

EUI-STG Forum on Democratic Participation and the Future of Europe. Memo on the Florence Citizens' Panel

Our Forum is entering a new stage. With the confirmation that the Florence (EUI) Citizens' Panel is going ahead, we now have the opportunity to assist in organising and insisting on real democratic participation. We will continue to be an observatory for the whole CoFoE process, drawing lessons for the future. In addition, we must now work to translate our ideas into action as much as possible, to do what we can to create meaningful participation in CoFoE, and help ensure the experience provides a learning experience to reinforce democracy in Europe in the future.

Citizens' Assemblies are often presented as an “extra”: but we need to see the connections with all other aspects of the process. The panels will be key as it is they that kick off the discussion at an institutional level. They will define the outcome, and the way the CoFoE will be perceived.

This memo gathers together feedback and proposals already put forward by members of the Forum to help us begin to answer the questions: how will we do the panel? How can we make it interesting, useful, and connected to civil society at local, national and transnational level? How can it best contribute to advancing participatory democracy in the EU beyond the conference?

The format

A reminder of the practicalities. There will be four panels in total: in **Strasbourg, Brussels, Warsaw and Florence**. Their remit is to “deliberate on topics” and “make recommendations to the Conference Plenary.” Each is composed of 200 citizens; at least one female and one male citizen per member state, chosen randomly, representative in terms of citizens' geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education; based on degressive proportionality used to compose the EP; at least one third will be young people (16-25 years old). Each panel will meet three times (12 in total) between September 2021 and January 2022; each during three consecutive days.

The guiding themes are based around those that are being discussed on the digital platform. They have been clumped together as follows:

1. European democracy/values/rights/rule of law/security
2. Climate change/environment/health
3. Stronger economy, social justice, jobs/education, youth, culture, sport / digital transformation
4. EU in the world/migration

The Panels will lead to a specific report, based on the original citizens' ideas. This will contain the final recommendations, but also a detailed account of the content of the discussions. This will include the argumentations and debates as well as the different deliberative steps that led to these. A final event in order to give feedback to the Panels on the follow-up will be organised in 2022. Further and more detailed information about the design and methodology of this process, and the links between the Panels and the larger CoFoE, [is available here](#).

We would like to raise three categories of questions:

1. Practical questions about the Florence assembly

- **Agenda-setting:** It remains unclear to what extent the Forum can be involved in agenda-setting or not. We are, however, concerned by the top down nature of the process so far. We will recommend adherence to a more bottom-up approach (e.g. following [recommendations from Citizens Take Over Europe](#).)
- **Themes:** We would like to host the panel on ‘Theme 1: democracy etc’ if we can. It has also been noted, though, that there is an overload of topics. We share a real concern that there is an over-synthesis of themes that will be hard to manage over a few days. We also suggest that the four assemblies coordinate around this issue.
- **Input:** A key question remains as to what extent civil society and experts can give input to the citizens that are deliberating, and how. The answer will greatly impact on our relationship to the organizational process itself. Specifically, the 200 citizens who will arrive in Florence to participate in the panel will need help. EUI academics could work as facilitators to help these citizens to do digital research (collating discussions from the national, local and regional panels); they can then bring these experiences more-directly into the transnational negotiations.
- **Lessons learned:** There is a need to consider past experiments while moving forwards. Our Forum has explored many of these, and some of its members have had a direct experience in organizing such assemblies. In our debates, we have cited *inter alia* France, where 60-70% of the population became aware of the climate citizens’ assembly, as a success; Ireland, where many proposals have fallen by the wayside and not reached the referendum stage, which teaches important lessons about the binding nature of the process. Iceland is another important precedent. We will be ‘crowd-sourcing’ lessons learned in the next few months. But the question remains: how do we best scale up i) to the transnational level ii) to feed a process like the CoFoE?
- **Status of recommendations:** How will the panels’ recommendation be followed through? Forum members are concerned that the interaction between participation and representation has not been properly thought out. The citizens’ panels and the European parliament have different forms of legitimacy. This can cause difficulties if left undistinguished: (e.g. if the citizens’ panels proposed recommendations that the parliament would not support, there would be the potential of a clash of legitimacies, with both the panels and the parliament claiming to ‘represent’ the citizens). How will these clashes be resolved? We will, from the offset, ask for further clarity on how exactly the ratification process will function.
- **Interaction between panels:** We don’t want to be in competition with our colleagues in the other host cities. On the contrary, we must be as closely aligned with the other three panels as we can. This is of paramount importance not only from a principle of cooperation but because common organizational design across all panels will strengthen the efficacy of the process as a whole and its potential to influence the larger outcome of CoFoE.

2. Broader engagement with civil society

- As the Forum has noted on several occasions, citizens' assemblies are potentially elitist as they only allow a few to participate, the rest only serve as witnesses. At the same time: this is a chance for much-needed deliberative oxygen in the time of Covid-19. We need to find structural ways of enabling external citizen input to impact on the process (Iceland, for example, live-streamed their Constitutional Council in 2011, and crowd-sourced questions via social media).
- To make the most of the opportunity, we must work to co-ordinate engagement among local civil society in Florence. Members of the EUI Youth Forum are already reaching out and organizing a communications strategy targeted at young people in the city. There are other possibilities here (e.g. the municipality supports a wide range of cultural networks); Florence hosts the Italian Erasmus agency, who we might want to team up with, alongside Florence University and other campuses.
- We also need to coordinate at an inter-city, regional, national and European level. This is very much the EUI's vocation and forte, as the Festival of Europe created 10 years ago has demonstrated, and more recently the SOU4YOU (the engagement component of the EUI's annual State of the Union) as well as the events organized by Engaged Academics.
- The panel is a chance to develop creative PR and media interventions around the CoFoE: i.e. visuals, and web presence. Initially, these communications could be coordinated around the same topics as the panel, to keep things focused. Creativity and humor will be vital components to ensuring they are successful.
- We must set up a website well in advance of the panel, to frame a "narrative" about it, including information on key discussion themes and deliberative process. We could produce short "neutral", but attractive materials – including physical booklets – with key info (pros and cons) on core topics.
- Our Forum has repeatedly insisted on the need for inclusion of non-European citizens in CoFoE. We must ask, and answer, the question: how can the panel facilitate that goal?
- An important open question remains regarding the role of the national panels more generally: How can we build links with them? In Italy and more broadly? This is crucial to building general, bottom-up empowerment.
- Connecting with the other host cities is not only a question of organization. We must invite key people from the other panels into our forum. Ours is a space for mixing and sharing; for exchanging ideas across borders. We should work to include individuals and institutions performing similar monitoring processes, e.g. *college d'europe*. If there are no links this process will not be able to influence the institutions.
- Another key factor will be our capacity to connect with the 'de-institutionalized' citizens' assemblies. There are many such initiatives. CTOE is planning a transnational citizens' assembly in Palermo at the end of October, and another in Porto in March or April next year which overlap with the overall aims of our Forum. Elsewhere, civil society movements are mobilizing to engage directly with other, national, citizens' assembly processes. WeMove, for example, are working to intervene in the Spanish government's Citizens

Assembly for Climate, to “ensure it becomes a model for similar processes elsewhere.” We must build bridges with these and other initiatives in order to build a participatory network across Europe.

3. Role of the Panel and bigger picture

- We will discuss how our Forum can best act as an advisory group on citizen participation in the CoFoE and draw lessons from our ‘embedded panel process’ in Florence, in connection with other parallel processes.
- The whole point of this Forum is to learn and analyze; we are not event organizers; it needs to be the basis for what we think about CoFoE and the future of the EU. We are an observatory – and this is an experiment – to legitimately say something for the long term, and to do so in conversation with other groups across the continent.
- We need to distinguish more, as this process goes on, between questions and positions, and to focus more on the latter.
- We cannot lose track of what happens afterwards; this will inform what we say in Europe. The process of ‘assessment’ is often missing in other citizens’ assemblies. We should therefore develop evaluative “standards” *ex ante* and maintain “logbooks” as the process develops. The Forum members will thereby take on the role of “participant-evaluators.”
- The digital platform has not been widely used so far. We, as independent observers, should consider the interface between this online resource and the panels/plenary – possibly in the form of communications and blogs.
- We must highlight the link between citizens’ deliberative processes (assemblies, panels) and voting as a means to make such deliberation more meaningful. There is scope to connect assemblies/panels and people that remains underexplored at this stage.
- There is a possibility of using the panel to draw attention to a demand that has recurred in Forum discussions: that citizens have a vote at the end of the process.
- The Festival of Europe, Florence, Spring 2022. There could be opportunity for synergies with the fall process of the citizens’ panel (a culmination of our efforts around CoFoE upstream.) The Festival of Europe is an opportunity to learn about and demonstrate the links between politics and the cultural world.
- We want deliberative democracy to be a permanent part of European affairs. We will deliver a proposal and learning document, on how to permanently institutionalize citizens’ panels. There are already six or seven posts on the digital platform calling for this.
- Citizen assemblies are not the panacea. There are other forms of participation that can be at least as conducive to citizens’ involvement in democratic processes (e.g. citizen participatory budgeting, revamped ECIs). How can citizens provide input into EU decision-making once the panels are concluded? The Conference is a stress test for Europe for this long-run perspective.

Annex: Reports on the Forum's Five Themes *(Updated 7 June 2021)*

When we set up this Forum, we defined four themes (later augmented to five) to orient our discussions and serve as a focus for our breakout groups. With the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) now – in most respects – launched, the digital platform live, and citizens' panels now in the process of being set-up, our Forum's activities must evolve in tandem, and we will be discussing and developing new ways of participating in the process.

This document is a cumulative attempt to keep track of – and synthesise – previous conversations from the breakout sessions, to gather proposals made by participants and guide the ongoing evolution of each theme and the Forum as a whole. The aim is to assist reflection on the emerging links between sessions and between the themes.

THEME 1: 'ORGANISED' AND 'UNORGANISED' CIVIL SOCIETY: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE, AND (IN WHAT WAYS) DOES IT MATTER? **6**

THEME 2: HOW CAN PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION INTERACT? **10**

THEME 3: SHOULD VOTING STAY AT THE CORE OF TRANSNATIONAL EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY AND IF SO, HOW? **15**

THEME 4: RE-SCALING PARTICIPATION: FROM THE LOCAL TO THE TRANSNATIONAL **20**

THEME 5: THE LANGUAGE OF PARTICIPATION **25**

Theme 1: ‘Organised’ and ‘unorganised’ civil society: what is the difference, and (in what ways) does it matter?

Chair: Niccolò Milanese

Participants: Nicholas Aiossa, Marta Pardavi, Richards Youngs, Chris Beck, Andrea Gaiba, Fee Kirsch, Costanza Hermanin, Hedvig Morvai, Lukas Wiehler, Zsuzsanna Szlenyi.

Description of theme: A longstanding trend in European societies is widespread participation in voluntary and informal civil society organisations: according to Eurofound surveys, over 95% of Europeans participate in one way or another, and the European Commission has estimated over 100 million Europeans dedicate volunteer time.¹ It is therefore unsurprising that at least since the White Paper on European Governance of the Prodi Commission, the European Union has sought ways of involving civil society in policy making.

The White Paper identifies civil society as playing an ‘important role in giving voice to the concerns of citizens and delivering services that meet people’s needs’. Article 10 of the Lisbon Treaty affirms the right of every citizen to participate in the democratic life of the Union’, and Article 11 commits the institutions to ‘give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action’, to maintain an ‘open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society’ and to consult widely with parties concerned. Yet, if various channels of consultation, dialogue and participation with civil society have been experimented with and are ongoing, it still seems fair to say that the participation of civil society in European decision making is less structured than that of social partners, that is to say businesses and trade unions. No doubt part of the reason is that ambiguity and uncertainty pervade the terrain:

- how is ‘civil society’ to be defined? in what ways can associations be ‘representative’, and how is this form of representation different from e.g. parliaments?
- Is the legitimacy of civil society organisations based on their relation to general interest, or do they represent private interests?
- How to classify different kinds of civil society organisation given the huge array and variety? What about political and social movements, or other forms of free assembly?

Two major evolutions concerning civil society over the past decade have decisive importance for considering these issues today. Firstly, some governments, and sometimes also private businesses, have increasingly sought to delegitimise civil society and reduce ‘civic space’, often instrumentalising many of the difficult questions about defining civil society to do so and even to justify shutting down civil society organisations. Many times, these governments and businesses have established their own ‘civil society’ organisations in place of those they undermine. Secondly, the form and methods of civil society organisation has evolved enormously, driven by technological

¹ ‘First European Quality of Life Survey: Participation in Civil Society’ Eurofound 2006: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef0676en.pdf; and see European Year of Volunteering website: https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/european-year-of-volunteering/index_en.htm

change and most notably the internet, by the scale of global issues, and also in response to increasing restrictions.

Despite this, one area where there has been very little change is in the legal forms of civil society organisations, which are often still based on paradigms of non-profit association over 100 years old (such as the French association law of 1901). Association law is still a highly national matter: no European association statute exists allowing the creation of a single association across the EU, despite the creation of European statutes for companies and corporations.

Part I – Meetings (October 2020-March 2021)

In the first meetings a growing skepticism from institutions about organized civil society was noted, and the reluctance to engage organized civil society in the planning of the Conference on the Future of Europe underlined. Several reasons for this were mentioned, including:

- competition with better recognized ‘social partners’ like trade unions and business;
- lack of agreed definitions about what civil society is;
- the lack of familiarity of policy makers with civil society and their discomfort engaging;
- fear of having to be more transparent and open to criticism;
- deliberate attempts to cut out civil society by governments which are openly hostile to civil society, and also to sabotage the conference as a whole;
- difficulty of explaining the representativity and legitimacy of civil society;
- lack of trans-European civil society organizations.

It was also noted that from civil society side there is reluctance to engage with the institutions in a new initiative given previously very disappointing experiences.

The distinction between organized and non-formal civil society was discussed, and several participants noted that there is a huge growth in less organized and non-formal kinds of civil society activity, and it would be useful to study this, collect examples and reflect on how such nonformalized civil society can be engaged in the conference. The Covid-19 pandemic has both enormously expanded non-formal civil society, and also made it more difficult for such actors to relate to policy making, so special efforts should be made to reach out to them through the Conference. It was felt that without the engagement of these non-formalized groups, the conference would suffer a severe lack of legitimacy.

Suggestions were made for civil society to both participants in the conference and observers of it, to ensure a wide and diverse input into the conference, a public visibility, but also an accountability of the decision makers. Risks of tokenistic participation of civil society were mentioned, and the difficulty of civil society mobilizing when it is so unclear what difference their participation would make.

In the following meetings a great confusion about the status and possibilities of civil society involvement in the Conference was discussed in reaction to the ongoing negotiations and different

positions of different institutions. Fears were raised that with such unclear modes of participation in the Conference, its democratic legitimacy was deliberately being sabotaged by less democratic 4 governments, and the Conference risks leaving openings for government selected 'civil society' or individual citizens to set the agenda or block decisions.

The difficulties of making distinctions between civil society, lobby groups, and government created civil society organizations or GONGOs was highlighted.

On the other side of the argument, there was interest that citizens assemblies - both organized by the institutions and organized 'independently' by civil society - could be a new way of restoring trust in democratic institutions, particularly in places where trust is very low, on the condition that these assemblies are organized in a way that is independent from the governments. Fears were raised of the Conference becoming an incoherent collection of national initiatives led by governments, which would cut out the European and cross border dimension of associative life which despite the legal, practical and political obstacles has nevertheless developed significantly in recent years.

PART II: Meetings (May 2021 – present)

13 May 2021

The session began with a reflection on the proposed makeup of the CoFoE plenary, and notably the 8 seats that have been reserved for NGOs. It was noted that the selection procedure for these 8 seats is very opaque, and it could be preferable to allow the civil society sector to choose its own representatives. There were also proposals for rotating participation. It was noted that there are also 18 seats for the Economic and Social Committee, which partly represents civil society alongside business and trade unions, although its members are chosen by governments. The president of the European Youth Forum: this participation of 'organised' civil society sits alongside the much larger participation of individual citizens: 80 chosen from both the Europe-wide the citizens panels and 27 from the national citizens assemblies (again the selection process is quite unclear).

It was noted that it could be the case that these individual citizens are themselves part of associations, that their participation in citizens panels makes them in some ways equivalent to representatives of organised civil society, and to the extent they are chosen according to socio-economic criteria, nationality, gender and so on they are also to some extent charged with 'representing' people like them.

It was highlighted that whatever way the civil society and citizen participants in the plenary are chosen, there will be inequalities in the input provided to the plenary. In order to address this, it was suggested that the civil society/citizen role should only be about providing information to the plenary, not participating in the decision making of the plenary on the same level with the elected political representatives who in principle represent everyone. In counterbalance to this, it would be

essential that the plenary and the Conference as a whole justifies its decisions to the public in full transparency and accountability.

This suggestion of counterbalancing unequal civil society input to the plenary with accountability to the public may be debatable along the following lines that were rapidly mentioned: it depends quite what the plenary is supposed to decide on (and to what degree it has a power of decision in comparison to the executive board of the Conference and the European Council which will receive the recommendations); it depends on to what degree the political representatives are really representing everyone: there are no transnationally elected representatives, for example, and so it could be considered that the citizens coming from the transnational panels are 'representing' a different constituency to the MEPs and national politicians; there is a political question about the centrality of the citizens to the whole process given its unique and one-off character.

The session closed with a discussion on the different forms of legitimacy the citizens panels and the European parliament have, especially in terms of the dangers that can arise if this is left undistinguished: e.g. if the citizens panels proposed recommendations that the parliament would not support, there would be the potential of a clash of legitimacies, with both the panels and the parliament claiming to 'represent' the citizens. In principle this claim to legitimacy also comes from the Council. In order to avoid a situation of breakdown, which could also be exploited by populist and authoritarian actors, it would be important to clarify the different kinds of representativeness and legitimacy of each actor represented in the plenary.

Theme 2: How can participation and representation interact?

Chair: Alberto Alemanno

Participants: Albenaz Azmanova, Vedran Dzihic, Heather Grabbe, Daniel Innerarity, Ayse Kadioglu, Dylan Marshall, Helmut Scholz, Karolina Boronska, James, Josep Folch, Karolina Boronska, Yves Sintomer, Nicholas Aiossa.

Description of theme: One of the major yet least acknowledged specificities of the EU legal order lies in its twin-fold model of democracy. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the Union derives its democratic legitimacy not only from representative democracy – which remains its founding democratic principle² –, but also from participatory democracy³. If citizens are directly represented at EU level in the European Parliament and indirectly by the Member States in the Council, they are also entitled “to participate in the democratic life of the Union”. As such, citizens – with their actions and omissions – form a source of legitimacy for the Union⁴. While participatory practices always existed in the history of the Union to legitimize/feed EU policymaking⁵ –, the provisions on democratic principles of the Treaty of Lisbon – by giving “expression to the principle of democracy in the EU legal order”⁶ – recognized for the first time participation as an autonomous, democratic principle on which the Union is founded. Yet where participatory input and representative input meet remains unclear, as it is their actual interface.

Far from being an EU-only issue, the relationship between participatory democracy and representative democracy remains largely under-theorized. However, on the eve of the launch of the CoFoE, and as epitomized by the ongoing French conversation of how to integrate and follow up on the recommendations of the Convention Climate into conventional, representative policy-making, this question imposes itself with great urgency.

- What are the major EU participatory instruments? (List, taxonomy)
- How they feed into EU representative policy-making? (typology of feed-back mechanisms)
- What does it take for representation to accommodate participation?
- What could it be the most promising feed-back loop logic and design to ensure such an interaction?

² S. Smismans, *European Civil Society: Shaped by Discourses and Institutional Interests*, 9 *European Law Journal* 473-495 (2003). See also the German Constitutional Court in its judgment of June 30, 2009, BVerfG, 2 be 2/08, para 172 (“neither the additional rights of participation, which are strongly interlocked as regards the effects of their many levels of action and in view of the large number of national parliaments, nor rights of petition which are associative and have a direct effect vis-à-vis the Commission are suited to replace the majority rule which is established by an election”).

³ See, e.g., Stijn Smismans, *The Constitutional Labelling of “the democratic life of the EU”: representative and participatory democracy*, in A. Follesdal and L. Dobson (eds), *Political Theory and the European Constitution*, London: Routledge, 122-138; Acar Kutay, *Limits of Participatory Democracy in European Governance*, *European Law Journal* 21, No. 6 November 2015, pp. 803-818, at 814.

⁴ Annette Schrauven, *European Union Citizenship in the Treaty of Lisbon: Any Change at All?* 15 *MJ* 1 (2008), p. 55; S. Besson and A. Utzinger, *Introduction: Future Challenges of European Citizenship*, 13 *Eur. L. J.* 573 (2007), 586; A. Warleigh, *On the Path to Legitimacy? A Critical Deliberativist Perspective on the Right to the Citizens’ Initiative*, in C. Ruzza & Della Sala, *Governance and Civil Society in the European Union: Normative Perspectives*, Vol. 1, Manchester University Press, 2007, 64.

⁵ For a detailed, historical reconstruction of the EU participatory practices and rationale, see Mendes, *Participation in EU Rule-making*, OUP, 2011.

⁶ Koen Lenaerts, *The Principle of Democracy in the case law of the CJEU*, *ICLQ* 62, April 2013, pp. 271-315, at 275.

Part I – Meetings (October 2020-March 2021)

- Framing the discussion: these questions transcend the Conference. Participation outside of representation; democratic innovation, petitions and channels of participation, keeping participation accountable in some way.
- Civil society is in the realm of representation, not just participation.
- Bridge the gap between elite participation and the participation of all. There are issues of accountability beyond simply electoral accountability.
- Two strands: concepts of participation and representation. We cannot discredit representative democracy with narratives or impossible expectations. We must correct the inequalities of representation. There is a lack of diversity in French experiments of participation. We must reflect the Europeanisation, under-representation of individuals feeling distant from Europe.
- Can we ignore these individuals and this phenomenon? Mobilization regularly anti-European. Must ensure expectations of Conference are realistic.
- Brought view from semi-periphery of the EU. Serbian authoritarianism uses the EU as a legitimizing tool. Tusk praising Vucic's re-election. Issues with front organizations giving a facade of participation.
- Does society know about taxonomy list of democratic participation.
- Participation doesn't necessarily mean to discredit representative democracy, it can enrich it. Example of Ireland and the Constitutional Assembly and youth engagement in referenda which followed.
- Models from MS have not transformed well to the European level.
- left-right divide not very present at EU level, failure of Spitzenkandidaten system.
- We need to spell out the dangers of participation. Cannot fall into short-termism and dump responsibilities of the future.
- Questions and issues of interacting with civil society and organizations which oppose EU values. Can we have participation of non-citizens? Issues with and models of transnational representation when looking at Vienna - alternative parallel election to the Landtag for the non-Austrian residents and that the parties now taking the issues raised in these parallel elections up in the formation of the regional government.
- Must highlight long-term issues of economy, inequality, climate.

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- Are we looking at a kind of Constituent moment, is there something similar going on like the Framework of the Convention 20 years ago? Or not at all?
- Experiences of children participation have been positive; we should think of how to include them in the Conference.
- One of the things that struck me is understanding how these three institutions interact, and how expectations are managed. I would see that as up as well as down. Expecting more and pushing for more. I was left more hopeful than when we started - We

perhaps don't need a Chair, especially if this is a big issue holding the Conference back. Or, at least, the Chair doesn't need to be a politician.

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The relationship between participatory democracy and representative democracy remains largely under-theorized. However, on the eve of the launch of the CoFoE, and as epitomized by the 7 ongoing French conversations of how (not) to integrate and follow up on the recommendations of the Convention Climate into conventional, representative policy-making, this question imposes itself with great urgency.

How can participation and representation meaningfully complement each other at the EU level?

- One of the ways in which participatory democracy might translate into a representative dimension is through issue identification. Social protests, campaigns and initiatives perform an important agenda-setting role for legislators and this aspect surely deserves more theoretical and empirical attention (i.e., under what conditions this process is more effective, and what factors might hamper it).
- One of the proposals to link participatory democracy with its representative dimension in case of CoFoE was to introduce into the Commissions' CoFoE online platform a real-time survey on the various aspects of potential EU reforms (i.e., introduction of supranational taxes, direct elections of EC President, transnational voting lists, competence shifts in strategic policy areas, etc.) addressed to all citizens. It would have to be well-disseminated and publicized, and run for the whole duration of CoFoE gathering citizens' views and preferences regarding the future of Europe. Yet, there were also opposing voices expressing concern that such survey could be potentially hijacked by powerful lobbies or interest groups – which would skew its results.

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- Participation + Representation. It is an issue of transmission. Translational. Almost like lost in Translation. The citizenship participation is a relationship. Participation feeds representation. Let's look at the 10 principles. There is a feedback loop. Loss of lost boxes. A question of authority. - Participation → agenda - Representation → results.
- The endpoint is passing over. Three institutions will decide how to respond. We need to examine them swiftly. In p.4 of the Joint Declaration, it says: there is no promise on the results.
- National parliaments feel relegated from the Conference. At the beginning it seemed like they were going to be in pain with the other institutions, but now they have been totally left behind. Not happy and very frustrated. How are they supposed to bridge from the People to Brussels. National politicians are key. We need more creative ideas to bridge and amplify the conference to all member states. Proposal on student competition and forums alike.

- National politicians are not supposed to do this. They are not meant to bridge. MEP should convey such bridging. The EU is not a monolith. Interlinkages are complex and need to be explained. EU-National-Local. There is an overbridge. We must find the tool. Multilingual platform is interesting. The EU does not only exist in the capitals. This is a problem.
- Getting the national dimension in the EU. A bold proposal. Get rid of the MEP. Send national parliamentarians to Europe. MEP can be thought of as a fake political category. An artificial political construct created by the EU. MEP bridge? Some argue that they create a distance more than bridging.
- It depends on the conception of the MS to EU representation. That conception is not homogenous. What is the job? To make governance at the European level. MP in the EP 8 would make weak governance. The representation role would be co-opted by national logics. Different expectations to what an MEP is. Questions of citizenship again.
- Bringing the MP in the Assemblies is possible. Mechanisms are there. Look at the Lisbon Treaty. It could be a set up in a different dual citizen's approach. The Green party would be happy for sure. Reflect the EU in the policy making. Mirroring the national interest. Co-optation → take away the responsibilities. UK Brexiters MEP.
- EP → covers comprehensive community interest. It reflects and comes back to the National. There cannot be a national competition. We need to bridge.

PART II: Meetings May 2021 – present

13 May 2021

- The session began with a general discussion of one of the most major yet overlooked questions ahead of the full launch of CoFoE: how will representatives and citizens work together?
- Participants expressed joint concern that the interaction between participation and representation has not been properly thought through. One suggested “a key issue is whether the participative element will lead to any meaningful decision or change. If it's just a general discussion with no real-world impact, there's little added value.”
- A link was shared to the recently published book *Citizen Participation in Democratic Europe* (ECPR Press February 2021) ed. by Alberto Alemanno and James Organ which brings together academics as well as practitioners “to give a forward-looking, holistic view of the realities of EU citizen participation across the spectrum of participatory opportunities.”
- One participant cited the need for “a feedback loop”, so participation is concretely linked to a meaningful European Parliament decision. In this way, participation would have a direct role within representative democracy. It was also pointed out – in response – that it's not (only) a question of the European Parliament versus citizens, but also the COMM and Council. It was noted that when talking about the role of citizens in the plenary, the COMM was against not only the MS. Politicians (comm – secretariat) need to understand that “the methods themselves are a political question.”
- The session concluded with a reflection on Citizen's Assemblies. It was pointed out that these are often presented as an “extra”: but that we need to see connections with all other

aspects of the process. One participant suggested panels will be key as it is they that kick off the discussion at an institutional level. They that will define the outcome and the way the CoFoE will be perceived: “if the panel-model fails, there’s a high risk we waste the idea.”

Theme 3: Should voting stay at the core of transnational European democracy and if so, how?

Chair: Kalypso Nicolaidis.

Participants: Farzam Abdolrasool, Carsten Berg, Josep Folch, Miguel Poiars Maduro, Nathalie Nougayrede, Christy Ann Petit, Farzam Abdo, Dylan Marshall, Maarten de Groot, Maarten Vink, Stefano Merlo, Ulrike Liebert.

Description of theme: From the 18th century onwards the history of democratization in Europe and in the world has been to a great extent the story of the extension of the franchise, the struggles associated with it, and the resistance from those wanting to preserve the status quo. What then is the equivalent of expanding the franchise in the European Union as a basis for the EU's democratic commitment? How should the CoFoE tackle this issue both in its mode of functioning and in the set of recommendations it envisages?

A number of themes emerge, inter alia:

- Transnationality at home: The current version of European citizenship mandates member states to grant the right to vote to EU foreign nationals resident in their country the right to vote in local and European elections.
- Should member states be encouraged/mandated to expand their own franchise further than that? Under what conditions should an EU citizen resident be able to vote in her/his country of residence but not of nationality? What about third country nationals?
- Transnationality at the supranational level: The long-standing debate on transnational lists to elect MEPs is embedded in a broader debate on how to Europeanise electoral votes at the national level or how to inject more transnational concerns in nationally restrictive debates.
- Are more minimalist approaches - such as inclusion of non-nationals in national lists – enough to encourage transborder discussions on goals and methods?
- What are the pros and cons, as well as obstacles, to introducing transnational lists?
- Voting on issues, not only on persons: There has been much misgiving on expanding the remit of voting to vote directly on issues rather than representatives. This so called 'direct democracy' is frowned upon in Brussels circles for being vulnerable to demagoguery as well as unpredictable. But isn't it time for the EU to grab the bull by the horns?
- Can we not do referenda better, inspired by the Swiss practice in particular, rather than throw the baby with the bath water? Should we in fact organize more internet-based consultations, that might even be binding in the form of “preferenda”?
- Some academics have suggested that new algorithmic technologies could help create our personal avatars that would make such a level of heightened involvement feasible? What are the prerequisites in terms of citizenship education throughout Europe?
- Trans-generational democracy: arguably, the EU should become the guardian of the long term, thus turning the democratic deficit on its head by seeking to compensate the short-termism of democracy at the national level by entrenching a “democracy with foresight” at the supranational level.

- Is such a view justified?
- What would this imply for the franchise? Should the voting age be reduced to 16-year-olds, for votes at the European level (on people or issues)?
- Should the EU rely on “preference votes” regarding trade-offs involved in setting policies for the long term?

Part I – Meetings (October 2020-March 2021)

We asked whether voting should stay at the core of Transnational European Democracy? Voting as one dimension of democracy but central in authoritative democracy. After all democracy in Europe → Expansion of the franchise for the past 200 years. Who has agency in 2020? Where are the frontiers of our franchise? How does it compete with other citizen input?

Questions on electorability. Discuss the extent of maturity about voting on persons. Are we (Europe) mature enough? How do we mature? Spitzen Kandidate as a failed but valuable try. Spitzen Kandidate as a great hope for deepening the democracy in European institutions. Frame all this question under the Representative vs. Direct democracy dichotomy. Personally, I have reservations and concerns on the political culture of Referendums: Risk of being captured by high interest (no space for diffused interest). Zero Sum decisions tend to be undemocratic. Radicalisation of politics and final transformation of a bubbled democratic ecosystem. For me Lessons → so far not so good. (Brexit).

Pros about direct democracy: in terms of capacity to engage citizens. We need mechanisms that bring the best of both worlds. Engagement and Complexity.

Interesting mechanism in order to combine Direct and Representative democracy. Not a pure form. Using direct democracy to reinforce the legitimacy of representation is smart.

Procedural combinations of different forms of democracy. The Lessons depend on where do you take the stock form. Different lessons of direct democracy in different examples. (Brexit referendum vs. Irish Citizen’s Assembly) So let’s not rush this anxiety for the citizens participation. What these two forms of Direct Democracy differ on? It’s approach and articulation: Bottom-up (Ireland) vs Top-Down (Brexit). What triggers legitimacy? The lessons to learn are mirrors of the status quo.

Proposals:

- System of deliberative assemblies randomly chosen through algorithms. Constructive forum that will reach the Council. With a Right of initiative. Let’s think about it as another layer in European Parliament. (not to create more blocks and vetoes but pursuing a pro-propositive spirit). Such right of initiative should bypass the Commission (we could limit to a number of initiatives a year submitted by the deliberation of citizens)
- proposal to give the possibility to citizens to vote at the end of the process. As with extend the franchise. Let’s not limit it to powerless initiative. How do you construct the Citizen’s

Assembly? under what conditions? They can become elitist spheres → In Ireland people followed because they knew a referendum was coming. (Incentives??)

- Small example of how to make democracy more direct:
- Placing of election booth next to the voting booth where anyone could fill an issue-centred questionnaire that will give an approximate spectrum, on where the parties fall in terms of your issue-driven responses.
- Preferenda?

Going back to the anxiety that Direct Democracy seems to create with the political elites. What is the basis for such anxiety? Two words come to my head:

- Unpredictability: Fear for the irrational scares the elites. Where does the rational element of democracy reside? Is it in the parliaments? Deliberations? Unproportionally: In respect to the level of maturity for a democracy? What logic of maturation are you applying? Unidirectional? Is it a gradual/incremental process? Look at Brexit. Democracy is unidirectional? Who are the gatekeepers then? Where is the freedom of speech in all of this? Nonlinearity produces fear/emotions.
- But how do we think about it outside the nation state? Create the conditions for such implementations. Non-Eu states must be part of the conversation → How do you bring them to the table? International Silence is undemocratic.
- On Reversing the-gaze → Proxies for voting → Citizen's Assembly → Create inputs and incentives for voting → Place them in the constellation of the transnational vote. Mature the vote. Mature the transnational. Accepting the uncertainty of democracy. How to take care of the anxiety? Theory of the emotions might be helpful.
- Maybe we could devise voting as a way to prioritise: everyone sends in their inputs, we all vote on what we deem to be priority, and then these are taken on by institutions to work on. Hard to decide who and how to vote, and there's always the risk of pressure groups mobilising a lot of the votes. And then parties could take some of these proposals, whether the ones that were brought forward or not, and use them in their campaign... What would all of this look like?

Summary:

- Overall, the Forum must propose mechanisms and instruments of representation where citizens are included in practical terms with tangible roles, beyond the classic listening exercise. Can the EU truly acquire a culture of real bottom-up policy making and participation? Can this be done short of voting?
- We need to highlight the link between citizens deliberative processes (assemblies, panels) and voting as a means to make such deliberation more meaningful. For instance, Ireland's experience with Citizens Assemblies has resulted in a number of the proposals have fallen by the wayside and not reached the referendum stage (e.g., enfranchisement of non-resident citizens and women's place in the home).

- At the same time, citizen assemblies are not the panacea. There are other forms of participation that can be at least as conducive to citizens involved (e.g., citizen participatory budgeting). How can citizens provide input into EU decision-making in the long-term? The Conference is a stress test for Europe for this long-run perspective.
- One big challenge is to open up and democratise high-expertise policy areas for the citizens. One place to do this is to create very public and inclusive foresight exercises at the EP. Another is for the EU to create interactive websites with transparent proceedings.
- Also, we should push for inclusion of non-European citizens. And we need to deal rebalance our attention from the 20 million non-resident citizens around Europe to the non-mobile citizens.
- Ultimately, the question remains, how far can we expand the franchise?

PART II: Meetings May 2021 – present

13 May 2021

The discussion began by exploring the question of the citizens' panels, their potential, and what pitfalls need to be avoided to ensure the process is effective.

One participant raised the example of Ireland, where 15% of proposals were not taken up, as evidence that this form of engagement - *per se* - is not enough. It was suggested that the 'permanent institutionalisation of Citizen's Assemblies', could be one solution to this; and one lens through which to observe and evaluate the role they will come to play within the CoFoE. Another participant underlined the need to think harder about lines of accountability and feedback loops to citizens. Citizen's Assemblies could be the nexus to build trust IF there is going to be ratification, and therefore votes. This is about talking about upstream to the right kind of vote.

The conversation moved to longer term questions. It was suggested that 'voting at the core question' is the wrong way to put it. The frame and guiding question is, or should be: how do we bring back voting at the core? (including the role of the European Parliament, rights of mobile citizens, and local participation.) A participant put forward 'automatic registration' as a possible measure to aid this. Another example that was put forward was popular involvement in referenda, as example of people having their say on the outcome. In all discussions the issue of ratification is therefore at front and centre. Several participants voiced concerns about the binding nature of the process. It was noted that the need for a better ratification process that is truly transnational must be a priority. This is, as the chair put it, the upstream of voting: upstream impacts the vote, but – by the logic of reverse causality – the prospect of voting impacts on the quality of voting.

The session concluded with a reflection on the current obstacles to public engagement. One participant suggested there is still not enough active talk about raising interest and enthusiasm. There is scope to connect assemblies/panels and people ("spreading the gospel"). Another participant suggested that the attractiveness of the process depends on the attractiveness of the topics chosen. Participatory budgeting was raised as an example of how citizens can be mobilised; it was also pointed out, in response, that participation at local level in such processes remains low, and that people must be empowered for them to work. The session concluded with a brief

consideration of language and its central importance for galvanising or diminishing engagement
[for more on this topic see Theme Five: 13/05/21 [here](#)].

Theme 4: Re-scaling participation: from the local to the transnational

Chair: Luiza Bialasiewicz

Participants: Hubbard, Wilkens, Laffan, Gichana, Pagano, Naira López, Alice HUbbarf, Daniela Heimpel, Natalie Nougayrede.

Description of theme: The current architecture of the EU is still bound to territorialized and state-centric understandings that fail to capture the increasingly mobile, de-territorialized and highly interdependent Europe of today. We will ask:

- How can the CoFoE more fully give voice to the polyphony of already-existing forms of democratic participation ‘on the ground’ that bring together citizens and groups across a range of networks of collaboration and cooperation, often spilling beyond institutionally recognized territorial containers?
- Such networks can be ‘vertical’ forms of integrative participation, allowing citizens to ‘jump scale’ and create new forms of cooperation and connectivity between different territorial scales: forms of connectivity that can be temporary and project-based, but also longer-lasting. They can also be ‘horizontal’: creating new national or trans-national networks bringing together groups across localities to engage specific policy fields, whether through formal partnerships and/or cooperation initiatives (that may draw on EU funding instruments), or through more informal, person-to-person networks and exchanges, focused on exchanges of knowledge and know-how but also the pooling of a variety of resources, material as well as immaterial.
- As relational understandings of political actorness have suggested, the ‘power’ of localities should be conceived not as simply a resource (or a favourable set of political, economic etc. resources) but rather “as something generated by the application of resources and skills over tracts of space and time” (Allen, 2010). Recent studies in the sociology of globalization have also suggested new ways of studying political power not as a fixed combination of ‘assets and interests’ but a “temporal strategization of space” (Lobo-Guerrero, 2012; Lobo-Guerrero and Stobbe, 2016) that allows actors to ‘make spaces’ for political action.
- How can we capture the ways in which citizens and groups across Europe ‘make spaces’ for their action? How can we give fuller voice to existing local and trans-local networks without creating simply another territorial ‘fix’ ? (for instance, such as the recent romanticization of the ‘urban’ as the solution to all of Europe’s democratic (and other) ills).
- While much has been made recently of the role that could be played by cities (and local communities more generally) in fostering more inclusive forms of participation, it is important not to idealize ‘the local’ as inherently more inclusive and democratic, as illustrated by the capture of these discourses by illiberal groups and regimes across a number of European contexts).

- Additionally, how can we re-think the ways in which such networks can create new public spaces?
- This is particularly important in a moment in which public spaces are under attack: most directly and violently by illiberal regimes, but also elsewhere through the increasing privatization and securitization of public life; developments rendered even more dramatic by pandemic politics.

Part I – Meetings (October 2020-March 2021)

Recap from the first discussion:

- how can we address the different scales of citizen participation? How do we give them voice – and appreciate how the different scales of action come together? How do we rethink the ‘spaces of the political’ in Europe today? Importantly, how can we learn from existing political experiences and political imaginations, since so much has already been done in this respect?
- There are countless initiatives and projects that have re-made ways of ‘doing politics’ between scales and across borders, ‘spilling over’ and ‘across’ the territorial containers of states, regions, localities. How can we ‘map’ such existing practices and projects to understand how they work and what ‘work’ they have been able to accomplish? How can we reconceptualise the ‘spaces’ of political participation as also non-physical?
- At the same time, we must be careful not to romanticize participation in such initiatives as it is quite selective (and often territorially unequal)
- groups and individuals, just as certain places, have different resources and possibilities for such engagement. Moreover, we must be wary of conflating participation with inclusion – and effective voice. Entry into the ‘public’ through such initiatives may often be temporary and fail to enact effective change.

Points made:

- Working with networks of young people all around the world that tackle issues of social justice and climate change. There is a pressing need to ‘mend’ transnational democracy since proposed solutions are often top-down and still hierarchical across scales, without acknowledging that citizens and grassroots initiatives are ‘doing it’ every day. How do we include them? Only then can it be legitimate. We talk about how to reach such groups and initiatives, but perhaps we should reframe the question: why do such groups and networks struggle to reach institutions?
- Working in creating open spaces for women and youth participation, also beyond the borders of Europe. For instance, how can institutionalized forms of contact and collaboration in EU-African Union relations reach everyday citizens and partially formal initiatives?
- Do we need a fuller discussion about what we mean by ‘political participation’? Does it include only institutional interaction, digital spaces, protest spaces? Some forms of

participation are easier to re-scale than others. Protests cross borders easily. We need to consider the importance of proximity, of the 'nearness' one feels with the project in question. Institutional participation is more difficult to scale-up (or 'across') like protests precisely because of that. Although this theme is not directly focussed on voting, lessons can be drawn from that.

- How can this discussion lead to forms of empowerment? Can we make use of existing local initiatives – for example, make use of existing spaces in Florence: schools, squares, cafés. - We want to promote a European 'public space' -something that is nascent and growing but still much less developed than at the local or national scale, both in digital and analogue terms. European democracy, or the 'historical start-up' that the EU is, needs to be grounded in a functional public space. In this sense, the possibilities that the digital space offers are promising, for instance initiatives like EuropeTalks (media orgs that brings together people of different backgrounds to build bridges). Perhaps we should draw up a Constitution for Digital Space for Europe to begin building a European digital public space? Elections are also important for a functioning public space; debates happen that ask relevant questions about present and future with the excuse of the elections; in such 15 contexts, we have to foster citizen debates and assemblies. However, it is very difficult, even at the local level. Bulgaria and Ireland had it and it was challenging; different languages make it harder, but we have to work to resolve it.
- Let's return to the question of who does the participating? How to reach hard-to-reach groups who are not as visible, who do not have access to these spaces (physical or digital)? We need to question critically the assumptions we make when talking about 'citizen participation'. For example, the currently fashionable slogans of "co-creation" are very problematic because they presume a potentially fully inclusive participatory process when they are really not. Also in thinking about participation – and who participates – we should also consider 'bad civil society' since for example far-right and identitarian movements connect very well across borders
- Participation underlines the capacity to be heard and considered, the possibility to wield influence and be taken into account, as well as to know and be able to use the existing participatory tools and avenues – so it is necessarily exclusive if not exclusionary.
- People are more likely to participate if they feel more affected, and they do if they know what is being debated. Participation must create a vibrant public space of people who feel politically competent.
- We need to consider possible hurdles: accessibility of information; most can't reach it, especially people with disabilities and the young. However, that is necessary in order to first, understand, and then affect decision-making processes.
- Access to public spaces is unequally distributed – so there's potential in digital activism, because there you can break down some of the divides; how do we do the equivalent in person?
- Part of the population doesn't want to be involved, or will be only mobilized with much higher difficulty. Democracy is also the entitlement not to participate if you don't want to.
- 'Public space' is not always primarily political; there is also cultural engagement, charitable engagement. Some people may appear not to be engaged, but they are engaged in more diffuse ways. For e.g., in the Netherlands and elsewhere, theatres play the role of exploring

boundaries between artistic practice and politics; we can also think of cafés as both a historical as well as contemporary European social network.

- Perhaps people can more easily engage with more straightforward, down to Earth questions like “what do you think your city should look like?”
- Who should move towards who? Academics should make the step in the direction of citizens, starting by changing the vocabulary. The EU bubble uses certain vocabulary that has to change and become more accessible. Far right movements have learnt how to simplify the ‘problems’ to be faced and solutions much better. (following a question on his own experience in engaging the population in Firenze and Fiesole as part of ‘Engaged Academics’) In terms of accessing the wider population, we use public communication channels, which allow for us to access the older population, and become more intergenerational. It’s vital to make personal experiences political, show they are widespread. For the younger population, digital channels work best (like organizing Instagram Lives) and allow us to collaborate with researchers all over the world. It’s vital to do our marketing right, get our targets right. - Overall, our key questions have been around what we mean by ‘participation’ – who and where? – and by ‘political spaces’ – where can these lie? Who can they include? - We have to pay attention at how the Far-Right successfully sloganizes and reduces complexity; however, that doesn’t get us far; it is the quality of the debate that matters, and the same applies to social media – replicating populist appeals is not the answer. * 16 - We tend to envision two routes to participation – the organisational/institutional one and the direct one. With the organisational/institutional: there is the difficulty of making civil society organisations trusted partners to institutions, European or of the national state. With the direct: the challenge lies in bringing citizens directly in contact with the tools and mechanisms of politics - without a structured ‘organisational’ layer in between that may become counterproductive. - We need to recognize that citizen assemblies may be elitist, in that they only allow a select (and often self-selecting) few to participate, the rest only witness it. - Would an answer to such unequal participation be forms of obligation: for eg, a form of ‘jury duty’ present in the US or UK so, an on-going citizen duty, bringing in new citizens every time.

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- The CoFoE can be “a vehicle for better awareness on particular issues” and in this sense communication will be key to making citizens aware how they can have impact (and why they should engage)
- We have a continent traumatised by the pandemic - how do you connect people with institutions in this moment when concerns are other? Or is this precisely the ‘right’ moment to get Europeans involved?
- Without an ambitious, humanistic media storytelling strategy, there is a huge risk of this conference being entirely invisible – or discounted as ‘just political’.
- We need to help bridge the gap between local experiences and concerns and the EU ‘bubble’ (or what is perceived as such).

- We should look at other examples of citizens mobilisation and tap into this momentum and leverage this - how do we tap into already existing movements?

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- There appears to be still a lack of clarity among the public on why the CoFoE should 'matter' – how can we bring the role of the Conference 'down to the ground'?
- What can be the role of cities and city networks, that does not merely give 'institutional' voice?
- There is a wide variety of municipal and 'municipalist' activism that needs to be tapped into – and facilitated, while also recognizing that different locations, just as different populations, will have different possibilities for political activism. Not wanting to replicate a false divide between 'cosmopolitan' and 'open' places more likely to be part of such transnational networks and those that are more 'inward-looking' (geographies also often tied to economic fortunes) – we must nevertheless be aware there is a wide differentiation. Some cities and regions (eg Barcelona) have taken a leading role in shaping debates and making the 'space' for new politics and new forms of participation – others much less so. How do we overcome this?
- We also have to be careful not to replicate another divide – that presumed between cities (and large cities in particular) and rural or peripheral areas. These divides surely exist and are important – but their effects are not the same everywhere. If anything, this speaks to the need to engage not just people but also places 'left out' of access to participation.

PART II: Meetings May 2021 – present

Our session began from a series of questions: how do we create spaces for participation at the local level - and join-up such spaces? How do we give localities a clearer voice - not just mediated by the Committee of the Regions? And how do we facilitate this without reifying (or romanticizing) the local?

In discussing these points, participants put forward three concrete proposals:

- Use existing public spaces that are truly public -that is, open to all but also used by a wide range of constituencies to create spaces for discussion about Europe. Perfect example - local public libraries or reading rooms! [One such initiative is the 'Europe Challenge' by the European Cultural Foundation.](#)
- Think about connecting up initiatives through existing city-to-city networks
- .. but at the same time be very aware of the limits to also local/urban participation - which will also be selective and self-selecting. So - as raised in the discussion in the other breakout themes - we need to be careful not to conflate participation with representation and be very aware of who is likely to participate (and where)

Theme 5: "The language of participation"

Chair: Paul Blokker

Participants: Lukas Wiehler, Hedvig Morvai, Dmytro Khutkyy, Fee Kirsch, Claudio Radaelli, Naira Lopez, Petar Markovic, Jamie Mackay, Vivien Schmid.

Description of theme: How to ensure that the communication around the Conference on the Future of Europe is engaging and reaches out to a wide and diverse group of citizens and residents?

Part I – Meetings (October 2020-March 2021)

Core questions evolve around how the CoFoE is communicated and publicized. Is there a change around communications regarding the CoFoE; should there be more emphasis on strategic or celebratory dimensions? Roles within the Conference and implications, what roles do institutions have, and is there a risk of the Conference looking like a federalist project and not what it is supposed to be? The role of leadership is huge. How can we better integrate OCS? Who should be doing the communications and who should be the target? How can we relate to the general public? What kind of genres are effective in communicating with citizens? Certainly, a lot of creativity is needed.

Summary notes from Forum Meetings

It was felt that a crucial dimension regards the extent to which the CoFoE manages to reach out to and interact with those citizens who are sceptical of European integration. The Language of Participation, as an inclusive language, needs to communicate and interact with Eurosceptic, populist, and radical extremist forces. In this regard, one dimension which seems easier to discuss across ideological and other divides is an emphasis on process, such as organization, the inclusion of groups, and mobilization, rather than an emphasis on substantive ideas. The emphasis should be on bottom-up and horizontal forms of communication and interaction, which underline that all groups in European society may participate, not only the pro-European, urbanized, frequent traveller type. One common dimension in citizens' perceptions might be a certain generalized antiestablishment position or a distrust towards institutions.

A further crucial matter is that of an understandable language: the communication of complex, technical dimensions of European integration. An inclusionary language hence also means the need for the EU institutions to be able to communicate complex matters in an accessible language (indeed, e.g., the Council's position on CoFoE seems not comprehensible for ordinary citizens). The EU is often perceived as an impenetrable barrier and the communication of its operation and policies as difficult to comprehend. Complex, expert, technocratic, legal and even constitutional matters need to be translated into a language that conveys the relevance and importance to ordinary people, in a common vocabulary. It was however also noted that one aspect that might be needed is a differentiation of language, that is, ways to speak to policy-makers and the like, and ways to speak to citizens.

In terms of the principle of attractiveness – vital for a successful conference which claims to put the citizen in the centre of things – it was suggested that an effective language may use specific forms or genres like humour, irony, ridicule, or tragedy, as ways of engaging people and to stimulate collective reflection on complex issues. It was noted that in this regard, it is also important to reflect on the language we want to use as Forum when we relate / talk to the outside world. We are creating a website; it is important to avoid making it too academic. One suggestion was to think about the EUROVISION format, but in a democratic competition way, which could be hosted by different countries, and different hosts, and this could really foster easier access (also well combined with humour/ridicule), and include short country videos and presentations. In order to reach out and engage in an inclusive manner with citizens, the principle of *audi alterem partem* is of great importance, in order to engage with our own biases and unwillingness to listen to messages, ideas, that do not overlap with our own views.

The communication around the CoFoE needs to make sure to include a visible language. A lesson is that of France, managing to have 60-70% of the population being aware of the climate citizens assembly. This is a big success - this should be the goal, and lessons learned from former assemblies should be applied. What is also needed is a Europe-wide media network that ensures coverage including local media outlets so it is not only the big national again no public broadcasters or other large media houses but that really a kind of establishing the channel of communication and linking up.

A further issue is that of an intermediating language. CSOs could play the role of intermediaries and mobilizing forces that help drawing attention to the Conference as such, but also “translate” issues at stake, potential and possibilities of the CoFoE. It was noted that a more comprehensive civil society network is needed that is not so much centred around western and central Europe but is also strong at the peripheries like Eastern Europe or Scandinavia. It is important to bring this whole discussion closer to the people in a completely different way than it is usually done with European exercises.

PART II: Meetings May 2021 – present

13 May 2021

The session began with a discussion of the media coverage of the Conference’s launch. It was noted that only a few outlets dedicated serious page-space to the proceedings, and, on the whole, journalists adopted sceptical positions. Most emblematic of this was a widely shared piece by the journalist Paul Taylor on POLITICO, (‘Hijack the Conference on the Future of Europe’, 7 May). The language of ‘hijacking’ has been augmented in other commentaries by discussion re: the need to “capture” public attention.

Participants discussed the challenge of *how* to write engaging articles about the process that could attract interest from non-EU aficionados. There are multiple audiences that require different levels and forms of communication: inter-institutional; intra-participants (laymen – academic - sentiments/modes of expression); it was suggested that publications like Euractiv could play an important bridging role here.

The question of ‘culture wars’ came up as an additional concern: there is a dichotomy in place, at this stage, between consensus creation and ‘debate’ – what to do, for example, about anti-EU, or, more problematically, anti-democratic voices?

It was suggested by one participant that it is necessary to think beyond ‘communication’ and to begin instead from a serious recognition of processes of exclusion, as experienced by racialised minority groups, and others, who do not trust the process. “Black Lives Matter is shifting discourse around citizen/institution relationships.” Another participant highlighted that there remains a lack of information about how involvement from citizens can and will have tangible influence.

Productive proposals emerged from the question: ‘how to go beyond wooden/institutional language’? Creativity, it was agreed, is key. Participants pointed to the example of the ‘sardines’ movement in Italy, which in winter 2011 filled thousands of piazzas across the country in pacifist anti-nationalist demonstrations, as a possible example of good practice. The potential of citizen-produced visuals for CoFoE was also put forward as one means of circumventing what is expected from the Conference – and helping it seem less ‘institution-led’.

The conversation concluded with the identification of three distinct communication priorities and approaches to be discussed in future:

- The communication of CoFoE and how it can reach outside of the Eurobubble
- The language of CoFoE itself (on Platform/Panels/Plenary)
- Observer communication: democratic approaches, and the problem of representation