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Multiplex Conference on the Future of Europe Event

13 January 2022, 18:00 – 20:30 (CET)

Follow-up Report

Objectives of the event

The Renew Europe Group in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has been actively engaged in the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE) since its launch last May and as such, its members play an important role in helping make the Conference a success. Many of its members have already held citizens' dialogues in their respective municipalities and regions. In addition, in order to facilitate for more of its members to organise a citizens' dialogue, the group came up with a concept that would facilitate the organisation of such a dialogue and at the same time create a European touch to it, namely what we have called a *multiplex event* allowing a number of Renew Europe CoR members and members of the Liberal Mayors Network to hold citizens' dialogues the same evening in parallel in their respective municipalities/regions, and allowing their citizens to be part of a dialogue with other European citizens. The event included a joint introductory and concluding session online to give it a truly European setting.

Participating Members of CoR/Liberal Mayors Network and their respective municipalities/regions:

- **Clotilde Armand** - Bucharest's Sector 1, Romania
- **Robert van Asten** - The Hague, Netherlands
- **Jean-François Barnier** – Chambon-Feugerolles (Loire department), France
- **Vincent Chauvet** - Autun, France
- **François Decoster** - Saint Omer, France
- **Paula Fernández Viaña** - Cantabria Region, Spain
- **Andreas Kondylis** – Alimos, Greece
- **Jonny Lundin** – Västernorrland, Sweden
- **Arnaud Michel -** Arras, France
- **Fintan Phelan** – Carlow, Ireland
- **Mirja Vehkaperä** – Oulu, Finland
- **Jean-Noel Verfaillie** – Marly, France

Subjects discussed during the individual dialogues

Participating local and regional authorities discussed about the future of their municipality/region with their citizens. Part of the discussion addressed questions about what their citizens want the European Union to be responsible for and what not. However, each individual dialogue was free to choose the specific subjects to discuss within this framework. Representatives reported back on several topics such as:

- A common European Defence Policy and strategic autonomy
- Research and Innovation
- Disinformation, awareness and media
- European identity, citizenship, education about the EU and revision of school curricula
- Harmonization of employment rights and working conditions
- Youth well-being, mental health and a European health policy
- Freedom of Movement
- Digitalisation and e-democracy
- A bottom-up approach to EU policy-making
- Climate change, biodiversity and a fair and just energy transition
- Participatory democracy, European elections, justice and the rule of law
- Integration of migrants

Citizens' recommendations from the individual dialogues

Chambon-Feugerolles (Loire department), France

1. We should democratize the Collective for a European Civic Service (CECS), and aim towards the creation of a European citizenship. This could be done by encouraging youth mobility, so that young people can travel and live across Europe and experience different parts of it. European history should be taught in all European countries from a very young age in order to work towards the recognition of a European anchorage for each citizen.

2. We should develop a Common European Defence policy to guarantee stability. It is necessary to pool the forces of all the EU states, because the objective of Europe is peace. Nonetheless, it is necessary to have the weapons to defend ourselves against powers outside of the EU (such as the USA, Russia, China or Turkey). The NATO exists, but it seems necessary to create and mutualise European forces for an independent European defence unit. This is a challenge of the EUFP which seems urgent to put in place in an objective of realism and solidarity through an economic, industrial and digital (cybersecurity) strategic autonomy.

3. Research and innovation should be further developed for a better defined global identity and to ensure the continuity of the European Economic Union in particular. We should also develop a more ethical digital and research philosophy by sanctioning foreign digital influences and interference (in culture, data etc.). We should also adopt a culture of risk taking when it comes to innovation and encourage a policy of independent and economic development of European research and digital technology.

Arras, France

4. We propose an imperative citizens' consultation in all European territories (cities and large towns) and not to neglect the rural areas.

5. European information should be further spread on a wider scale and be easily accessible and used as a tool to unify citizens. We need to incentivise the media to do more. For example, the City of Arras in France is committed to providing European information to its citizens via its municipal bulletin.

6. We propose the creation of common European days (e.g. car-free day) and, in terms of education, creating a European programme in all schools because young people's vision of Europe is very complex (particularly with regard to mobility).

Marly, France

7. It is necessary to have a legal and commercial harmonization of rights and working conditions, when it comes to aspects such as wages, company taxes, working hours etc.

8. We need reindustrialization to ensure the strategic autonomy of the European Union.

9. We need to have a common European Defence Policy to guarantee stability.

Oulu, Finland

10. Where are the forests of Europe? All countries grow carbon sinks. The forestry policy must be kept at the national decision-making level. Forests play an important role in Finland's national economy, biodiversity, well-being and tourism. Europe must thus develop new technologies to support forest growth, protection and sustainable use. The same measures cannot be applied in all European Member States in order to prevent deforestation.

11. Young people need help with mental health problems and access to treatment. We need to find the root causes in order to find solutions at European level. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected our mental health, as perceived by young people. The need for treatment is growing tremendously. It is important to note that the workload, the level of requirements, the demands of working life, the lack of social contacts, remote work and remote learning all increase the pressure.

12. Securing Europe's external borders is a common issue. The European defence and security policy must be part of a common table. Defence cooperation could be deepened and further developed. Unanimity decisions in the European institutions should be abandoned. We need to start a debate on the development of Europe into a federation.

Västernorrland, Sweden

13. We suggest developing legislation and directives to harmonize identity documentation in the EU to facilitate the free movement of citizens.

14. It is important that the Swedish government prioritises the completion of the Bothnian Corridor by 2030.

15. It is important that Europe understands the Nordic vision of forests and forestry in the green transition.

The Hague, Netherlands

16. EU policy often has a local dimension and is most of the time implemented locally. A bottom-up approach in EU policy-making is needed as we should always take into account what such a new policy/directive means to the ordinary people.

17. There are differences between European countries in preferences about how we want to organise the outdoor space and public domain, we should respect and encourage this.

18. We would like to see a fair energy transition where industries and business pay their fair share alongside citizens.

Cantabria Region, Spain

19. Free movement of workers is a fundamental principle laid down in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The right of persons to move and reside freely within the EU must take into account the new reality of teleworking that has emerged in the wake of the pandemic.

20. In relation to the free movement of workers, more investment in the industry is needed to attract and retain talent.

21. Labour and fiscal flexibility is needed to encourage the creation of small businesses and to favour youth employment, which will serve to attract talent from abroad and retain local talent and favour social cohesion in the EU.

Alimos, Greece

22. We need to have more Europe. We need citizens' active participation in the European elections. Citizens should have the ability to not only vote for members of the European Parliament, but also for the President of the European Council. The President of the European Council should be given more powers to act with more rights and initiatives by proposing European legislation and laws which would then be approved by the European Parliament. The European Parliament would be able to work closely with the European President to create legislation for the Member States. This would make the European elections substantially more European than national. This way all the citizens would become more active and truly give them the notion of a union, feeling closer to Europe as a whole, as well as independent members of a European Union.

23. The European Structure and Investment Funds and Programs intended for regions and municipalities should be managed by the Central European agencies, which would then make the funds available directly to the regional governments, so that a municipality or region that

need funds for a project would get them directly from Brussels. This would lead to a better tie and relationship with the European Union. The money which is intended for projects initiated and undertaken by the local authorities should not need to go through channels from the national governments. They would go directly from the EU agencies to the local authorities. This would cultivate an active relationship between the European Union and the local authorities. The citizens would be able to see first-hand the direct European support towards their municipality or region. This would give local authorities a more active role in European policy.

24. We need a common European policy for the protection and defence of the European borders from irregular immigration, as well as a common protocol for the integration of immigrants in the European Union and into the European lifestyle.

Bucharest Sector 1, Romania

25. We need a common and just European Health policy. Romania educates many doctors using public funds and these doctors emigrate to other European countries in extremely large numbers, leaving Romanian citizens without access to basic medical services in some regions. When Romanians need medical services that exist only in other countries, they must pay. Europe should offer a solution to some problems, such as the issue of organ transplants.

26. Infrastructure should be standardized and built in a more uniform way in all European areas, in all types of mobility without affecting nature (in a more environmentally friendly way). We also need protectionist measures for local producers and for shortening the food chain. Finally, we need more green spaces and more naturally protected areas.

27. The powers and capacity of the European Union institutions in the field of justice should be enhanced by: (a) Establishing an obligation for EU Member States to accede to the Treaty on the European Public Prosecutor's Office and to appoint a minimum number of prosecutors to this institution, according to an appropriate criterion. b) Explicitly legislating the principle of supremacy of European law and European courts in relation to national law and national courts of EU Member States. c) Generalising the decision-making mechanism of qualified majority in the Council of the European Union and eliminating the need for unanimity on certain subjects.

Autun, France

28. We suggest the creation of a European diploma (in the medical sector for instance) to ensure an equal level, to make it easier to work all over Europe, and to minimize the medical desert of the little towns and villages.

29. We suggest ensuring that accessibility to for example public transport and buildings for disabled people is harmonized in all the EU countries and controlled by the EU when a EU subsidy is granted. This should be a precondition for EU funding.

30. There is a necessity to change the French education system. We suggest introducing educational reforms, which could draw on inspiration from other countries. We need to develop the whole system, not only by inspecting the administrative side of things, but also

by looking at the approach of teachers, pupils and school curricula. In order to assist this, we suggest introducing an Erasmus for teachers, which would enable a better understanding of different educational systems across Europe and to benefit from others' experiences.

Carlow, Ireland

31. We need to create a welcoming atmosphere for migrants, rather than put up barriers. Carlow, Ireland for example, has a proud tradition of welcoming migrants, particularly the Rohingya and Syrian communities.

32. Europe should not only focus on development and economic policies, but also social policies around mental health and care for people.

33. We need to break down the European jargon. How can we as citizens of Carlow, Ireland access the EU? More interaction is needed in an accessible way, combined with comprehensive education and an awareness programme in our schools.

Saint Omer, France

34. We need to strengthen European democracy so that Europe can speak with one voice, a discourse that is understandable for all the citizens, and that comes from representatives known by the inhabitants.

35. Regarding migration, there needs to be more solidarity towards immigrants, a revision of the Dublin Regulation, more support for citizens' and associations' initiatives in favour of people in exile.

36. We need to affirm Europe's leadership on climate change with a harmonization of public policies and means.

Methodology and audience of the event

The multiplex event brought together local and regional authorities and citizens from 12 municipalities and regions from 8 different countries to discuss about the future of their municipality/region and identify the issues most prominent to them in their municipality/region and how they could be solved on both the local/regional level as well as with the help of the European Union (EU). Important here was to reach some conclusions of what the citizens wanted the EU to be responsible for and what not. Each individual session had been asked to deliver three concrete recommendations for the future of Europe.

The number of citizens that each of the participating members invited was entirely up to their decision and depended on the size of the municipality/region and the place they had at their disposal taking into account current COVID-19 measures. However, it was important that the group of citizens was as representative as possible of the whole population of their municipality/region and with a plurality of political views. Thus, the event was open to the general public for anyone who wished to participate and the link to connect to the joint introductory and concluding sessions was advertised online in advance.

Participating local and regional authorities gathered with their respective group of citizens in a location of their choice in their region/municipality. They had the option to gather physically or meet remotely via an online videoconference platform of their choice. For the introductory and concluding sessions, the Renew Europe Secretariat in the CoR set up an online videoconference via interactio, with interpretation from and into all the languages of the participating countries. For the individual citizens' dialogues in-between (18:30 – 19:45 CET) everyone disconnected and discussed with their citizens online/in-person at the chosen location.

For the reporting back session, which like the introduction session was held on interactio with interpretation, each city/region had to insert three key recommendations in the interactio chat box and each of them appointed a spokesperson, who was called upon to present their recommendations to the other participants.

Programme of the multiplex event

Introduction (online via Interactio)	

18:00 – 18:30 (CET)	• Welcome by the President of the Renew Europe group in the European Committee of the Regions, **François Decoster**
	   o Explanation about the objective of the event and the procedure to follow;
	   o Presentation of cities and regions participating in the event.
	• Guest speaker:
	   ➢ **Sandro Gozi,** Member of the European Parliament

Individual citizens' dialogues (in-person/online)	
18:30 - 19:45 (CET)	• During this session, everyone disconnects from the joint online session and each local/regional politician discusses about the future of their municipality/region with their citizens, possibly with the help of a moderator. Part of the discussion addresses questions about what their citizens want the European Union to be responsible for and what not. • This session should be concluded with the drafting of three key recommendations for the future of the European Union to be inserted into the

	chat box of the concluding interaction session. Translation into English can be done with [Deepls Translate.](#) • The group appoints a person that will be responsible for reporting back to the reporting back session.
Reporting back and Conclusions (online via Interactio)	
19:45-20:30 (CET)	• In this session, everyone reconnects to the joint session. This session will be devoted to the reporting back of the conclusions of the individual discussions with citizens and presentations of their possible suggestions and recommendations. • In order to manage this within the allocated time slot, President Decoster will ask one representative of each municipality/region to present one of its recommendations.