



# Conference on the Future of Europe

## Summary report of the first and constitutive meeting of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Wednesday 24 March 2021

17.00-19.00, Europa Building (meeting room S7, hybrid meeting)

**Participants:** please see participants list in annex

### ***Summary and conclusions:***

*The Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe held its first and constitutive meeting on 24 March 2021 in the Council building (in hybrid format) following the invitation letter from the three Presidents of the EU Institutions. The Executive Board will oversee the work, process and organisation of the Conference.*

*This first meeting took place in a constructive and positive atmosphere and was co-chaired by the Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs, Ana Paula ZACARIAS, Commission Vice-President Dubravka ŠUICA and MEP Guy VERHOFSTADT. Participants confirmed their commitment to an inclusive and transparent collaboration to make the Conference a success and underlined that the Executive Board must act as a single entity.*

*The Executive Board took first steps to make sure that citizens can soon start to contribute to the Conference, in particular on the multilingual digital platform. The platform was very well received by participants and its swift launch was supported by all. Ahead of the next Executive Board meeting, suggestions will still be made to address questions raised on the presentation of topics, with a view to endorse the launch of the platform for 19 April 2021. The Board decided to leave the decision on the visual identity to the Common Secretariat, with the support of the respective Communication services.*

*The Board discussed the possibility of a formal event on 9 May in Strasbourg as well as a possible first Conference Plenary on 10 May (depending on restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic). It also held an exchange of views on its internal working methods and the working methods of the Plenary. Draft working methods for the Conference (Executive Board and Plenary) will be prepared with a view to their discussion and endorsement at the next meeting of the Executive Board.*

*The next meeting of the Executive Board is planned for 7 April 2021.*

## **1. Introductory remarks and exchange of views**

In this constitutive meeting of the Executive Board all representatives and observers made short introductory remarks. All confirmed their commitment to an inclusive and transparent collaboration and to make the Conference a success.

Portuguese Secretary of State ZACARIAS (co-chair) chaired this agenda point and underlined the need to work together in a transparent and inclusive manner. She stated that the work will be based on the Joint Declaration.

The Co-chairs emphasized the unique character of the Conference as a unique opportunity to set out a common path for the future, with the three EU institutions for the first time giving citizens a direct voice on the Future of Europe.

They underlined the need to be innovative in this process and recalled the objective to put citizens at the heart of deliberations. The role of the Executive Board to steer the Conference and the need to work as one single entity were considered crucial.

The Board representatives stressed that the main goal is to involve citizens in the whole process. The need to have an interactive communication, an open inclusive and user-friendly system was emphasized. The Board welcomed the Charter that is to be respected by everyone taking part in the exercise. It was stressed that the Conference should also listen to critical voices. It should also be vigilant when it comes to illegal content or hate speech. The importance of citizens' participation in Conference plenaries was also highlighted.

Some pointed to the tight timetable and the need to carry out the consultations by the end of the year in time for the preparation of the joint report to the Joint Presidency by spring 2022 during the French Presidency.

Some other Board representatives welcomed the inclusive approach, including all the European Parliament's political groups and the National Parliaments. The strong interest of Member States in the Conference was also underlined.

Other representatives welcomed the interinstitutional cooperation on this innovative process, which could also be seen as a kind of decentralised strategic foresight exercise. Some pointed to the need to translate the outcome into concrete steps, including through the respective work programmes of the Institutions.

Some observers stressed that this cannot just be a listening exercise, but must become a room for deliberation and a dynamic European debate and that there are fundamentally different views on the Union and its values that need to be addressed. It was nevertheless underlined that despite the different points of view, the Conference should be approached with an open and positive attitude and focus on bringing the Union closer to the citizens, while also keeping the subsidiarity principle in mind. Furthermore, it was highlighted that, in order to be a success, this must be an ambitious, transparent and open process for all.

Other observers also referred to the positive experiences that European regions have with the participation of citizens and stressed the key role of National Parliaments and the special link they have with citizens. It was highlighted that there is a need to also look beyond Europe

and that the Conference process should be an open one, Moreover, it was underlined that the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council will be most involved in the process, hence the importance to strengthen the cooperation between national Governments and national Parliaments.

The support of the European Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committees was highlighted as well as their readiness to endorse the Joint Declaration principles and to actively contribute to the process. It was noted that the European Economic and Social Committee's experiences in mediating between employers, employees and citizens would be an added value for the Conference.

Furthermore, the need to involve social partners in the work of the Conference was underscored to bring a non-institutional perspective in the Executive Board. Finally, the importance of discussing topics related to the economy, labour market and social issues was emphasised. There was a call from the invited social partners to include all recognised social partners in the Executive Board.

**Conclusion:** Representatives and observers confirmed their commitment to an inclusive and transparent collaboration and to make the Conference on the Future of Europe a success.

## **2. Exchange of views on the multilingual digital platform and its launch**

Commission Vice-President Dubravka ŠUICA (co-chair) chaired this agenda point on the digital platform, underlining its importance as the Conference's digital hub and the need to endorse it, together with a set of basic principles for participants, so that the debate among citizens can start shortly. She informed that the platform will offer translation in all official EU languages, providing a genuine opportunity for transnational debates to citizens. Citizens and organisations will be able to organise events and provide their feedback directly on the platform. To actively contribute and use the platform, citizens must commit to a Charter including the principles enshrined in the EU Treaties and in the Joint Declaration. A system of moderation will also be put in place. Furthermore, she stressed that the topics are reflecting those in the Joint Declaration. In addition, citizens have under the 'other' category the possibility to start any discussion they wish.

The Director-General for Communications of the European Commission was invited by the Board to present a proposal for a multilingual digital platform. The platform will maximise participation, deliberation, accessibility and transparency. It is conceived as both a multilingual interactive tool and the digital hub for the Conference, i.e. the single place for citizens to find all information related to the Conference, share ideas and where the input from a multitude of events will be collected. It will allow all data to be analysed, monitored and published. The presentation also included the suggested visual identity.

In the discussion that followed, the platform was very well received by participants and there was agreement that it should be launched as soon as possible, with the 19 April 2021 being the possible date foreseen. A number of questions in relation to the listing of topics were raised by some, in particular whether migration, security, social issues and economic issues

are sufficiently reflected in the list of topics on which citizens will be able to contribute. Co-chairs agreed to come back at the next meeting on the 7 April with a proposal that takes on board the suggestions on the matter.

Questions were also asked on the analytical capacity of the platform and the possibility to use other languages besides the EU official ones and the possibility of non-EU citizens to react.

It was confirmed that the tool has an analytical capacity based on artificial intelligence and moderation and that all necessary security and data protection measures have been put in place. The tool operates fully in the 24 official languages, the Board may take decisions as regards practical arrangements with individual Member States if needed. As regards non-EU citizens, it was noted that the Conference is aimed primarily at citizens of the Union, but that there would be no geoblocking.

On the visual identity, the Board agreed to leave the decision to the Common Secretariat, with the support of the respective Communication services, based on the work carried out so far, including the citizens' consultation on the elements for the visual identity.

**Conclusion:** The Executive Board discussed the multilingual digital platform and supported the launch of the tool as soon as possible. The Board took note of suggestions in relation to the description of topics and the Co-chairs will come back with suggestions for the next Board meeting with a view to launch the platform on 19 April. The Board decided to leave the choice of the visual identity to the Common Secretariat and the respective Communication Services, based on the work carried out so far.

### **3. Exchange of views on Working Methods of the Plenary and the Executive Board**

MEP Guy VERHOFSTADT (co-chair) chaired this agenda point. He described the key elements that should be addressed in the working methods of the Conference, notably concerning the Executive Board and the Conference Plenary, to enable launching the Conference works in practice and in time for its formal opening, all within the framework given in the Joint Declaration. He indicated in particular that, in accordance with the Joint Declaration, the 9 representatives of the Executive Board shall take decisions by consensus. Items to be addressed for the Executive Board include the role of co-chairs, role of observers and practicalities of Board meetings. He also expressed his view that the Common Secretariat should physically work together in one location. As regards the Plenary, the size of the plenary, of its delegations and its decision-making as well as the design and organisation of citizens' panels should also be addressed. A first discussion took place in which the Board underscored the need to agree on the working methods of the Conference, and notably of the Executive Board, swiftly. The urgency to discuss other crucial elements such as the Plenaries and the citizens panels was also highlighted. Co-chair VERHOFSTADT proposed to present his fellow co-chairs with a draft text on the rules of procedure for the Conference, ahead of the next Executive Board meeting.

**Conclusion:** The co-chairs will prepare for the next meeting draft working methods for the Executive Board and a draft for the Rules of Procedure of the Conference.

#### **4. Next steps and next meeting**

Board representatives agreed that the next meeting of the Board will be held on 7 April and will focus on any outstanding issues relating to the platform launch, the preparation of the launch event on 9 May and a possible Plenary and the working methods for the Executive Board and the Plenary as well as citizens panels.

**Conclusion:** The next meeting of the Executive Board will be held on 7 April 2021.

**Contact:** Susanne Höke, member of the Common Secretariat

## List of participants:

<b>CO-CHAIR</b>	<b>Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT (Renew Europe, BE),</b> <i>Member of the European Parliament</i>
<b>CO-CHAIR</b>	<b>Ms Ana Paula ZACARIAS (PT),</b> <i>Secretary of State for EU Affairs</i>
<b>CO-CHAIR</b>	<b>Ms Dubravka ŠUICA,</b> <i>Vice-President of the European Commission</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Mr Manfred WEBER, (remote participation) <i>Member of the European Parliament (PPE, DE)</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Ms Iratxe GARCÍA-PÉREZ, (remote participation) <i>Member of the European Parliament (S&amp;D, ES)</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Mr Gašper DOVŽAN (SI), (remote participation) <i>Secretary of State for EU Affairs</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Mr Clément BEAUNE (FR), (remote participation) <i>Secretary of State for EU Affairs</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, (remote participation) <i>Vice-President of the Commission</i>
<b>Representative</b>	Ms Věra JOUROVÁ, <i>Vice-President of the Commission</i>

<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr Gerolf ANNEMANS <i>Member of the European Parliament (ID, BE)</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr Daniel FREUND <i>Member of the European Parliament (Verdes/ALE, DE)</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr Zdzisław KRASNODEBSKI, (remote participation) <i>Member of the European Parliament (ECR, PL)</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr Helmut SCHOLZ <i>Member of the European Parliament (The Left, DE)</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Ms Milena HRDINKOVÁ (CZ), (remote participation) <i>State Secretary for EU Affairs</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr. Hans DAHLGREN (SE), (remote participation) <i>Minister for EU Affairs</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Mr Juan GONZÁLEZ-BARBA PERA (ES), <i>Secretary of State for EU Affairs</i>
<b>OBSERVER</b>	Ms Sofie WILMÈS (BE), (excused) <i>Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister</i>
<b>OBSERVER (COSAC)</b>	Mr Luís Capoulas SANTOS (PT), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Assembleia da República</i>
<b>OBSERVER (COSAC)</b>	Mr Guido WOLF (DE), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions of the Bundesrat</i>
<b>OBSERVER (COSAC)</b>	Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM (DE), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Bundestag</i>
<b>OBSERVER (COSAC)</b>	Mr Marko POGAČNIK (SI), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Committee for EU Affairs of the Državni Zbor</i>
<b>OBSERVER (COSAC)</b>	Mr Bojan KEKEC (SI), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs of the Držvni Svet</i>
<b>OBSERVER (CoR) Invited</b>	Mr Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS, (remote participation) <i>President of the European Committee of the Regions</i>
<b>OBSERVER (EESC) Invited</b>	Ms Christa SCHWENG, (remote participation) <i>President of the European Economic and Social Committee</i>
<b>OBSERVER (BusinessEurope) Invited</b>	Mr Markus BEYRER, (remote participation) <i>Director General of BusinessEurope</i>
<b>OBSERVER (ETUC) Invited</b>	Mr Luca VISENTINI <i>Secretary General of ETUC</i>

<b>CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Ms Katrin RUHRMANN
<b>CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Ms Marta ARPIO
<b>CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Mr Colin SCICLUNA
<b>COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Ms Patricia JIMINEZ
<b>COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Ms Marie-Charlotte VAN LAMSWEERDE
<b>COMMON SECRETARIAT</b>	Ms Susanne HOEKE