorities), social partners, civil society representatives and key stakeholders, (hereafter, briefly referred to as European citizens).

The Conference on the Future of Europe, which was scheduled to start in early 2020, was postponed due to the serious health situation caused by Covid 19²; in addition to the pandemic, an interinstitutional dispute over the leadership of the Conference has delayed its launch³. As a result, the Conference, which originally was aimed to run two years (from May 2020 until the first half of 2022), has been significantly shorter.

On 10 March 2021, European Parliament President, Prime Minister of Portugal, on behalf of the Council of the EU, and European Commission President signed the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe⁴. The purpose of this out-of-box-initiative was to relaunch the project of European integration in an unprecedented way: for the first time, the EU reform proposals were not discussed at government level, but were analysed and redefined ‘from the bottom’⁵. In this view, CoFoE constituted the first European experiment in transnational participatory democracy, going beyond prior models of technocratic or deliberative constitutional change⁶.

In compliance with the principle of democratic participation enshrined in Art. 11 TEU, Art. 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference states that:

² It was originally put forward in spring 2019, originating in an idea of French President Emmanuel Macron inspired by the model of local committees channelled into the En Marche!. On 16 July 2019 the proposal was fully taken on board by the new European Commission President in her political guidelines for the 2019-2024 term before the EP. Moreover, the proposal for a Conference on the Future of Europe was also strongly backed by the EP, which quickly set up an hoc working group (WG), representing all political parties. The proposal in favour of a Conference on the Future of Europe was also endorsed by the European Council. About the historical rationale of the CoFoE see Fabbrini, F. (2019) and Von Ondarza, N. & Alander M., (2021).

³ At the end the three institutions agreed to act as co-guarantors of this initiative.

⁴ Joint Declaration of the three institutions on the Conference on the Future of Europe, „Engaging with Citizens for Democracy-Building a More Resilient Europe“, 10 March 2021 states: „to reflect on our Union, the challenges we are facing and the future we want to build together with the objective of strengthening European solidarity“. Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sed/doc/news/flash>.

⁵ The CoFoE can be seen as an innovative experiment to renew the EU, yet the initiative also evokes two precedents: the Conference of Messina and the Convention on the Future of Europe. See Fabbrini, F. (2021). Moreover, previous experiences of democratic consultations include the European Citizens’ Dialogues and the European Citizens’ Consultations. The former, set up as early as 2012 by the Barroso Commission, were re-proposed by the Juncker Commission, which had contributed to the debate on the future prospects of the Union with its 2017 White Paper. The Citizens’ Consultations were to be a bottom-up process of legitimisation of the Union’s future priorities, to be debated in the different Member States, albeit with the involvement of the institutions, and especially of the Commission.

⁶ Drawing on the experience of already existing participatory structures (such as the European Citizens’ Initiatives, the Petition Tool, citizen dialogues or the Commission’s public consultations), the CoFoE, for its institutional organization, attempted to achieve something unprecedented, namely to create a forum for participatory democracy on a transnational scale. See more details in Fabbrini, F. (2021).

„The Conference is a ‘bottom-up’, citizen-centered process that allows Europeans to express their views on what they expect from the European Union“⁷.

The need to undertake a deep reflection on the EU’s future in order to step forward a new integration process has been forced by the pressure of the most recent events, namely the 2020 pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine: to the persisting problems, such as the asylum and migration policy or the banking union, or the central structural deficits in the Eurozone, new questions added specifically related to EU competence in health policy, common defence, EU role in the future international scenario⁸.

Thus the Conference is seen as an opportunity, on the one hand, to strengthen input legitimacy through citizen participation and, on the other, to deepen integration, including an expansion of EU competences and greater powers for the EP.

2. Architecture and work of the Conference

Not only the mission, but also the governance structure of the CoFoE was outlined in the Joint Declaration adopted in March 2021. The debate has been structured on different levels designed to channel and filter from the bottom up the output of the democratic deliberations⁹.

Three tools were keys for the citizen’s participation: 1) a Multilingual Digital Platform (MDP) where all Europeans had the opportunity to share ideas for the future of the EU; 2) European Citizens’ Panels (ECPs) and 3) decentralized national citizens’ panels (NCPs).

On the basis of the input is the MDP, a collector of ideas and proposals clustered in 9 macro-themes: climate change and environment; health; a stronger economy, social justice and employment; the EU in the world; values and rights, rule of law, security; digital transformation; European democracy; education, culture, youth and sport; other ideas. It was the main hub for citizens’ contributions and information on the different parts of the Conference and an interactive tool to share and debate ideas and input from the multitude of

⁷ On 9 May 2021, the Executive Board endorsed the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, established in accordance with the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe and laid down the foundations and principles of the Conference. The Rules of Procedure provided the framework for the work of the different Conference structures and their interaction. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en#about-the-conference

⁸ „The Conference on the Future of Europe represents an important opportunity to reflect on the integration process in the aftermath of a devastating pandemic and in the midst of the „deepest economic recession in [the EU’s] history“. European Commission, *Remarks by Commissioner Gentiloni at the Press Conference on the Spring 2020 Economic Forecast*, Brussels, 6 May 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_822.

⁹ The pivotal ingredient to enabling a genuine interaction among participants and to reaching a constructive dialogue is the deliberative process.

events organized at national level by citizens and national, regional or local authorities under the umbrella of the Conference.

The ECPs are the key element of the Conference: they were meant to facilitate open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate; they were the filters for translating proposals into recommendations to be presented to the Plenary of the Conference and to the Executive Committee. The topics set out in the Platform were divided and discussed in four panels, each consisting of 200 citizens from the 27 Member States¹⁰. In addition to those Member States were encouraged to also establish national citizens' panels¹¹.

The CoFoE is a hybrid political process where randomly selected representatives of European citizens coexisted with representatives of the institutions of the Union, national parliaments, the governments of the Member States seated in the Conference Plenary.

The Plenary was composed of 449 individuals, representatives of the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the social partners (representatives of trade unions), civil society, representatives of regional and local authorities, representatives of the national parliaments, of the Council (two per Member State), of the Commission and of the European Parliament¹².

Following the discussions on the recommendations of the ECPs at national and European level and the contributions gathered by the MDP, the Plenary Session addressed its proposals, deliberated by consensus, to the Executive Committee¹³.

¹⁰ CoFoE's five criteria for inclusive panels are nationality, urban/rural, socio-economic background, gender and age. The ECPs were thematically divided along four cross-cutting clusters - focusing on (I) a stronger economy, social justice, jobs; education, youth, culture and sport; digital transformation; (II) European democracy; values and rights, rule of law, security; (III) climate change, environment; health; (IV) EU in the world; migration. In this framework, European citizens convened for three panel sessions, both in person and online, over a span of six months between September 2021 and March 2022, and - also with the support of experts invited to speak as witnesses - deliberated on the topics at hand and advanced a number of orientations for future debate.

¹¹ Only six Member States - including five of the six founding members of the EU, and the three largest EU countries (Germany, France and Italy) - effectively hosted national citizens' assemblies, while the others limited themselves to organizing more traditional engagement and dissemination events.

¹² In its composition it fulfills not only the principle of participatory democracy, but also the principle of representative democracy. To facilitate its deliberation, the Plenary structured its work in nine working groups - corresponding to the nine topics addressed by the Conference. Representatives from the European citizens' panels were selected as chairs and spokespersons of the working groups, and with the support of the Common Secretariat (a technical body with staff from the Commission, EP and Council) they prepared elaborated proposals.

¹³ This body is co-chaired by three members each of the three EU institutions, assisted by four institutional observers. It included representatives from the national parliaments of Member States holding the EU Council Presidency (the so-called Presidential Troika of COSAC - Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union); delegates from the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the social partners, were invited as permanent observers. Its task was to steer the work of the Conference and to draw and publish the conclusion of the Conference Plenary.

As mentioned above, on 9th of May 2022 the final outcome of the discussions, debates and events was presented in a report addressed to the three Presidents of the EU institutions, who, according to Article 23 of the CoFoE regulation, undertook - each within the scope of their competences and in accordance with the Treaties - to rapidly examine how to effectively follow up the 326 measures including concrete objectives¹⁴.

A feedback event to keep the momentum of the conference alive and to fully inform citizens about the progress on the follow up has been scheduled for 2 December 2022.

3. The proposals

What are the preferences of European citizens and their expectations towards the EU? An analysis of the recommendations is revealing.

Surprisingly, no significant proposals aimed at reducing or containing the competences of the EU institutions emerged on the platform: on the contrary all in all, the substantive input from the Plenary plead for a more sovereign federal EU. From the 49 proposals¹⁵, some 10% of citizens' panel recommendations clearly require Treaties' change for their implementation. This includes, for example, the request for qualified majority voting instead of unanimity in several areas, a right of initiative for the European Parliament, introducing a new EU citizenship statute, EU-wide referenda, transnational electoral lists, creating a European Health Union, the harmonisation of fiscal policy within the EU, the

¹⁴ After the closing ceremony in Strasbourg, the European Commission on 17 June 2022 adopted a Communication setting out how it can follow up on the outcome of the Conference (Communication on the Future of Europe 17 June 2022 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/IP_22_3750) and more recently on 14 September 2022, in her State of the Union address, President Ursula von der Leyen outlined flagship initiatives which the Commission plans to undertake, in the coming year, in response to citizen's recommendations (https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/index_en); in early June, the **European Parliament** adopted a Resolution proposing amendments to the Treaties under the ordinary revision procedure (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220603IPR32122/parliament-activates-process-to-change-eu-treaties>). At the **European Council** meeting on 23-24 June, leaders stated that the EU institutions should ensure that there is an effective follow-up to the final report (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10033-2022-INIT/it/pdf>) and also in the General Affairs Council of the 20 September, Ministers exchanged views on the follow-up to the CoFoE (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/meetings/gac/2022/09/20>).

¹⁵ In details within the 9 macro-areas selected, 'Climate Change and the Environment' includes 6 proposals (1-6), which divided into 57 specific measures; Health', includes 4 proposals (7-10) and 24 measures; „Stronger economy, social justice and employment' suggests 60 measures, divided into 6 general proposals (11-16); there are 8 proposals on 'EU in the World' (17-24), divided into 45 specific measures. 'Values and rights, rule of law, security' presented 6 proposals (25-30) corresponding to 24 measures; „Digital Transformation" 5 proposals (31-35) broken down into 40 measures. 'European Democracy' is the most ambitious in terms of innovative demands: there are 5 proposals (36-40) and 33 measures; finally 'Migration' includes 5 proposals, (41-45) and 16 measures and 'Education, Culture, Youth and Sport' 4 proposals, (46-49) and 24 measures.

EU taxes on large corporations, the changing the names of EU institutions, European minimum wages, strengthening the Parliament's right of inquiry. Moreover, citizens are ahead of governments in seeing the need for a stronger EU foreign and security policy.

By contrast, the vast majority of Conference proposals and initiatives can be implemented using all the possibilities offered by the current Treaties framework.

Citizens want the EU to use its regulatory powers to prepare Europe for the future by advancing the energy transformation, creating incentives for more sustainable agriculture, strengthening labour protections, improving data protection, promoting convergence in Europe, and introducing stricter and more sustainable import standards.

All the citizens' panels also expressed the wish for the Union to improve its public communication on policies and legislative projects, and to communicate general information about its work in a more comprehensible form¹⁶. The wish for greater participation in the EU's political processes was also explicitly expressed, and it was suggested that the innovations introduced for the Conference be continued as a permanent citizens' forum¹⁷. On the one hand, the citizens' recommendations clearly imply that the EU's existing major projects, such as the Green Deal, the digital agenda and the European Health Union, enjoy legitimacy¹⁸.

4. Critical remarks

Does the CoFoE represent a new push for European democracy? Has it set a new model of citizens' participation in Europe?

Certainly, the Conference was conducted with transparency, discussions were open to all and disseminated via streaming; yet, as the EU project grows in complexity, simple transparency initiatives are insufficient.

The results of democratic participation, emphatically presented by the EU media as triumphant, are not in the numbers¹⁹: reality is that throughout the

¹⁶ For example, the citizens' panels proposed in various contexts establishing an online tool operated by the EU and offering: general information about EU institutions and policies; verified political information and counter-disinformation; fact checks; online referendums; and discussion with politicians.

¹⁷ In those terms the President of the Commission announced her will to translate this experience into a permanent consultation forum, allocating resources for the 'institutionalisation' both of the citizens' panels (which should be able to submit recommendations to the Commission, before the latter formulates legislative proposals) and of the online platform (which could flank the Convention convened by the European Council for the reform of the founding treaties pursuant to Article 48 TEU).

¹⁸ Ondarza, N.v. & Elander, M. (2022)

¹⁹ Referring to the specific efforts to gain public visibility through media, see Michailidou, A. & Trenz, H. (2022).

Conference, only a very small fraction of citizens was aware of what happened, and even fewer have actively engaged with it²⁰.

Looking at the CoFoE's structure, the most innovative element, aimed at effective transnational participation and lively community debate, is the MDP. Although an innovative tool, which broken down the linguistic barriers, just some 53000 Europeans contributed within the one year of its existence. This number is too small to name the platform a success. The national events have been very heterogeneous as it was left to the Member States how to organize them. 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 obstacles²¹.

Limited visibility, low degree of digital participation, complex procedures and uncertainty about the CoFoE's ability to produce tangible political results were clear hindrances which affected a broad participation.

Beyond those technical reasons the CoFoE remained largely invisible in the broader public sphere, overshadowed by pandemic and war. Unnoticed and conceived as yet another EU bureaucratic exercise.

Nevertheless, the Conference represents a successful sociological experiment of participatory democracy which can and should be repeated in different formats in the future: the participatory toolbox of the EU is set to be expanded.

More effective avenues are still needed to develop a stronger common European identity.

For the future it would be better, to focus on more concrete and capillary instruments²², that directly and constantly involve a citizens and civil society such as for example EU citizen forums that include political parties' representatives; network of democracy facilitator hubs across Europe to help and encourage local initiatives feed into the European level of decisions, consultations and opinions to be formulated in 'Have your say' platform²³.

In other words, the efforts in the future should foster horizontal connections between democratic forums across borders, not only vertical connections through Brussels.

²⁰ In fact, out of a population of about 447.7 million inhabitants, the sum of those who participated in the debate (both through the platform and through participation in the events) is less than 780,000, a small number in absolute terms and even more modest when one considers that it would not even be enough to propose a popular legislative initiative under art. 11(4) TEU and 24 TFEU. Considering that the results of these citizen participation formats have hardly been incorporated into the EU's decision-making processes, it is hard to believe that the level of citizen involvement in CoFoE will have game-changing significance and will lead to a genuine reform.

²¹ Hierlemann, D., Zabel, M.(2022).

²² Young, R. (2022), Raspadori, F.(2022).

²³ Through which the Commission already questions, on specific issues, variously qualified categories of citizens (entrepreneurs, students, environmentalists, trade unionists, etc.)

5. Conclusion

The CoFoE was organized as a citizen-focused, bottom-up exercise designed to gain input from citizens on the key questions facing the EU. As already noted, the combination of random and institutional representation is a key feature of the Conference: the hybrid process lies in the involvement of the institutions of the EU and the Member States in informal consultative democratic processes with the participation of (a limited number of) European citizens who are aware that they belong to a community with a common destiny. Due to its institutional organization, the Conference does not cover the so-called democratic deficit of the Union since it does not change the Union's institutional framework and the rules governing its operation and its relations with the Member States.

However, the Conference should not be underestimated as a process of political democratic participation because it showed that a dialogue between Europeans is possible, even if it often remains latent and needs strong political initiatives to emerge.

Whilst it should definitely serve as an inspiration for future experiments in bringing citizens' participation deeper into the EU policymaking process, there is still room for improvement regarding the organization of the process itself²⁴.

In the end, the Conference have created a watershed moment for European democracy even when many did not expect so at its conception²⁵. It has been a useful tool for raising public awareness, however it has been a too ambitious project²⁶ that is unlikely to lead to changes in the Union's architecture within a reasonable time.

The risk is that the failure to translate the demands coming from the grassroots into concrete action will have a boomerang effect: promising an elaborate mechanism for citizens' involvement, and then not taking their proposals seriously could keep them away from sharing in the EU project and would ultimately only demonstrate how great the distance is between the EU citizens and Brussels.

Bibliography

- De Groot, M. (2021), *Let us gain control over the future of Europe!: The case for citizen-driven EU Treaty change*, edited by A. Alemanno and J. Organ, *Citizen Participation in Democratic Europe: What next for the EU*, London/New York: ECPR Press/Rowman and Littlefield, 2021, pp. 187-200.
- Den Dooven, W. (2022), *Europe Day 2022: End of the Conference on the Future of Europe - but the beginning of a Europe for all Europeans?*, 7 June 2022, <https://www.foederalist.eu/2022/>

²⁴ Galante L., Nicolaidis K. (2021).

²⁵ Den Dooven, W. (2022).

²⁶ Venizelos, E. (2022).

- Fabbrini, F. (2019), *The Conference on the Future of Europe A New Model to Reform the EU?*, DCU Brexit Institute, Working Paper n. 12, 2019, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3515188> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3515188>.
- Fabbrini, F. (2021), *The Conference on the Future of Europe: Process and prospects*, European Law Journal, vol. 26, issue 5-6, p. 401.
- Fabbrini, F. (2022), *The Conference on the Future of Europe: A call for treaty change*, 10 June 2022, <https://www.foederalist.eu/2022/>
- Galante, L. & Nicolaidis, K. (2021), *Whatever it takes? Ten principles to bring the Conference on the Future of Europe closer to its citizens*, 11 November 2021, EUI transnational democracy blog, <https://blogs.eui.eu/transnational-democracy>
- Hierlemann, D., Zabel, M. (2022), *The Conference on the Future of Europe: a catalyst for change?*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.foederalist.eu/2022>
- Michailidou, A. & Trenc, H. (2022), *The Future of Europe debate needs the intermediary power of journalism*, March 7th, 2022, <https://blogs.eui.eu/transnational-democracy>.
- Pirozzi, N. (2021), *The Conference on the Future of Europe: Tackling Differentiated Integration*, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, March 2021, 4 p.
- Ondarza, N.v. & Alander, M. (2021), *The Conference on the Future of Europe Obstacles and Opportunities to a European Reform Initiative That Goes beyond Crisis Management*, (SWP Comment, 19/2021), Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021C19>
- Ondarza, N.v. & Alander M. (2022), *After the Conference on the Future of Europe: Time to Make Reforms Happen Four lessons for a European Union again requiring a new balance between deepening and widening*, (SWP Comment, 49/2022), Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C49>
- Raspadori, F. (2022), *La Conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa e le colonne d'Ercole della lontananza dei cittadini*, BlogDUE, 24 giugno 2022, www.aisdue.eu
- Russack, D. (2022), *The good, the bad and the ugly of the Conference on the Future of Europe*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.foederalist.eu/2022/>
- Tesauro, G. (2022), *Una nuova revisione dei Trattati dell'Unione per conservare i valori del passato*, I Post di AISDUE, III (2021), aisdue.eu Focus „Conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa“, n. 1, 18 giugno 2021.
- Venizelos, E. (2022), *The Conference on the Future of Europe as an Institutional Illusion*, VerfBlog, 2021/12/16, <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-as-an-institutional-illusion>
- Young, R. (2022), *EU Democracy After the Conference on the Future of Europe*, 12 May 2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/05/12/eu-democracy-after-conference-on-future-of-europe-pub-87110>