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Summary of minutes from EPF General Assembly 13.6.2022

The annual General Assembly was this time with EC Vice President for Democracy and Demography Dubravka Suica, President for European Economic and Social Committee Christa Schweng and former Chair of the Danish Parliament and UN General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft. as keynote speakers ahead of the formal General Assembly. Unfortunately, Covid 19 and other obligations kept our MEPs Alin Mituta and Helmut Scholz away.

The General Assembly agreed to launch the Center for European Citizens' Democracy (CECD) to strengthen democracy and renew trust and the sense of ownership in the European Union by engaging citizens in European policy-making and improve the EU's ability to reflect the needs and visions of European citizens. You will soon hear much more about this initiative but attached is our draft description. As you will see below, the initiative was well received by our keynote speakers:

Center for European Citizens Democracy

1. "I want to thank Europe's People's Forum for your very valuable contribution throughout the Conference on the Future of Europe. Our focus must be on developing an ecosystem of democratic innovation and of citizens engagement and participation in democracy. . Today you are launching the permanent **Center for European Citizens Democracy**. This initiative goes in the direction set by the citizens and will contribute to the democratic ecosystem." "As part of the follow-up the three institutions will hold their feedback events in the Autumn. This will put a seal of legitimacy on the entire process. As we enter this phase I continue counting on the constructive support of the organised civil society." (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
2. "During the Conference on the Future of Europe I continued to appreciate Europe's People's Support for your constant and proactive support in the process. The launch of your Center for European Citizens Democracy is a concrete step in your commitment to strengthen democracy and trust and extending ownership to the European Union by engaging citizens. Be sure we will be happy to explore ways to cooperate." (Ms. Christa Schweng)
3. "I am convinced that the Centre for European Citizens' Democracy is a superb initiative to strengthen democracy in the European Union and in the candidate countries as well. And I try to convince former colleagues and other decision makers in Denmark that CECD should be supported to get a good and effective start in this very important project" (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)

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Conference on the Future of Europe

No wonder, the keynote speakers used the opportunity to also make their assessments of the Conference on the Future of Europe that formally ended 9 May.

1. "Hearing about this idea in 2019 I had hoped the preparation would have taken place in a matter of weeks and the implementation would have given ample time to experiment and reach every citizen that might want to contribute. We know that this was not the case" (Ms. Christa Schweng)
2. "Besides providing a new safe space for deliberation the conference went a step further and is bringing citizens ideas and reflection directly into European Union policymaking." (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
3. "I want first to say that I consider the conference a success. Not unfeathered, not without difficulties but a process that led to good results in a difficult moment. A result which surely represent the discussion and ideas coming from the citizens and enriched by the variety of contributions coming from the plenary and the working groups. My worst fear for the Conference was that it would lead to a pre-digested conclusion that could be written already in 2020. As you all noticed, it did not happen, on the contrary. They were active, enthusiastic participants" (Ms. Christa Schweng)
4. "We need more insightful citizens debate on climate, on sustainable infrastructure, on the rule of law, on the fight against tax evasion, and inequality. We need to understand the vulnerable and marginalised and give them a stronger voice in the European conversation. We need the best structures both nationally and European with a prudent use of all the possibilities in digital technology." (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)
5. "Citizens asked us to invent citizens participation and deliberation at European level including youth involvement in democracy including through deliberative processes. In direct response of this President Von der Leyen said that she will give citizens panels the time and resources to make recommendations before presenting key legislative proposals. A first panel will be launched already by the end of this year. A number of proposals highlight the role of civil society as a fundamental feature of the European Union. Citizens requested strong policies to improve the functioning of labour market so that they ensure fair working conditions and promote gender equality and employment including young people and vulnerable groups. They also encouraged civil society to contribute to the Union's efforts to uphold the rule of law across all member states." (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
6. "It is important that the Conference on the Future of Europe produced 49 proposals from citizens participation. Representative Citizens panels of people representing the broad population having time to understand and publicity for their work to expand their own experience to a broader public." (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)



7. “The follow-up process will be the most crucial phase in the architecture of the Conference. As such this is a key zone without which the whole construction would fall apart. If at this time the contributions, the efforts, the ideas and recommendations from citizens will not be properly followed up, any future activity of this kind would be deprived any credibility. If the follow up will be successful, then I believe the need to continue citizens involvement will become undeniable.” (Ms. Christa Schweng)
8. “The work on the follow-up and the feedback from the conference has started. It is vital that we provide the citizens with the necessary feedback on their precious, committed work. Already this week the Commission will set out its first formal reaction to the conference proposals. But it cannot end there, of course. Thanks to our courage to come together to deliberate in the Conference on the Future of Europe, European democracy will never be the same again.” (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
9. “I believe that involving citizens at a more stable basis and innovative and active ways should become a part of European policy making. A more direct and continued approach would bridge the long standing rift between the EU-level and the citizens and at the same time allow more perspectives in European policy. The more points-of-views that participate the more the policies will be supported. And for this perspective I believe that future inspirations from the conference should bring together not just citizens but also organised civil society, social partners and all institutions to improve quality and facilitate the forceful decisions that are taken.” (Ms. Christa Schweng)
10. “The European Commission will spare no effort to deliver concrete results. Many of the proposals can be achieved through either the existing initiatives or through others that are already under discussion. In some areas the conference proposals give a push to speed up ongoing work – examples include the 5th or 55th package for climate and environment or the proposal on minimum wages. Other proposals are new proposals, and some others will require more reflection. The first new proposals inspired by the conference will be announced by the President Von der Leyen in her state of the Union speech in September this year.” (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
11. “While some recommendations require treaty changes, we must not forget that the vast majority of recommendations can be followed up within the current framework. We must not overlook these low hanging fruits. Harvesting them should not be delayed by long discussions about treaty changes.” (Ms. Christa Schweng)



The need to strengthen democracy

1. “The Copenhagen Democracy Summit had a lot of talk about the superiority of democracy vis-a-vis authoritarians, but the best intervention was actually that of President Obama, where he underlined the necessity to improve democracy to be able to preserve it at all. It is a huge problem of course in United States of America to engage citizens and make sure that their voices are heard at all because there is as in some other European countries as well the problem that the mechanisms of elections nearly always means that the majority becomes the minority in the corridors of the parliament.” (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)
2. “In recent years we have faced a number of crises. I think about the Covid 19 Pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the fleeing refugees, mostly women and children. But besides these dramatic events there are also major shifts at a slower but no less important pace. I think of the demographic changes of aging, depopulation and the challenges facing democracy across the European Union and the World. None of these crises is an isolated incident. In fact all can be looked at as an opportunity that needs addressing from all levels of governance. We can only successfully tackle these crises if we engage the citizens at all levels and together.” (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
3. “Many people lost – specially during the financial crisis and during European austerity reactions to financial crisis – lost trust in our system. That lack of trust has led to the rise of populism, nationalism and basic attitudes towards immigrants as well. Cases of rule of law treating democracy only as an empty shell has happened in Hungary and is under way in Poland.” (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)
4. “After a particular heated exchange between a Eurosceptic Member of the European Parliament and a group of citizens during a plenary session this exchange would continue vividly outside the plenary room. I thought his was what the conference was meant to be. Not of course to strengthen scepticism to Europe but on the contrary to demonstrate that open debate was possible between radically different people and perspectives and even if disagreeing it is possible to come together.” (Ms. Christa Schweng)
5. “We need civil society support and pressure to the understanding of the supreme necessity for more international and European cooperation in these troubled times.” (Mr. Mogens Lykketoft)
6. “Citizens must be able to find their home in the house of European democracy at all levels. Democracy is precious. Having personally experienced a war myself I can never take it for granted. After all, democracy is louder than Putin’s bombs.” (Ms. Dubravka Suica)
7. “The Commission’s Competence Centre of Participative and Deliberative Democracy can act as a catalyst in reaching a European Union knowledge base in participative and deliberative practices, particularly through its public participation and deliberative democracy festival.” (Ms. Dubravka Suica)

If interested we offer you the full video from the presentations

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Elections.

The General Assembly re-elected the current president Roger Casale (IT), and members of the board Steen Illeborg (BE), Stephen Boucher (FR) and Bent Nørby Bonde (DK).

For the first time in the history of Europe's People's Forum a vice president was elected – namely Ingeborg Niestroy (DE), Coordinator for IASS of the Horizon project Real Deal. Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Studies at European Policy Centre, Janis A. Emmanouilidis (BE) and Director of Missions Publiques Antoine Vergne (FR) have been elected to the Board.

Members not up for election are Christiane Dienel, (DE) Proff. Dr. Director Nexus-Institute, Elizabeth Phocas, (GR) Director of Operations, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (Eliamep), Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, (HR) Director of Odraz Sustainable Community Development and Stefano Sotgiu (IT), Ph.D. Candidate, University of Sassari, President Prossima Democrazia.

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