



Conference on the **Future** of **Europe**

Summary report of the second meeting of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Wednesday 7 April 2021

17.00-20.00, European Parliament Spinelli Building (meeting room 5G3, 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 second meeting on 7 April 2021 in the European Parliament Spinelli building (in hybrid format).

The second meeting was co-chaired by Commission Vice-President for Democracy & Demography, Dubravka ŠUICA, the Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs, Ana Paula ZACARIAS, and MEP Guy VERHOFSTADT. Guy Verhofstadt opened and closed the meeting.

Following the implementation of adjustments requested by representatives during the last meeting and additional clarifications and answers provided by the Commission services, the Executive Board endorsed the Multilingual Digital Platform, including the Charter and the visual identity agreed by the Communication Services of the three institutions and endorsed by the Common Secretariat, with a view to its official launch on 19 April 2021.

The Executive Board endorsed the draft working methods of the Executive Board as proposed by the Co-Chairs without any changes .

On the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt presented his proposal. Based on the ensuing discussion and expected written contributions by the representatives and observers of the Executive Board, the Common Secretariat will prepare a draft text for the Rules of Procedure for the Conference and submit it to the Co-Chairs with a view to presenting a common proposal of the Co-Chairs at the next meeting of the Executive Board and endorsing the Rules of Procedure by 9 May at the latest.

The Communication services of the three institutions are tasked to prepare a joint proposal for an inaugural event on 9 May and submit it, through the Common Secretariat, to the Co-Chairs, with a view to endorsing a draft programme at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

The next meeting of the Executive Board will take place on 22 April.

MEP Guy Verhofstadt (Co-Chair) opened the meeting.

1. Endorsement of the Multilingual Digital Platform (incl. Charter)

Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica (Co-Chair) chaired this agenda point on the Digital Platform. The Chair underlined that the issues raised during the Board's last meeting were being accommodated so that the platform can be launched on 19 April and begin registering activity, three weeks ahead of the Conference inaugural event on 9 May. She highlighted the following:

- two new topics (on migration and on education, culture, youth and sport), bringing the list to 10 topics; a few topics were adjusted, to explicitly refer to the rule of law and security, as well as social justice and jobs;
- a section of the Platform will provide information and documents on the Conference, including the governance of the Conference, the main documents and support on the use of the Digital Platform;
- on the participation of citizens outside the EU, the Platform will not be geo-blocked, and a pragmatic approach would be applied by the moderators. It was underlined that this is also important in order to allow EU citizens outside the EU to participate. Moderators will however closely check that discussion stays within the parameters of the Conference and if need be content could be excluded from the analysis or additional measures can be considered;
- on the use of non-official languages, she underlined that the Platform operates in the official languages, but that technical solutions are in place that allow the Member States concerned to support the Platform with the speedy detection, translation and uploading of these contributions.

The European Commission's Director-General and Deputy Director-General for Communication were invited to make additional clarifications on questions that had been previously submitted and on new comments raised by members of the Board during the discussion. They made the following remarks:

- on the question of misuse, several measures are in place. The multilingual moderating team would be monitoring for trolls, fake news and hate speech. The moderation would be done ex-post in a transparent way. Users will also be able to flag inappropriate content themselves, and a quota system of daily interventions could prevent bots or other organised campaigns from destabilising the platform. In terms of the speed of content removal, the aim would be to do it within hours and under one day;
- on the question of analysing the contributions on the Platform, this will be assisted by Artificial Intelligence on text mining developed by the Commission's Joint Research Centre. This will not substitute the human element but help with the first stage of identifying, sorting and categorising ideas and proposals. All events should be therefore registered and reported on the Platform. Event organisers must translate discussions into concrete ideas. These will then be transformed into accessible

reporting, to be finalised by the Common Secretariat under the supervision of the Executive Board. The analysis reporting from the ideas and events will be used to feed into the discussions by the citizens' panels and the plenary;

- on national events, these will be clearly indicated and identifiable and there will be a special contact point to allow the creation of events;
- on the ranking of displayed contributions, the number of people commenting and endorsing would be visible and real-time statistics on contributions would be available regularly. Users will also have other means to follow what happens with their input and get feedback, including through notifications and a newsletters;
- on the visibility of national and institutional events, there will be a colour coding system and a contact point to allow the creation of events;
- all events, including those organised by other partners and NGOs, would be assisted by a helpdesk, with tool kits and "dos and don'ts" available for all organisers. The organisers' own logos can co-exist with the logo of the Conference as long as the Conference visual identity is always represented by the established Conference logo;
- on the possible right of appeal to moderators' decisions, in case of particular sensitivity cases, the matter will be brought to the Common Secretariat.

Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt noted that most of the concerns previously raised had been taken on board and that the platform could be given the green light. He envisaged that the Board might have to deal with problematic issues that will arise in the future, the tool being a pioneering 'flywheel' of the Conference.

Co-Chair Ana Paula Zacarias agreed that the adaptations have covered most of the concerns raised and thanked DG COMM for their answers and big efforts to provide this relevant tool. She also underlined the importance of launching this new tool on 19 April and the possibility of introducing possible adaptations and changes along the way, if required.

Chair Dubravka Šuica concluded that the Board was ready to endorse it. The Chair added that the launch would consist of a press conference presenting the platform, preceded by a joint op-ed and a media campaign.

Conclusion:

Following the implementation of adjustments requested by representatives during the last meeting and additional clarifications and answers provided by the Commission services, the Executive Board endorsed the Multilingual Digital Platform, including the Charter and the visual identity agreed by the Communications Services of the three institutions and endorsed by the Common Secretariat, with a view to its official launch on 19 April 2021.

2. Endorsement of the working methods of the Executive Board and presentation of the rules of procedure for Conference Plenaries incl. the EU Citizens Panels

Portuguese Secretary of State Ana Paula Zacarias (Co-Chair) chaired this agenda point. The Chair underlined that the Joint Declaration forms the basis for the rules of procedure and that the Rules of Procedure for the Conference will consist of three building blocks: the working methods of the Executive Board, citizens' participation (the Multilingual Digital Platform and European Citizens Panels) and the Conference Plenary.

The Chair presented the main elements of the chapter on the working methods of the Executive Board (composition of the Board, working modalities, Common Secretariat, the possibility to engage experts, notice of meetings, calendar and agenda, documentation, conduct of meetings, transparency and location of meetings).

The Chair called for swift decision making on the rules of procedure, with the endorsement of the working methods of the Executive Board at today's meeting, and the analysis of the other two building blocks in the upcoming weeks, with the view of approving the rules of procedure in their entirety at the latest by 9 May.

In the discussion that followed, questions were raised, inter alia, with regard to:

- the participation and role of observers in the Executive Board, in particular of the social partners, and the possible invitation of organised civil society to meetings of the Executive Board;
- the possibility for observers to participate in the preparatory works of the Executive Board;
- the possibility for representatives or observers to be substituted;
- the basis for the conclusions of the Conference Plenary to be drawn up by the Executive Board;
- the deadlines for sending documentation for Board meetings;
- the role of experts.

In reply, the Chair underlined that:

- with regard to the participation of invited observers, the Chair referred to the wording of the Joint Declaration which cannot be altered in the Working Methods, but noted that in practice the Executive Board will aim to be as transparent and inclusive as possible and, in principle, continue the practice followed so far of inviting observers from the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, and social partners to all meetings of the Board;
- the Co-Chairs prepare the meetings of the Executive Board; when needed they will reach out to permanent and invited observers for input or discussion;
- in line with what was stated in the invitation letter of the three Presidents for the first meeting of the Executive Board, neither representatives nor observers can be replaced; in the spirit of compromise, if they cannot attend, somebody else may follow the meeting in their place but only in a listening mode;

- the participation of civil society organisations in the Executive Board is not foreseen in the Joint Declaration; they should however be represented in the Conference Plenary;
- documentation will be sent two working days in advance;
- the working methods foresee the possibility of engaging and inviting experts; this question will be addressed in particular in the context of the organisation of citizens panels;
- questions on the conclusions of the Conference Plenary should be addressed in the chapter of the rules on the Conference Plenary.

Conclusion:

The Executive Board endorsed the draft working methods of the Executive Board as proposed by the Co-Chairs, without any changes.

In the following part of this agenda item, Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt presented his proposal on the other building blocks of the rules of procedure, notably the Conference Plenary and citizens' participation (Citizens Panels and the Digital Platform). He outlined the main elements of this proposal with regard to the principles of the Conference, citizens' events and citizens' panels, the feedback mechanism, youth participation, the Digital Platform, composition and organisation of the Conference Plenary, transparency and presentation of conclusions.

For Citizens Panels, he suggested that only the main principles are laid down in the rules and that the precise practical organisation could eventually be included in a separate document.

Co-Chairs Ana Paula Zacarias and Dubravka Šuica thanked Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt for his proposal that would still need to be discussed and analysed together with other contributions from representatives and observers. Ana Paula Zacarias also recalled that the Joint Declaration is the basis for the Rules of Procedures and highlighted the call for a "lean governance structure". Participants were invited to express their views, comments and ideas during the ensuing debate and to submit their contributions in written form in the next days, to enable the co-chairs to elaborate a common proposal to be presented at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

In the discussion that followed, questions were raised, inter alia, with regard to:

- the size and composition of the Conference Plenary and its components;
- the role of the Conference Plenary, and its conclusions;
- the composition and selection of the European Citizens' Panels;
- the link between the contributions received via the Digital Platform and the agendas for the Citizens' Panel and the Plenary;
- the participation of candidate countries and other states that have a close relationship with the EU;

- the timeframe of the Conference, taking into account the Covid-19 pandemic situation;

In reply, Chair Ana Paula Zacarias called for a pragmatic approach to enable the approval of the rules by 9 May at the latest and recalled that citizens are at the centre of the Conference.

Conclusion:

On the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt presented his proposal. Based on the ensuing discussion and expected written contributions by the representatives and observers of the Executive Board, the Common Secretariat will prepare a draft text for the Rules of Procedure for the Conference and submit it to the Co-Chairs with a view to presenting a common proposal of the Co-Chairs at the next meeting of the Executive Board and endorsing the Rules of Procedure by 9 May at the latest.

3. Event on 9 May

MEP Guy Verhofstadt (Co-Chair) chaired this agenda point and underlined the main aspects of the inaugural event for the Conference on 9 May:

- the event will take place in the European Parliament premises in Strasbourg;
- it will be held in a hybrid format (of approximatively 2-hour duration), making it a modern, dynamic and original event to viewers;
- the respective Communication services of the three institutions will present, through the Common Secretariat, a proposal at the forthcoming Executive Board meeting.

Conclusion:

The Communication services of the three institutions are tasked to prepare a joint proposal for an inaugural event on 9 May 2021 and submit it, through the Common Secretariat, to the Co-Chairs, with a view to endorsing a draft programme at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

The Chair indicated that an Executive Board meeting needs to be planned before the launch of the Conference to approve the Rules of Procedure and adopt a calendar of meetings. The next meeting of the Executive Board will take place on 22 April.¹

Conclusion: *The next meeting of the Executive Board will take place on 22 April.*

MEP Guy Verhofstadt (Co-Chair) closed the meeting.

Contact: Eva-Maria Poptcheva, member of the Common Secretariat

¹ As agreed by the Co-Chairs.

List of participants:

CO-CHAIR	Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT (Renew Europe, BE), Member of the European Parliament
CO-CHAIR	Ms Ana Paula ZACARIAS (PT), (remote participation) Secretary of State for EU Affairs
CO-CHAIR	Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, (remote participation) Vice-President of the European Commission
Representative	Mr Manfred WEBER, (remote participation) Member of the European Parliament (PPE, DE)
Representative	Ms Iratxe GARCÍA-PÉREZ, (remote participation) Member of the European Parliament (S&D, ES)
Representative	Mr Gašper DOVŽAN (SI), (remote participation) Secretary of State for EU Affairs
Representative	Mr Clément BEAUNE (FR), (remote participation) Secretary of State for EU Affairs
Representative	Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, (remote participation) Vice-President of the Commission
Representative	Ms Věra JOUROVÁ, (remote participation) Vice-President of the Commission
OBSERVER	Mr Gerolf ANNEMANS Member of the European Parliament (ID, BE)
OBSERVER	Mr Daniel FREUND Member of the European Parliament (Verdes/ALE, DE)
OBSERVER	Mr Zdzisław KRASNODEBSKI, (remote participation) Member of the European Parliament (ECR, PL)
OBSERVER	Mr Helmut SCHOLZ Member of the European Parliament (The Left, DE)
OBSERVER	Ms Milena HRDINKOVÁ (CZ), (remote participation) State Secretary for EU Affairs
OBSERVER	Mr. Hans DAHLGREN (SE), (remote participation) Minister for EU Affairs

OBSERVER	Mr Juan GONZÁLEZ-BARBA PERA (ES), (remote participation) <i>Secretary of State for EU Affairs</i>
OBSERVER	Ms Sofie WILMÈS (BE), (excused) <i>Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister</i>
OBSERVER (COSAC)	Mr Luís Capoulas SANTOS (PT), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Assembleia da República</i>
OBSERVER (COSAC)	Mr Guido WOLF (DE), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions of the Bundesrat</i>
OBSERVER (COSAC)	Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM (DE), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag</i>
OBSERVER (COSAC)	Mr Marko POGAČNIK (SI), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Committee for EU Affairs of the Drzavni Zbor</i>
OBSERVER (COSAC)	Mr Bojan KEKEC (SI), (remote participation) <i>Chairman of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs of the Drzavni Svet</i>
OBSERVER (CoR) Invited	Mr Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS, (remote participation) <i>President of the European Committee of the Regions</i>
OBSERVER (EESC) Invited	Ms Christa SCHWENG, (remote participation) <i>President of the European Economic and Social Committee</i>
OBSERVER (BusinessEurope) Invited	Mr Markus BEYRER, (excused) <i>Director General of BusinessEurope</i>
OBSERVER (ETUC) Invited	Mr Luca VISENTINI, (remote participation) <i>Secretary General of ETUC</i>
CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT	Ms Katrin RUHRMANN
CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT	Ms Marta ARPIO
CO-HEAD COMMON SECRETARIAT	Mr Colin SCICLUNA

COMMON SECRETARIAT	Ms Eva-Maria POPTCHEVA
COMMON SECRETARIAT	Ms Rebecca RHLALOU
COMMON SECRETARIAT	Ms Susanne HOEKE